Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation John F. Kennedy School of Government Harvard University

HOW CITY HALL CAN INVIGORATE THE FAITH COMMUNITY AROUND A CITYWIDE HOUSING AGENDA

Stephen Goldsmith Daniel Paul Professor of Government, and Director, Innovations in American Government at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government

William B. Eimicke Director of the Picker Center for Executive Education of Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs

Chris Pineda Research Assistant, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

Fall 2005

FINAL DRAFT

Introduction

Faith-based organizations, or FBOs, have sheltered the poor – at times in collaboration with federal, state and local governments – since the founding of the United States and they still continue to play a major role in housing and services for people in need.¹ In recent years, the political and legislative environments have been especially conducive for partnerships between the public and the faith sectors. At the national level, President George W. Bush made faith-based initiatives a priority of his domestic agenda and continues to encourage government to work through FBOs in addressing problems within distressed communities.²

At the local level, faith-based initiatives – despite their variety – have generally led to a broad array of pragmatic partnerships between government and faith-based organizations in order to expand services. Additionally, growth in the number of city hall/FBO partnerships is evident: a 2001 survey conducted by the U.S. Conference of Mayors indicates that at least 121 mayors had appointed liaisons to the faith community, and 37 more were planning to appoint liaisons.³ In 2004, the U.S. Conference of Mayors launched a Mayors Center for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to support and expand these collaborative efforts.

This paper examines how city governments can collaborate with faith-based organizations, and invigorate these partners, around a citywide housing agenda. Specifically, the paper explores: (1) why city hall/FBO collaborations are important; (2) what FBOs bring to the issue of housing; (3) how cities can more effectively collaborate with FBOs; (4) lessons on collaboration from the various 'Unlocking Doors'* cities; and, (5) a case study on city hall/FBO collaboration in the city of Nashville. The goal of this paper is to fill the gap of practical knowledge on collaborations with the faith community by presenting a framework to help city halls more intentionally leverage successful partnerships, based on lessons learned from other local cases.

The Importance of City Hall/FBO Partnerships and Collaborations

City hall tends to be the governmental unit of last resort. When poverty concentrates in our nation's cities, local officials are called upon to deal with the consequences: increased homelessness and a lack of affordable housing that makes it difficult for even working families to find a home. The standard resources available to local officials – namely, federal, state and local dollars – are limited, however, and may not alone solve these problems. Thus, creative partnerships must be structured that produce more solutions with the public dollars available. Further, it should be recognized that housing often carries with it not only individual imperatives but community imperatives as well. Homeownership and decent affordable housing can stabilize, or in the absence thereof destabilize, a neighborhood. Faith-based and community-based organizations, accordingly, play a critical role, at times in concert with the for-profit development

^{*} Unlocking Doors is an initiative of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development designed to highlight and promote successful local strategies for involving faith-based and community-based organizations in developing affordable housing projects and promoting homeownership in cities across the United States.

community, in meeting these challenges. However, while this type of collaborative effort requires careful thought and planning, too often these partnerships are *ad hoc* or not carefully arranged around a clear public purpose.

What FBOs Bring to the Issue of Housing

A review of the literature suggests that although faith-based organizations have a unique "vantage point" from which they enter community development, it is one filled with advantages and disadvantages.⁴ It is certainly the case, however, that FBOs bring significant and unique strengths and resources to the task of community development:⁵

- **FBOs are trusted by their communities**. Faith-based organizations tend to have longstanding histories in distressed neighborhoods, having remained long after other institutions have left. This commitment to the community coupled with a mission of service fosters the impression that FBO leaders act on principle and can be trusted.
- FBOs create and provide community leadership. Congregation leaders have historically played a leadership role in distressed neighborhoods. Moreover, an FBO's activities provide ample opportunity for congregation and community members to serve their communities and develop leadership skills in the process.
- **FBOs can access financial and human capital**. Faith-based organizations can often access the financial resources of their congregants, including upwardly mobile members who no longer live in the community. In addition, many FBOs are able to access committed and skilled volunteers from affiliated congregations.
- **FBOs are community and cultural anchors**. FBOs often have an "open-door policy," and thus serve as a central meeting place for communities, where various issues are discussed and activities organized. In some communities, FBOs have further developed this facilitative role to include that of stabilizing land owner.
- FBOs are more readily holistic in nature. Faith-based organizations tend to be more holistic in their approach – compared to secular nonprofit organizations – addressing the financial, social and spiritual needs of inner-city residents. For many FBOs, behavioral change is just as important as meeting immediate needs.

