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Congregations in the Community: A Case Study of Social Welfare Provision

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Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank Mary Collins for her support in the completion of this research project and the JSSW reviewers/editor for suggestions that strengthened the paper.

Congregations in the Community: A Case Study of Social Welfare Provision

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A complex mix of community and government activities address social welfare needs. Even with structural changes, communities are active in assessing and providing for their own members' needs, though in widely variable forms. Religious organizations are key in community social welfare. This project investigates the role of religion in social welfare provision at the local community level. Examining religion's participation contributes to the understanding of religion's role in the public sphere as moral commentator, contributor to the common good, and identity legitimation. This article uses a functionalist theoretical framework and case study data to discuss congregations and social welfare provision.

Key words: social welfare, faith-based organizations, congregations

A complex mix of community and government activities and policies address social welfare needs, and the balance of roles varies from country to country and sometimes community to community. In the last two hundred years, economic changes and other factors have led to the development of comprehensive welfare states in many countries, making national/federal governments significant players in social welfare planning and provision. Even with these structural changes, communities are still active in assessing and providing for their own members' needs, though in widely variable forms. Religious organizations are key players in providing for community social welfare needs, whether congregations or formal faith-based organizations. This project investigates the role of religion in social welfare provision at the local community level in the U.S. national context. Examining religion's participation in social welfare provision contributes to the understanding of religion's role in the public sphere as possible moral commentator, contributor to the common good, and identity

legitimation. This article uses a functionalist theoretical framework and case study data to discuss the role of congregations in community social welfare provision.

The following discusses congregational activity in a small U.S. city through the lens of the stakeholders interviewed for the study; this is supplemented by information from telephone surveys, publically available information, and background information about the city. The theoretical framework organizes the findings, beginning with congregational activities and moving on to stakeholder views. From the community data, collaboration dominates the conversation about what role congregations play in social welfare provision. Reflecting on the theoretical frameworks from Casanova (1994, 2009) and Warner (1993, 2005) of moral commentator, contributor to the common good, and identity legitimation, collaboration reflects aspects of these while also connecting them. The following discussion of the research findings synthesizes collaboration as the primary relationship between congregations and the social welfare community, linking this to congregations as contributors to the common good through their bureaucratic flexibility and access to subcommunities as brokers of trust and information conduits.

Religion in the Public Sphere

Participating in social welfare structures is one way that religion is active in the public sphere. To place this participation in context, the following discusses theoretical developments of the relationship of religion and society generally. As a beginning, functionalist theories of modernization and religion are presented to understand how religion is differentiated from other social structures. Historically, religion is an institution that has served political and social functions as a primary actor in governing bodies, in shaping cultural norms, and as an integral part of other facets of society. Theorists disagree on how differentiation changes the role of religion in society (Bellah, 1970; Durkheim, 1912/1995; Parsons, 1961). Some secularization theories equate religion's differentiation with religion being excluded from the public sphere and becoming a concern purely of personal faith (Bellah, 1970; Berger, 1969).

As a society modernizes, religion is expected to play a less significant role (if any) in political discourse and other aspects of the public sphere. This expectation, however, has continually been challenged by the reality of international politics and new iterations of modernity.

In contrast to the evolutionary views of Berger (1969) and Parsons (1964), Smith (2003) locates the changing role of religion in the power dynamic between the established church and elite groups instead of in implicit social evolutions. Smith is rooting secularization to political and economic changes that Parsons argues are also linked to the Reformation and the rational individualism that Parsons argues Protestantism enables. This begins to incorporate institutional change and differentiation into the discussion of religion's relationship with society. In contrast to Parsons' evolutionary argument, Smith presents an intentional maneuvering of institutions within society that shapes the shared culture. This institutional change happens within a context of pluralism that Martin (1978) argues is a "resultant pattern" within the secularization process, especially in the U.S. (p. 5). (Martin, however, writes that secularization is "largely related to ethos rather than to institutions and beliefs" [Martin, 1978, p. 5].) Understanding pluralism then becomes another variable in defining and assessing secularization.

These presentations of secularization and the changing relationship between religion and society emphasize the differentiation of religion from other sectors of society and, as a consequence, the declining significance of religion in the public sphere. However, this model of modern society and privatized religion has been challenged by other examinations of religion in secular society. The work of Casanova (1994, 2009) and Warner (1993, 2005) are particularly useful to understand possible modern roles for religion in society.

