

# **FAITH-BASED ADOPTIVE/FOSTER SERVICES: FAITH COMMUNITIES' ROLES IN CHILD WELFARE**

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## Value Added Role of the Faith Communities in the Child Welfare System

The nation's Abrahamic faith communities—Christianity, Judaism, Islam—share a prophetic tradition that promotes social justice advocacy, community organizing, and, also, the delivery of human services for isolated, vulnerable, and politically weak populations.

Some expressions of this prophetic tradition, ironically, appear to be almost conservative—i.e., when they supplement and extend a social welfare system that is already in place and that is admittedly flawed. Their services often aim to make this system “work better”—in supplementing the services that can be offered by public agencies; in humanizing the interaction between participants and public agencies; in recruiting participants; and in providing day-to-day support services for these participants.

Just as often—hopefully—faith-based spokespersons for the nation's prophetic tradition point out that even well-intended publicly-sponsored welfare services produce injustice. They formulate and advocate needed changes in the laws and administrative policies that guide public social programs. They pressure public agency officials to revise their missions and/or to reshape their service strategies. They experiment with alternative service delivery models.

In relation to public agencies that serve foster/adoptive children and families, faith communities typically perform the following “value-added” roles.

- *They recruit foster/adoptive parent candidates* In Los Angeles, for example, ChildShare, a faith-based foster/adoptive parenting organization, actively recruits foster/adoptive parents in congregations, often by issuing “biblically-based invitations” during worship services. It uses staff members and volunteers to recruit in Latino, African-American, and Asian-American congregations. Recently its reach has extended to hearing-impaired congregations. It attempts to locate foster/adoptive parents who adhere to a child's own faith tradition. It tries to locate foster/adoptive parents in a child's own community.

Nationally, faith communities have established networks of organizations that recruit foster/adoptive parents and then connect these recruits with public agencies to assure that legal requirements are met. Examples: Catholic Adoptive Services, Presbyterian Children's Homes, Christian Child and Family Services Association (Churches of Christ), the Salvation Army, Jewish Family Services, Lydia Home Association (Evangelical Free Church of America), and an extensive system of Southern Baptist state-based foster/adoptive organizations.

- *They provide support services for foster/adoptive families in their own and other congregations.* Encouraged by ChildShare, FosterHope, Catholic Family Services, Jewish Family Services and other similar faith-based organizations, congregations offer support groups for foster/adoptive parents, respite child care services, food and clothing, transportation, and sometimes even financial assistance. Fellow

congregation members send cards and flowers to celebrate the contributions of foster/adoptive parents. They offer prayer support.

- *They offer mentoring relationships for families, youth, and children who are at-risk.* Faith communities have a long history of mentoring services through organizations such as Catholic Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Jewish Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Now with the cooperation of these organizations, they are expanding mentoring relationships to the children of prisoners and to children who are in danger of being removed into the foster care system.
- *They provide specialized family support service agencies for at-risk families and children.* Protestant, Jewish, and Catholic communities have constructed an extensive network of shelters, multi-service agencies, specialized human service agencies, clinics, and community centers that collaborate with public agencies. While many of these are subsidized by public grants, they depend heavily on monetary gifts, in-kind contributions, and volunteer hours from members of faith communities. These organizations significantly expand the pool of crisis intervention services that are available in urban low-income neighborhoods. They are often perceived by residents as “neighborhood-based”—a perception, according to many national and local studies, that reduces the fears of residents who are often wary of public institutions.
- *They participate in regional/city/neighborhood coalitions that try to assure a continuum of care for at-risk families and children.* Faith-service organizations cooperate with other private sector welfare agencies, public welfare agencies, universities, and congregations in informal and incorporated coalitions that expand and reinforce each other’s contributions. For example, Project Hope in Los Angeles has created a coalition that tries to assure that at-risk families have access to needed family support services. The San Fernando Interfaith Council cooperates with a large number of public and private agencies in their services for at-risk families. Now that Council is making plans to participate contractually in a publicly operated mall of family services that will be built in Los Angeles’ San Fernando Valley.
- *They put pressure on public agencies and legislative bodies to humanize foster/adoptive strategies that are experienced as unjust.* In California, for example, the faith-based Faith Communities for Families and Children, which is associated with the California Youth Law Center, actively opposes current public policy that provides financial incentives for at-risk children to be placed in the foster care. Public policy, they argue, is shaped by the fact that child welfare systems rely heavily on federal funds that are directed toward children who are removed from their unstable homes. The organization dramatizes abuses in Los Angeles County’s foster care system, and calls for broad-scale reform—at least for the formulation of a demonstration project, which, over a five year period of time, would test family preservation theory.

