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**FAITH-BASED ORGANIZING AND PARTNERSHIPS IN A PITTSBURGH  
NEIGHBORHOOD: A LOOK AT EAST LIBERTY**

A Thesis

Presented to the

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts

by

Damon T. Bethea

April 7, 2004



## **PREFACE**

As federal, state and local governments cut back on funding to social services agencies, many inner city Americans are looking for assistance at neighborhood churches and other faith-based organizations (FBO) to fill the gaps left by reductions in funding to social service agencies. Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush have focused on FBOs making up the difference, and a number of them are doing this. As a result, there is a growing interest by researchers in the United States on the effectiveness of FBOs in urban communities.

I would like to thank God for helping me making it through this research project. Secondly, I would like to thank the five churches, the Community Ministry, the Community Development Corporation and the Community Healthcare Center for participating in this project. Without their participation this research project would not have happened. I would also like to thank my readers, Drs. Moni McIntyre and Sharon Nepstad, for their guidance, wisdom and support throughout my project. I appreciate them both, and I am thankful to have them on my committee. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their continuous support and encouragement. I could not have made it through all of my graduate school experiences without their support and encouragement.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

For centuries churches and faith-based organizations (FBOs) have been seen as essential parts of communities. There are thousands of FBOs in the United States, and many of them provide important social services to their community, e.g. Meals-On-Wheels, food pantries, after-school tutoring services for children and youth, and family development programs. This type of church involvement has been embraced by a variety of political leaders including Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton. In a White House paper found on the White House's Faith-Based and Community Initiatives' Website, entitled "Guidance to Faith-Based and Community Organizations on Partnering with the Federal Government," President George W. Bush states that "the indispensable and transforming work of faith-based and other charitable service groups must be encouraged. Government cannot be replaced by charities, but it can and should welcome them as partners. We must heed the growing consensus across America that successful government social programs work in fruitful partnerships with community-serving and faith-based organizations" (FBCI 2002:2). Furthermore, the President asserts that community partnerships with FBOs are necessary to strengthen and empower communities across America to serve those in need.

Partly in response to these presidential endorsements and changes in welfare policy, FBOs have flourished in recent years. Indeed, U.S. churches collectively spent between \$15 and \$20 billion on faith-based social services in the late 1990s (Aspen Institute 2001:2). The expansion of FBOs has generated a body of literature that assesses the effectiveness of these programs, but little has been written about racially integrated and/or predominantly European American churches providing services within

predominantly African American communities in the United States. Neither has much attention been given to class dynamics.

Before addressing these topics, it is important to define briefly “Faith-Based Organizations.” Richard Wood (2002:6) identifies FBOs as “community social service groups that are affiliated with religious institutions and hold a non-profit 501(c) 3 status.” Using Wood’s definition, I have studied several FBOs in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania that are active in the East Liberty neighborhood in the city’s East End. According to the 2000 census data found on the department’s Website, East Liberty has a population of nearly 7,000 residents ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)). Of these, 72.5 percent are African American, 21.5 percent are European American and an additional 6 percent are of Asian, Hispanic, Native American and multi-racial backgrounds. The 2000 census data also indicates that nearly 25 percent of East Liberty households live in poverty. Like other urban communities in the United States, East Liberty deals with issues of low-income wages in households and growing rates of poverty. As a result, many East Liberty households turn to the FBOs in East Liberty for additional support.

In this research project, I focused on five churches and three organizations. The churches include a racially integrated progressive Presbyterian Church, a predominantly European American Presbyterian Church, two African American Baptist churches (one small in membership population and the other with a large membership population), and an African American Church of God in Christ (COGIC) church. The Community Ministry, the neighborhood’s Community Development Corporation (CDC) and the Community Healthcare Center represent the other bodies’ studies. The services provided by these FBOs concern housing, unemployment, healthcare, substance abuse programs,

quality education for children, computer and technological literacy, enrichment programs for children and youth, and quality programs for seniors. Table 1 in Appendix A profiles the services that each of the named FBOs provides to the East Liberty and East End communities.

The key research questions to be addressed in this research project are: 1) How does the racial composition of the church community affect their relationship with the residents of East Liberty whom they serve? 2) How does the class composition of the congregation affect their relationship with the residents of East Liberty and their ability to serve them? 3) How does the theological orientation of the church shape their involvement in the community? 4) What are these churches' attitudes about working in partnership with other churches and FBOs?

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING FBO EFFECTIVENESS**

Several researchers have explored factors affecting faith-based organizations. In this section, I summarize the results of these studies, particularly focusing on issues of race, class and community partnerships. The success of a FBO is likely affected by several factors. These include race and class dynamics within an urban community, the degree of input of residents have in determining community needs and services offered, and the use of pre-existing social networks and partnerships within communities. These are among the issues to be considered when investigating FBOs working within urban communities.

