Executive Summary

In the wake of welfare reform, many states have considered utilizing local religious communities as a point of social service delivery for relief previously offered through state entitlement programs. "Charitable Choice," Section 104 of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, forbids states which explore routing social services through local voluntary associations from discriminating against faith-based organizations as prospective providers of such services. On the heels of welfare reform, this study examines the food assistance strategies currently employed by a heterogeneous sample of religious communities in Mississippi's Golden Triangle Region. Our study situates rural Mississippi's faith-based food assistance efforts within the broader context of congregational poverty relief programs. Where appropriate, we draw comparisons between faith-based food assistance and the service delivery mechanisms utilized in public assistance programs.
As an investigation of the social processes undergirding faith-based food assistance, our study distills key research findings from over six hundred pages of transcribed in-depth interviews. These data, collected from 1997-1999, were culled from religious leaders representing thirty local congregations in rural northeast Mississippi. We have also conducted observational research at a subsample of four religious congregations and have tracked various parachurch food assistance and relief efforts on the local scene. We set the context for our qualitative investigation by first providing an overview of Charitable Choice legislation and a summary snapshot of social life in rural Mississippi. We then analyze four key organizational strategies through which rural Mississippi congregations provide food assistance to food-insecure populations. These congregational relief strategies include:

- **intensive food assistance**, which entails sustained interpersonal contact between congregants and local needy populations (e.g., highly active on-site food pantries, particularly those complemented by a hot meal program);
- **intermittent direct food assistance**, which encompasses congregational programs that foster periodic contact between churchgoers and the hungry (e.g., holiday food baskets);
- **parachurch food initiatives**, brought about through collaboration among local congregations (e.g., food provided through interfaith relief agencies); and
- **distant missions of food provision**, through which local congregations sponsor group mission trips to severely disadvantaged areas located in the state, region, or another country abroad (e.g., week-long food provision and poverty relief undertaken in the Mississippi Delta, Appalachia, or Central America).

Using pastoral interview data and field observations, we outline the contours of these food assistance strategies, paying special attention to their distinguishing features and the congregational contexts in which they are utilized. We also highlight congregational motivations for adopting particular food relief strategies, and evaluate the advantages and disadvantages associated with each of these food assistance initiatives.

**Intensive food relief**, which places the provider and recipient of relief in a sustained relationship with one another, often challenges social barriers (e.g., racial divisions and class-based hierarchies). However, intensive food relief requires a considerable investment of time and resources, leading some congregations to prefer intermittent direct food assistance. Given its more bounded time frame, **intermittent direct food assistance** can provide short-term relief from episodic food insecurity. However, intermittent direct food assistance does not facilitate the same enduring social bonds that are often yielded by intensive engagement with the poor. **Parachurch food assistance** entails the provision of food-based relief through umbrella faith-based agencies typically supported by collaborative congregational efforts. Parachurch agencies can provide food assistance efficiently (i.e., in a centralized fashion) to local disadvantaged populations—particularly those facing short-term food insecurity. Yet, if they operate as liaison organizations,
parachurch agencies can reinforce social distance between local congregants and the poor. *Distant missions of food provision* give congregants direct exposure to poverty and hunger through congregationally sponsored sojourns of several days to several weeks. Such mission trips personalize poverty. However, given their emphasis on geographical travel and short–term spiritual pilgrimage, distant missions do not guarantee a transposition of social action in one’s home community.

Our study of faith–based food assistance in rural Mississippi yields a series of important implications which we discuss in the concluding section of this report. Most notably, our investigation illuminates the contours, motivations, and prospects for faith–based food assistance efforts—particularly, those implemented in the rural South. If religious communities are to become more involved in local food assistance efforts, it is imperative that policymakers understand the range of food assistance strategies that congregations have heretofore utilized, and the social context in which such programs are undertaken. Government officials and community development specialists should also be aware of the cultural meanings that religious communities invest in food and the organizational motivations that undergird the particular food assistance strategies adopted by local congregations. In the end, we argue that religious communities can be a valuable ally in our society’s effort to redress food insecurity. At the same time, faith–based food assistance initiatives implemented under Charitable Choice should be structured with an awareness of the opportunities and the limitations likely to accompany such programs.

**INTRODUCTION**

In 1996, the federal government passed the most comprehensive welfare reform bill—the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA)—in recent memory (see, e.g., Bane and Ellwood 1996). Whereas the pre–welfare reform program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) placed relatively few restrictions on public assistance to families that qualified for the program (typically low–income, single–parent households with dependent children under age eighteen), PRWORA replaced AFDC with Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

PRWORA and TANF are founded on two key assumptions. First, welfare reform is based on the philosophy that virtually unlimited access to public assistance promotes welfare dependency among the poor and produces a class of citizens whose motivation to seek paid employment is undermined by unfettered access to government–sponsored assistance. By limiting the federal funds available for public assistance efforts, policymakers wished to redefine welfare from an entitlement–based system—i.e., a system predicated on the government’s obligation to provide benefits to anyone who qualifies—to a more restrictive temporary relief program.

Second, TANF and welfare reform are founded on a commitment to political devolution. Whereas options for the administration of welfare payments prior to the passage of PRWORA were limited by a bureaucratized disbursement system, welfare reform provides states and, ostensibly, local communities with greater autonomy in the distribution of public assistance monies through block grants. The block grant system is
predicated on the notion of "local empowerment," which assumes that state–level and community policymakers are best positioned to determine the particular needs of citizens within local communities.

As part of this broader commitment to political devolution, the Charitable Choice portion in PRWORA (Title I, Section 104) identifies religious congregations as a potential outlet for social services underwritten by block grants (see A Guide to Charitable Choice 1997; Chaves 1998; Cnaan 1999). Specifically, Charitable Choice forbids states that explore routing social service provision through local voluntary associations from excluding religious congregations as prospective service providers simply because of their faith–based orientation. During welfare reform debates, policymakers who championed a dramatic restructuring of public assistance with the aid of local faith communities found a vocal advocate in Marvin Olasky. Olasky, an academic, journalist, and evangelical Christian catapulted the prospect for faith–based welfare reform into the public consciousness through his popular treatise, The Tragedy of American Compassion (1992). In this provocative volume, Olasky chided what he saw as the lack of accountability characteristic of the modern welfare system. Furthermore, he charged that religious communities can and should figure prominently into any effort toward welfare reform. Olasky argued that prior to the rise of the welfare state in the twentieth century, churches and charitable organizations were counted upon to minister to America’s needy and did so most effectively.

Food assistance issues figure prominently into Olasky’s advocacy of religious communities as social service providers. Olasky envisions a scenario in which religious organizations simultaneously (1) provide immediate material relief—food, as well as clothing and temporary shelter—to the poor, (2) stimulate economic productivity among the disadvantaged through the inculcation of marketable skills, and (3) promote moral reform among welfare recipients who he alleges often lack such values as thrift, self– sufficiency, and personal accountability. Strikingly consistent with the assumptions underlying PRWORA, many advocates of Charitable Choice conclude that religious communities will provide social services more effectively than the government alone because congregations can offer temporary assistance that is accompanied by strict moral and fiscal accountability standards. These same champions of Charitable Choice contend that grassroots faith organizations are highly attuned to the local needs and particular life circumstances of the people within their home communities. Not surprisingly, Olasky’s vision of faith–based welfare reform has stimulated rancorous debate. While some critics fear that religious communities are structurally incapable of offering social services to the sizable ranks of the contemporary poor, others are deeply concerned that Charitable Choice initiatives will effectively breech the wall of separation between church and state.

**Study Objectives**

The last several years have witnessed growing support for Charitable Choice initiatives among policymakers throughout the South and the nation at large. Many states have implemented Charitable Choice partnerships between state–level human service agencies and local faith–based congregations (Griener 2000; Sherman 2000). Moreover,
President–elect George W. Bush strongly supports faith–based solutions to a wide range of social problems, including poverty and hunger. Bush has proposed an Office of Faith–Based Action as a pivotal agency in his administration’s implementation of "compassionate conservatism." He has also nominated Wisconsin governor Tommy Thompson for Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. Under Thompson, Wisconsin led the nation in welfare reform and Charitable Choice implementation. In light of these developments, this study examines the food assistance strategies currently employed by a heterogeneous sample of religious communities in rural Mississippi. Our study situates faith–based food assistance efforts within the broader context of congregational relief programs, and explores pastoral receptivity toward the expansion of such relief programs with block grant monies.

On the heels of the policy debates and considerations described above, this study aims to address several interrelated research questions:

- What food assistance strategies are currently employed by local religious congregations, and what factors facilitate or inhibit the effectiveness of these programs? Specifically, what types of food assistance do faith communities currently provide to the needy, and how do such communities address food security issues among the disadvantaged? How do these faith–based aid programs effectively address hunger and nutritional needs among local vulnerable populations, and what are the limitations of current programs?

- How is the provision of food by local religious communities linked to other forms of congregational relief? That is, what other types of aid—both material and non–material—do religious communities provide to vulnerable populations in addition to food–based assistance? What are the organizational rationales and desired outcomes that motivate food assistance and other aid provided by local religious communities?

- How are the disbursement mechanisms and aid–giving strategies utilized in congregational relief initiatives different from those employed within public assistance programs utilized prior to welfare reform? Specifically, how does food provision by local congregations differ from that previously provided through public assistance programs such as Food Stamps?

- Are local religious communities willing to participate in Charitable Choice initiatives that could expand their current food assistance and aid–provision programs? How do pastors and congregants evaluate the prospect for an infusion of block grant monies into local faith communities *writ large* and their religious congregation in particular?

Several previous studies have examined the types of aid that religious communities provide to their members and the unique means by which faith–based relief is provided (e.g., Chaves 1998; Eng and Hatch 1991; Harris 1995, 1996; Hogstel and Davis 1996; Humphrey 1980; Morrison 1991; Olson, Reis, Murphy, and Gehm 1988; Rawlings and Schrock 1996). In general, this literature suggests that religious communities can—and
often do—provide their members and local needy populations with safety nets that buttress the effects of poverty, economic downturns, and personal misfortune. However, food relief has received short shrift in a research literature that has focused more squarely on economic assistance and the health care services that religious congregations often provide to their members or local community residents. Moreover, because the vast majority of studies on faith–based social service provision were undertaken well prior to welfare reform, such investigations typically do not explore the efficacy of church–state liaisons in social service provision.

Interestingly, one recent survey–based study has explored pastoral receptiveness to Charitable Choice initiatives with data gathered from 1,236 US congregations. In this study, Chaves (1998) found that approximately one third of faith communities surveyed would consider participating in a Charitable Choice program. Moreover, liberal and moderate congregations, as well as African–American faith communities, were more likely to be favorably disposed toward Charitable Choice initiatives. Yet, despite the merits of such investigations, no study of which we are aware has focused sustained attention on the relationship between faith–based food assistance programs and other congregational sources of relief with an eye toward evaluating the feasibility of Charitable Choice initiatives.

Ecological Context: The Social and Religious Landscape of Rural Mississippi

Our study aims to determine if religious communities are in a position to expand food assistance and congregational relief programs in an age of temporary public assistance. In several respects, Mississippi provides an ideal test case in which to examine the feasibility of faith–based welfare reform. First, Mississippi has exhibited a longstanding antipathy toward government–sponsored welfare through AFDC payments that are notoriously lower than the national average. Consequently, if faith–based welfare reform can work effectively in Mississippi despite such antipathy toward public assistance, the implementation of such a program in other states might be quite feasible as well.

Second, not unlike much of the South, Mississippi features a population that is disproportionately rural, geographically dispersed, and quite likely to face persistently high levels of poverty. Most germane to our investigation, Mississippi is the nation’s leader in food insecurity. Because Mississippi religious communities have long faced these demographic issues in recruiting and ministering to their membership, our study will examine the extent to which these factors may either serve as obstacles to faith–based aid or stimulate creative forms of social service delivery by local congregations. In the end, the findings generated from this study will illuminate the prospects for faith–based welfare reform and expanded food assistance programs not only in Mississippi, but also across much of the South and throughout rural regions of the United States.