City halls should be aware that the potential advantages described above may not always be actualized, however. Contrary to the claim that religiously based social services are distinctive in their holistic or personal approach⁶, some scholars argue that congregations are more likely to engage in "fleeting contact" with needy people.⁷ Specifically, their contention is that FBOs participate in or support programs aimed at meeting short-term emergency needs such as food, clothing, and shelter.⁸ Other researchers argue that faith-based organizations use federal housing funds in much the same way as secular-based nonprofits, and that while President Bush's executive order in 2002[†] put a spotlight on FBOs, they "can't pick up all the slack as the government pulls back."⁹ Scholars who hold this view suggest that what sets FBOs apart from their secular counterparts is simply "the missionary zeal with which they approach their missions."¹⁰

[†] George W. Bush, "Equal Protection of the Laws for Faith-based and Community Organizations," Executive Order, 12 December 2002, http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/20021212-6.html

Potential Challenges to Collaboration with FBOs

The advantages associated with faith-based organizations are also accompanied by potential challenges that city halls should take into consideration when seeking to form partnerships around housing and community development activities. These issues, which may need to be overcome or at least managed by city halls, include:¹¹

- **Religious proselytizing**. Perhaps the leading concern around city hall partnerships with FBOs is that tax dollars will finance religious proselytizing in the delivery of services. While it is true that no public funds can used directly for inherently religious activities, confusion may remain about church/state boundaries among some FBOs.
- **Past lack of engagement**. While FBOs have long been involved in community development activities, the Charitable Choice provisions that equalized access for FBOs to receive certain public funds is still very recent. Given this past lack of engagement, some FBOs may need to be actively solicited to partner with city hall.
- Organizational capacity. Faith-based organizations new to housing activities may be over-reliant on volunteer staff, or lack necessary financial management and real estate finance skills. Similarly, FBO staff may not be aware of the considerable time and effort required on their part, particularly in the early stages of housing projects.
- **Competition with secular nonprofits**. This issue is linked with organizational capacity issues in that many FBOs new to housing activities lack the experience of their secular counterparts. For this reason, inexperienced FBOs can be at a disadvantage when competing for funding and other scarce resources.
- Community perceptions. FBOs active in housing development may face community resistance if there is a perception that project benefits (i.e. new homes) are targeted to needy congregation members, rather than non-congregants. Resistance can also arise if people think the FBO is "taking over the neighborhood."
- **Religious missions and compromise.** Faith leaders acting on principle may be unwilling to compromise with city hall. Further, there may be little room for negotiating partnerships if an FBO approaches a goal like poverty reduction as an issue of social justice, without regard to the city's budgetary constraints.

Finally, for the "arms-length" nonprofit organization created by a faith institution, a host of more specific challenges awaits, including: "reconciling distinct interests of the parent organization and subsidiary;" "fighting perceptions that church moneys and development/service moneys are fungible;" and, "dealing with stakeholders who scrutinize the *professional* activities of the service provider subsidiary according to the *faith* messages of the church."¹²

How Cities Can Collaborate with FBOs More Effectively

As previously stated, there is nothing new about faith-based organizations delivering social services, including housing, in U.S. cities. Since the time of the Settlement House

Movement, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, charitable and faith-affiliated organizations have provided housing, health care, child care and a wide variety of social services for immigrants, the homeless and others in crisis. What is new is the effort by mayors, governors and the President himself to encourage and enable faith-based organizations to access government programs to help those in need. This effort represents a substantial shift in approach from two previous polarizing approaches. One of these approaches assumed that government's responsibility needed to be discharged by government employees operating inside tight rules. The other approach assumed that if government merely got smaller, faith-based organizations and other players in the nonprofit sector would take over important services. Today, however, pragmatic mayors intentionally create partnerships with FBOs in order to more effectively deliver public goods. The question at the local level is no longer whether the sectors should collaborate, but how.