### Race

Many FBOs work in impoverished urban neighborhoods that are predominantly populated by people of color. The economic concerns of the residents are frequently

compounded by racism, and therefore many community organizations take a “race-based approach.” In his book, *Faith in Action: Religion, Race and Democratic Organizing in America*, Richard Wood explores issues of race and class, and he delineates various approaches that faith-based organizations can take. One of these models is called “multiracial organizing.” Wood states that “Multiracial organizing roots itself culturally in the racial identities of participants, appealing to potential participants as ‘people of color.’” (Wood 2002:7). This approach involves the attempt to mobilize and unite community residents of different backgrounds (African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans and others) who share the status of being racial and ethnic minorities. It focuses on the belief that every person of color has the right to equal treatment and access to housing, education, employment, etc. This form of organizing has an emphasis on the inclusion of people of color mobilizing together within their community, and an acknowledgement that these minority groups do not possess the same access to the aforementioned resources such as their Caucasian counterparts. By focusing on the goals that these various groups share, multi-racial organizing can strengthen a movement (Warren 2001:153).

Wood acknowledges that there are some limitations to multi-racial organizing. He acknowledges that there are “. . . significant constraints arising from three sources: (1) the lack of ambiguity and flexibility within polemical understandings of racial identity currently widespread in American culture; (2) the relative dearth of cross-racial cultural resources (particularly social networks and trust) to support multiracial organizing efforts; and (3) the tension embedded in organizational ideology between the universalizing thrust of its democratic ethos and commitment to human rights and the

radically particularizing thrust of rooting its appeal in racial identity. These constrain the organization to a role as a politicized civic association rather than an influential player in political society” (Wood 2002:268-269). Within multi-racial organizing, Wood acknowledges that these obstacles have to be overcome in order for the movement to be effective and have a positive impact on the community.

Another model is cross-racial organizing, which entails European Americans working in collaboration with racial and ethnic minority groups. Mark Warren (2001) argues that when European Americans work in areas with a large number of people of color, they must be willing to work with the poorer leaders and other members of the community. This is a way that European Americans can gain trust within the community and build networks. When European Americans are no longer seen as outsiders within a community of color, then their organizing and service efforts are less difficult, and they develop legitimacy among leaders and residents in the community.

Given that European American congregations and religious institutions sponsor many FBOs, this may be the model that many European American FBOs take. However, there are unique challenges with organizing across racial lines. These include power struggles, an unwillingness to partner due to racism, as well as proprietary attitudes toward resources. One of the first steps that must be taken is to acknowledge and address that racism exists. An example of this is identified in Emerson and Smith’s book, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (2000). Emerson and Smith assert that the Promise Keepers – a movement of Christian men focused on their duties to God, family, and community – have made a concerted effort to include African Americans at their national rallies in recent years. They mention that at

one Promise Keeper rally, a man publicly stated that, “we have grieved our brothers and sisters of color. We have ignored their pain and isolation. We have allowed false divisions to separate us. We must reconcile our differences, and come together in the name of the Almighty God!” (Emerson and Smith 2000:50). The Promise Keepers made a public recognition that for years, men and women of color have had a different life than those in mainstream society and changes must occur in order for everyone to enjoy a life of equality in America.

When faith-based organizations work in low-income urban neighborhoods populated by racial minorities, they must acknowledge that “. . . power and race remain undeniable influences in community change initiatives” (Stone and Butler 2000:vii). If European American congregations decide to work in communities of color, then issues of race cannot be ignored and they will have to develop strategies and techniques to gain trust and to make those in a community feel comfortable with their community presence and activity.

Given the particular challenges of working across racial lines, it may be that those churches whose congregations most closely reflect the racial composition of the community will be most effective. In other words, black churches might be more effective in black communities than white churches are, since it is easier for them to gain the trust of residents, because they are not perceived as outsiders. Additionally, African American churches have an extensive network of congregants with access to resources, which makes their work within an African American community less difficult. Furthermore, they may also have greater understanding of the plight of urban African American communities.

Black churches in the United States have a long history of activism within urban communities. During the Civil Rights Movement, black churches were not only places of worship, but also places for community organizing efforts, speeches, and other forms of community outreach and development. Mark Warren, author of *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*, acknowledges that “in the fifties and sixties, these churches provided a crucial foundation for the civil rights movement through their preexisting networks of leaders and followers under the influence of their pastors” (Warren 2001:199). This tradition continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as indicated by a report issued by the Ford Foundations Black Church Program. Many of the churches involved in this program provided services to their members and others within their communities – from daycare services to soup kitchens (Jackson and Brown 1989:34). Although the Ford Foundation report indicates that black churches are providing various social services and playing an important role in the economic development of their communities, the issue of race is not explicitly addressed in this report. Therefore, we do not actually know if African American FBOs are more effective than those sponsored by European American congregations.

### Class

When examining issues of race, class should also be explored. In *Where We Stand: Class Matters* (2000), bell hooks argues that when individuals explore race in America, they must also explore class issues. She believes that race and class go hand in hand, and one cannot survive without the other. According to hooks, “it is impossible to talk meaningfully about ending racism without talking about class” (hooks 2000:7). Richard Wood concurs, noting that social inequality in the United States stems from

institutional racism, class privilege, and patriarchy (Wood 2002:108). Emerson and Smith further underscore the interactive dynamics of race and class. They state that “economic inequality between blacks and whites is pervasive. Occupationally, white Americans tend to be concentrated in the prestigious, better-paying jobs, while black Americans tend to be clustered in low-prestige, lower-paying jobs. Black Americans are also much more likely to be unemployed” (Emerson and Smith 2000:12).