Casanova (1994) argues primarily that differentiation among spheres of society is an inevitable element of modernity, but religion having a differentiated sphere from the public one does not mean religion must remain in the private sphere. Differentiation requires religion to relinquish its dominance of the public sphere and also to shape and define its own sphere. Casanova (1994) describes this as the "transformation of the church from a state-oriented to a society-oriented institution"

(p. 220). With this, religion is then able to reenter the public sphere in a new role. While he argues that democracies have "built in pressure toward the privatization" (p. 222) of religions, Casanova (1994) writes that religious institutions and groups resist being excluded to the private sphere. The deprivatization argument locates religion's public role primarily as a critique of norms and values. His forms of deprivatization outline a role for religion in the public sphere and in civil society: protection and debate of traditional values and norms, holding states and markets morally accountable (as moral commentators), and contributing to a common good.

Maintaining a common good emphasizes that religion is not only an external commentator on society but also an active contributor. Casanova (1994) writes about the common good as "normative structures" (p. 230) and religion as an actor in reinforcing those mechanisms in society. Religious ideas and communities attempt to balance individual interest against the common good by arguing for the benefit of things such as social welfare policy and services. For this research project, Casanova's work suggests that understanding the role of religion in the area of social welfare means paying attention to actions that provide moral commentary and attempt to contribute to the common good.

In the U.S., this role for religion in the public sphere is unique because of the lack of a previous history of an established, state-oriented church. The third role of religion used for this research is that of identity legitimation. Warner (1993, 2005) emphasizes the disestablishment of churches as central to understanding religion in the U.S. Religion provides a group membership with a socially legitimate identity and shared values that then provides access to the public sphere. Warner (1993) argues: "Insofar as a subordinated group requires for its emancipation access to financial and social resources, churches in the U.S. are a convenient and legitimate means of organization ..." (p. 1069). He further states that it is empowering in its voluntary social organization and its "mediation of cultural difference." This suggests that understanding the role of religion in social welfare must include attention to the way religious organizations embody and enable the participation of diverse cultural groups. This research project incorporates Warner's concept of identity legitimation by examining the

congregation as a nexus for subcommunities, both as a place to bring cultural groups together and to link these groups with the larger community.

Using the work of Casanova and Warner, three key questions arise that inform this research project: To what extent is religion serving as a moral commentator? To what extent is religion actively contributing to the common good? And to what extent is religion a means of expressing legitimate cultural differences in the larger community? While many possibilities exist, these three questions will focus this project's exploration of how religion participates in the public sphere, and specifically, how religion participates in social welfare.

Religion & Social Welfare

Congregations and other religious groups play a significant role in the history of social welfare in the U.S. The historical evolution of social welfare policy entailed a transition of responsibility for social welfare from private, often religious, groups to government agencies. Of course this shift has not happened in a clear, linear fashion. Major intersections of religion and policy in the U.S. include the changing distribution of responsibilities, subsuming religion under public policy (fitting religious activity into a constitutional structure), and religious actors as contributors to policy as an interest group (Collins, Cooney, & Garlington, 2012). The current era of devolution (transferring responsibility from the federal to the local level) arguably has shifted the onus for social welfare to communities, religious groups, and congregations. Since the welfare reform initiatives under the Clinton administration and the major faith-based services discussions of George W. Bush's administration, a subset of research in the U.S. has focused on the role and viability of faith-based organizations (FBOs) in social welfare provision.

As mentioned, religious organizations have always been involved in social welfare provision (Daly, 2009; Wineburg, 2001). The profession of social work grew out of congregations taking on an urban mission to address social problems subsequent to rural-urban and international migration. Even with the shift of social welfare to the purview of government policy, religious organizations have continued to provide services

informally and through formal government contracts, and to participate in the political process as policy advocates (Bane, Coffin, & Thiemann, 2000; Cnaan, Wineburg & Boddie, 1999; Formicola, Segers, & Weber, 2003). Large social service organizations, such as the Salvation Army and Catholic Charities, have historically provided formal extensive programs across the country supported by federal and community funds, serving millions of individuals while also managing a delicate balance of religious character and secular programming. Congregations have also historically provided support for members in crisis and organized member resources to contribute to the local community. While the current debate around FBO involvement in social welfare sometimes is framed as whether or not they should be involved, this ignores the long history of social welfare activity. When this history is taken as a given, the debate then centers on who should take responsibility for meeting social welfare needs, how we want religion to be active in the public sphere (regarding social welfare), and the suitability of faith-based programming to receive federal funds to address social welfare problems.