At the 2003 meeting of the Roundtable, sponsored by the Rockefeller Institute of Government, three panels that were reporting on research projects cautioned conference

participants to be extremely cautious in comparing the effectiveness of faith-based and public human service programs. Although faith-based programs occasionally rank high on various effectiveness scales, they said, many public programs do, too.

National and regional studies of faith-based human services, however, consistently report that participants often speak about the respect they receive in faith-based human service programs. They also cite many occasions in which staff members of faith-based programs go well beyond the call of duty in providing support for children and families.

Grace Dyrness, associate director of USC's Center for Religious and Civic Culture, speaks about the important contribution of faith communities to the child welfare system in their ability to produce leaders who have vision and energy. These leaders are committed to the welfare of the communities, especially their own neighborhoods, over the long haul. As an example, Dyrness cites Joe Hernandez, pastor of Los Angeles's Ebenezer Church, who participates in Faith Communities for Families and Children. "He is there fighting for justice, caring for the kids, picking them up off the streets when their parents kick them out, providing homes and rides." Peter Spoto, a researcher at the Center, agrees with Grace Dyrness. Then he adds, "Leaders like Joe Hernandez think holistically about the well-being of their neighborhoods. They're always looking for partnerships with government, business, and the rest of civil society."

### **Historical Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Child Welfare**

The evolution of faith-based services for foster/adoptive children and families can be described with reference to four eras:

- *Antebellum America*. Prior to the industrial revolution in America, most Americans lived in rural settings. Child welfare primarily was the responsibility of extended families, although faith communities—Anglo-American and African-American and European-American—provided strong backup for families experiencing stress. Indeed, one early response to the needs of urban orphans was to relocate them to families and faith communities in rural settings.

During the early decades of the nineteenth century, however, there were signs of things-to-come in America's growing cities. The faith communities' response to the vulnerability of Western European immigrants crowding into American cities was to build benevolent societies that served their needs. Relatively rare until the Jacksonian era, for example, orphanages and "children's asylums" achieved sudden popularity in the 1830s. By 1851, there were seventy-one orphanages in the United States, more than a third of them in the State of New York. All were established by private, mainly Protestant philanthropic associations. The leaders of these associations argued that orphanages were enlightened alternatives to public almshouses, where children had been thrown together with adult paupers, the aged, the widowed, the mentally-retarded, and the unemployed.

In New York City and elsewhere, “colored” orphans fared worse than other orphan populations. White orphanages often would not accept them, and African-Americans lacked financial resources to build their own orphanages. In 1836, the Colored Orphan Asylum was established by two white, Protestant activists in New York City. Even in the face of extreme financial problems faced by this kind of institution, racially-segregated models of orphan care spread to other urban centers.

From 1848 to 1860, when Jews made up less than five percent of New York’s population, ninety-three Jewish welfare societies were incorporated, a substantial number of which served Jewish widows and orphans. What was later to become the Hebrew Orphan Asylum was founded in 1863.

- *The Post-Civil War and the Progressivist Era.* By the Civil War, faith-community-sponsored orphanages and children’s asylums were generally regarded as failures. In the eyes of many, they had become purely custodial institutions, where children lived in overcrowded dormitories, were only marginally fed and clothed, and were poorly educated. It appeared that routine discipline and regimentation had become ends in themselves.

Late in the nineteenth century, alternative visions for child welfare emerged in the context of Christian Socialism and the American Social Gospel. Almost all modern professional services for children were conceived in the period between 1890 and the First World War—a period marked by faith-based social criticism and faith-driven institutional innovation. Reacting to the cruelties of Social Darwinism, Protestant/Catholic “Christian Socialists” and “Social Gospel” reformers set forth formulations of Christian theology in which faith-inspired love became manifest in services for the poor and the isolated. By the beginning of the twentieth century, religiously affiliated orphanages and children’s asylums were already giving way to networks of institutions whose services were directed toward specific groups of children—e.g., developmentally disabled, delinquents, and physically impaired. These institutions were precursors to contemporary group homes and multi-service residential treatment centers.

According to Murray Levine and Adeline Levine, the Settlement House movement that was initiated in the 1890s provided a “bridge between two worlds”—the world of public and private (including faith-based) custodial institutions and the world of specialized children and family services. Born in nineteenth century English Christian Socialism, settlement houses and/or “workingmen’s centers” were viewed as strategies for coping with the social disintegration that accompanied the nation’s rapid industrialization, and, also, as strategies for attracting working families to Protestant institutions. Settlement houses were routinely attached to churches and to religiously-affiliated philanthropies. Indeed, many urban churches virtually functioned as settlement houses: building facilities that included gymnasiums, pools, libraries, dispensaries, medical clinics, loan funds, soup kitchens, employment services, educational programs, and residences. Settlement house workers were often highly educated men and women, oriented toward social action and social advocacy.