This begs the question of how the economic power of middle class European American churches – as compared to African American churches – influences their ability to provide services and foster economic development in impoverished neighborhoods. Some of the problems that may arise when middle class churches serve a low-income neighborhood are that those affiliated with a middle class church may be seen by those in the neighborhood as detached from the every day issues of low-income individuals and families. They may simply find it difficult to relate to community residents due to differences in class, education or other background experiences. Additionally, low-income residents may perceive middle class churches as folks who do not really care about them and are primarily doing “the work of the Lord” for self-serving purposes, such as making themselves look good in the eyes of their fellow congregants or others. Furthermore, those from middle class churches may be seen as outsiders who are not really part of the every day activities in the community.

### Community Partnerships

To be effective, FBOs sponsored by middle or upper class churches need to overcome this image as outsiders, and one method of doing this is to work with partners in the community. This strategy has been used by many mainline Protestant churches.

According to James Wind, “one special way in which this distinctive mainline style is expressed is through the formation of coalitions that bring various religious and secular groups together to work on major issues. Instead of singing in solo fashion, the mainline had to change its voice to blend into an always-evolving chorus or improvisational ensemble” (Wind 2002:10). Wind notes that community partnerships are more likely to be formed by socially and politically liberal churches – which typically have a strong social justice component to their ministry – than conservative mainline churches. When these liberal mainline churches form coalitions with neighborhood groups, their effectiveness is enhanced because “. . . well-organized neighborhood residents and key stakeholders are a critical force in the success of any comprehensive community revitalization effort” (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2002:7). Additionally, FBOs that establish partnerships create a sense of inclusion that can win the respect of residents. Finally, partnerships also extend FBOs’ ties to social networks within a community. Many FBOs provide financial support, access to human capital from their church members, and other resources and connections that perhaps other community organizations do not possess (Rainbow Research 1991).

Research indicates that these partnerships can be highly effective. In a 1994 study, the Rainbow Research, Inc. found that the 28 FBOs who worked with community partners “1) stimulate[d] greater involvement of religious institutions in community revitalization, 2) create[d] new religious/community partnerships, 3) strengthen[ed] community ministries, and 4) attract[ed] new sources of funding for religious/community partnerships” (the Rainbow Research, Inc. 1994:iv). Mark Warren also notes that FBOs can establish trust within communities through relationship building and cooperation. He

believes that “forging multiracial cooperation therefore requires a *process* that builds trust and mutual understanding over time. A certain degree of trust is necessary to get the process going. But, then, cooperative action offers the context for building greater trust, relationships, and mutual understanding” (Warren 2001:99-100). He states that if a community encourages leaders from different races, classes, and religious denominations to work together toward a common goal, then the walls that divide communities will be torn down. With Warren’s model for successful FBO organizing, community partnerships are the key to successfully tackling the challenges of race, class and poverty.

If faith-based organizations do not collaborate with community partners, various problems may arise. This includes the potential perception that the FBO may be seen by the residents as trying to “take over things” without the input of the residents.

Additionally, FBOs may be seen as working strictly for their own interests rather than in the residents’ interests. FBOs not using the ideas of partnership, which has been a significant component of community building initiatives since the 1980s and 1990s, will be at a disadvantage in the community because they will be seen as distant and uninterested in the community.

The research of FBOs I discovered, however, has not fully addressed the factors that can derail such collaborative efforts between community groups and FBOs. For example, conflicts between FBOs and existing organizations providing similar social services in neighborhoods are rarely discussed. In addition, tensions may arise over goals and priorities as well as the designated use of resources. These are some of the issues I explored in the context of FBO initiatives in Pittsburgh’s East Liberty neighborhood.

## **METHODOLOGY**

To examine how issues of race, class, and community partnerships shape faith-based organizations, I designed a multi-method qualitative research study that included in-depth interviews, analysis of church documents, and participation observation. I selected five churches in the East Liberty neighborhood that were involved in faith-based organizing. In order to gain the trust of these FBOs, I adopted the use of pseudonyms to protect the identity of the churches and organizations in this study. I describe these FBOs briefly below (also see Appendix A).

### The Churches and FBOs

One of the FBOs discussed in this research project is sponsored by an integrated progressive Presbyterian Church. Using a pseudonym, I will refer to this church as “Progressive Presbyterian.” It was founded in 1819, and its current edifice was completed in 1935. This church has become one of the physical focal points of the East Liberty community. With a congregation of 587 people, 60 percent are European American, 23 percent are African American and 17 percent are Asian American, Hispanic American, Native American and multi-racial Americans. This church has been known to embrace diversity of all types and encourage people to celebrate diversity within church communities. This spirit of inclusiveness brings individuals and families of this church from all parts of the Pittsburgh Metropolitan Area. The services this Progressive Presbyterian Church provides to the East Liberty community are a homeless shelter, food pantry and soup kitchen. These services are provided through their partnership with the Community Ministry. This church also provides financial support to the Neighborhood Theatre and to the Community Healthcare Center. They also work

with the neighborhood Community Development Corporation (CDC) and provide tutoring and other after-school programs for children.