The Golden Triangle Region (GTR) connects three Mississippi counties (Oktibbeha, Lowndes, and Clay), and their respective county seats (Starkville, Columbus, and West Point). Columbus is the largest of these small cities, with a population of approximately twenty–four thousand residents. Starkville has about eighteen thousand residents, while
West Point has a population of just over ten thousand (Mississippi Population Data Sheet 1993). Mississippi is overwhelmingly populated by whites (63%) and blacks (36%), complemented by very small Asian and Hispanic populations (1% non–white/non–black)(Mississippi Population Data Sheet 1993).

A wide range of statistical indicators underscore the pervasiveness of food insecurity and persistent hunger in Mississippi (Bickel, Carlson, and Nord 1999; Nord, Jemison, and Bickel 1999; Rowley 2000). Mississippi is among the nation’s leaders in food–insecure households. Recent data reveal that 14% of all households in Mississippi are characterized by food insecurity—compared with a national rate of 9.7% food–insecure households and a generally stable rate of 11% in the South at large. Mississippi is also among the nation’s leaders in the percent of all families facing persistent hunger (4.2% in Mississippi, compared with the national rate of 3.5%).

The disproportionate size of the state’s food–insecure and persistently hungry population is likely linked to the fact that nearly 20% of all Mississippians and 32% of all children in the state live in poverty (1996 Statistical Abstract; Kids Count Data Book 1998). About 15% of Mississippi children live in extreme poverty. Such youngsters reside in a household whose income is less than half the poverty level. This indicator of extreme poverty is significantly greater than the national rate (9%)(Kids Count Data Book 1998). Mississippi has the highest child mortality rate (10.5 deaths per 1,000 live births), often considered to be an important indicator of child well–being and a marker of social inequality (Kids Count Data Book 1998). Moreover, Mississippi leads the nation in female–headed families with no spouse present (15.57%)(1990 Census data). Income disparities between northeastern Mississippi’s Golden Triangle Region (the site for our study) and the U.S. are similarly striking.²

Religious institutions have long played a central role in Southern culture (Boles 1972; Harrell 1981; Harvey 1997; Johnson and Jersild 1996; Stowell 1998; White and White 1995). Mississippi and its Golden Triangle Region are no exception to this general pattern. In rural locales such as the Golden Triangle Region, churches are the key institution through which local communities define themselves and forge social bonds. Throughout the Golden Triangle Region, churches—mostly Protestant and, particularly, Baptist and Methodist congregations—dot the landscape. On average, Southern Baptists account for well over 40% of all church adherents in the Golden Triangle Region, while United Methodists attract over 15% of the churchgoing population in this tri–county area (Bradley, Green, Jones, Lynn, and McNeil 1992). Taken together, nearly 40% of the Golden Triangle Region’s total population—that is, both religiously affiliated and unaffiliated residents—identify with one of these two denominations (Bradley et al 1992).³

In light of the history of racial oppression throughout much of the South and in Mississippi, black religious communities in this region have justifiably been described as "semi–involuntary institutions" that enlist the participation of many local African Americans (Ellison and Sherkat 1995). Black churches in the South are known to foster especially close bonds of collective solidarity and serve many vital social and economic
functions for local African American residents (Johnson and Jersild 1996; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Black Baptists represent the most formidable African American Protestant denomination in the Golden Triangle Region. The Church of God in Christ (COGIC), the world’s largest Pentecostal denomination, traces its historical origins to early twentieth–century rural Mississippi. While not as numerous as their Baptist counterparts, COGIC churches remain prominent in the religious landscape of northeastern Mississippi.\textsuperscript{4}

**Research Methodology**

Pastors representing thirty different faith communities participated in the in–depth interview portion of our study. (One pastor in our sample served two churches.) Congregational profile data on all pastors who completed a survey questionnaire is provided in the appendix to this report. Congregations sampled for this study, also profiled in the appendix, were selected on the basis of several criteria. First, given the significance of race relations in Mississippi, we have taken care to sample religious congregations for racial diversity.\textsuperscript{5} Second, our sample of local religious leaders balances a concern for denominational diversity with a recognition of the predominance of Baptist and Methodist churches in this region of Mississippi.\textsuperscript{6} Finally, we interviewed leaders from faith communities that vary considerably in membership size (ranging widely from twenty–six to eighteen–hundred total members) and those that differ in locale (semi–urban county seats, small towns, and remote rural areas).

After religious leaders (e.g., pastors, experienced church officers) completed a pre–interview survey, in–depth interviews were conducted with respondents by one or, in some cases, two members of our research team. Our pre–interview survey and in–depth interview questionnaire are both displayed in the appendix that accompanies this report. Interviews were conducted using a semi–structured format. Semi–structured interviewing provides all respondents with the opportunity to answer the same set of questions, but also permits probing outside the scope of the formal interview instrument as needed. Interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and then analyzed.

Our analysis of over six hundred pages of interview transcripts was guided by a theoretical framework which we describe in more detail elsewhere (Bartkowski and Regis 2000). In general, our theoretical framework attunes us to three key issues concerning faith–based food relief:

- **religious narrative** (Ammerman 1994, 1997; Hopewell 1987; Roof 1993; Schreiter 1998; Wuthnow 1994a, 1997; Yamane 2000). We treat such narratives as congregational stories that religious communities generate as they grapple with the nature of hunger and poverty while defining the proper religious response to these social problems;

- **moral logics** (Bartkowski 2001; Becker 1997; Hart 1996; Wuthnow 1991). We analyze explicit and implicit pastoral allusions to the conditions under which food assistance is deemed to be justifiable and appropriate. **We focus on two key moral logics—judgment and compassion. The moral**
imperative of judgment rests on the principles of authority and social hierarchy (e.g., pastor/congregant, veteran–member/ newcomer). Judgment requires the application of accountability structures—formalized standards or thumbnail rules—to determine the deservingness of aid recipients. By contrast, the moral imperative of compassion rests on the principles of equality and mutuality (e.g., all have sinned; no one is beyond God’s love), thereby mandating the extension of relief to all comers.

- social capital (Ammerman 1997; Putnam 2000). Here, we analyze pastoral references to the influence of social networks and collective bonds of trust on the provision of faith–based food relief. Within the rural South and much of the U.S, the same networks of trust that bond insiders together often exclude outsiders through stratification mechanisms that include denominational cleavages, racial divisions, and economic inequality (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990; Marsh 1997).

In collaboration with two research assistants, the authors also conducted on–site participant–observation research in a select subsample of four congregations—a white United Methodist church; a black Baptist congregation; a white Southern Baptist church; and an African–American Church of God in Christ congregation. Our understanding of faith–based food assistance efforts undertaken by local congregations was greatly enriched by this participant–observation. For six months, the principal investigators and research assistants attended church services, missionary outreach planning meetings, and relief activities at these congregations. Special efforts were made to observe relief initiatives that entailed the provision of foodstuffs to food–insecure populations from the local community and, in several instances, within these congregations. Data collected through participant–observation, analyzed selectively throughout this study, enabled us to observe the planning, execution, and effects of congregational relief programs in action.

It bears mentioning that many pastors in our sample of religious congregations expressed a great degree of ambivalence toward the prospect of church–state collaborations in poverty relief when we interviewed them. The right–most column in the appendix to this report reveals that pastors from twenty–three (77%) of our thirty religious organizations were familiar with "the idea that churches might become more involved in the restructuring of public welfare." However, pastors at only twelve (40%) congregations were clearly favorable toward this initiative. (In fact, even those pastors who were most favorably disposed toward Charitable Choice initiatives expressed various reservations about this program.) Religious leaders from eleven (37%) congregations expressed such a profound ambivalence toward faith–based welfare reform that their responses defied categorization as "favorably disposed" or "opposed." Four local pastors (13%) were expressly opposed to a church–state aid–provision partnership. These pastors either argued that their congregations would be unwilling to participate in this venture or cited church–state collaborations as highly problematic (see Bartkowski and Regis 2000 for further discussion).

RESEARCH FINDINGS
FOOD ASSISTANCE STRATEGIES UTILIZED BY RURAL MISSISSIPPI RELIGIOUS CONGREGATIONS

We now turn to the core findings of our study—namely, pastoral accounts and congregational practices related to faith–based food assistance in rural Mississippi. After introducing these religious communities’ generalized commitment to the holistic provision of relief, we outline four key strategies that local congregations utilize to provide food assistance to the disadvantaged. In doing so, we carefully assess the congregational motivations and implications associated with each of these four food– provision strategies.

Holistic Aid: Situating Faith–Based Food Assistance within Congregational Poverty Relief Programs

Religious leaders in our sample are virtually unanimous in defining faith–based aid and food assistance broadly enough to include both a material component and a non–material dimension. Local pastors commonly argue that faith–based aid provision is a holistic endeavor that—unlike public assistance programs—aims to address the material needs of the disadvantaged while simultaneously providing the means for moral development and spiritual sustenance. Pastor Nancy Evans from River Road United Methodist suggested that her African American church’s work with local elderly was quite successful precisely because this program assists older individuals “financially and then spiritually also.” This particular church has a jail ministry program founded on the same principle. River Road’s jail ministry entails not only visitation with the imprisoned, but a personal grooming service for them. References to holistic aid provision abound in pastoral testimonies of poverty relief.

Many congregations meld material and non–material forms of relief quite creatively where food assistance efforts are concerned. Virtually all local religious communities in our study offer special programs during various holiday seasons (e.g., Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter). While the specifics of these programs vary, they all generally complement the provision of material aid (e.g., complimentary dinners at the church) with ritual activities (e.g., special worship services) for those who wish to attend them. Even forms of aid that, at first blush, would seem to be one–dimensional often subtly combine various types of relief work. Revivals, for example, are designed to inspire religious conviction among the unchurched and newcomer while rekindling the faith of the regular church–goer. In this sense, revival–based ministries would seem to center primarily around the satiation of spiritual needs. However, the spiritual fervor produced in congregational revivals is often pointed toward a material outlet. At many revivals, special collections may be taken up for local charitable organizations, or food (i.e., dry or canned goods) may be collected from revival attendees to support the church’s own social ministry efforts. In addition, these special services often provide pastors with a forum for the recruitment of church members into volunteer aid programs. In such venues, boundaries between tangible and intangible forms of aid are blurred while food– based, monetary, and human resources are deftly drawn together in the service of social ministry.
Despite a virtually unanimous commitment to holistic relief, many congregations develop a preference for particular aid–provision strategies. In what follows, we describe four key strategies through which local congregations typically offer food assistance to the poor. To be sure, these food provision strategies are not mutually exclusive. Many congregations use several of these strategies simultaneously. Nevertheless, pastors often justify their preference for a particular style of food provision by invoking two key moral logics—heartfelt *compassion* and discerning *judgment* toward the disadvantaged. These are moral imperatives with which all religious leaders in this study wrestle.

**Intensive Food Relief: Sustained Engagement with the Hungry**

One food provision strategy utilized by several local churches is intensive engagement with those facing persistent food insecurity. Intensive engagement entails sustained, face-to-face contact with the poor. Many of the congregations that practice this aid–provision strategy do not need to look far to find the poor. These congregations are typically located within or nearby low-income neighborhoods. In many cases, these congregations include working poor and disadvantaged persons. Various types of disadvantage—hunger and malnutrition, substance abuse, inadequate housing, educational deficiencies, and unemployment—are fought with intensive relief efforts.

Because many of the churches that practice intensive relief identify with the poor, these forms of disadvantage are viewed not as private troubles but, instead, as public issues. According to this logic, the poor struggle with the fallout from broad social forces that include racism, classism, family dysfunction, underfunded county schools, and lack of economic opportunity in the local area. Among congregations that utilize this aid–provision strategy, ministers defend the merits of sustaining intimate, face-to-face contact with the disadvantaged within and outside of their faith community. These pastors commonly argue that it is only through such intensive, enduring contact that they can cultivate solidarity and friendship with the poor, can become a trusted and reliable source of basic necessities to the needy, and can offer lasting emotional support to those who face persistent poverty. Terms such as "personal," "human," and "direct" are used to describe the seemingly redemptive power of the enduring relationships claimed to emerge from this strategy of food provision.