The picture painted by devolution includes a significant role for congregations and other religious organizations in the community as more able to meet social welfare needs because of their unique moral mission and access to the community (Cnaan et al., 1999). "It is assumed that poverty results from immoral behavior ... [and] that personal renewal is necessary in order to end poverty and welfare dependency ... [F]aith-based groups are more effective than secular programs because religion changes lives" (Formicola et al., 2003, p. 174). Also, the shift of responsibility away from federal government structures forces communities to maximize any contributions (formal or informal) available, including those of FBOs (Daly, 2009; Sager, 2010). Partly the shift towards emphasizing community organizations' (and specifically FBO's) social welfare provision is also predicated on the idea that government hinders a community's ability to care for itself (Bane et al., 2000) or weakens civil society (Glenn, 2000).

Some of this thinking about FBOs' unique access to the community is based on geographic proximity to populations in need. Increasing research at the intersection of geography

and social welfare demonstrates the significance of the geographic location of services to effectively meeting social welfare needs (Allard, 2009; Bennett & Cherlin, 2011; Coulton, 2005; Graefe, De Jong, & Irving, 2006; Mowbray et al., 2007; Murphy & Wallace, 2010; Queralt & Witte, 1998). Congregations and FBOs are assumed to be "more embedded" in needy communities (Allard, 2009, p. 42) (though other research has problematized this assumption [Ammerman, 1997b; Chaves, 2004; McRoberts, 2008]). This geographic relationship is part of the view of congregations and other FBOs as more able to serve community needs, with physical access to provide services but also proximity leading to stronger relationships of trust (Allard, 2009; Bane et al., 2000; Cnaan et al., 1999). Research shows that congregation members are not necessarily members of the congregation's geographic community, so this relationship of service provision and trust based on physical proximity is more nuanced than might be assumed (Ammerman, 1997b; Chaves, 2004).

With the devolution of social welfare responsibility to states and communities, including faith-based initiatives, more questions have been asked about the appropriate role of religion in the public sphere, in social welfare activities and beyond. The particular separation of church and state in the U.S. means that religion's role in the public sphere has been an ongoing negotiation from its founding, as seen in the functionalist discussion above. Religious organizations that utilize government funds to provide services must negotiate the placement of religious icons in public meeting places, the language in organizational missions and titles, and other aspects of the religious character of an organization that faith-based initiatives strive to protect. Beyond these regulatory questions, faith-based initiatives have also raised questions about government's role in promoting religion in the public sphere (Sager, 2010) or participating in religious organizations' missions (Formicola et al., 2003). Constitutional questions have also framed faith-based initiatives as overstepping the separation of church and state (both in terms of the establishment clause and the free exercise clause) (Davis & Hankins, 1999; Formicola et al., 2003; Sager, 2010; Sullivan, 2009; Wineburg, 2007).

Also key to understanding the involvement of FBOs in

social welfare provision is examining what role they already play. Certainly, religious organizations play a dominant role in garnering and distributing charitable resources (Cnaan et al., 1999) and are seen as having unique access to communities in need (Allard, 2009; Baker et al., 2006; Day, 2014; Dionne & Chen, 2001; Farnsley, Demerath, Diamond, Mapes, & Wedam, 2004), though other research has countered this argument (Kennedy & Bielefeld, 2006). Research shows that congregations are primarily involved in providing programming related to food, clothing, and shared resources for other organizations, such as volunteers and physical space in the local community (Allard, 2009; Ammerman, 2005; Bartkowski & Regis, 2003; Chaves, 2004; Cnaan, Boddie, Handy, Yancey, & Schneider, 2002; Day, 2014; Hasenfeld, Chen, Garrow, & Parent, 2013; Wuthnow, 2004), in addition to mission work further afield. Congregations play key roles in social welfare partnerships as gap-fillers and support formal service organizations instead of providing such programming themselves (Ammerman, 2005; Cnaan et al., 1999).