Another FBO participating in this research project is what I termed Mainstream Presbyterian Church (a pseudonym). This church is also actively involved in providing services to the residents of East Liberty. The Mainstream Presbyterian Church has been a part of the East Liberty neighborhood since 1836. With a membership between 200 to 250 people, nearly 80 percent of its congregation is European American, while 20 percent are of African American, Asian American and Hispanic backgrounds. This Mainstream Presbyterian Church is undergoing a number of transformations with a goal toward increasing membership, their outreach ministries target East Liberty's youth and homeless. The church provides a Boot Camp after school program, a daycare center, and a program focusing on homeless individuals with medical issues. Additionally, the Mainstream Presbyterian Church was one of the founding partners of the Community Healthcare Center.

One of the African American FBOs used in this project is a small predominantly African American Baptist church, "Rejoice Baptist Church" (pseudonym), which has more than 500 members. This church's founding pastor was extremely active in the Pittsburgh community during the 1950s and 1960s as a community organizer. As chairperson of the Pittsburgh Public Schools during this time, he was involved in community service organizations, and a leader in the integration of the city's public schools. It was this man's vision for community involvement and community action that prompted him to form this church during the 1960s. Rejoice Baptist Church was created with the help of teachers, doctors, lawyers, activists and other professionals – many of whom were African American. The services that Rejoice provides to the community

include a mentoring program at a neighborhood elementary school and partnering with the Community Ministry on their outreach efforts.

In addition, a large predominantly African American church, “Pietistic Baptist Church” (a pseudonym), participated in this research project. This 97 year old church is currently one of the largest churches in the city with a membership of more than 7,000. Pietistic Baptist Church is predominantly African American, but there is a small number of European Americans who are members of this congregation. Many of Pietistic’s services and ministries to the East Liberty community are done through their community center as well as through the church. They offer children and adults computer technology literacy as well as a male mentoring program at a neighborhood middle school. Most of the male mentoring program activities are conducted outside of the community center. Pietistic’s programs are mainly geared toward educational advancement within the community.

The last church participating in this research project is an African American Church of God in Christ (COGIC) church, “Holy COGIC Church” (a pseudonym). This church was established 33 years ago in Wilkinsburg, Pennsylvania – a suburban community that borders Pittsburgh’s East End neighborhoods. The church grew out of the efforts of a Baptist pastor in Braddock Hills, Pennsylvania. After nineteen members were “won to Christ” at a tent revival in the late 1960s, the pastor started his COGIC church in Wilkinsburg. Eventually, the church outgrew its site and searched for a new location. They found a site in East Liberty, where they have been since 1991. Why did they select East Liberty and not another neighborhood? The pastor said that his church had a connection with East Liberty through their annual tent revivals, and they felt a “call” to work in an inner city neighborhood. In 1991, the Holy COGIC Church building

was completed, and it currently has more than 1,000 members. This church has established a Community Development Corporation (CDC) and owns a gospel radio station in Pittsburgh.

All of the churches are working with the Community Ministry and assisting them in providing services to East Liberty and other neighborhoods in Pittsburgh's East End. The Community Ministry is an interfaith coalition of 47 congregations, parishes and institutions united to serve human needs by promoting recovery and self-help among the residents of Pittsburgh's East End (Annual Report 2002:1). The Community Ministry provides a variety of services. For example, they offer a food pantry and homeless shelter housed at the Progressive Presbyterian Church, as well as Meals-On-Wheels and programs for children, youth and families in the East End. The Community Ministry is housed within the Mainstream Presbyterian Church and continues to be an active organization committed to East Liberty and other East End communities.

### In-depth Interviews

After identifying the churches to include in my study, I conducted in-depth interviews with key individuals involved in the congregation's faith-based organizing efforts. The research methodology for this project is a qualitative design that uses an inductive approach. Data was gathered through eight face-to-face interviews with individuals and community organizations including the director of Community Mission at the Progressive Presbyterian Church, the pastors of the other churches, the pastor of the Pietistic Baptist Church's Community Center, and the executive director of the Community Healthcare Center. These interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. In addition to these individuals, I interviewed the executive director of the Community Ministry and the real estate director at the Community Development Corporation (see

Appendix B). I used a guided conversation approach based on a series of open-ended questions, listed in Appendix C.