**Feed the Body and Nourish the Soul**

In many cases, faith communities that favor this approach to poverty relief have structured the physical facilities and social activities of their congregation to facilitate intimate contact with poor persons can be maintained on prolonged and predictable bases. Churches with on–site food pantries and frequent hot meal programs welcome the poor onto their physical premises and into their congregational community. Intensive relief initiatives make food directly and regularly available to the hungry. Consistent with the holistic approach to aid–provision discussed earlier, food pantries in congregations highly committed to intensive relief often facilitate enduring bonds—in a word, social capital—between the aid–provider and the relief recipient. On a fundamental level, the interactions facilitated in many on–site food pantries are marked by an intimate familiarity with the
aid recipient’s name, life circumstances, and immediate social circles. Such venues transform the nameless, faceless "poor" and "hungry" into actual living persons whose struggles can be heard, understood, and redressed—at least in part—through the intensive benevolence of the religious community. At the same time, a congregation’s choice to house a food pantry on its grounds serves as a publicly visible emblem of that church’s commitment to the needy within the local community.

More than virtually any other form of relief, intensive food assistance aims to weave together material provision and spiritual sustenance. Providing food to the hungry on a regular basis is, of course, materially significant given the pressing nature of hunger. Recurring hunger and chronic malnutrition can pose a threat to one’s physical health and psychological well-being. Moreover, episodic starvation can severely diminish the quality—and even the longevity—of one’s life. While these concerns are not to be minimized or dismissed, many faith communities that provide intensive food relief via on-site pantries are not satisfied only to feed the body. They intend to nourish the soul with spiritual sustenance as well.

There are several different ways that congregations with intensive food assistance programs seek to accomplish this dual task. At Faith Haven—COGIC (Church of God in Christ), the charismatic senior pastor—Elder Reeves—plays a prominent role in the distribution of food from the church’s on-site pantry. Faith Haven is located at the juncture of a business district and a working-class African American neighborhood. As Elder Reeves personally distributes food to the community’s needy, he offers eloquent words of affirmation, encouragement, and love to recipients of the church’s benevolence. In playing such a central role in weekly food provision efforts, Elder Reeves adeptly blurs the line between his formal church role as a charismatic leader and his longstanding commitment to hands-on food provision as a servant to the disadvantaged. By transgressing the line between leader and servant, Elder Reeves effectively removes the shame and stigma that might otherwise accompany the receipt of church benevolence. The testimony offered through this pastor’s personal involvement in food distribution draws force from the countercultural facet of Christian theology that equates greatness not with self-aggrandizement and worldly achievement but with humble service to the "least of God’s children." And as Elder Reeves practices the humility of hands-on giving at the food pantry, aid-seekers are invited to follow his lead through their humble acceptance of his servanthood to his church and the community.

Beyond the relational dimensions of intensive food provision, it is noteworthy that Faith Haven provides foodstuffs not piecemeal, but rather packaged together as an assortment of goods—again, underscoring the theme of holistic, "well-rounded" relief. Food items in these sacks vary greatly from basic necessities such as canned vegetables and dry cereal to other items that might, at first glance, seem rather indulgent—for example, heart-shaped boxes of chocolates on Valentine’s Day. In this instance and others like it, food "beyond the necessities" is provided to relief recipients to communicate the congregation’s love and concern for both the physical and spiritual well-being of the needy.
Nourishing both the body and soul is also the primary motivation of intensive food relief at the predominantly white Hopewell Church of God. Hopewell, situated in an affluent white suburb near a highway that divides white neighborhoods of privilege from black neighborhoods of need, serves a hot meal to the local poor once per month during its food pantry’s open hours. In this congregation, members assert that it is not enough to open their pantry—funded jointly by congregational contributions and USDA–subsidized food from the Mississippi Food Network—once per week for grocery sack distribution. Adding a monthly hot meal program to their pantry–based distribution efforts provides congregants and local needy persons with the opportunity to bridge the pervasive racial boundaries and class divisions in this small Southern town. Pastor Johnson explains that one goal of Hopewell’s food assistance program is to engage in "incarnational ministry—much like it was performed in the early church, in Acts of the Apostles." Incarnational ministry entails the building of relationships with the families that Hopewell serves, and stands in bold contrast to food assistance orientations that focus solely on "running people through" a pantry as quickly as possible.

Compassionate giving is the stated motive underlying intensive food assistance at both Faith Haven and Hopewell. Yet, even in the context of such intensive relief, these congregations struggle to adhere to the imperative of compassion. Hopewell’s Pastor Johnson says that would prefer not to have the "rigamarole" of government paperwork and its concomitant qualification criteria associated with their food assistance program. Like other congregations that wish to disburse government–subsidized food, the church must require proof of residency (e.g., an electric bill), inspect social security cards for everyone in the household, and secure other identifying information from recipients. Still, Pastor Johnson is well aware that his congregation can serve more needy persons by securing USDA–subsidized food for its pantry from the Mississippi Food Network.

Hopewell has taken many steps to offset the red–tape "rigamarole" associated with food provision from the pantry. Despite the large numbers of people served within their combined pantry–meal program, Hopewell has structured food disbursement to minimize the amount of time recipients spend standing in lines. At points where recipients must provide identifying information, there are many tables staffed with volunteers to speed the process along. Slow–moving lines would smack of an impersonal, bureaucratic culture that is precisely the opposite of a highly personalized "incarnational ministry." This identifying information is collected in a building separate from the site at which grocery sacks are disbursed and the hot meal is provided.

As the procurers, cooks, and servers in the hot meal program, a coterie of highly active Hopewell women are the embodiment of intensive benevolence. While serving hot food to those coming through the meal line, the Hopewell women extend warm welcomes to the local needy—many of whom are African American. Conversational exchanges between church members and relief recipients continue as hot meals are consumed at one of a few dozen nicely decorated tables in Hopewell’s multipurpose benevolence hall aptly called the "Compassion Pantry." The hot meal program is preceded by a worship service—optional for recipients of church benevolence—that is designed to set a spiritual tone for Hopewell’s food assistance efforts. Recipients in this hot meal program also have
the opportunity to visit a prayer table—which, again, program supervisors are careful to emphasize is an optional part of their food relief efforts. The prayer table features extended member–led prayers in which the congregant and relief recipient join hands, close their eyes, and seek spiritual supplication in a private, one–on–one forum.

Interestingly, the church has chosen to fund its hot meal program solely from congregational coffers. In many respects, it is in the context of its hot meal program that Hopewell can be most compassionate and least discriminating about whom they serve (e.g., resident/non–resident). Quite tellingly, a leader in Hopewell’s hot–meal program says that while their hot meal program probably serves "a few" people who may not really need such benevolence, they "are not going to turn anyone away. We figure that’s between them and the Lord."

Personalized, compassionate food assistance at the Hopewell pantry is also sought after through a disbursement structure designed to be exhibit sensitivity to recipient–specific needs and life circumstances. The size and number of grocery sacks provided to a recipient take into account the number of people in that individual’s family. And a group of sacks is always prepared and ready for those with special dietary needs (e.g., diabetes). Here again, grocery sacks are disbursed through a division of labor that aims to meld efficiency with compassion. Standing in front of the sack preparation counter, several church volunteers fields tickets containing household information and deliver the grocery sacks to aid–seekers. Behind the counter, a separate group of volunteers busily prepares sacks to replace those that have just been disbursed. And yet another group of volunteers delivers sacks to recipients’ cars. Grocery delivery is offered to everyone who receives a sack, but is most commonly accepted by parents with young children, elderly individuals, and those who receive more than one bag of groceries.

**Feasting and Fasting through Intensive Relief**

Within the context of such intensive relief efforts, then, food becomes a medium for the generation of various forms of social capital. The strategic inclusion of a heart–shaped box of chocolates within a food sack, and the serving of a hot meal with grocery disbursement, aim to establish a sense of intimacy—a "feast" among basic necessities—between the concerned provider of aid and the needy recipient of such benevolence. The faith community’s holistic concern for the physical and spiritual well–being of needy individuals is designed to generate a denser, more enduring form of social connectedness than could be provided through Spartan forms of food distribution.

And yet, pastors who endorse and practice this aid–giving strategy as the primary means of offering relief are quick to note the appreciable time and painstaking effort—a symbolic "fast" through self–sacrifice—demanded by intensive engagement. In actuality, intensive engagement with the poor places great demands on wide range of persons—pastors themselves, their church staff, and many of their local congregants. Yet, these adherents’ longsuffering for the welfare of other less fortunate individuals is not seen as a drawback. To the contrary, the collective effort marshaled to support intensive relief efforts is viewed as a transformative—and therefore crucial—aspect of sustained...
engagement with the poor. Apart from his hands–on engagement with the Faith Haven–COGIC food pantry, Elder Reeves makes available his home phone number on all church brochures—including those distributed at local public events—with an open invitation to be contacted at any time. This rather bold gesture serves as evidence of his unyielding commitment to ministry, and throws down the gauntlet to other local pastors who would prefer to draw clearly defined lines between their pastoral work role and their personal family life. In the same breath, this pastor’s wide distribution of his personal phone number among poor non–members in his community implies a critique of local religious leaders who wish to demarcate their public ministry to the poor from their private congregational calling.

Given the prodigious effort associated with intensive relief to those in need, some of its practitioners are explicitly critical of religious leaders who would rather avoid sustained personal engagement with the poor. At times, pastors committed to intensive relief allude to other congregations or religious organizations (e.g., affluent churches or ministerial councils) that have opted for monetary donations that lead to "boardroom" poverty programs bereft of personal engagement. Some of these pastors even castigate groups within their own denominations who eschew this "on–the–ground" approach to combating poverty.

One pastor who advocates intensive engagement with the poor ministers extensively to Hispanic migrant workers in the local area. Food is a central motif in this pastoral narrative. In advancing his critique of hands–off congregational philanthropy, this pastor impersonates the voice of a hypothetical, detached religious leader who would opt for cash–based assistance in lieu of more sustained personal engagement: "'We do a Good Samaritan program for them. But we make sure they don’t come and eat with us.'" Then, adopting his own voice once again, this pastor offers his critical appraisal of this financial–donation–only relief strategy: "So, you know, the right hand is saying, ‘Here is five–hundred dollars,’ and the left hand is saying, ‘Make sure you don’t spend it around me, because I’d rather not talk to you.'"

**Intermittent Direct Food Assistance**

A second benevolence strategy utilized by many congregations entails the provision of intermittent direct food assistance to the poor. This aid–giving strategy is quite popular among a wide range of local congregations—black and white churches, along with working–class and middle–class faith communities. Intermittent direct relief itself is best understood as a continuum of aid provision ranging from benevolence work conducted over a given period of time to support provided directly on just one occasion. Moreover, the way in which such relief is offered varies by congregational context.

At times, intermittent direct relief may take the form of semi–extended support under the auspices of "adopt–a–family" initiatives. In this scenario, an affluent religious congregation or some faction of members within it engages in benevolence work with a particular family facing hard times. Financial support, meals, and child care may be provided until the family overcomes its hardship. Interestingly, these initiatives may
emerge through informal social networks in which there is a common point of contact between the sponsoring congregation and the needy family. In one case, parents in a white affluent United Methodist congregation became aware that the family of their child’s school teacher had run across a string of misfortunes (e.g., serious medical problems, monthly financial shortfalls). In this instance, the child himself serves as a conduit for the cultivation of social capital. The nexus of relationships in which this particular youngster is enmeshed (mother–son/student–teacher) facilitates the reciprocal bonds of trust that helped initiate the adoption of this family by the mother’s Sunday school class. This discrete, grassroots adopt–a–family initiative—and its apparent success in this particular church—stands in bold contrast to the top–down “pairing” of churches with needy households wrought by former Governor Kirk Fordice’s Mississippi Faith & Families program (see Bartkowski and Regis 2000).