The huge influx of immigrants from Western and Eastern Europe created special problems in Catholic and Jewish communities. Sensing that public schools were functioning as Protestant institutions, Catholic and Jewish religious leaders established alternative and/or supplementary school systems, then created networks of social welfare agencies, group homes, and multi-service community centers.

According to Dorothy Brown and Elizabeth McKeown, "From its inception, Catholic social provision was anchored in child-care." In addition to parochial schools, Catholics established congregate centers for children in large urban areas. Operated mainly by religious congregations of women, these centers served orphans. They also served children whose parents could not provide adequate care. Over time, they evolved into specialized service centers, e.g., for pregnant teenagers, for battered women and children, for children whose families suffered from drug/alcohol addiction, for the children of homeless families, etc. During this period, Catholic children and family service also began to cooperate with other local charities, federations, and community chest programs. They also enlarged their activities to include day care and adoption services.

- *Post-Depression America.* President Roosevelt's New Deal vastly expanded the nation's publicly-funded social safety net. Although publicly-funded child welfare agencies existed long before the New Deal (e.g., public orphanages were established during the tenure of President Taft), the devastating impact of the Depression on American families made it all too clear that faith communities and private philanthropies were not equipped to guarantee a family safety net. More and more, child welfare services were delivered by public agencies, with faith-based child welfare agencies serving in supplementary and experimental ways.

During and after World War II, faith-based organizations followed national trends in favoring residential treatment centers for families and children. These centers, at least in intent, were designed to be homelike, with recreational activities, and cottage-based dormitories. Based on principles associated with "milieu therapy," children and families were typically served by paraprofessional staff under the direction of mental health personnel.

After the 1960s, like family and children services in general, faith-based children's services have increasingly focused on the child, with services directed toward improving the entire ecology of children's lives. The child advocacy movement, inspired by the broader civil rights movement, shifted priorities away from institutionalizing orphans and children from at-risk families toward the preservation of families in their own neighborhoods and in their own religious traditions, whenever possible.

In the mid-1960s, President Johnson's War on Poverty directed money to faith-based organizations and other community-based organizations to support their human service activities, e.g., senior housing, youth services, children's services. This practice reflected the War on Poverty's creed that neighborhood services should be planned as much as possible on a local level with "the maximum feasible participation of the poor." Neighborhoods should be empowered to accept

accountability for their own development. African-American churches received a large number of War on Poverty grants.

The family preservation and reunification movement was born in the mid-1970s, in the context of the high priority that President Carter assigned to the protection of fragile families. Family preservation principles were implicit in the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 in response to criticisms by child welfare professionals who had expressed concerns about chronic problems in the nation's foster care and adoption system.

These principles became explicit in laws that were enacted in a number of states in response to the federal Adoption Assistance in Child Welfare Act. A California law that was friendly to the family preservation movement, for example, was passed in 1982. It mandated treatment services for families to prevent removing children, whenever possible, from their homes. It also mandated services that would focus on reuniting foster children with their families as quickly as possible, whenever reunification could be regarded as a safe alternative.

### **Current Trends in Faith-Based Child Welfare Services**

Faith communities did not invent the family preservation and reunification movement, and, in fact, like many public child welfare agencies in their communities, they have been slow to incorporate its tenets in the configuration of services that they offer.

Vanguard faith-based based child welfare programs and congregations, however, are increasingly incorporating family preservation and reunification principles in the services they offer. At the very least, they are attempting to assure that foster/adoptive families are created within the foster/adoptive children's own racial/ethnic/religious communities, and even within their own neighborhoods (where relationships with biological families, friends, neighbors, and neighborhood organizations can be maintained).

The family preservation and reunification movement emphasizes the crucial importance of "strength-based" or "asset-based" children and family therapies. These therapies take account of the strengths of children and their families in dysfunctional situations. They attempt to reinforce and build of the foundation of these strengths.

"Asset-based" therapies are offered by teams of child welfare service providers, planning and working together, whose activities focus on the strengths and needs of particular families. According to Toni Yaffee, who has championed family preservation and reunification principles in the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, these principles mandate a "whole new way of engaging in child welfare services." They mandate inter-agency teaming in an environment where services have traditionally been offered independently by a range of child welfare agencies. "To be truthful," Yaffee says, "the transition has been very painful. It draws into question many of the habits we thought were OK. We didn't realize how much our protection of turf had affected what we had been doing."