### Gathering a Sample

The snowball sampling technique was used to identify additional East Liberty organizations within East Liberty and other individuals to be interviewed for this research project. According to Therese L. Baker, “in snowball sampling, you first find a few subjects who are characterized by the qualities you seek, interview them, and then ask them for names of other people whom they know who have the same qualities or other qualities that interest you” (Baker 1999:141). Consequently, my initial contacts led me to other individuals and organizations in the East Liberty community who were helpful subjects for this research project. I contacted these individuals by letter to invite their participation in this research project. The letter outlined the purpose and solicited their assistance with this project. Within one week I contacted them and set up an interview time.

Once the interviews were completed and transcribed, I coded and analyzed the transcriptions, looking for common themes and patterns that emerged from the data. Additionally, I collected church brochures, reports and other information and analyzed the content of these materials for further data. I also attended services and workshops sponsored by these churches, and recorded my observations in field notes.

Throughout the data collection process, I focused on four key questions:

- 1) How does the racial composition of the church community affect their relationship with the residents of East Liberty?
- 2) How does the class composition of the congregation affect their relationship with the residents of East Liberty and their ability to serve them?
- 3) How does the theological orientation of the church shape their involvement in the

community? and 4) What are these churches' attitudes about working in partnership with other churches and FBOs?

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

In summarizing the key findings of my research, I begin by looking at those churches involved in cross-cultural organizing. In other words, I look at the two churches whose congregations include a sizeable number of European Americans – the Progressive Presbyterian Church and the Mainstream Presbyterian Church. Although Progressive Presbyterian Church is more racially integrated than the other church, both congregations face the challenges of working across racial lines, since East Liberty is predominantly African American.

### Cross-Cultural Organizing

Mark Warren argues that those leading white churches have “to be willing to work side by side with poorer leaders of color” (Warren 2001: 104). For Warren, in order to build community across racial lines, there needs to an attempt by European American churches working within an African American community to partner with other community leaders so that there will not be a perceived racial divide. Warren’s argument can apply to the Mainstream Presbyterian Church. According to its pastor, Mainstream Presbyterian Church has embraced the idea that it has to work with those in the community and reflect the community in order to survive. The pastor believes that his church can either turn a blind eye to the community’s needs and its people and die, or it can become a part of the community and thrive. The pastor of the Mainstream Presbyterian Church has clearly chosen the latter alternative. He stated that “recently, I help to organize a meeting with other churches and social service organizations in East Liberty to talk about the future of our community” (February 11, 2004). This is one way

in which this pastor and his church are doing more to engage the East Liberty community.

The Mainstream Presbyterian Church has recently made a concerted effort to open itself to the East Liberty community. Moving from a conservative European American church to a fully integrated church is one of the pastor's main goals. Within Robert Wuthnow and John H. Evans' book, *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism*, Bradford Verter wrote a chapter on "Furthering the Freedom Struggle: Racial Justice Activism in the Mainline Churches Since the Civil Rights Era," where he uses the experience of a church in Decatur, Georgia, which parallels the experiences of Mainstream Presbyterian church in East Liberty. Verter states that the pastors of the Decatur church are, "both white [they] altered the church to reflect the community. They installed images of black angels and a black Jesus to match the white one, and they included music from African American traditions in their services. They expanded the social ministry of the church to include a wide array of community services, including literacy programs, social service programs, and a prison outreach program" (Verter 2002:204). Similarly, the Mainstream Presbyterian Church has incorporated into its services music from the African American church tradition and has instituted other approaches to make the church more inviting to African Americans and other racial and ethnic minorities.

The pastor of the Mainstream Presbyterian Church recognized that "[it has] only been recent that this whole direction of the church has changed. We have a part of our mission here which is Christ-centered and potentially cross-cultural. . . .So, race has everything to do with this congregation and who are we. It's been hard to admit" (February 11, 2004). For this church, the recognition of racism and the role of the church

in the East Liberty community helped the Mainstream Presbyterian Church to become more active in the community.

The Progressive Presbyterian Church recognizes race, but they do not believe it influences their work in East Liberty. This church publicly proclaims itself as a liberal and inclusive church that welcomes everyone regardless of race, class, age, gender, or sexual orientation. The director of community mission at the Progressive Presbyterian Church states that “one of our strong suits is that we are open and people feel comfortable here – no matter what race or ethnicity they are. I really haven’t seen any problems working in the community, because they realize we are liberal and open-minded. I’m sure there are those who may not agree with us [or] don’t know who we are as a congregation” (February 3, 2004). Due to their openness, the Progressive Presbyterian Church is able to attract a variety of individuals that likely would not otherwise participate in church activities. Additionally, this church’s belief in social justice and equality for everyone drives their commitment to the East Liberty community, and they do their best to partner with community leaders on issues affecting the neighborhood.

There are some differences between the Mainstream Presbyterian Church and the Progressive Church in regard to what may affect their work in East Liberty. Until recent years the Mainstream Presbyterian Church had a reputation for being distant from the community, not being racially or ethnically diverse, and not being open to working within the community. Their services are still widely known, but they are slowly gaining the community’s trust. In contrast, the Progressive Presbyterian Church has a history of immersing itself in community programs, reflecting the diversity of the neighborhood (race, class, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), and having a strong reputation within the community for good programs and services. As a result, they have enjoyed the long

standing trust of the residents. Each of these Presbyterian Churches has chosen a different path and each one has had a different result from the work they have done in the East Liberty community.