More common by far than the informal adopt–a–family scenario described above are churches that use this aid–provision strategy to provide one–time aid in the face of a discrete crisis, or disburse intermittent relief during particular times of the year. When individuals are forced to confront a house fire, a physical accident, or the death of a relative who had no savings or burial insurance, a local church will often step in and provide short–term material relief—typically accompanied by offerings of social support such as short–term visitation. Here again, the provision of food occupies an important place in the intermittent direct relief provided by many local congregations.

**Known Quantities: The Problem of Trust Solved**

The provision of intermittent relief in the face of a discrete crisis is most certainly inflected by social capital considerations. "One–shot" or short–term aid that is provided to individuals who are well–known by congregants is rarely viewed as a "handout." Rather, it is understood as "mutual aid." When food assistance takes the form of mutual aid, it may entail the a group of families within the congregation procuring, cooking, and delivering a series of dinners to a needy household—e.g., a couple who recently had a baby, a member facing a short–term financial crisis. Alternatively, a pastor or member may go to the grocery store and purchase food for an elderly individual whose mobility is impaired.

Consequently, when the aid recipient is a member of the benevolent congregation, the problem of trust—"Will the aid be used responsibly and appreciated?"—is resolved rather straightforwardly. Active members risk a denial of access to future resource pools—and, more importantly, social ostracism—if they are found to have been irresponsible in their use of relief. When mutual aid is practiced on a broad scale, religious communities function very much like a "revolving credit association" in which benevolence (in this case, food) is a currency that members invest regularly and withdraw in troubled times.

In some cases, congregational leaders themselves may not wait for members in need to come forward and request benevolence. Because trust is the cornerstone of dense congregational networks, mutual aid may be offered—rather than requested—in a strikingly pro–active fashion. Several religious leaders explained how they navigate
friendship and kinship networks to discover the nature of an ailing member’s "situation" and to ascertain the individual’s specific needs. Those needs might entail the payment of medical or prescription bills in the face of an insurance shortfall. Or, they might entail employment contacts in the wake of a job layoff. Congregational members realize, of course, that these types of personal crises can spill over into financial shortfalls that might lead to short–term food insecurity. A leader at a local mosque composed largely of university students described members as "too shy"—that is, too proud—to request assistance in the face of short–term need. This religious community and many others like it respond to this "too–shy" orientation with mutual aid that can be offered in the dignified spirit of a gift rather than the unacceptable form of a handout.

Food–based mutual aid, and "inreach relief" more generally, offers three key advantages. First, as noted above, issues of character and deservingness are made less ambiguous through extant social networks. Prior knowledge of the person in need is viewed as a form of accountability—in a word, proof that the foodstuffs or particular relief will be appreciated and used judiciously by the recipient. Second, intracongregational relief enables members of the congregation to witness first–hand the ways in which their aid–giving can transform the lives of people they value and call their friends. In this way, the aid–givers receive an excellent "return" on their "investment." The providers of aid become the recipients of renewed bonds of trust and faith within their own community—bonds which are reaffirmed by effectively meeting the needs of fellow congregants. Finally, because these momentary providers of aid may someday find themselves in need of relief, they are wise to tie their fortunes to the collective and reciprocal investment networks made possible through congregationally based mutual aid.

There are also several gray–area cases of intermittent direct relief where benevolence is not technically mutual, but the problem of trust can nevertheless be resolved. In some instances, non–member beneficiaries of aid are able to "ride the coattails" of faith–based social capital through transitive relationships with select congregants. Thus, a church member’s relative or close friend may be seen as trustworthy because of this individual’s relationship with a trusted congregant. In yet other circumstances, social capital between congregants and non–members is a product of the faith community’s local tradition and the collective memory of benevolent members. Some churches provide intermittent relief such as holiday food baskets to particular elderly persons or couples in the community because they "have always done so." The enduring character of this relationship is, of course, viewed as an asset within such congregations. Congregants build for themselves a legacy of longstanding—though still intermittent—food relief because they take pains to remember a specific elderly person or couple during the winter holiday season.

Unknown Quantities: Managing Risk by Determining Need

Aid solicitors who are not known to members of local congregations present many faith communities with a thorny set of questions. Given limited congregational resources, how should faith communities manage the risk associated with providing relief to potentially untrustworthy parties? And, in the absence of social capital, upon what basis are bonds of trust between the relief provider and the aid solicitor to be formed?
Although most pastors eloquently discussed their aversion to aid-provision "standards" or "means tests," many of these same religious leaders conceded that limited financial resources and congregational-denominational accountability structures required the development of screening mechanisms for unknown aid solicitors or suspected "abusers" of faith-based benevolence, including foodstuffs. Aid-giving standards imposed by local faith communities vary considerably, but include:

- call-backs to verify the source and status of phoned-in solicitations for aid;
- visitation to the home of the needy person, whereby available household resources and living circumstance can be ascertained;
- in-depth discussions of alternative avenues for resource acquisition that an aid solicitor should explore before drawing on church benevolence funds;
- an escort to the grocery store for supervised purchase in lieu of providing cash; and
- referrals to faith-based or secular agencies that specialize in providing the type of solicited aid (this last option is discussed more fully as a distinct aid-provision strategy in the following section).

To be sure, few religious leaders were willing to state outright that they would deny aid to non-members. Indeed, most pastors said that when faced with an aid request, the membership status of the individual ("Is this aid-seeker a member?" "Will he/she attend our services?") is not raised and is considered irrelevant. Yet, despite the stated irrelevance of membership status, adaptive—and sometimes exclusive—aid-giving tactics are wielded by many local congregations.

Several congregations whose social networks cascade outside of the church can deny or withdraw aid if they have reason to believe an individual will squander limited congregational resources. A pastor from a black Methodist church spoke generally about the power of grassroots social networks in this regard: "We try to find out [about aid recipients and their situation] when people call. Because this happens a lot. This is a very small town ... If we find out [aid recipients] are having any kind of deviant behavior, using the money in a negative way and if they are just abusing what we give them, we just jerk back and don’t give them anything else."

Speaking specifically about faith-based food relief, another pastor admitted that after a recent aid request which he viewed as abusive, he now employs a "screening process." Notice how this pastor invests consumable products of various sorts—food, soda, cigarettes—with symbolic meanings that convinced him of the illegitimacy of this food solicitation:

I remember I had one call when I first came to [current church]. A woman called me. I’m not going to mention any names, but she said that she was out of food [and said that] they had small children in the home. They were going to get paid in three days. So, I called my treasurer. I went through my cupboards and she went through her cupboards. And then we went to the store and got some bread and milk and lunch meat and some stuff
like that. So I went to the house to give them the food and they had just finished eating breakfast. The refrigerator was full. There was [Coca–cola soda]. When I say Coke bottles, I’m not saying generic. I am saying Coke products. Two–liter bottles of Coke lined up against the wall—about four or five of them. Two of the people were smoking cigarettes, which is an indicator to me that if you have money to buy cigarettes and you need food, you ought to be able to make a choice there. And then [we] come to find out that these people were actually professionals that were ripping off . . . a major series of chain stores in the area, with lawsuits for boxes falling on them and things like that. I knew that before I went down there, but the concern was for the children. And I didn’t have time to go to the house and make a visit.

Pastoral accounts such as this reveal how food and consumable goods become invested with symbolic meanings in the process of faith–based relief. Such subjective judgments are themselves replete with power machinations that can enable pastors to define deservingness and diagnose the problems of the poor. In the instance cited above, power resides in the pastor’s ability to judge the purchase of name–brand items as an extravagance rather than a product of clever marketing ("Coke Adds Life!"). Moreover, cigarette smoking is viewed here through the lens of individual choice and budgetary mismanagement rather than being recognized as a drug addiction or perhaps a creative strategy for suppressing one’s appetite in the face of long–term hunger.

**Scruples, Scrutiny, and Purchasing Power**

Stories of aid solicitors’ "abuse" of faith–based relief programs are not uncommon in the local area, and sometimes cast the poor as unscrupulous opportunists looking to take advantage of faith–based benevolence. Despite the questionable credibility of such views, pastoral perceptions about the unscrupulous character of the poor have real–world implications, as these concerns often generate programs that aim to curb such forms of "abuse."

In lieu of time–consuming pastoral escorts to the food store and invasive "site visits" to aid solicitors’ homes, several churches in northeastern Mississippi have developed a food voucher system that is implemented in cooperation with local grocery stores. This voucher system, like other types of intermittent direct food relief, is inflected by the complex machinations of compassion and judgment. As initially intended, this collaborative effort between local congregations and grocers allowed customers to purchase food items only with vouchers that are, essentially, checks written by the church. Through the local grocer’s monitoring of purchases by voucher–carrying customers, alcohol, tobacco, and non–food items could not be bought with church–sponsored food vouchers. Moreover, grocers were charged with ensuring that voucher–carrying customers receive no change if they spent less than the amount stipulated on the check.

When it came to the attention of some churches that mothers with young children were forbidden from purchasing diapers with these vouchers, compassion seemed to mandate that the initial exclusion of non–food items be amended to include diapers as a
purchasable commodity under the voucher system. Several churches followed suit with this change in the voucher system. Yet, thorny issues of judgment—particularly, struggles over the legitimacy of particular types of foods—have marked this faith–based initiative. An experienced social worker in a local town often serves as a liaison between churches and food insecure populations within the context of this informal voucher system. This social worker recounted how purchase restrictions placed upon church vouchers were being enforced too vigorously by check–out personnel at one local grocery store. Having been charged with enforcing the purchase restrictions on church vouchers, checkers at this particular store had taken it upon themselves to evaluate the consumer decisions of some voucher–carrying customers. According to this informant’s account, some checkers refused to ring up items (e.g., candy bars) deemed to be too extravagant for voucher–carrying customers. Of course, some advocates of faith–based welfare reform such as Marvin Olasky view screening mechanisms as one of the most redeeming qualities of food provision in local religious communities. It is such sanctions, from an Olaskian perspective, that promote personal accountability and moral reform among the poor.

The Downside of Mutual Aid for Non–Members

Consequently, faith–based social capital is not solely integrative, but can serve exclusionary ends as well. The same membership circles that enable church–goers to support one another with intermittent direct relief also provide the power, if needed, to deny aid requests to non–members. Some resource–poor religious communities with needy members perform very little "outreach" per se and instead focus on intracongregational benevolence because a failure to exclude "outsiders" could threaten the congregation’s well–being. A black religious leader at a small, rural Church of Christ congregation offered the following account of their ministries: "Right now, we're not offering any outreach—except during Christmas and Thanksgiving. We give out food baskets [at those times]." In fact, this church is not atypical of some small, rural congregations. The provision of food baskets and gifts to local needy families during the winter holiday season is a good example of restricted congregational relief.

When asked how her church would respond if an increasing number of non–members came to the church requesting aid, this Church of Christ leader replied:

That has never really happened, really. We are out in the country and no one just comes up and asks. We have a lot of little churches that people go to, and each one asks their own. But if I would have to make a comment on it, non–members are always welcome. And I think that there would have to be an assessment as to need or real need, you know, in order to give. But when you come and there is a need for our members, our members will be served first. Unless there is a greater need for this person—an emergency kind of thing.
Given the scarce resources in the congregation, this religious leader defends the inner-directed relief orientation of her church. While she contends that non-members are welcome to solicit aid, she argues that such occasions are rare. Given the many churches nearby, local aid solicitors are expected to "ask their own" congregation when in need. For this reason, non-members who approach this Church of Christ congregation with needs that fail to meet "emergency" status should be prepared to defer to members’ relief requests.