Under the influence of the McKnight Foundation, The James Irvine Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the techniques of community asset mapping are being applied in the Family Preservation and Reunion Movement. Churches, temples, mosques, and other private sector organizations are being identified as valuable community assets that can be brought to bear to support at-risk children and families. Public child welfare agencies are encouraged to empower these community-based organizations—to include them in public/private teams, whose services are directed toward building on the strengths of at-risk families and children. According to Toni Yaffee, this “way of doing business is really quite radical, and we are only just now learning how to do it.” Public child welfare agencies have historically interacted with congregations, faith-based nonprofits, and other community organizations, Yaffee says, but “as often as not, public agencies have used them to disseminate information and to serve on community advisory councils.”

The asset-based and public/private teaming strategies that are being adopted by family preservationists are, virtually by definition, associated with community development and community organizing orientations. One of the central, commonsensical insights of the family preservation and reunification movements is that at-risk families and children are attached to neighborhoods. Thus, public and private child welfare programs increasingly turn their attention to the availability (and/or absence) of family-strengthening resources in particular neighborhoods, or at least in particular regions of cities and counties. They are studying the neighborhoods they serve. They are applying asset-mapping skills. They are learning to use residents to identify barriers to child welfare that are encountered in their neighborhoods. They are learning to think spatially (i.e., in terms of bounded urban territories) about the reduction of these barriers.

Los Angeles’s Project Hope offers an example of this orientation. Spurred by its family preservation values, the project is building a continuum of human services for residents in a particular, neighborhood of Los Angeles. Project Hope administrators can identify, in exact terms, the streets, boulevards, and avenues that constitute boundaries for this “territory.” Their efforts to identify barriers that are encountered by residents are relative to that neighborhood. Strategies to reduce these barriers are also relative to assets in that neighborhood.

The Children’s Planning Council and the Child Care Planning Council, embedded in the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, are also committed to a community development approach. Their efforts to work strategically within discreet Service Planning Areas (SPAs) have achieved mixed success. But their commitment to working in this way stays firm. Public/private partnership, child welfare administrators assert, make sense only when they are local.

Public/faith-based teaming in discreet neighborhoods has also been encouraged by the Bush administration’s Faith-Based Initiative. The Compassion Fund, administered by Health and Human Services, has given a very high priority to raising the capacity of small faith-based and community-based organizations to serve particular low-income neighborhoods.



## Case Examples of Innovative Practices

### ***Congregation-Based Adoptive/Foster Parent Recruitment and Family Support Services***

*One Church One Child, Illinois (OCOC).* Organized in 1980, the organization recruits adoptive families for Illinois children who are wards of the state. A high priority is the recruitment of foster/adoptive parents for African American children. FCOC encourages churches to identify caring, loving, and safe families who are willing to adopt or serve as foster parents to at least one child. It works with the Matching for Adoption and Permanency in order to expedite legal procedures associated with the adoptive placement process. It then advises the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services regarding the placement of African-American children. One Church One Child has been successfully replicated, with regional variations, in Texas, New York, Florida, and Oklahoma.

*The Faith-based Partnership for Adoption, Philadelphia,* is a coalition of four of the region's child welfare agencies — Jewish Family and Children's Service of Greater Philadelphia, Lutheran Children and Family Service, Bethany Christian Services, and Bennett & Simpson Enrichment Services with One Church, One Child of PA, Inc. The Partnership's goal is to engage local and regional congregations in efforts to find adoptive families for children.

*Faith Communities for Families and Children (FCFC), Los Angeles,* is faith-based program that works in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services and, also, with the Youth Law Center. It is a coalition of over 50 religious organizations, including Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Catholic, Protestant, and Mormon dominations. The program's mission is to locate foster/adoptive placements within families that belong to a child's own faith tradition. If it is not possible to find placements for children in their own religious organizations, FCFC at least tries to recruit foster/adoptive parents in the children's neighborhoods, or to recruit families that agree to facilitate the relationship between a child and his/her neighborhood. FCFC also recruits and trains mentors for at-risk families. It informs communities about the availability of homes for children from their congregations after licensing. It cooperates with courts in efforts to enlist their support for family preservation. It encourages public agencies to arrange for licensing and training at congregational sites. It also encourages its members to stay abreast of public policy issues that affect the region's foster/adoptive care system. It encourages members of participating congregations to be active, informed advocates of public policies that support family preservation and reunification values.

*Born in Our Hearts Adoption Ministry, Massillon, Ohio.* Born in Our Hearts Adoption Ministry at River Tree Christian Church began a partnership with the Foster Care and Adoption Department at Christian Children's Home of Ohio (CCHO) in 2001. The ministry holds social gatherings with children and adults considering adoption. The church also provides space for CCHO's Foster Care and Adoption Department and for a counseling center.