#### Faith-Based Organizing within East Liberty's Black Churches

Warren points out that “African American churches have a long tradition of engagement with social and political issues in the black community” (Warren 2001:199). Additionally, “the theological tradition of the black church, then, offers a rich resource for efforts to sustain the African American community and work for its liberation” (Warren 2001:199). Thus Warren asserts that African American churches are at an advantage when working within an African American community because trust and commitment, for the most part, have been proven throughout the years. Integrated churches and European American churches may need to do more to gain the community's trust so that they are perceived favorably by outsiders.

In contrast to Warren, I found that the African American churches in East Liberty have been less involved in community development than the racially integrated Presbyterian churches. Instead, the three black churches selected for this study are more interested in constituency development. For example, the real estate director at the Community Development Corporation noted that even though some African American churches have social services, they tend to make these services available to only their members and not to the community at large (February 19, 2004). In contrast, the director pointed to the Progressive Presbyterian Church as an example of a church interested in community development, evidenced by the fact that it houses a Community Development Committee at the church. The Progressive Presbyterian Church has also provided funding for the renovation of the community theatre and other development ventures in

East Liberty. Even though the director acknowledged that some African American churches have moved beyond constituency development toward community development, there is still the perception that programs and projects are geared toward their church members.

Another reason for the lack of community partnering among the black churches has to do with their history of conflict and competition. The pastor of Pietistic Baptist Church's Community Center stated that there had been a rift between a former pastor and one of the organizations in the community. She acknowledged that she has begun to develop a working partnership with the organization, and they are overcoming past disputes. The pastor of Holy COGIC Church also stated that there is a history of churches in East Liberty not working together. He believes that it has now developed into a cultural phenomenon that is ingrained into the culture of the black churches in the community. The pastor of Holy COGIC Church acknowledged that "we need to come together so that everyone can get something. There needs to be a coalition. They want to make sure they get themselves taken care of and then they help others. That is a major impediment to social development and to the redevelopment of the Pittsburgh community" (March 10, 2004).

He also stated that churches have a mentality of looking out for their own congregants first and then assisting other people, organizations and churches in East Liberty with their remaining resources. When I asked him if their unwillingness to work together had to do with theological differences, he responded that it has more to do with what he called the "crab bucket effect" – every crab attempts to get to the top of the bucket while others are also clawing to the top. The COGIC pastor believes there is strength in numbers, and it does not benefit the community when each FBO seeks the

same resources. The pastor of Rejoice Baptist Church also supports partnerships and working with other FBOs and community groups. He believes that a church or an organization has a better chance of receiving resources if they are seen as partnering or collaborating with other groups in the community than if they are not. Unfortunately, despite this verbal support for community partnerships, the history of competition between churches in East Liberty has kept the black congregations from forming coalitions.

Despite the fact that African American churches have an initial advantage within African American communities over their European American church counterparts, other factors play a large role in their effectiveness. The emphasis of African American churches on constituency development over community development, along with the focus on evangelism, may mean that they do not connect with the residents in the way that churches with a strong social justice component have done. Additionally, historical rifts and personal conflicts between pastors and organizations have created reluctance between them to work with together within the community. These are the factors that African American churches have to overcome if they want to have a thriving, engaged role in East Liberty.

### Class

The pastor of the Rejoice Baptist Church acknowledged that his church has encountered classism, in addition to racism, in the work they do in the East Liberty and Larimer communities. He mentioned that even though his church has been active within the community for a long time, there is still a perception by many in the neighborhood that the church is at a distance from the everyday concerns of the community. The pastor of Rejoice Baptist Church stated that “classism hinders [their work] because that part of

the body that looks to the part that's well and expects that the part that's well will help them with their ailment and so when I or members of my congregation walk up the street and start speaking to people, they don't think we understand or know their situation. So, immediately, that creates a class issue unfortunately" (March 1, 2004). This statement comes from how the church is perceived by those in the community – as being a church with more middle class African American congregants who would not know how it is to be poor on a daily bases. He also mentioned that his Evangelism Team does more relational outreach to the community now in order to gain trust from those in the community. Their belief is that if they develop good relationships with those in the community, then they can gain the trust of the community and further their work. His church, along with the Progressive Presbyterian Church, believes in outreach and working in the community. If they gain a few members from their work, then that would be a positive outcome. If not, they are satisfied with knowing that the community is better off because of their commitment to the community.

Additionally, the pastor of the Mainstream Presbyterian Church mentioned that Presbyterians are perceived as being middle to upper middle class Americans and that they may not be concerned with those in the inner city. He believes this perception is being torn down through the work that Presbyterian Churches such as his and others are doing. However, the Progressive Presbyterian Church is a Presbyterian Church with a long standing history of being active in East Liberty before and after "white flight."