City Hall Approaches to Collaboration with FBOs

In a previous paper by this author, *City Hall and Religion: When, Why and How to Lead*, eight city mayors were studied to determine why they sought collaborations with faith-based organizations, the methods they used in collaborating successfully, and the issues that arose in the process of collaborating.¹³ These findings may be useful in providing direction to other cities seeking to build partnerships with faith-based and community development organizations, as well as assessing the results of the Unlocking Doors initiative.

The eight mayors studied in *City Hall and Religion*[‡]—Manuel Diaz of Miami, Glenda Hood of Orlando, Patrick McCrory of Charlotte, Martin O'Malley of Baltimore, William Purcell of Nashville, Graham Richard of Fort Wayne, R.T. Rybak of Minneapolis and Anthony Williams of Washington, D.C.—sought collaboration with faith-based organizations for five general purposes: (1) to improve communications; (2) to more effectively deliver youth services; (3) to leverage public resources; (4) to strengthen community ties; and (5) to enhance geographic renewal. Additionally, an unspoken and yet obvious reason for mayors to engage the faith community is the political support they hope to gain.

In *City Hall and Religion*, four roles were identified that city halls can adopt to best help faith-based organizations and enable successful collaborations with the faith community (see list below). Aside from using their authority in these four roles, an important strategy that mayors can employ is to focus partners on achieving "small wins" as a way to build and maintain the energy of the participating organizations and generate momentum for future projects.

1) <u>Funder</u>: Mayors can help FBOs with funding, either by providing money for specific projects, helping FBOs access funds from other sources, and/or giving FBOs the tools they need to acquire funds on their own.

[‡] Miami and Nashville were also observed as part of HUD's Unlocking Doors initiative.

- 2) <u>Troubleshooter</u>: Mayors can act as troubleshooters, using their authority or networks to reduce the bureaucracy or "red tape" that FBOs face in their development activities.
- 3) <u>Convener</u>: Mayors can convene potential partners from the faith community, government, and the nonprofit and private sectors in order to facilitate, catalyze or even engineer collaborations to accomplish public projects.
- 4) <u>Promoter</u>: Mayors can act as promoters, using the "bully pulpit" of their office to recruit volunteers for collaborative projects, encourage partnerships with the faith community, and publicly highlight the efforts of faith-based organizations.

City Hall Choices in Approaching FBO Collaboration

The manner and terms that city leaders use to approach the faith community matter greatly. Four issues should be considered in a mayor's efforts to successfully engage faith-based organizations towards achieving public policy objectives. First is the question of who sets the agenda. Does the mayor establish a vision and get the faith community to buy in or does the faith community bring the concerns of the public to the mayor and get him to do something about it? Alternatively, is there a brainstorming process by which consensus can be reached on a shared agenda? The process of agenda-setting, consequently, coupled with divergent priorities among partners can potentially compromise a collaborative project.

Second, should there be a formal advisory council or should the relationship with the faith community remain informal? A representative board of advisors can help to have all voices heard and build consensus, whereas a designated group of "anointed" leaders can turn others off or start a turf war. Third is the issue of accountability versus flexibility. If faith-based and other community organizations take public dollars they must be accountable for how those dollars are spent. Sometimes the "strings attached" to public funds may cause a faith-based organization to turn away from its original mission, and yet the funds could be too sorely needed or too large for the FBO to pass up. And if faith-based and community organizations are held to the same "straight-jacket" of rules and regulations that apply to government agencies, does this not compromise the advantages of using such organizations to deliver human services—by rendering ineffectual their freedom to be innovative?

Finally, political and governmental constraints and the missions of faith-based organizations will not always align and may actually come into direct conflict. Government is concerned about proselytizing by faith-based organizations. Faith-based organizations, on the other hand, worry about governmental rules and regulations (and falling short of them). In the event an FBO modifies its mission in light of governmental rules and regulations, an FBO's ability to help those in need may be compromised or their reputations diminished in the eyes of the larger faith community.