Case Study

This case study pulls together these theoretical and policy questions about the role of religion in community social welfare provision. Through multiple methods, data were gathered to understand the role specifically of congregations in this small city and the perspectives of social welfare stakeholders on religion's responsibility. None of the congregations surveyed had large scale formal social service programs, though the contribution of their informal services was certainly significant. When asked about services provided to the community, most respondents included activities like providing or contributing to a food pantry, collecting and donating used clothing, hosting classes focused on job skills or language acquisition, or seasonal activities (primarily around the winter holidays).

All of the congregations identified member donations as the primary source of funding for social welfare activities. Food and clothing donations, classes and AA meetings, and other volunteer opportunities were provided primarily through relationships with other community organizations. Some

congregations rented space to community groups who provided programs like after-school activities or classes. About a third of the congregations had multiple worship services for different language/ethnic groups, whether hosted by the congregation or through sharing/renting out the sanctuary. Some congregations focused more on providing social welfare-type support to their own members. This seemed to be true for congregations with higher concentrations of members from marginalized groups (often new immigrants).

Further research using publicly available information about congregations and content from the interviews showed congregations playing a significant role in the social welfare web of relationships and services in this city. The major areas of contribution were human services (food-related, material goods) and community benefit (volunteers and money). This aligns with the discussion below; respondents from the major social welfare organizations identified congregations as key players in social welfare provision through contributions such as collaborative food pantries, seasonal activities, and provision of volunteers (ongoing or for specific projects).

A key example of the intersection of congregation contributions was one Presbyterian church from a centrally located neighborhood. As the traditional members (white, middle class) moved to the suburbs over time, more families from new immigrant groups joined from the surrounding neighborhoods. The church included both integrated services and separate language services, recognizing the need for cultural groups to have shared time. This example is unique in that the congregation intentionally wanted to bridge the gap between serving the geographic community and making that community constitutive of the congregation. This church also rented space to a soup kitchen when the original host (a United Methodist church) closed down; this continued to be staffed by volunteers from area congregations who also provided the food. Area congregations (and a few non-religious groups) committed to serving the meal at least one day a month, sometimes more frequently.

In the discussion of the interview content below, the network of social welfare providers clearly relied on the collaboration of a range of community organizations, including

congregations, as identified in this overview of congregational social welfare activity. The theoretical work of Casanova (1994, 2009) and Warner (1993, 2005) is synthesized into a discussion of collaboration and its components.

Stakeholder Perspectives: Collaboration

Almost all respondents emphasized the need for collaboration among all types of organizations in order to insure the social welfare needs of the community were met. Collaboration is mentioned in many different forms (as discussed above): volunteering, contributing resources to another organization's program, organizational leaders sitting on boards of multiple organizations, providing physical space for programming, etc. Rebecca (04RO), from one of the major local non-profit players in the community, explains,

[W]e all play a role in working together; it would be difficult for me to say off the top of my head a particular role that one group should play over the other, I think. You know, when we look at community and building strong communities, it's everybody working together.

Respondents made reference to organizational collaborators as key to meeting service needs they cannot meet alone, to getting access to different target groups, to applying for funding that requires organizational networking, to increasing visibility, and to avoiding duplication of services. Derrick (04DO), from a local non-profit serving homeless individuals, used the language of "synergy" needed to pursue their mission. As discussed below, gaps in service provision exist for a variety of reasons. Respondents identified collaboration as one of the strategies to address these gaps and needs. Networking was useful both for bringing a variety of resources in for service recipients but also for providing information and referrals for outside resources. Collaboration allowed for formal and informal distribution of information so that multiple constituencies could be reached.

Respondents also identified collaboration as necessary to obtain funding for programs. Collaboration was seen as required by funders to demonstrate community relationships, but respondents also discussed ways that joining forces to

apply for funding expanded the range of possibilities and distributed the responsibility for applying for funds and implementing programs.