*Spaulding for Children's Bandele ("follow me home") Project, Detroit.* Spaulding for Children designed Bandele to assist African-American children to find adoptive placements in families that participate in African-American churches. Bandele's staff sponsors social and

artistic activities for waiting children in churches. Activities include fashion shows, play performances, and participation in the Rites of Passage program. The children involved were referred by participating agencies and transported to church events by an agency or Bandele staff person. Children took part in community and religious activities while being featured in photolisting books and bookmarks for church members. When prospective adoptive families were identified, Bandele staff members referred them to participating agencies on a rotating basing. Bandele staff members have concluded that, when congregations and pastors linked Bandele with their own missions and programs, they found ways of identifying qualified adoptive parents.

*The General Baptist State Convention, North Carolina*, works with the state's Division of Social Services to recruit African-American singles and couples to be adoptive and/or foster parents. The program's Adoptive and Foster Care Ministry attends conferences, workshops, and Sunday services at churches to elicit interest. The Ministry's staff works with volunteer project coordinators in each of more than 100 congregations that are participating. It also cooperates with other faith communities, the North Carolina NAACP, and the North Carolina Association of Black Social Workers to promote the initiative.

*FosterHope, Los Angeles*, recruits foster/adoptive parents in the Jewish community for Jewish at-risk children. The program is a collaboration of Jewish Family Services, Vista Del Mar Child and Family Care Services, the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services, and ChildShare, a long-established Christian foster/adoptive parent recruitment program. FosterHope provides rabbis with materials for sermons on foster care, and it conducts information and recruiting sessions at synagogues and temples.

### ***Congregation-based mentoring services***

*Amachi, Philadelphia*, is a partnership of churches, the Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society at the University of Pennsylvania, the Robert A. Fox Leadership Program at the University of Pennsylvania, and Philadelphia-based Public/Private Ventures. The program works with a carefully selected group of Philadelphia churches, which recruit and support long-term volunteer mentors for children and youth. Amachi provides training sessions for these volunteers. It also interprets for public officials and funders what Amachi has learned about effective practices in urban faith-based mentoring. In May, 2002, Amachi was replicated in New York City. Subsequently it has been replicated in twenty-two additional sites in various cities across the country. In, September, received a grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for programs that mentor the children of prisoners.

### ***Specialized faith-based family support services***

*Family Services of Central Florida, Leesburg, Florida*. Family Services of Central Florida, a faith-based social service agency, is an affiliate of Central Baptist Children's Home. The program offers a variety of support services in addition to its recruitment program: (1) Substitute care, which provides temporary home placements when children must be removed from their biological families for their safety and protection. (2) Family preservation services, which offers parenting education/training, and homemaker or day care services. (3) Intensive therapeutic services that address the clinical needs of children. (4) Family

reunification services that help biological parents achieve parenting standards that are sufficient for reunification with children who have been removed by courts.

*Baptist Children's Family Homes of North Carolina*, located in four regions of the state, offer a continuum services for families and children, including emergency care, residential, parenting education, foster/adoptive care, and family reunification services. Programs that promote value change in at-risk families are offered at all of the organization's residential facilities. These programs help families to understand what is happening in family relations and to learn problem-solving skills.

***Regional/state/city/neighborhood coalitions and faith-based organizations that attempt to assure a continuum of specialized care services for at-risk children and families***

*The Alliance for the Care of Abused Children, Los Angeles*, is a program of the San Fernando Valley Interfaith Council, in collaboration with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services and the San Fernando Valley Child Abuse Council. This program links local congregations and community organizations with Department of Children and Family and Children social workers in order to meet the basic needs of at-risk children who are abused, neglected, or living in poverty. Working through the program's "Adopt a Social Worker" model, congregations and other organizations provide the basic and sometimes court mandated necessities, such as beds, cribs, and clothing. These basic items can be the determining factor in creating situations in which a child can be maintained in his/her biological family, or in which a child can be reunited more quickly. The program also provides extras, which a child may never receive otherwise, like musical instruments, prom dresses, and funds for summer camp.

*Project Hope, sponsored by California Hospital, Los Angeles*, has created an informal coalition of public and private human services agencies to serve the needs of at-risk children. The core program in Project Hope is an early childhood education center, but this center is associated on a day-to-day basis with agencies that offer English-as-a-Second Language, legal services, literacy education, parenting education, violence intervention, and adoptive/foster parenting services. Project Hope cooperates with Faith Communities for Families and Children—a faith-based program that recruits foster and adoptive parents in congregations. What makes Project Hope unique is that it defines its coalitional mission geographically, i.e., in relation to territory bounded by specific streets and avenues. The coalition in this territory includes cooperating, religious congregations, public services, community-based nonprofits, and religiously-affiliated human service agencies—all committed to building a continuum of care for at-risk families in downtown Los Angeles.