It is important to recognize that the term "non-member" is often code for an array of intersecting social cleavages. Because many religious communities in Mississippi—and, to a great degree, throughout the U.S.—are such homogeneous organizations, a key outcome of this help–our–own orientation entails the preservation of boundaries that insulate persons of different racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and denominational backgrounds from one another. Race is an especially salient theme in our interviews. Most pastors interviewed for this study conceded that race currently affects the way in which churches provide aid to the needy and would likely do so into the future. Several pastors even argued that racism is more entrenched within local churches—white and black congregations alike—than outside of them. Even those religious leaders who maintained that racial antagonism does not directly influence the provision of aid within their own churches typically recognized that such factors hold sway in neighboring congregations.

Many congregations that employ an intermittent aid–giving strategy for ministry to non-members wrestle with the antinomies of compassionate giving and discerning judgment. Some of the pastors that we interviewed point to struggles within their congregations regarding who should be helped and, especially, how members' donations ought to be used for relief. And, of course, religious organizations are guided by both ethical imperatives (e.g., helping those in need) and practical considerations (e.g., maintaining financial solvency). It is in confronting these vexing issues that some congregations have sought to cultivate collaborative relationships with parachurch relief agencies.

**Parachurch Relief Agencies: Collaborative Food Assistance**

A third aid–provision strategy utilized by local congregations in northeastern Mississippi entails the forging of collaborative relationships with parachurch relief agencies. Why would faith communities opt to refer solicitors of food assistance to parachurch relief agencies? Congregational relief efforts in northeastern Mississippi highlight both supply and demand considerations that shape some churches’ preference for this form of relief provision.

**Faith–Based Bureaucracy? Centralized and Standardized Assistance**

On the demand side of the aid–provision relationship, the centralized and standardized relief of parachurch agencies is believed to safeguard individual churches from aid solicitors who might advance fraudulent, self-serving, door–to–door requests for relief—which, as noted above, several pastors argued are quite common. Standardized and
centralized relief is typically used in large towns where population density makes knowing one’s neighbors difficult. Parachurch agencies typically employ screening procedures, often maintain a centralized database on agency contributors and aid solicitors, are open regular hours, and are overseen by individuals judged to be competent staff workers.

In singing the praises of one local parachurch relief agency, Outreach and Uplift Relief (OUR) Ministries, one pastor offered the following account: "We have to be careful in the church—because the funds are limited—of who we help. So, there has to be a screening process, because unfortunately there are those people who are out there to make a living off of the church. Some of them do very well at it. Some of them make eighty thousand dollars a year and are not in need at all." This pastor continues by describing the critical role of OUR Ministries in light of such dilemmas, and suggests that some unscrupulous aid solicitors might secure food from local congregations only to turn around and sell the food for cash:

We [local churches] feed OUR Ministries. OUR Ministries, in turn, helps the needy. They are our screening process. If I have a question about somebody [pause]. Let me explain this to you. I am a sharp guy. I know how to read a phone book. I know how to go to the Yellow Pages under "churches." If I want to make five to ten thousand dollars in a week, I start calling every church in [county]. If I can get into every church in [county], thirty–eight of them, it’s feasible to come up with five to ten thousand dollars worth of food or things that I could sell ... By taking them to OUR Ministries, there is a master file maintained there. That’s one of the places I can call to check on people to see if they are abusers of the system.

**Time, Money, and Congregational Outsourcing**

These demand–side concerns about fraudulent aid solicitations are not the only reason that many congregations use parachurch relief agencies. On the supply side of the aid–provision relationship, various types of congregational dynamics make parachurch relief agencies an attractive option. Leaders in some churches comment on the time constraints faced by their members—many of whom are in dual–earner households where couples struggle to meet their own family obligations. Here the notion of "helping our own" takes on a somewhat different meaning—that is, day–to–day financial provision for one’s family in order to maintain a middle–class standard of living.

A religious leader from a large white Methodist church composed of middle–class members offered the following account of their membership: "We do have a lot of generous, giving people here who are very concerned about others. It is a very caring and loving church." However, when asked about the prospect of church members participating in expanded aid programs, she reacted with some caution and hesitancy:
"You know, time, of course, is an issue for everyone nowadays with all of the working folks we have. We do have retirees who are very gifted and who are doing a lot of things." In light of the fact that they support a plethora of non–profit and interfaith relief agencies with philanthropic donations of food, money, and clothing, this church often refers individuals requesting food and other forms of material relief to these agencies. According to such reasoning, the church "already supports" aid to the needy through such donations.

Consequently, faith communities that engage in extensive congregational philanthropy value the time—and, most likely, the trouble—that they can save themselves by channeling church–door solicitors for food and other provisions to parachurch relief agencies via referrals. Such churches may not find it feasible to have an on–site food pantry, given their lack of volunteers, money, or congregational infrastructure. Several churches that engage in outsourcing often provide a long list of local interfaith relief agencies that they underwrite through resources (i.e., food, money, clothes) donated by members and, occasionally, through temporary volunteer labor. To be sure, these churches may use other relief–provision strategies—such as intermittent direct relief—in addition to congregation–sponsored philanthropy. However, several pastors argued that, given the time constraints and lifestyles of their members, they can most efficiently provide aid to the needy through semi–professional parachurch relief organizations rather than at their own church door.

Apart from time constraints, the contested meaning of money emerges as a salient factor in congregational alliances with parachurch agencies. Congregational monies are invested with both material value and moral value (Wuthnow 1994b; see also Lamont 1994; Zelizer 1997). As a material currency, benevolence funds in many small local churches are extremely limited. Such churches are simply not able to address "desperate, dire" aid solicitations of over three to five hundred dollars. These churches will often provide a referral to a parachurch relief agency rather than exhaust their benevolence funds completely. In return, the local church may channel small contributions of food (canned and dry goods), clothing, or other resources to the parachurch agency as such items are donated.

Yet, in many cases, the material value of congregational relief funds is eclipsed by the moral currency which is invested in such monies. Pastoral referrals to parachurch relief agencies sometimes seem motivated by a desire to quell membership concerns about the use of congregants’ donations. Of course, no pastor openly admitted providing referrals to parachurch agencies simply because he or she feared confronting uncomfortable questions about the use of member donations. Nevertheless, a careful analysis of the complex machinations of power in local congregations make such a scenario quite fathomable. Several pastors, especially those at Methodist and Baptist churches, stated quite straightforwardly that the church belongs more to the congregants themselves—and longtime members in particular—than to pastors. Methodist pastors serve itinerant appointments in which they are transferred from one church to another every few years. In a handful of instances, congregational power dynamics centered squarely on the use of member donations.
For example, one pastor mentioned that his church members sometimes suffer from confusion concerning the rights of "ownership" over donated monies. He stated emphatically that the moment donations touch the collection basket they are no longer the property of any individual; rather, they become "God’s money." Indeed, this pastor had recently spoken to his congregation on this very point because there was debate about pastoral authority over financial contributions to the church. This same pastor recently chastened several of his senior congregants for begging out of their financial obligation to support the church’s benevolence programs because they are living on fixed incomes. Dismissing these excuses as "fixed income syndrome," this pastor charged that virtually all working people are on "fixed incomes"—i.e., incomes in which meager raises amount to modest cost-of-living adjustments. It is indeed possible that local skirmishes about the ownership and expenditure of benevolence donations encourage pastors to rely on parachurch relief agencies. In such cases, a parachurch aid-provision strategy lends legitimacy to pastoral relief efforts and circumvents thorny squabbles—material and moral in character—that may otherwise come between pastors and the congregations they are charged to serve.

Of course, when employed as the sole or primary aid-provision strategy, philanthropic aid-giving and congregational referrals to parachurch relief agencies maintain or exacerbate social distance between local faith communities and the disadvantaged. By outsourcing the actual provision of aid, the faith community can—strategically or unwittingly—"buy out of" its moral responsibility to assist the poor. Still, the parachurch strategy presents itself as an attractive option when compared with the range of vexing issues that accompany church-door relief—the deservingsness of solicitors, the time constraints faced by congregants, and potential challenges regarding the "appropriate" use of social ministry funds. Yet, congregational philanthropy and referrals to parachurch agencies can bureaucratize the aid-provision process. Such efforts are precisely the opposite of the Olaskian vision in which a particular local religious community provides both material resources and social networks that, taken together, are supposed to promote personal accountability, job readiness, and moral reform among the poor.

**Distant Missions of Food Relief**

Several churches in the local area employ yet another aid-provision strategy, which we call "distant missions," to engage in social ministry to poor and hungry populations removed from the local scene. Through various types of distant mission programs, congregations offer their membership the opportunity to participate in pilgrimages of relief provision to a needy population afar. Quite often, such trips entail providing food assistance—through soup kitchens and hot meal programs in mission shelters—to needy populations in an extralocal setting. Some distant mission programs utilized by local churches are centered around a proximate location in the Southern U.S.—typically, a one-day trip by van from the Golden Triangle Region. Several affluent churches offer a full slate of distant mission trips from which interested congregants can, in the discourse of travel and tourism, "choose their preferred destination." The plethora of relief itineraries and mission destinations offered in such churches range widely from weekend to multi-week excursions. Such trips may entail travel to remote areas of rural poverty or
inner-city ghettos. For the most venturesome souls, select churches offer distant mission trips of approximately two weeks to an impoverished area abroad, including Central American sites near the Caribbean.

Distant missions are typically paired with one or more of the relief-provision strategies described above. One large white affluent church offers a variety of missions on the domestic scene and abroad—a week’s relief work at an inner-city homeless shelter in Texas; ministry to needy persons living in Appalachia; and several weeks of relief work at a Christian mission in Latin America. This church employs a distant missions strategy in combination with an array of other aid-provision programs: "one-shot" funds for discrete crises, a grassroots adopt-a-family initiative begun in a Sunday school class, referrals to a local interfaith relief agency that this church helped to organize, and local volunteer efforts with—among other non-profit organizations—Habitat for Humanity.

Often, distant mission trips are coordinated through pastors or adults who work with youth groups in such congregations. Several churches in this study coordinate distant missions for their youth that involve travel to highly disadvantaged populations (e.g., the homeless, inner-city children, residents of dilapidated homes in cities of adjacent states). Consistent with the metaphor of religious pilgrimage, the aim of these missions is transformation and redemption on several levels. First, the relief work performed on these distant missions is designed to yield small, but perceptible transformations of the disadvantaged community. The short-term, intensive relief work performed by the mission team is often designed to have an enduring impact. Such is the case when repair work for homes or relief shelters is complemented by intensive engagement with the poor during the mission trip.

Second, distant missions can promote spiritual transformation for the travelers whose faith and camaraderie are enriched by the extraordinary challenges that they collectively confront on such sojourns. Distant missions programs involve relationships that gain meaning, in part, through their social structure. "Mission teams"—complete with seasoned "mission coordinators"—coalesce under the auspices of church leaders who oversee the slate of program offerings. Particular mission teams may develop a repository of meaningful memories and enduring friendships by returning—on an annual basis—to face the trials presented in "their" mission field. Team-specific cultural repertoires emerge through these repeated excursions. Mission teams develop particular strategies for resolving gender etiquette in the absence of private bathing facilities.

Mission teams that provide food assistance to extremely disadvantaged populations face a thorny dilemma. Mission teams determine the proper amount of tourism and recreational time that should be incorporated into the mission trip. Should team members permit themselves to eat out—particularly in comfortable restaurants—when they are confronted with needy persons who face extreme hunger on a daily basis? Particular mission teams develop their own methods for determining the appropriateness of eating out at well-heeled restaurants during their trip to a poverty-stricken mission field. Yet, the fact that such issues are discussed by mission teams underscores the social significance of food—to both relief providers and recipients—on such ventures.
Folklore generated through on-the-ground confrontations with "lived poverty"—particularly, extreme hunger—also emerges in the wake of these trips. Annual meetings among mission teams provide a forum for the recounting and dissemination of mission field folklore. During a meeting of mission field coordinators in a local church, a team leader recounted one of his most vivid memories from the field—namely, the "syrupy thick black coffee" consumed by homeless men at his inner-city mission site. In the absence of food-based calories, these men opted for a sugar-laden beverage that left an indelible impression on mission team members.