Contributions to the Common Good

As Casanova (1994) argues, one of the legitimate entries for religion into the public sphere is through contributing to the common good. Interpreting one aspect of this as concrete contributions, I collected data directly through questions to stakeholders and indirectly in analyzing the topics they chose to discuss. In asking stakeholders about whether they thought religion should contribute to the common good, frequently they responded by saying that any person or group should contribute who has the inclination and the resources. Responses varied regarding whether this should be one of religion's primary activities. Some respondents saw contributing to the common good as peripheral to the congregation's purpose for the individual.

Others emphasized concrete contributions to the community as core to congregational activity, such as feeding the poor, addressing physical needs, and, as Robert (06RC) from a local evangelical congregation put it, "spiritually, physically, socially, mentally, and intellectually" providing care. Kasey (05KCO), a leader of a religious non-profit, linked addressing poverty with self-sufficiency:

You know, I mean, when Jesus talked, you know, He talked more about money than He did about sin. He talked about taking care of the poor. He talked about taking care of people that can't take care of themselves. And He talked about teaching a man to fish rather than giving him a fish, you know; it's religion, but it's very social.

The discussion of religion contributing to the common good in concrete forms often centered on the ideas that congregations have limited resources and different organizational goals. Many respondents (representing all organizational types) specifically stated that congregations should not be held responsible for community activities beyond their resources. Other respondents also noted that pushing congregations to

provide services beyond their organizational resources was detrimental to the primary responsibility to their members. Cesar (03CC), a pastor at a local Pentecostal congregation with many new immigrant members, framed it in terms of balancing various congregational missions. As individual organizations, congregations are shaped by the membership's needs and skillsets. While some respondents identified participation in social welfare as part of religious education or worship, others emphasized the importance of prioritizing congregational members' spiritual care as the primary role.

As discussed above, the information about congregations shows two major areas of social welfare activity—human service and community benefit. Three major areas of material contribution by congregations to social welfare provision were dominant the interview findings—food, physical space, and volunteers. This reflects findings in the literature as well (Ammerman, 2005; Cnaan et al., 1999; Day, 2014). While direct contributions of money were referenced by respondents, this was not a major resource for service providers or focus of discussion for congregation stakeholders. These three areas of contribution were identified both by congregational members (as providers) as well as nonprofit organizations and state agencies (as recipients).

Using Casanova's (1994, 2009) theoretical frame of contributing to the common good was useful for drawing out specific social welfare activities respondents saw for congregations. The primary contribution respondents identified was collaboration. Beyond material contributions to collaborations, congregations were identified as having specific characteristics that made them uniquely valuable: bureaucratic flexibility and access to subcommunities.

Bureaucratic Flexibility

Respondents from all three types of organizations (congregations, non-profits, and state agencies) identified a vital role for congregations in the bureaucratic flexibility they have regarding use of funds and programming. Some gaps in services provided by non-profits and state agencies were attributed by respondents to funding or programmatic guidelines. These guidelines were designed to distribute

limited resources in equitable and targeted ways, creating purposeful restrictions that unintentionally generated service gaps. Respondents identified ways in which congregations' freedom from such structural guidelines allow them sometimes to meet individual needs in these gaps, such as providing gas cards or food boxes as needed. This flexibility was mostly identified related to funding differences. Congregational funds for social welfare activities came from member donations, which rarely have spending restrictions attached, whereas funding for state agencies and non-profits almost always is for specific programming with clear spending guidelines. This difference allowed congregations to be much more "reactive and direct" (Sheila [04SO] from a local non-profit organization oriented towards networking).

Most respondents were quick to add that congregations were rarely in positions to provide assistance in a systematic way. Congregations were recognized as a resource for informal contributions that could not be formalized, even though these contributions were necessary to meeting social welfare needs. There was a clear expectation on the part of state agency and non-profit organization respondents that these resources would be available. Katherine (05KO), a staff person from the largest non-profit represented in the sample, discussed the necessity of having congregations to reach out to for informal resources for individual clients, even though her organization represented the major provider (and recipient of state contract funds) of affordable housing and related services in the area.

The flexibility offered by congregations as opposed to social welfare organizations was discussed both as an aspect uniquely available to congregations and as a problematic flaw in social welfare organizations. Respondents identified the rationale for and necessity of programmatic guidelines in social service organizations, so the goal was not necessarily to change bureaucratic structures. Respondents also noted that, depending on funding and program involvement, non-profit organizations as well as congregations can be more flexible than state agencies.