Within the East Liberty churches, there are signs of class divisions. FBOs such as the Progressive Presbyterian Church have class diversity among its congregants. Each Sunday, there is a mixture of different classes during the service (from wealthy to poor). By contrast, although churches such as Pietistic Baptist Church may have class diversity

among its congregants, there is more of a sense of wealth there because of the types of cars in the parking lot and the dress of the congregants. These phenomena send powerful messages about the members' commitment to social justice.

The pastor of Rejoice Baptist Church further argues that overall the Christian faith has done a poor job of overcoming its classist and racist past. He argues for a faith that is inclusive regardless of race and class, even though he knows that that is very different concepts for some in the Christian faith to embrace. Traditionally, Christians in the United States have not embraced African Americans or other racial and ethnic minorities. This fact illustrates the separation within the Christian faith that this pastor described. So, classism and racism continues to be an issue for many FBOs.

The pastor in charge of the Pietistic Baptist Church's community center acknowledged that "50 percent to 60 percent of congregants [from this church] live in the East Liberty community" (February 26, 2004). Their active members live both within and outside of the East Liberty community. The 40 to 50 percent of the members who do not live in the East Liberty community could be perceived as not being connected to the community and seen as outsiders.

#### Theological Orientation of the Church

In my original research design, there was no significant plan to discuss the theological orientation of the FBOs. However, its importance emerged as I did my research because I now see it as a major factor in the way FBOs provide services in East Liberty. As previously stated whether or not a church provides services before or after a person joins the church can be an issue. Essentially, this comes down to the theological orientation of the church.

For the Progressive Presbyterian Church, social justice is a strong component of their mission. They believe that sharing God's love with the world requires equality and openness to everyone. Their mission is "Our congregation seeks to promote peace, justice and human dignity; to reflect a spirit of openness, sharing, and learning in our ministry and mission; to build a richly diverse faith community that witnesses to our oneness in Christ across all boundaries of race, social class, culture, gender and sexual identity." For them, a combination of social justice and sharing Christ's love is imperative. They are perceived to be very liberal on issues within the Christian community and perhaps the most liberal church in the East Liberty community. At this church, everyone is welcome and no one is excluded.

Their commitment to social justice and equality drives them actively to engage the community. Inertia is not an option for them. They believe that sharing the love of God with everyone means service and commitment to the community. The Progressive Presbyterian Church's emphasis on social justice, equality and inclusive has given it a reputation for effectiveness in the East Liberty community.

For Pietistic Baptist Church, which is one of, if not, the largest and wealthiest African American church in East Liberty, their goal is "to practice Christian Discipleship in our everyday lives. Christian Discipleship is developing a personal, lifelong, obedient relationship with Jesus Christ, in which he changes your character into Christlikeness, and transforms your values into Kingdom values, to involve you in his mission in the home, the church and in the world." This mission does not use language that offers inclusion in the way that the Progressive Presbyterian Church does – despite the admission from one of the pastors, who is the director of the church's community center,

that the church has a small and growing European American membership within their church.

It would appear that a FBO's theological position plays a definitive role in how they reach out to and work within an African American community. Conservative churches do comparatively little outreach and community services. For churches in this study, social justice does not play a large role in their work. These churches do believe that African Americans have not received "a far shake," but they do not emphasize social justice and inclusion in the way that the Progressive Presbyterian Church does. In fact they tend to take a moderate or conservative stance on many social justice issues, gay and lesbian rights as well as women's rights. These churches believe in sharing God's love with the world in a way that does not emphasize social justice.

#### Other Factors

I believe that the mission and leadership of the church and the belief of those participating in the church – the belief in its mission, theology and leadership – keeps the stability of the FBO. However, each case is different. In the early 2000s, the pastor of the Progressive Presbyterian Church decided to retire from ministry and leave his post at the church. He was seen by long time congregants as a pastor who continued and strengthened the church's work in the East Liberty community. After his departure, a new pastor took his place and has been the interim pastor of the church for the two years. The church is looking for a new pastor and a part of the search deals with making sure that the new pastor will embrace the mission of the church and will be willing to lead it based on its mission to the community. However, the pastor of Rejoice Baptist church mentioned that there was a significant turn over in pastors before his arrival. He stated that:

In the years after [the founding pastor] death, I believe in the 1970s, the church was without a pastor for about five years. They had a pastor who did not stay very long. After him, there was another pastor, and he was here another seven or eight years. So, in the time between this legendary community leader and pastor and today, there has been a tremendous shift. I raise all of that to show that all of that had an impact on the neighborhood. . . . So, the fluctuation of leadership in this neighborhood impacted the cohesiveness of this neighborhood. That along with other factors that create urban decay – joblessness, crime, drugs, and with all that stuff. So, you see how leadership in a community plays a role in the community and how what happens in faith communities can impact the community (March 1, 2004).

To some extent, perhaps the pastors before the current pastor at Rejoice Baptist Church did not believe in the work the church was doing in the community or the church did not believe they had the right pastor in charge. It seems that the leadership of the church is a factor in how involved the FBO is in the community.