Lessons on Collaboration: The 'Unlocking Doors' Cities[§]

[§] Cities involved in HUD's 'Unlocking Doors' initiative include: Chicago, Columbus, Detroit, Miami, Nashville, Oakland, and Raleigh. This section of the paper draws exclusively from the results of the initial research and forums held in seven cities. Key issues, best practices, lessons learned and partnership

The analysis from *City Hall and Religion* is applicable for reviewing the information gathered in the seven Unlocking Doors forums. In four of the cities—Chicago, Columbus, Nashville, and Miami—faith-based organizations reported active and effective engagement by the mayor and city government. Further, in these four cities it also appears that the mayors sought collaboration with the faith community for the same general purposes outlined in *City Hall and Religion*: to enhance communications, leverage public resources, strengthen community ties, and enhance geographically-targeted renewal.

In Oakland, while there is an energetic mayor (Jerry Brown, the former Governor of California and Presidential candidate) and an active faith community, there was no clear discussion of how the Mayor was directly seeking to engage the faith community in achieving his public policy objectives. Detroit also has a dynamic young mayor in Kwame Kilpatrick – albeit with less experience in government than Oakland's Brown – with strong ties to the faith community and an office reporting directly to him focused on faith-based initiatives. Detroit forum participants suggested, however, that opportunities to collaborate had not been maximized due to the absence of a specific strategic plan from the Mayor and an extremely politicized fund allocation process. In Raleigh, faith-based organizations do not generally access public funds, perhaps due to previous restrictions on religious activities or to fears that their missions could be compromised. Moreover, while Raleigh Mayor Charles Meeker is collaborating with the faith community do not match at this time.

In the four forum cities reporting successful collaborations, the mayors have used the four methods previously described to produce successful outcomes. Chicago Mayor Richard Daley has provided funding for partnerships with faith-based organizations and encouraged city agencies to partner with the faith community. He has also frequently convened organizations from all sectors to help establish collaborative methods, such as the 'Restoring the Walls: A Call to Faith and Action' conference in October 2004. This session was designed to establish collaborative methods for meeting the needs of the very poor and homeless. In addition, Mayor Daley has used funding announcements and ribbon cuttings to create the "small wins" necessary to build momentum and sustain the energy of partnering organizations.

In Columbus, forum participants credited Mayor Michael Coleman with using his convening power to establish a broad-based and representative task force to help create collaborations. He then championed several ideas suggested by task force participants, creating the small wins that kept participants energized and active. Mayor Coleman also helped establish a housing trust fund that provides a reliable flow of public and private funds for housing projects, and encourages city agencies to work with faith-based organizations. By and large, Coleman is credited with having a vision for better housing in Columbus and working with all sectors of the community to create a comprehensive strategy to make that vision a reality. He has also devised innovative methods for

strategies to develop affordable housing were discussed at the forums by participants representing various local faith-based organizations and officials involved with housing issues.

expediting housing projects and cutting the costs of affordable housing development by using the city's foreclosure laws, providing tax exemptions, enforcing building and safety codes, and expediting permits.

Nashville^{**} Mayor Bill Purcell jump-started the very successful and on-going affordable housing efforts underway in his city by convening the Nashville Housing Summit in April 1999. He then created an office of affordable housing to direct city funds to affordable housing projects and encourage city agencies to engage faith-based organizations, all while leveraging the impact of public dollars with private funds and in-kind contributions. Mayor Purcell is also very visible at public events and announcements to create the small victories that keep the affordable housing movement alive and well. Like Mayor Coleman of Columbus, Mayor Purcell is credited with having a vision for affordable housing in the city and for creating a plan with specific targets to ensure implementation and the achievement of shared housing goals.

In Miami, Mayor Manuel Diaz has used the four methods mentioned previously to engage the faith community: funding, troubleshooting, convening and promoting. The city showed up in force at the Miami Unlocking Doors forum, where the faith community praised the Mayor for his extraordinary efforts to provide housing subsidies, facilitate multi-sector partnerships and champion small victories. While the Mayor's economic development programs have been extremely successful, an adverse side-effect has been that the stock of affordable housing has diminished. Today, the majority of the city's current residents could not afford the home they currently live in, if they were moving into the community today. Given the extraordinary escalation of property values in Miami, Mayor Diaz is having to consider targeted property tax exemptions, expedited development and permit processing, required set asides of affordable housing units, and more aggressive foreclosure procedures if his affordable housing program is to succeed.