Subcommunity Nexus

In asking questions about congregations' general role in

the community and also about identity legitimation, many respondents spoke of congregations as a point of access to target populations for service agencies, as well as a source of information about different groups in the community, serving as a subcommunity nexus. Information was seen as flowing to groups in need of service and from these groups to service providers. Service providers utilized congregations as gatherings of specific target populations to provide education about social welfare topics and services. This ranged from information about health clinics to domestic violence to community gardens. Service providers also utilized congregational members and leaders to educate themselves about cultural groups and needs in order to better design programs and services. Congregations were referenced as key organizations to identify and utilize in community needs assessment projects. While these respondents clearly saw congregations as a resource, they did not necessarily know how to go about forming relationships with congregational leaders. Often this was identified as a desirable goal that needed more attention. Sometimes the connection to a congregation was made through a staff member of the organization.

Warner (1993) writes that religion plays a unique role in the U.S. as a legitimate cultural difference. Immigrants who come to the U.S. are expected to integrate into society and adopt American values, with religious identity as an acceptable tie to the traditions of the past. The construction of identity is beyond the scope of this discussion. However, the role of religious group affiliation in providing identity legitimation through a sense of belonging, group cohesion, and access to the larger community can be examined as significant to understanding the role of religion. As such, the interview guide included a specific question about the role of religion in identity legitimation. This question had particular relevance for the community because of its history as an immigrant settlement area, and most respondents identified this immediately as a significant factor.

Respondents identified the act of gathering as a group as well as the content of the group activity within a religious context as meaningful in building community and relationship. Similarly, respondents identified that the relationships formed

in a congregational setting were significant because of the religious nature of the gathering and because of the support and community that the relationships provided. Congregational groups were compared to families in terms of the support and bonding involved for individuals.

Katherine (05KO), from one of the area's largest non-profit providers, specifically linked the participation in a congregation centered on shared ethnicity or national background to a pathway to greater relationship with the larger "majority community." She discussed the congregation as a safe place from which to then be able to move into the larger community and be accepted as part of this larger whole.

Three congregation leaders in particular spoke about seeking out opportunities to be involved in the greater community, both for the benefit of their congregation members and the community as a whole. Two of these leaders (Cesar [03CC] from a Pentecostal Hispanic church and Shane [03SC] from a local Muslim group) spoke positively of their activities with non-profit social welfare organizations and stated that the organizational network made efforts to include their congregations in needs assessments and planning. Both respondents also articulated a need for more communication with marginalized group leaders and were hopeful about increased opportunities for their congregations to be integrated into the larger community. The third congregation leader was from an African Presbyterian church, and Karl's (05KC) experience negotiating a relationship between his congregation and the larger social welfare community was negative. He discussed his attempts at representing his congregation in other organizational activities as unproductive, both in drawing attention to the members' needs and in his relationship with his congregation.

People sought help from congregations both because of the convenience of the physical location and because the congregation and its leaders were seen as trustworthy brokers of information. Respondents from all three types of organizations especially identified immigrant congregational leaders as important for transmitting information because of the particular trust relationship they have with their members (a particular subcommunity). A few respondents also noted that this meant

that congregational leaders had a responsibility to be informed about resources in the community so that they could provide this information to their members.

This use of a congregational leader as an information conduit was not without conflict. Karl (05KC) described the housing foreclosure crisis as a missed opportunity to use community resources to help his congregational members who lost their homes. He went on to describe community agencies that came to him for help in accessing the congregational members for assistance programs after the crisis had already been weathered (though many members lost their homes). Community agencies were frustrated that members were not participating in their programs, and members were angry that assistance opportunities had not been offered when they would have been useful.

The idea of trust was implicit in many of the interview questions and data, though the term "trust" was not used in the interview guide. Collaboration and information sharing, however, require elements of trust, even when this is not stated explicitly. Trust was a key element in establishing the legitimacy of an organization in relationship to its target population. This legitimacy was defined by Karl (05KC), a pastor of a congregation primarily consisting of new immigrants, as trust that a social welfare organization was giving individuals correct information. Respondents from non-profits and state agencies identified the significance of establishing trust with the community in general and target populations specifically in order to achieve this legitimacy, and establishing this trust by pursuing relationships with specific congregations. Trust played a significant role in social welfare provision generally and then more specifically with congregations as potential brokers of trust.