***Advocacy***

Faith communities in the United States, working through national, state, and local advocacy organizations, have a long record of advocating on behalf of legislation and public policies that serve the interests of children and youth. In California, for example, the Lutheran Public Policy Office in Sacramento has specialized in issues related to childcare, after-school care, and other children and family issues. The California Council of Churches is currently

advocating universal pre-school and the expansion of affordable childcare (associated with a broad spectrum of specialized family support services). The United Methodist Church in Southern California has focused on the need for after-school care, and has lobbied public school systems to include faith-based and other community-based organizations in their efforts to support at-risk children in public after-school programs.

Large numbers of faith-based programs that offer recruitment and support services for adoptive/foster parents also include public policy advocacy in their agendas. Most of these programs have some component of collaboration with public welfare agencies, and collaboration creates opportunities for critiquing the humaneness policies related to children and youth. Mia Thompson, former director of Faith Communities for Families and Children, explained, when you are in virtually daily communication, "advocacy happens all the time." Faith-based human service organizations, however, carefully try to configure their advocacy activities in ways that protect their tax-exempt 501(c)(3) status.

*The Youth Law Center (Children's Legal Protection Center), California and Washington D.C.*, provides a good model for how a legal research-and-advocacy nonprofit can enter into cooperative advocacy relationships with faith-based organizations. The Youth Law Center is a non-profit, public interest law office that has worked to protect abused and at-risk children since 1978. The goal of the Youth Law Center's work is to ensure that vulnerable children are provided with the conditions and services they need to grow into healthy, productive adults. The Center's staff attorneys are widely recognized as leading legal advocates in children's law. Staff attorneys work with legal services attorneys, children's advocates, service providers and private lawyers serving the indigent to support their work on behalf of poor children. Working in cooperation with the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family to Family Project, the Youth Law Center encouraged the establishment of Los Angeles-based Faith Communities for Families and Children (described above), a program that includes a strong public policy advocacy component. It is now exploring possibilities of replicating that program in the Bay Area of California.

### ***Emerging Collaborations***

Virtually by definition, faith-based child welfare services are collaborative, in the sense that at least they must integrate their work with the public service agencies that are vested with legal responsibilities for maintaining foster/adoptive systems. Congregations that recruit foster/adoptive parents, for example, must turn to public agencies to certify or license these recruits. They must turn to public agencies to process, and, subsequently, to monitor foster placements.

Faith-based child welfare programs, more often than not, collaborate with other private sector organizations. The programs routinely involve informal and/or contractual relations among various combinations of congregations, religiously-affiliated nonprofit agencies, community-based welfare agencies, advocacy organizations, and even colleges and universities.

The Center for Religion and Civic Culture is aware of a number of coalitional child welfare services that are in planning stages in California. For example:

- The Youth Law Center is currently considering possibilities for replicating its Los Angeles-based Faith Communities for Families and Children in the Bay Area. If this project moves forward, it would bring together a broad coalition of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Muslim congregations.
- Los Angeles County's Department of Children and Family Services, Probation Department, and Department of Public Social Services are well-along in planning a mall of public, faith-based, and community-based children and family welfare services in the San Fernando Valley region of Los Angeles. The primary faith-based partner in this enterprise will be the San Fernando Valley Interfaith Council, which currently sponsors a wide variety of community-building programs.

### **Opportunities for Replication**

The following generalizations are drawn from studies conducted of faith-based human service/advocacy organizations and coalitions in California, especially Los Angeles County, since 1997. They are also drawn from a national study of faith-based human services, sponsored by the Pew Charitable Trusts, which has emphasized effective practices.

National and state studies consistently report that religious congregations currently offer a broad range of human services, typically in an informal manner. They most often offer emergency food, clothing, and shelter programs. They enlist volunteers and provide donations for local and regional human service projects (e.g. homeless shelters, faith-based multi-service centers, Habitat for Humanity).

Congregations whose memberships exceed about 750 are more capable of incorporating organized, professionally staffed human service projects into their agendas.

*Mentoring.* National and state studies of faith-based organizations generally agree that congregations of virtually any size are capable of being involved in mentoring programs, especially when these programs are coordinated by outside religiously-affiliated nonprofits (interfaith, denominational, and/or interdenominational). Congregations depend on these outside organizations to offer recruiting events and training materials, and, also, to establish connections to the public agencies that refer clients. They require assistance from outside organizations in creating data collection systems. Individuals who administer mentoring projects complain about the high turnover rate among the volunteer mentors they have recruited and trained. They have had to broaden the pools from which they recruit, sometimes by using the media to appeal to the general public.