The issues that can thwart a mayor's efforts to successfully engage the faith community were also evident in the Unlocking Doors forums. In Oakland, Mayor Brown and the faith community disagree about the proper income mix for new housing in the city and there appears no effective mechanism to bring the agendas into alignment. In Detroit, the faith community is looking to Mayor Kilpatrick to set the agenda but there seems to be no consensus among members of the city council, state agencies and the mayor's office regarding affordable housing priorities. Participants at the Detroit forum also reported that citizen participation in public policy making was low and not encouraged by local public institutions. Raleigh forum participants indicated that faith-based organizations may fear the restrictions and political implications of accepting public funds, explained as a "hangover effect" from an earlier time when government was reluctant to engage faith-based organizations due to concerns about religious proselytizing.

Overall, there is much to learn from the experiences of the mayors and the faith-based organizations in the seven cities participating in the Unlocking Doors forums and the six additional cities studied in *City Hall and Religion*. Clearly, there are some best practices which have worked in a number of different cities of varying sizes, geographic locations and different levels of economic activity. Likewise, similar obstacles are faced by a

^{**} See pp 14-16 of this paper for more information on Nashville's successful collaborations with FBOs.

number of the cities studied. Were more research available, a larger sample of cities might reinforce the lessons that have emerged thus far but might also uncover new and effective ways to form collaborations between cities and faith-based organizations.

Model of City Hall/FBO Collaboration: Nashville, TN^{††}

Nashville is the capital of Tennessee and a growing, diverse urban center. The city is host to a significant portion of the country music industry, a number of health care companies and the headquarters of a number of national religious organizations. In 1963, the city established a metropolitan government for Nashville and surrounding Davidson County.

Mayor Bill Purcell was elected in 1999 and re-elected in 2003. During his initial campaign and throughout his term in office, Mayor Purcell has focused on several key priorities, including: improving the schools, making neighborhoods safe, and improving the quality of life for all citizens. The Mayor believes affordable housing is essential for achieving all other priorities; as a result, he created the Office of Affordable Housing within the Mayor's Office following his election in 1999.¹⁴

To address the growing need for affordable housing in his city, Mayor Purcell convened the Nashville Housing Summit in April 1999, bringing together a wide array of interested and committed partners. The Summit concluded that Nashville needed both rental and homeownership units, and to meet the need of 35,000 units over the next decade, production would have to increase by more than 2,000 units annually. Mayor Purcell committed himself and the resources of the city to help meet these production targets, and by the end of 2003, more than 11,000 new units of affordable housing had been constructed or preserved.¹⁵

Faith-based organizations have praised Mayor Purcell for his vision, commitment to affordable housing, his focus on neighborhoods, and for creating a clear plan that has produced significant numbers of new or rehabilitated affordable housing units. Beginning with the Housing Summit, the Mayor has encouraged cross-sector partnerships and made a sustained effort to involve faith-based and community development organizations in those partnerships.

There are many faith-based organizations, large and small, that have contributed to the production of affordable housing in Nashville. Among the largest and most active FBOs are the 15th Avenue Baptist Church CDC, Nashville Habitat for Humanity, and Tying Nashville Together. These organizations have helped build senior housing, single family homes and some subsidized rental housing. In addition, these FBOs have provided funding, development knowledge, vision and planning skills, and partnering experience—resources that community-based organizations without faith affiliation also bring to the table.

^{††} For more information on the work of Mayor Bill Purcell and faith-based organizations in Nashville, please see: Banks, Brady, Briggs Xavier de Souza, and Coffin, Brent. 2003. *Mayor Purcell and the Faith Community Confront Nashville's Housing Needs*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Kennedy School of Government.