Moral Commentator

Casanova (1994) argued that religion and congregations have a role in holding other social institutions to a moral standard through participating in public discourse with a moral voice. The interview guide included a specific question about whether the respondent agreed with this idea of religion as a moral commentator, using as an example a religious leader

speaking out about policy issues. A frequent response was that all individuals have an equal right to speak out, regardless of affiliation, but religious leaders or figures do not have a particular responsibility to participate in political discourse. A few respondents expressed concern about a dominant conservative Christian political voice, but they were careful to be clear that everyone has a right to speak their political mind.

In answering the specific moral commentator interview question, most respondents turned more to the topic of religion as a moral compass for individuals, "to guide individuals in their moral consciousness" (Diane, 02DX). This individual focus is different from the concept Casanova discussed, but the emphasis on moral direction for individuals in the interview content is interesting in itself. Respondents seemed less able or willing to focus on a larger macro role for religion than on roles at the individual level. This could be due to the interview guide structure but certainly is an area for further research.

Respondents did identify a role for religion and congregations in the moral lives of the community and individuals, with various definitions of "moral," mostly focused on vague concepts of "doing the right thing" (Laurie, 03LC, from a local synagogue) and treating others well. In this role, religion defines the "right thing" and provides a guiding framework, "fences" (Jason, 05JC, from a local Protestant church) or "rules and structure" (Sheila, 04SO, from a local non-profit oriented towards networking) for doing the right thing. Sam (03SO), a member of a local interfaith group, specifically discussed a link between a more secular society and an increase in negative values. Both productive (providing a framework) and punitive (shaming) roles in the moral life of individuals are seen to be provided by religion and congregations. Respondents articulated these roles in the formal sense of religion but also in more informal ways, such as spirituality and beliefs, similar to the "Golden Rule Christianity" discussed by Ammerman (1997a).

Respondents also talked about the values needed to work in the area of social welfare, specifically a belief in acting in moral or ethical ways. Some respondents identified spiritual or religious aspects to these values that shaped their social welfare activities, while others separated the moral aspect of the work from any sort of religiosity. A few respondents were

careful to clarify that they believed religion or religious beliefs were not necessary for moral behavior. Jessica (07JC), a member of a local Protestant church, identified religion as a mechanism for morality but separated religion as only one possible layer of understanding human relations and the "moral grounding" needed to help us "be good."

The transmission of values was mentioned in two ways—how congregations provide continuity of values and how they negotiate values with new immigrant groups. The continuity of values is tied in with previous discussions of community cohesiveness and identity legitimation. Louise (04LO), a staff person at a local non-profit oriented towards women in crisis, used the example of people who maintained their affiliation with the Catholic Church even through the series of public sexual abuse scandals, saying: "You know, the common values were so important that they could hold onto that when it went through a crisis." Robert (06RC), an evangelical pastor, linked "moral decency" specifically with spiritual and religion education. Other respondents talked specifically about the continuity of history as the thread of shared values in this particular community, from the Revolutionary War to the shifting communities of new immigrants. Congregations were viewed as playing a role in maintaining this history and facilitating new immigrants' integration into the community values.

Conclusion

Collaboration was identified as the primary role for religious organizations (specifically congregations) in meeting the social welfare needs of this community. Through the relationships with social welfare organizations, congregations were able to make concrete contributions and act as a subcommunity nexus. This research reinforces the theoretical categories from Casanova (1994, 2009) and Warner (1993, 2005) of contributor to the common good and identity legitimation in the discussion of religion's role in the public sphere, synthesizing these into a nuanced understanding of collaboration. While the data did show some perspective on religion as a moral voice in the community, this was a much less emphasized element of the

stakeholder responses. The expectation of social welfare providers that congregations play significant, though informal, roles reflects both an ongoing engagement between religion and the public sphere as well as a welfare structure limited in its coverage of community needs. Further research is needed to understand the impact this has on communities' abilities to meet their social welfare needs, as well as how this dynamic differs in various regions of the U.S. where religion plays more or less of a public role.

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