Third, many distant missions teach lessons about the cultivation of values such as hard work, thrift, and self-sufficiency. Some youth-oriented distant missions are underwritten in part by young congregants’ fund-raising activities. In one prominent local church, mission funds are generated by youngsters’ sale of flowers to other members. Consistent with agrarian metaphors in the Bible (e.g., blossoming grains of wheat, fruitful vineyards) and the small-town locale in which these Christian youngsters live, the flowers used to generate these funds are said to represent the "planting" of mission "seeds." In a sense, youth who take these pilgrimages of aid provision are being both confronted by and insulated from poverty. Through their mission trip, they face the stark "reality" of poverty. Yet, through their fund-raising efforts, they are ostensibly being provided with the values—and the social capital—to protect them from personally facing such misfortune.

Finally, such face-to-face ministry to the very poor serves as a "getaway"—a liminal break from the everyday grind—for church youth. These getaways are designed to be educational and morally challenging, as well as fun. Such mission trips often include a day or so of recreational activities in which participants consume distinctive aspects of the distant culture that might not otherwise be available to them in a small Mississippi town.

Like the first aid-provision strategy outlined above (i.e., intensive food relief), distant missions require intimate contact with the poor and hungry while promoting spiritual transformation for all parties involved. Reflecting on the impact of these types of programs at his large white, middle-class church, one pastor concludes: "[The youth] become sensitive. When they have the opportunity to work with poor people, they begin to see people and not just the situation or something they have heard. They identify with people." Such relief work can therefore subvert common misperceptions about poverty through experiential knowledge. This first-hand experience attaches faces, bodies, and names to an otherwise abstract group of people—namely, "the hungry" and "the poor"—who are foreign to middle-class youngsters whose dinner tables and refrigerators are never wanting for food. However, at the same time, such outreach efforts entail a pilgrimage that propels the aid-givers outside of his or her own community. There is, then, no guarantee that distant-mission pilgrimages promote local activism—or even a permanent awareness of social inequality and food insecurity—upon the sojourner’s return home.

CONCLUSION
This report set out to shed light on the complex social processes underlying faith–based food assistance in the rural South. Our empirical focus has been fixed on thirty congregations located in the northeastern portion of Mississippi—the Golden Triangle Region. The significance of our research is underscored by important place of Charitable Choice provisions in welfare reform legislation. Charitable Choice forbids discrimination against faith–based social service providers by state governments that contract out their social services to community groups or other private entities.

The Mississippi religious congregations in our purposive sample are generally committed to providing holistic relief that ministers to the material and spiritual needs of disadvantaged population. Consequently, congregations typically offer food assistance interlaced with less tangible forms of aid—counseling, prayer, and other forms of social support. Beyond this pervasive goal, however, religious communities adopt one or more distinctive tactics for undertaking food assistance.

We have analyzed four organizational strategies through which local Mississippi congregations provide food assistance to the hungry. Using pastoral interview data and field observations, we outlined the contours of these food assistance strategies, paying special attention to their distinguishing features and the congregational contexts in which they were utilized. We have sought to highlight the motivations that local pastors invoke to justify their use of particular benevolence strategies. We also evaluated the social outcomes—intended and unintended consequences—associated with each of these congregational strategies for food assistance.

First, intensive food assistance fosters sustained contact between local congregants and food–insecure populations. Intensive food relief is manifested most clearly in congregations that have highly active on–site food pantries. Active pantries are open on a regular basis (e.g., a set numbers of days and hours per week), but also supplement these "regular hours of operation" with ready responses to emergency requests. Where on–site food pantries are concerned, intensive food relief entails the application of few or no frequency–of–use restrictions. (As described more fully below, frequency–of–use restrictions—i.e., the mandated elapse of a "waiting period" for return solicitations—lend themselves to an intermittent orientation toward food assistance.) In some congregations, pantry–based intensive food provision is paired with a regular hot meal program.

Whatever its form, intensive food assistance aims to build sustained, meaningful relationships between the providers and recipients of food–based congregational relief. One pastor whose congregation opts for intensive food assistance refers to this approach as "incarnational ministry." Through references such as these, congregations come to value the direct and enduring contact that intensive food assistance facilitates between congregants and food–insecure families. Moreover, the fresh, home–cooked food served through church–based hot meal programs expresses compassion and concern for food–insecure families in a way that prefabricated canned and dry food alone cannot. This is not to say that canned and dry food is an inferior form of faith–based food assistance. While prefabricated, the immense value of canned and dry goods stems from the fact that they can be used over a long period of time—a "gift that keeps on giving." However,
given the cultural significance of the "home–cooked meal," hot meals personalize food assistance and build intimacy between provider and recipient.

A second strategy utilized by local congregations is intermittent direct food assistance. This food assistance strategy is manifested in congregations that provide direct relief to food insecure populations, but do so over a bounded period of time. The provision of holiday food baskets to needy families during the Christmas season is one of the most pervasive forms of intermittent direct food assistance. Congregations that employ rotational, frequency–of–use restrictions in their food pantry programs (e.g., serving a recipient–household no more than once every three months) also provide intermittent assistance. Food–based mutual aid provided to congregational members facing short–term misfortune is yet another common form of direct intermittent food assistance.

Given the short–term, periodic character of intermittent food assistance, less volunteer support and fewer material resources are needed to undertake this relief–provision strategy. Consequently, some congregations opt for this strategy because their membership would not support—financially or via volunteer staff—intensive (i.e., sustained) food assistance initiatives. However, given the bounded time frame within which intermittent food relief is typically offered, it is more difficult for relief providers and recipients to build intimate interpersonal relationships through this aid–provision strategy unless it takes the form of mutual aid (i.e., intracongregational relief).

Third, many congregations collaboratively provide relief to food–insecure households through parachurch food assistance initiatives. In several instances, congregations pair this relief–provision strategy with intensive or intermittent food assistance. Pastors who strongly prefer this food assistance strategy praise its efficiency and champion the "one–stop" centralization of food assistance and other relief services. Many of these pastors express anxiety over "door–to–door" relief requests from "unscrupulous" aid solicitors. They support parachurch agencies as a means of countering the efforts of those who would otherwise "abuse" faith–based food programs. Large resource–rich congregations often provide financial support to underwrite the services of parachurch agencies, while small resource–poor congregations rely on such organizations to keep from exhausting their meager benevolence funds and stocks of food. Participating congregations of all sizes periodically hold food drives to provide foodstuffs to such agencies. When such relief efforts facilitate collaboration among local religious communities, parachurch relief can generate bridging capital across congregations and denominations that otherwise might not have much exposure to one another.

However, despite the apparent efficiency of centralized food disbursement, there is an inherent limitation associated with parachurch food assistance. Because parachurch agencies often serve as a liaison between local congregants and the poor, they can reinforce social distance between aid providers and relief recipients. In some cases, the erection of such organizational barriers may keep poverty at a comfortable distance from privileged churchgoers. If this food provision strategy is used in the absence of any other, the providers and recipients of such benevolence may never meet face–to–face. Social
distance can indeed reinforce the notion that "poverty," "hunger," and "the poor" are abstract concepts divorced from the everyday experiences of privileged churchgoers.

Finally, several congregations sponsor distant missions of food provision. Within the context of these programs, congregants can travel to a distant locale—i.e., another town or state and, in some circumstances, another country. Such trips are typically slated for a predetermined period of time during which congregants travel to their mission destination and are immersed in poverty relief—often including food provision. This relief strategy often challenges and transforms congregants' preconceptions about hunger and poverty. However, given the distant locales and bounded time period for such mission trips, this strategy of relief provision risks leaving the congregant/sojourner with the idea that "real need" is far removed from his or her local environ.

Our study of faith–based food assistance in rural Mississippi yields several significant implications for the formulation of social policy concerning faith–based food assistance. First, as congregations are integrated into civic efforts to redress hunger, it is important to recognize that food itself has significant cultural meaning within religious communities. In many religious communities within our study, the sharing of a meal and the provision of food are key social mechanisms through which faith–based fellowships are forged and sustained. In our overwhelmingly Christian sample of congregations, notions of "breaking bread together," Jesus Christ’s edict to "feed my sheep," and the commemorative significance of meals (e.g., the Last Supper) have a profound resonance.

As a cultural resource, food itself and the relief initiatives surrounding it enable religious congregations to craft a distinctive history, a collective identity, and a unique relationship to the surrounding community (see Sack 2000). Policies that utilize faith–based organizations to redress food insecurity should be informed by the recognition that food is a cultural marker—not simply an economic commodity or a source of nutritional sustenance—for religious communities. In light of this finding, we suspect that congregations would resist aid–provision orientations that "secularize" food by focusing only on its economic or nutritional value. To be sure, congregations are concerned about the price, quality, and nutritional value of the food they purchase for distribution through pantries, hot meal programs, and holiday gift baskets. However, food carries a great deal of symbolic freight within religious communities and emerges as a central feature of congregational efforts to provide holistic relief that feeds the body while nourishing the soul.

A second key implication from our study builds on cultural significance of food within religious life. As a cultural marker for religious congregations, food is invested with power. On the one hand, religious congregations can use food as a means of fostering social integration and engaging in compassionate ministry to the disadvantaged. Food baskets containing a few "indulgences"—e.g., a box of chocolates, gourmet bread—can be used to communicate heartfelt compassion and a deep concern for the material, emotional, and spiritual welfare of the recipient. On the other hand, food can be used as a tool for judging the material and spiritual worthiness of aid solicitors. In such cases, food can be used an exclusionary cultural resource wielded against the "undeserving poor."
Several pastors discussed their strategies for determined "need" when confronted with requests for food. One pastor even recounted his site visits to check the supply of food in the homes—and even the refrigerators—of aid solicitors. This same pastor judges the deservingness of food solicitations by such factors as the presence of cigarettes and brand-name soda in the homes of those requesting assistance. In religious communities, food can function as a source of social integration and can be wielded as a tool for social exclusion.

Finally, we encourage policymakers and welfare administrators to evaluate carefully the range of food assistance strategies utilized by congregations in the local areas over which they have jurisdiction. In their pursuit of food security, policymakers and administrators should support faith-based food assistance strategies that will best redress the specific needs of food-insecure families on the local scene. Yet, how is this goal to be attained?

Most importantly, there should be a clear recognition that each faith-based relief strategy has potential advantages and limitations. Moreover, food assistance strategies that are appropriate in one venue may be inappropriate in another setting. For example, intensive food relief places the provider and recipient of relief in a sustained relationship with one another. This food assistance strategy is often transformative for both parties. In situations where there is a great deal of socioeconomic distance between food providers and recipients, intensive food assistance can break down social barriers and address protracted food insecurity. However, intensive food relief requires a considerable investment of time and resources on the part of local congregations. Time-intensive programs might be most viable in religious communities with a sizable contingent of retired congregants or those committed to supporting such ventures over a long period of time. While we cannot be sure where such initiatives might succeed or fail, it seems likely that intensive food assistance efforts might flounder in congregations with members who perceive themselves to be too short on time or resources for intensive relief. In our study, a congregation composed largely of middle-class, dual-income families explicitly opted against intensive relief—and instead favored parachurch outsourcing of food assistance—for this very reason.

Of course, as a one-stop service provider, parachurch relief agencies may be seen as an efficient conduit for the disbursement of food to local disadvantaged populations. Parachurch agencies can retain records of recipients’ aid solicitations, thereby allaying some pastors’ concerns about fraudulent requests for food and other aid. Moreover, parachurch agencies might be useful in meeting the needs of families that face food insecurity on a short-term basis (e.g., a household whose wage-earner is temporarily between jobs). These collaborative relief efforts can also build networks of trust and reciprocity among local congregations.

However, given the social distance that parachurch agencies can produce between the providers and recipients of relief, these organizations are unlikely to build the integrative, enduring forms of social capital between faith-based providers of aid and the poor. This potential shortcoming of parachurch food assistance must be recognized and weighed against the appeal of "efficiency" that attracts some congregations to this form of relief.
In the end, policymakers should seek to ascertain the needs of food–insecure families (e.g., protracted hunger, short–term food insecurity) before opting to support a specific strategy of faith–based food assistance.