*Recruitment and congregational support of foster/adoptive families.* The Center's study of ChildShare and of Faith Communities for Families and Children suggest that congregations are capable of being involved in foster/adoptive family recruitment programs, coordinated by outside religiously-affiliated nonprofits. These kinds of programs seem to be compatible with the volunteering culture of congregations. Members and congregations are able to offer respite care and other supportive services. They comfortably provide the kinds of contributions required by Adopt-a-Social-Worker programs. At this point, the Center has not

observed the kinds of administrative fatigue in foster/adoptive family recruitment programs that are often experienced in congregation-based mentoring programs.

Mentoring and foster/adoptive family recruitment programs seem to work in both sectarian and interfaith, and inter-religious environments. ChildShare, for example, projects an interdenominational Christian identity. The congregational affiliates of Faith Communities for Families and Children are drawn from a wide variety of Los Angeles's religious traditions.

Particular mentoring and Foster/Adoptive Family recruitment programs are most easily replicated in a variety of geographical settings when they are associated with programs that have already succeeded in other settings, that have already attracted the support of funders, and that have been led by charismatic administrator/leaders. Success breeds success. Replicated programs are increasingly trusted as viable options for replication.

*Coalitions that try to build a "continuum of care"* for residents of a particular region/city/neighborhood are labor intense. They focus on local needs and local resources. They take a long time to build. They require constant attention to inter-agency communication. They are difficult to replicate, except when foundations and/or public funders provide financial support for particular models (as they did in Los Angeles's health care-oriented Barrier Reduction Program). The leaders of effective "continuum of care" coalitions, however, regularly appear in national and regional training conferences. Their programs are described in "effective practice" profiles, distributed at these events, on the Internet, and by intermediary organizations.

Building stable, innovative, financially viable *specialized faith-based human service organizations* is an arduous task. These organizations rarely survive over the long haul when they depend on funding from a particular foundation or a particular public grant program, whose priorities change over time. They must cultivate multiple funding sources. They require entrepreneurial leadership. They are often the strongest when they have institutional identities that are related to particular faith traditions (e.g., Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, Episcopal Community Services, Jewish Family Services) or to highly visible, large congregations (e.g., West Angeles Church of God in Christ, First AME Los Angeles).

### **Leaders in the Field**

Baylor University's School of Social Work has assumed a prominent leadership role in making the case and in training leaders for an expansion of congregation-based human services. Diana Garland, the School's Director, has a high level of national visibility.

Other schools of social work that have joined Baylor University in embracing this mission are at Calvin College and Robert Wesleyan College.

In an important sense, leadership in the broad field of faith-based adoptive/foster parenting services is pervasively local. There are many programs that are doing excellent jobs in their own settings, and their leaders often play important regional roles in interpreting their experience for others. They serve as mentors for organizations that are considering new strategic opportunities.

Among the programs cited in this report, however, a limited number should undoubtedly be placed on a short list of organizations that can confidently be used by foundations as innovative, replicable models. For example

- In the arena of faith-based mentoring, the model developed by Philadelphia-based *Amachi* is impressive. It has already been replicated in a large number of places. Its Public/Private Ventures credentials and its historic ties to the Philadelphia mayor's office open doors for both public and private sector funding.
- In the arena of faith-based efforts to recruit and support foster/adoptive parents, *One Church One Child*, has an excellent record of success in Illinois, Texas, New York, Florida, and Oklahoma. Like *Amachi*, the program has good leadership, good training procedures and materials, and innovative family support activities. Especially in Illinois, the program has given a high priority to working with African-American congregations—a priority that acknowledges the concentration of African-American children in the foster care system.
- Los Angeles-based *Faith Communities for Families and Children* offers a nationally significant model, although the program is still relatively young and has not as yet been replicated in other regions of California or the nation. The program is multiethnic, multiracial, and multi-religious. Its models family preservation and reunification values. Its ties to the Youth Law Center (and, thereby, to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family to Family Project) assure that the program's participants are knowledgeable about public policy issues. They are encouraged to be advocates for public policy issues that are compatible with visions of justice associated with family preservation and reunification.
- Any number of programs come to mind as models for assuring that at-risk families enjoy easy and affordable access to a "continuum of services." *Family Services of Central Florida* (Leesburg, Florida) offers a good example of how a single faith-based organization can build an array of services. *Project Hope* (Los Angeles) offers a good example of how a coalition of service programs and congregations can be built to serve the needs of at-risk families in particular urban neighborhoods.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are directed toward the Annie E. Casey Foundation for possible use in future discussions about the foundation's priorities for its involvement in the arena of faith-based child welfare services.