Additionally, I found that it seems that where the pastor goes on a community project or partnership is the way the church will go. The pastor of the Pietistic Baptist Church's community center mentioned that some of their former partnerships were impacted do to the previous pastors' relationships with community organizations and churches. For instance, if the pastor of the church had a bad experience with another church or community organization, then he will not work with them, and his church members will most likely follow suit. It is a sign of loyalty to the pastor and his beliefs.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

After my research on this topic, there are a few recommendations I have for those interested in designing FBO or existing FBOs wanting to strengthen their effectiveness in their community. First, FBOs must be well-versed in the most pressing needs of their community. This is important in the sense that a FBO should provide a service to the community that will benefit it and not be wasteful to the community. This can be achieved through conducting informal surveys of church members, working with the resident association or working with the local Community Development Corporation. Second, FBOs working within an urban community have to be prepared to deal with issues of race and class. By understanding these issues and being prepared to deal with them, a FBO can increase their effectiveness and gain the trust of the community. Additionally, emphasizing community development instead of constituency development will enhance a FBO's effectiveness in the community by giving it a sense of inclusion in the activities of the community and with other churches, organizations and residents. Finally, developing partnerships is crucial to FBOs effectiveness. Having a willingness to partner with other churches and organizations can be beneficial in many ways. It can increase the likelihood of receiving financial assistance from foundations or other funders'; it can give a church more exposure in the community; and it can demonstrate the FBO's commitment to the community. These recommendations will enhance a FBO's reputation in a community and assist in transforming the community.

**APPENDIX A**

**Table of East Liberty FBOs and their Social Services**

<b>FBO</b>	<b>Social Services</b>
The Progressive Presbyterian Church	House the Community Ministry’s Homeless Shelter for Men House the Community Ministry’s Food Pantry House the Community Ministry’s Soup Kitchen Provide financial assistance to the Neighborhood Theatre Provide financial support to the Community Healthcare Center Work with the Neighborhood Community Development Corporation on neighborhood community development Offer tutoring for children and other after-school program Provides Housing Assistance
The Mainstream Presbyterian Church	House the offices for the Community Ministry and Assist in the founding of the Community Healthcare Center Provide programs to assist homeless and others with substance abuse and various healthcare needs
Rejoice Baptist Church	Provide Housing Assistance Work with the Community Ministry (financially and through other means) Provide a mentoring program with a neighborhood elementary school
Pietistic Baptist Church	Provide Housing Assistance Work with Community Ministry (financial and through other means) Provide a male mentoring program at a neighborhood middle school Provide programs for Seniors Provide computer and technology classes Provide educational program for children and youth
Holy COGIC Church	Conduct Housing Advocacy Emerging community development work Provide access to media

<p>The Community Ministry</p>	<p>Provide homeless shelter for men at the Progressive Presbyterian Church          Provides tutoring programs          Provide after-school recreation and club programs          Provide youth entrepreneurship programs          Conduct summer day camp          Provide meals-on-wheels          Offer soup kitchen at the Progressive Presbyterian Church          Offer a food pantry at the Progressive Presbyterian Church          Offer a drop-in center          Provide Housing Services</p>
<p>The Neighborhood's Community Development Corporation</p>	<p>Conduct Housing Advocacy          Conduct Employment Advocacy          Conduct Commercial and Real Development</p>
<p>The Neighborhood's Community Healthcare Center</p>	<p>Provide Healthcare Assistance          Conduct Healthcare Advocacy and Awareness</p>

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Interviews:**

1. Executive Director, Community Healthcare Center, January 28, 2004
2. Director of Community Missions, Progressive Presbyterian Church, February 3, 2004
3. Executive Director, Community Ministry, February 4, 2004
4. Pastor, Mainstream Presbyterian Church, February 11, 2004
5. Director of Real Estate, Community Development Corporation, February 19, 2004
6. Pastor and Executive Director, Pietistic Baptist Church Community Center, February 26, 2004
7. Pastor, Rejoice Baptist Church, March 1, 2004
8. Pastor, Holy COGIC Church, March 10, 2004

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Questions for FBOs

1. What do you think are the most pressing needs in East Liberty?
2. What is the greatest strength or contribution to the community by your FBO?
3. How would you describe the structure of the East Liberty community partnerships?
4. What types of project/programs has your FBO worked on with your community partnerships?
5. Who were the target beneficiaries of these projects/programs?
6. What were your expectations in terms of addressing the needs of the targeted beneficiaries under this partnership?
7. How was the program implemented?
8. What were the results of the projects/programs?
9. What have you learned from these projects/programs?
10. Do you believe East Liberty has become a better neighborhood through community partnerships with its churches?
11. What are the services your organization provides to the East Liberty community?
12. Can you tell me an instance in which race became an issue in these FBOs?
13. Due to your organization's position in East Liberty, how does your organization handle issues of race within East Liberty?
14. Any examples of when issues of race influenced your decision to be or not be involved within a project/program in East Liberty?
15. Are there racial tensions between your organization and the residents and others in East Liberty?
16. Is race a "big deal" for your organization when working in East Liberty?

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- White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives ([www.fbc.gov](http://www.fbc.gov) and [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)).