Our study of faith–based food assistance strategies utilized by rural Mississippi congregations reveals that religious communities can be a valuable ally in our society’s effort to redress food insecurity. At the same time, faith–based food assistance initiatives implemented under Charitable Choice should be structured with an awareness of the opportunities and the limitations likely to accompany such programs. Many Americans can agree that food insecurity is a serious problem in a society marked by such an abundance of resources. Yet, solving this problem with the support of local congregations will require a keen awareness of the role of food in religious communities and a critical appraisal of the strategies faith–based organizations have adopted to redress hunger in all its forms.

ENDNOTES

1. Within the Golden Triangle Region, Clay County is the most rural and has the highest percentage of blacks when compared with its two GTR counterparts. Clay County is 53.3% black, whereas Lowndes (37.2% black) and Oktibbeha (34.3% black) conform more closely to the ethnic composition in the state. As the most rural of the three counties, Clay County is 48% farm land. Lowndes and Oktibbeha counties have 39% and 28% of their geography composed of farm land. By way of state–level comparisons, 34% of land in Mississippi is used for farming; 53% of Mississippians live in rural areas. Oktibbeha County is the site of a large state university (Mississippi State), which has an important effect on the county and provides it with a distinctive local economy and land–use structure. Oktibbeha and Lowndes counties have more robust middle class households than does Clay County, whose income distribution is skewed toward the very low and very high end of the income spectrum. (Census and administrative data analyses to support this overview are available upon request from the authors.)

2. Like Mississippi at large, households earning $5,000 or less annually are over 3.5 times more common in the Golden Triangle Region (8.26%) than in the nation at large (2.34%). These figures on the Golden Triangle Region, drawn from 1990 Census data, generally reflect poverty rates in Mississippi at large. Within Mississippi as a whole, 7.89% of households earn $5,000 or less annually. Similarly dramatic differences occur in other low–income brackets, where the Golden Triangle Region has a sizable over–representation of poor households when compared with the U.S. Within the Golden Triangle Region, 13.95% of households earn between $5,000 and $9,999 annually, as compared with only 5.59% in the US as a whole. Along these same lines, upper–middle class incomes are under–represented in the Golden Triangle Region. Upper–middle class incomes between $75,000 and $99,999 in the Golden Triangle Region account for 2.60% of all households. This figure compares with 6.33% of U.S. households whose income falls within these parameters of relative privilege. Mississippi as a whole ranks last among all states in per capita money income ($16,531) (1996 Statistical Abstract). It is for such reasons that some scholars have described Mississippi as among the poorest states in
the nation (Howell 1997). Although the Golden Triangle Region is not the poorest region in this poorest of states, it closely reflects the general patterns of impoverishment found throughout Mississippi.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Mississippi features one of the highest rates of public assistance use in the country. In 1992 and 1995, respectively, Mississippi led the nation in receipt of public assistance (AFDC and SSI)(11.8%)(1995 Statistical Abstract) and in receipt of Food Stamps (19.26%)(1997 Statistical Abstract). Public assistance use rates in both Mississippi and the Golden Triangle Region—which, again, closely parallel one another—often registered at well over twice the national average. Data gathered by the Social Security Administration reveal unusually high 1990 public assistance use rates for Mississippi (15 public assistance recipients per 100 non-recipients) and the Golden Triangle Region (14 recipients per 100 non-recipients). These public assistance use rates are over twice the national average (6.5 recipients per 100 non-recipients). Among counties in the Golden Triangle Region, public assistance use rates in Clay County (19 public assistance recipients per 100 non-recipients) far outpaces Oktibbeha county (12 recipients per 100 non-recipients) and Lowndes county (13 recipients per 100 non-recipients).

3. Although both Southern Baptists and United Methodists are predominantly white denominations, the United Methodists have several thriving African American congregations in the local area. When compared with Southern Baptists and United Methodists, all other predominantly white Protestant denominations in these three counties attract meager percentages of the total churchgoing population—typically, under 3% of all churchgoers. The Catholic presence is quite weak in Clay and Lowndes counties—attracting under 2% of the churchgoing population. Catholic adherence is significantly more robust in Oktibbeha County, where this church claims 7.6% of all adherents (Bradley et al 1992). Given the university nearby and its eclectic mix of non-Protestant churchgoers, the Oktibbeha County Catholic church has one of the most racially diverse congregations in the local area.

4. Black Baptists, typically affiliated with the National Baptist Convention, account for between 16.6% (Oktibbeha County) and 32.5% (Clay County) of the total churchgoing population in the Golden Triangle (Bradley et al 1992). Statewide and regional membership figures on the Church of God in Christ are not readily available. Worldwide membership in this denomination is estimated to range from 5.5 to 6.5 million adherents (Lindner 2000; Mead 1995), and COGIC has as many as 15,300 churches worldwide served by over 33,500 clergy (Lindner 2000). Given its Mississippi roots, COGIC continues to enjoy prominence in many Southern states. COGIC is a predominantly black denomination whose original followers were rejected by Black Baptists because of their emphasis on sanctification (holiness) and speaking in tongues (Mead 1995). COGIC churches enjoy a distinguished Civil Rights legacy in the local region (see Lincoln and Mamiya 1990: 224). Although Black Baptists are clearly the numerical majority among local African American churches, several thriving and civically engaged COGIC are present on the local scene as well.
5. In light of racial demographics in Mississippi, our sample is composed primarily of pastors from predominantly Anglo [N=16] and black [N=11] congregations. We also interviewed a couple of religious leaders [N=2] who minister to two very different transnational populations—upwardly mobile Muslims at a local university and disadvantaged Hispanic migrants—in the surrounding area.

6. A substantial proportion of our sample is composed of Baptist [N=9] and Methodist [N=9] congregations. Apart from Baptist and Methodist religious leaders, we also interviewed local Catholic priests [N=3]; pastors from the Church of God in Christ (COGIC)[N=2], Presbyterian congregations [N=4](both the theologically conservative PCA and the more theologically liberal PC–USA), a Latter–Day Saints (Mormon) religious leader [N=1], and (as noted) a leader of a local Islamic Center [N=1] which serves Muslim students in a Golden Triangle Region university community.

7. To protect the identities of individuals and organizations that participated in our study, all names of pastors and religious organizations in this report are pseudonyms.

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APPENDIX: CONGREGATIONAL PROFILES AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

PROFILE OF SAMPLED RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denominational Affiliation</th>
<th>Pastor/Leader Characteristics</th>
<th>Membership Characteristics</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Facilities</th>
<th>Budget</th>
<th>Types of Aid</th>
<th># People Helped/ Month</th>
<th>Charitable Choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Denominational Affiliation:**
- Baptist
- Catholic
- Protestant
- Jewish
- Hindu

**Pastor/Leader Characteristics:**
- Years of experience
- Educational background
- Specializations

**Membership Characteristics:**
- Age distribution
- Gender ratio
- Marital status

**Location:**
- City
- Suburb
- Rural
- Urban

**Facilities:**
- Size
- Capacity
- Amenities

**Budget:**
- Annual revenue
- Expenses
- Surplus

**Types of Aid:**
- Financial assistance
- Food and clothing
- Housing
- Medical

**# People Helped/ Month:**
- Average
- Maximum
- Minimum

**Charitable Choice:**
- Evaluation criteria
- Criteria weightage
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview view</th>
<th>Interviewer</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Facilities</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Provided (in millions)</th>
<th>Familiarity and Affect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>White (99.5%)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>58 years old</td>
<td>M.Div</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>8 offices</td>
<td>40 classrooms</td>
<td>HH Inc: $50K+</td>
<td>$1.3 million</td>
<td>1,2,3,5,9, 10,11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>White (100%)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>46 years old</td>
<td>No seminary</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>3 offices</td>
<td>Kitchen: 200</td>
<td>HH Inc: $30–50K</td>
<td>not specified</td>
<td>not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>CH1: White (100%)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>49 years old</td>
<td>No seminary</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1 office</td>
<td>Kitchen: 150</td>
<td>CH1: Semi-rural</td>
<td>CH1:</td>
<td>CH1: 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2 churches served by pastor, designated as CH1 and CH2)</td>
<td>140 total members</td>
<td>280 active members</td>
<td>HH Inc: $30–50K</td>
<td>CH1:</td>
<td>CH1: 1,3,7,12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>65 active members</td>
<td>8 classrooms</td>
<td>CH2: Semi-rural</td>
<td>CH2:</td>
<td>CH2: 7,12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>HH Inc: $30–50K</td>
<td>Kitchen: 100</td>
<td>CH2: White (100%)</td>
<td>CH2:</td>
<td>CH2:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>110 total members</td>
<td>3 classrooms</td>
<td>CH2:</td>
<td>CH2:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>White (100%)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>55 years old</td>
<td>Seminary</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1 office</td>
<td>Kitchen: 100</td>
<td>HH Inc: $20–30K</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>30 active members</td>
<td>60 active members</td>
<td>1 office</td>
<td>Kitchen: 100</td>
<td>CH1: 1,2,3,5,8,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Southern Baptist (SBC)</td>
<td>White (100%)</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>58 years old</td>
<td>Seminary</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>3 classrooms</td>
<td>Kitchen: 100</td>
<td>HH Inc: $1.4 million</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>96 total members</td>
<td>60 active members</td>
<td>3 classrooms</td>
<td>Kitchen: 100</td>
<td>CH1:</td>
<td>CH1:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Familiarity and Affect: Familiar, Ambivalent, Unfamiliar.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Church Type</th>
<th>Degree</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Locations</th>
<th>Classrooms</th>
<th>Kitchen Size</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Active Members</th>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Southern Baptist (SBC)</td>
<td>M.Div., D.Min.</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>HH Inc: $10–20K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>10 offices</td>
<td>50 classrooms</td>
<td>$630,000</td>
<td>1,2,3,9,11,13</td>
<td>130 (incl. 100 for daycare)</td>
<td>Familiar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Southern Baptist (SBC)</td>
<td>Biblical Studies</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>HH Inc: $30–50K</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>8 offices</td>
<td>45 classrooms</td>
<td>$141,000</td>
<td>2,3,7,11,12,13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Familiar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Southern Baptist (SBC)</td>
<td>M.Div.</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>HH Inc: $30–50K</td>
<td>Semi-rural</td>
<td>2 offices</td>
<td>20 classrooms</td>
<td>not specified</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,8,13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unfamiliar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Catholic (Parish)</td>
<td>Th.M.</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>HH Inc: $20–30K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2 offices</td>
<td>11 classrooms</td>
<td>$480,000</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,5,7,10,11,13</td>
<td>15–20</td>
<td>Favorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Catholic (Parish)</td>
<td>M.A.</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>HH Inc: $20–30K</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5 offices</td>
<td>12 classrooms</td>
<td>$250,000</td>
<td>1,2,3,8,12,14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Familiar</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: 1. White (99.9%) | 2. White (100%) | 3. White (100%) | 4. White (100%) | 5. 950 total members | 6. 90 total members | 7. 450 total members | 8. 375 active members | 9. 372 active members | 10. 200 total members | 11. 158 total members | 12. 740 total members | 13. 1158 total members |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Ph.D. (secular)</th>
<th>50K</th>
<th>3 offices</th>
<th>$3,000</th>
<th>1,2,3,7,8,9,10,12 (as needed)</th>
<th>2 families</th>
<th>Familiar</th>
<th>Ambivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Latter–Day Saints</td>
<td>White female</td>
<td>47 years old</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>12 classrooms</td>
<td>Kitchen: 200</td>
<td>$188,000</td>
<td>1,2,3,6,7,9,13,16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Presbyterian (PC–USA)</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>32 years old</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1 office</td>
<td>13 classrooms</td>
<td>Kitchen: 150</td>
<td>$270,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Presbyterian (PCA)</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>51 years old</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2 offices</td>
<td>10 classrooms</td>
<td>Kitchen: 175</td>
<td>$200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Presbyterian (PC–USA)</td>
<td>White female</td>
<td>58 years old</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>3 offices</td>
<td>20 classrooms</td>
<td>Kitchen: 100</td>
<td>$70,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Presbyterian (PC–USA)</td>
<td>Black male</td>
<td>44 years old</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>2 offices</td>
<td>9 classrooms</td>
<td>Kitchen: 200</td>
<td>$165,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td>Denominational Affiliation</td>
<td>Pastor/Leader Characteristics</td>
<td>Membership Characteristics</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>Budget</td>
<td>Types of Aid Provided</td>
<td># Peo. Helped/ Month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>Black female</td>
<td>Black (100%)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1 office</td>
<td>not specified</td>
<td>1,2,3,4,7,14</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>60 years old</td>
<td>106 total members</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 classrooms</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Seminary</td>
<td>50 active members</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$110,000</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Degree–seeking</td>
<td>HH Inc: $20–30K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Black male</td>
<td>HH Inc: $30–50K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