Nashville's FBOs, however, also bring with them a unique relationship with their congregations, enhancing their ability to identify, recruit, qualify and support prospective home buyers throughout the long and complicated process of acquiring a home. And given that faith-based organizations are characterized as places of trust, prospective home buyers and renters often seek FBO assistance on difficult personal and financial matters that stand in the way of their housing dreams. Another important resource of FBOs is seen with organizations such as Nashville Habitat for Humanity, which has a proven capacity to recruit large numbers of skilled volunteers whose free labor makes the homes they help produce much lower in price. In cities like Nashville, faith-based organizations can also access the resources and influence of members who live in affluent suburbs. Tying Nashville Together, an FBO, has been successful in building a diverse membership whose combined voice is very effective in championing affordable housing as a public policy priority.

Conclusion

Faith-based organizations bring a range of important resources to the task of affordable housing development, most notably, the trust of their surrounding communities as well as a keen knowledge of the needs of their people, based on their ongoing role as a community anchor. When compared to secular nonprofits, faith-based organizations differ in significant ways, which can at times lead to problems. Due to real and perceived legal and political challenges, FBOs have historically been underutilized in the provision of public-assisted housing. Increasingly, however, faith-based organizations are working with city hall and establishing a track record of success. The extent of these collaborations, of course, varies depending upon the city and FBOs involved, and some obstacles to collaboration still remain. But if handled with knowledge and great care, there are tremendous opportunities that city hall/FBO collaborations offer to better meet a city's housing needs.

ENDNOTES

¹ Mary A. Cooper, *The Role of Religious and Nonprofit Organizations in Combating Homelessness*, in *The Homeless in Contemporary Society*, eds. Richard Bingham, Roy Green and Sammis White (London: Sage Publications, 1987).

² Michael Leo Owens, *Capacity Building: The Case of Faith-Based Organizations*, in *Building the Organizations that Build Communities*, ed. Roland Anglin (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2004), 156.

³ Laurie Goodstein, "States Steer Religious Charities Toward Aid," *The New York Times*, 21 July 2001.

⁴ Avis Vidal, *Faith-Based Organizations in Community Development* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2001), 16

⁵ Henry Cisneros, *Higher Ground: Faith Communities and Community Building* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1996); Allison Calhoun-Brown, *While Marching to Zion: Otherworldliness and Racial Empowerment in the Black Community*, Paper presented at the American Political Science Association annual meeting, (Washington, D.C.: 1997); Vidal, *Faith-Based Organizations in Community Development*, 17-18.

⁶ Marvin Olasky, *The Tragedy of American Compassion* (Washington, D.C. Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1992).

⁷ Mark Chaves and William Tsitsos, "Congregations and Social Services: What They Do, How They Do It, and With Whom." *The Aspen Institute: Nonprofit Sector Research Fund*, Working Papers Series (Spring 2001): 23.

⁸ Mark Chaves and William Tsitsos, "Congregations and Social Services: What They Do, How They Do It, and With Whom." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (December 2001): 670

⁹ Anya Martin, "From a higher cause: Faith-based organizations approach affordable housing from a scriptural spirit, but otherwise they're not so different from any other nonprofit with a heart," *Journal of Housing and Community Development* 60, Issue 3 (May/June 2003): 57

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Joseph R. Hacala, "Faith-based community development," *America* 184, no. 14 (2001): 16; Vidal, *Faith-Based Organizations in Community Development*, 18-19.; Arthur E. Farnsley, "Can Faith-Based Organizations Compete?" *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 30, no. 4 (March 2001): 110.

¹² Xavier de Souza Briggs, *Faith and Mortar: Religious Organizations and Affordable Housing Strategy in Urban America*, in *Building the Organizations that Build Communities*, ed. Roland Anglin (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2004), 50.

¹³ Stephen Goldsmith, *City Hall and Religion: When, Why and How to Lead*, Paper prepared for the Executive Session on Faith Based and Community Approaches to Urban Revitalization, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (Cambridge, MA: 2003).

¹⁴ Brady Banks, Xavier de Souza Briggs and Brent Coffin, *Mayor Purcell and the Faith Community Confront Nashville's Housing Needs*, Paper prepared for the Executive Session on Faith Based and Community Approaches to Urban Revitalization, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University (Cambridge, MA: 2003), 2.

¹⁵ Ibid., 6.