*Action Research.* The Center for Religion and Civic Culture benefited enormously from the preparation of this background paper. In fact, we regard the design of what the Annie E. Casey Foundation asked us to do as a promising model for action research. The foundation asked that we think holistically about the state of faith-based child welfare practices in the United States, that we identify what values faith-based human services add, that we identify trends, that we survey vanguard programs, that we identify leadership organizations, and that we venture recommendations. In effect, we were asked to do asset mapping within the field of faith-based child welfare services. As this work progressed, staff members in the Center became convinced that what we were doing (perhaps in a less constrained time frame) could profitably be replicated in relation to neighborhoods, cities, regions, and/or states.

The field of faith-based child welfare services needs action research that identifies models and conceptual frameworks that are effective in serving children and families. Then action research needs to examine these models and frameworks to discern what makes them effective. Then it needs to examine how effective models and frameworks—or elements drawn from them—can be applied in other geographical and cultural settings.

Jacquelyn McCloskey, Professor of Social Work at USC, strongly supports action research (directed toward foster/adoptive issues) that are lodged in research centers that study the involvement of religion in civic affairs. Departments of children and family services, she claims, consistently encounter difficulties in their relations with faith-based child welfare agencies. They need “translators”—university-based researchers who can interpret the culture of public child welfare agencies for faith-based organizations, and, conversely, that can assist public agencies in understanding the cultures of faith-based organizations.

*Organizational Development.* Programs that embody family preservation and reunification values are valuable urban assets. These programs utilize a variety of service models, and, with additional resources, each can realistically explore new opportunities that are available to them, e.g., for adding adoptive/foster services, for encouraging the replication of their programs in other cities, for mentoring other organizations, for expanding their involvement in coalitions, and/or for expanding their interaction with public agencies and departments to facilitate the access of at-risk families in underserved areas to high quality, affordable services.

In Los Angeles, for example, Faith Communities for Families and Children is a valuable urban asset, which deserves to be replicated elsewhere. Our impression, however, is that the organization needs time and resources to strengthen its financial and staff base in order to serve a county that contains a high percentage of the state’s and nation’s low income, poverty populations and. The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services is eager to involve the region’s faith communities in their efforts to assure that its seven Service Planning Areas (SPAs) provide access to the services needed by at-risk families. The Department seems to be serious about interacting with faith communities. This is an opportune moment for Faith Communities for Families and Children to consider whether it can be an active player in elaborating the County’s plans for its SPAs, especially for SPAs that serve low-income families. It needs organizational development funding for this kind of short-term/long-term venture.



We would suggest that that the Annie E. Casey Foundation could profitably consider organizational development grants for well-established organizations like Amachi and One Church One Child. These programs, which have proven to be successful in replicating themselves in various areas of the country, might, for example, consider establishing ties with the Youth Law Center, to educate their constituencies concerning the public policy context of their labors and to encourage grassroots, faith-based advocacy. This kind of development is currently occurring in health and faith partnerships (parish nurse programs), where congregation-based health councils are becoming strong advocates for universal health access.

*Program Replication.* Replicating effective programs (e.g. One Church One Child, Amachi) is a politically complex, labor intensive process. Some of these programs have already attracted funders who are willing to support the process of replication. Others have not. The Youth Law Center offers a case in point. If the Center's leaders decide that they will try to replicate Faith Communities for Families and Children in other regions of the state and/or nation, it will require funding to deal realistically with opportunities.

*Muslim Foster/Adoptive Infrastructure.* Based on an admittedly-narrow sample, it appears that the nation's enormous-and-still-growing Muslim population has not as yet established a broadly-dispersed infrastructure for serving Muslim foster children or for assuring that at-risk Muslim children will be placed in Muslim foster homes. The situation appears to be changing. There are, for example, Muslim participants in Los Angeles's Faith Communities for Families and Children, and individuals associated with Los Angeles's Islamic Center tell us that the Muslim community now realizes that it must "play catch-up" in dealing with foster/adoptive issues. The times seem right for considering opportunities to support the development of Muslim foster/adoptive infrastructure in urban areas where there are large Muslim populations.

### **Future Trends**

The Center for Religion and Civic Culture has observed a limited number of faith-based organizations that regard their human service programs as magnets for civic associations, for public departments and agencies, and for private welfare agencies that will invest in the cultural and physical health of a neighborhood. A faith-based entrepreneurial training program in Los Angeles' MacArthur Park, for example, opens its facilities for use by neighborhood associations. It works with the Los Angeles Police Department to encourage consistent law enforcement in the park. It cooperates with the city's community redevelopment agency and with the mayor's office. It encourages the presence of arts groups in the park on weekends to make the park family-friendly.

We expect to see more faith-based programs like this. The development is consistent with the current emphasis on building a continuum of services that strengthen a neighborhood's (or other urban "territory's") children and families.