PROFILE OF SAMPLED RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES (continued)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Church Type</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Members</th>
<th>Active</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Relevance</th>
<th>Familiarity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>46 years old</td>
<td>Black (98%)</td>
<td>Seminary M.Div.</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>205 total members</td>
<td>150 active members</td>
<td>HH Inc: $30–50K</td>
<td>1,2,7,9,</td>
<td>#*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>United Methodist</td>
<td>45 years old</td>
<td>Black (100%)</td>
<td>Seminary M.Div.</td>
<td>Semi-rural</td>
<td>206 total members</td>
<td>150 active members</td>
<td>HH Inc: $20–30K</td>
<td>3,4,7,9,11,</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Missionary Baptist (National Baptist Convention)</td>
<td>57 years old</td>
<td>Bi (90%); Wh (5%)</td>
<td>Seminary B.A.</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>525 total members</td>
<td>350 active members</td>
<td>HH Inc: not specified</td>
<td>1,2,3,5,8</td>
<td>5–10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Missionary Baptist (National Baptist Convention)</td>
<td>43 years old</td>
<td>Black male</td>
<td>Seminary Th.M.</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>500 total members</td>
<td>375 active members</td>
<td>HH Inc: not specified; middle/upper-middle class</td>
<td>2,3,5,12,13,</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Missionary Baptist (National Baptist Convention)</td>
<td>69 years old</td>
<td>Black male</td>
<td>Seminary B.A.</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>500 total members</td>
<td>375 active members</td>
<td>HH Inc: $30–50K</td>
<td>1,2,3,7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Missionary Baptist (National Baptist Convention)</td>
<td>48 years old</td>
<td>Black male</td>
<td>Seminary Certificate</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>300 total members</td>
<td>200 active members</td>
<td>HH Inc: under $10K</td>
<td>1,2,3,7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# = not specified
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Religion/Churc</th>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Facilities</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>(National Baptist Convention)</td>
<td>Black (100%)</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1 office 3 classrooms Kitchen: 7,13,14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ (COGIC)</td>
<td>Black (100%)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>1 office 2 classrooms Kitchen: 50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Church of God in Christ (COGIC)</td>
<td>Middle Eastern male</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5 offices 16 classrooms Kitchen: 1,2,3,4,5,12,13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Muslim (North America Islamic Association)</td>
<td>White male</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>3 offices 4 classrooms Kitchen: 16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Catholic (Hispanic Ministry)</td>
<td>Black (100%)</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1 office not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>International</td>
<td>Black (100%)</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>3 offices 4 classrooms Kitchen: 200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Asian (15%); BI (10%); Wh (2%)</td>
<td>200 total members</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>not specified</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Catholic (Hispanic Ministry)</td>
<td>150 active</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1 office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Black (100%)</td>
<td>200 total members</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>3 classrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>HH Inc: $30–50K</td>
<td>50 total members</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>5 offices 30 total members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>HH Inc: $10–20K</td>
<td>35 active members</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>HH Inc: $20–30K</td>
<td>125 active members</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>HH Inc: $10–20K</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
- “Depends on # of needy”
- “For needy according to their need; social support”
- Rural
- Urban

Demographics:
- Black (100%)
- Black (99%)
- Black (100%)
- Black (100%)
- Black (100%)
- Black (100%)
- White male
- Middle Eastern male
- No seminary
- No formal religious training
- Catholic (Hispanic Ministry)
- (National Baptist Convention)
a: With the exception of "Charitable Choice Affect," this table was prepared from pre-interview survey information taken from pastors or religious leaders in our non-probability sample of local religious congregations. Charitable Choice Familiarity and Affect were estimated from responses to interview questions 6, 13, and 16 (see Appendix B). We use these multiple questions to estimate familiarity with and affect toward Charitable Choice in order to improve the validity of these data. The final row in this table (interview #28) counts a multi-church Hispanic Ministry as one entity for the purposes of our sample.

b: The assigned interview number does not reflect the order in which churches were surveyed or interviewed.

c: Where needed, "Wh," "Bl," and "Hisp" are used to abbreviate "White," "Black," and "Hispanic," respectively. "HH Inc" represents the typical household income within the congregation; the figure provided represents annual income, where $xK stands for x thousand dollars.

d: The term "urban" takes on a particular meaning in the rural South. Urban designates a church located in a county seat.

e: The figure following kitchen (e.g., "Kitchen: 200") describes the approximate number of persons that the kitchen facilities can serve.

f: The numerical references listed under "Types of Aid Provided" conform to the following the key:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 – HELP PAYING RENT</th>
<th>6 – LOW-COST HOUSING</th>
<th>11 – CARE FOR THE ELDERLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 – HELP PAYING UTILITIES</td>
<td>7 – CLOTHING</td>
<td>12 – TRANSPORTATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – GROCERIES</td>
<td>8 – MEDICAL SERVICES</td>
<td>13 – COUNSELING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – CASH</td>
<td>9 – CHILD CARE</td>
<td>14 – TUTORING</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – TEMPORARY SHELTER</td>
<td>10 – HOT MEALS</td>
<td>15 – AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>16 – OTHER (Specify)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**PRE-INTERVIEW SURVEY ADMINISTERED TO RELIGIOUS LEADERS**

*Interview Code No.:*
Before we begin the interview, I would like to obtain some information about your religious congregation and your opinion about various topics.

Please place an "X" in the appropriate spaces and fill in the blanks to the best of your ability.

PASTOR INFORMATION
2. Beginning with first grade, how many years of schooling have you completed?

3. Were you trained at a religious institution/seminary? If so, where? What degree (if any) did you receive?

4. How long have you been pastor of this church?

5. Where did you serve as pastor before coming to this church (location, denomination)?

6. Is your church affiliated with a parachurch group or larger religious network? If so, which one(s)?

**********************************************************************

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

MEMBERSHIP AND ATTENDANCE
1. What is the total membership of the church?

2. How many of those members would you consider active members?

3. At a typical weekly service, approximately how many people are in attendance?

4. On which days of the week do you have services? (Sunday through Saturday provided as response categories)

5. What types of services do you have on each day? (Brief description space provided)

6. Estimate what percentage of your congregation is in each age category:

   ___ % Under 20
   ___ % 20–34
   ___ % 35–49
   ___ % 50–65
   ___ % over 65

7. Your church membership is approximately ___ % male and ___ % female.

8. Do you have any services that primarily draw men or women? If so, what are they?

9. At a typical service, your congregation is (estimate percentage)

   ___ % European–American/White
   ___ % African–American/Black
   ___ % Asian–American/Asian
   ___ % Hispanic (Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban origins)
   ___ % American Indian
   ___ % Other (specify)

10. OCCUPATION

    The most common occupations in your congregation are

    ___ white collar/professional
    ___ skilled workers/technicians
service workers/retail/sales
laborers
home maker
unemployed
other (specify)____________________________

INCOME
11. How would you describe your congregation?
working class/low–income
lower middle class
middle class
upper middle class
upper class

12. A typical household of your congregation earns:
under $ 10,000
$10–20,000
$20–30,000
$30–50,000
over $50,000

AID PROVIDED BY THE CHURCH
13. Which of the following types of aid or services does your church provide on a regular basis?

H E L P
CARE FOR THE ELDERLY

- -

GROCERIES

- -

TRANSPORTATION
14. In a given month, how many people does your church help?  _________________

ANNUAL CHURCH BUDGET

15. The yearly budget of your church is $__________________.

CHURCH DEBT

16. Does your church have a debt?

17. If so, how large a debt do you have?

18. How many years will it take to pay it off?

FACILITIES

19. What is the size of church buildings (overall square footage)?

20. What is the seating capacity of your church?

21. How many classrooms does your church have?

22. How many offices does your church have?

23. Does your church have kitchen facilities? If so, how many people can be served out of your kitchen?

24. Does your church have a playground? If so, how many kids can it accommodate?

25. Does your church have bathroom facilities? If so, how many toilets?

26. Does your church have insurance? If so, what type(s) of insurance? What is the amount of coverage?

*Pre–interview survey was self–administered prior to the interview. Given space considerations and readability, the survey was slightly reformatted for this appendix. The specific questions asked on the pre–interview survey have been retained here.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS*
1. To begin, tell me a bit about the history of your church and what your church stands for.

2. How is your church organized? What positions does your church have, and how are decisions made in your church?

3. What type of social service programs (e.g., outreach, mutual aid, relief or missionary work) does your church currently offer? How active are these programs? At whom are they targeted and by whom are they staffed? Is your congregation involved in any community based or inter–church relief programs? Have you heard of Mississippi Faith and Families? If so, what has been your experience with that program?

4. Which of the church’s outreach or aid programs have been successful and which have not? What factors have contributed to their success or failure?

5. What do you think of government–sponsored public assistance that is currently in place in our society? Do you think churches might be able to provide aid in way that the government cannot? How do churches provide aid differently than that provided by the government? (PROBE: Do churches provide different types of aid? Do churches use different means for delivering assistance to the needy?)

6. Have you heard of the idea that churches might become more involved in the restructuring of public welfare? What do you think of that idea? What do you think would be the outcome of such a program? Do you think the members of your congregation would or could support such a program?

7. Suppose your church was given a block grant from the state to provide additional aid to the needy in the community. What types of aid could your church provide with such a grant? How would the church use those funds? Who do you think should make decisions concerning how that money is used?

8. What standards do you use when deciding to give aid? Would those standards change if public money were used to expand your aid programs?

9. If welfare services were to be routed through local churches, do you think attitudes about race or ethnicity would affect the way in which such aid is distributed? Do you think that race currently affects the distribution of aid provided by Mississippi churches?

10. In deciding to take people off of aid, what rules do you currently apply? Do you think these rules would change if you had additional funds at your disposal to provide aid?

11. Do you think your church, or churches in general, can help people get off welfare? Do you think a joint effort among churches would be effective in seeking this goal?

12. Many people living in poverty are single mothers and their children, as well as the elderly. Do you currently provide aid or services to these types of individuals? If so, how effective have these programs been? Would additional funding enable you to initiate or expand the aid provided to these groups of people?

13. If your church were to cooperate with the government in providing welfare services, would you have any concerns about such an arrangement? Would members of your congregation support this arrangement?

14. How will members of your congregation be affected once welfare support is no longer available to current recipients?
15. Suppose an increasing number of non–members came to your congregation seeking aid. What do you think would be the reaction of your church to these non–members’ efforts to seek aid?

16. What are your views concerning the separation of church and state? If the church did play a role in providing welfare services, how might your views about the separation of church and state affect the program?

17. Thinking back over the past several years, what has been the single biggest change in the way you minister to your congregation? What has brought about this change?

18. Do you think that religion is more or less important in this country today than it was twenty years ago?

19. What programs does your church offer youth? In what ways, if any, does your church minister to the youth in your congregation?

20. Finally, I am curious about your general impressions of religion in America today. What do you think are the most important issues that are influencing religion at the national level? How do you think religious communities should respond to the issues/challenges you have identified?

*Semi–structured interview instrument. Interview questionnaire adapted as needed to fit congregational context.*