



**NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER
FOR FOSTER CARE
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at the Hunter College
School of Social Work

INFORMATION PACKET: *Faith-Based and Community Initiatives*

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INFORMATION PACKET

Faith-Based and Community Initiatives

Prepared by Kristine E. Schuerger

The 1996 Welfare Reform legislation signed into law by then President Clinton marked a fundamental shift in ideology and practice by the federal government concerning social policy. Welfare Reform significantly narrowed and restricted governmental responsibility in the realm of social services, and federal funds allocated for social welfare programs were reduced drastically. A driving force behind this legislation was the growing awareness that poverty remained a prevalent social problem despite the provision of government-funded entitlements, benefits and services to individuals and families. Many, many people were asking why 40 years of “War on Poverty” had yielded little to no progress, and why, if at all, should the government continue to fund programs that are minimally effective? Inevitably, Welfare Reform spurred an intense debate. Some groups placed blame for the lack of outcomes wholly on the government, while others pinned responsibility on poor individuals themselves.

Included in the body of Welfare Reform legislation was the “Charitable Choice” provision which opened the door for many faith-based organizations to receive funding from states to provide social services using TANF funds. In reaction to this provision, some government officials, social service providers, religious organizations and secular groups began to voice disparate opinions on the matter. Soon enough, this difference of opinion escalated into an ideological standoff as the notion of religious organizations receiving federal funds to provide social services generated numerous ethical, constitutional and morally charged questions. Just as Welfare Reform had radically altered the American political and social landscapes, so too did faith-based proposals promise to bring about fundamental and controversial changes. Needless to say, the future of social services hung in the balance.

With the election of George W. Bush to the presidency, we saw Faith-Based Initiatives catapulted into the national spotlight. The passage of Faith-Based Initiatives has been a top priority of the Bush Administration. Immediately upon taking office, President Bush established the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and outlined his plan to further Welfare Reform and to expand Charitable Choice. Broadly, the legislation President Bush is currently pushing Congress to pass would allow faith-based social service providers access to government grants and funds, essentially placing religious and secular social service organizations on equal ground. The White House has been vocal in support of faith-based models of social service delivery, praising them as less bureaucratic, more community-oriented and more “compassionate” than large government agencies. Many Americans support faith-based initiatives and see great value, appeal and merit in allocating federal funds to religious groups to provide services for the needy. Organizations that oppose these initiatives have been vocal and emphatic as well, asserting that certain components of the faith-based initiatives are unconstitutional, elitist and impractical.

Given the current constraints and future uncertainty facing social service providers on account of Welfare Reform and the proposal of Faith-Based Initiatives, it is important for providers and consumers to be knowledgeable of relevant issues and ideologies. In this packet, I have compiled information on the pros and cons of faith-based initiatives, frequently asked questions, policies and legislation, suggested readings and a list of web resources.

FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Faith-Based Organization?

Any social service organization or agency primarily funded and sponsored by a church, synagogue, mosque, temple, etc. Historically, most faith-based organizations have been excluded from access to government grants and funds because of constitutional, moral, legal and ethical concerns; in particular, concern that federal funding of religious groups defies the constitutional principle of separation of church and state.

What are Faith-Based Initiatives?

“Political initiatives of the Bush administration that propose the expansion of “charitable choice” provisions to many federal government programs in order to allow faith-based organizations that provide social services to compete for funding.” [<http://www.pewforum.org>]

What is “Charitable Choice?”

“Although the phrase “charitable choice” is often popularly used to refer to the general concept of government funding of faith-based social service programs, it is more accurately a term that refers to a precise legislative provision first enacted by Congress in the 1996 federal welfare reform law. Additional charitable choice provisions have since become law as part of other federal and state legislation.” [<http://www.pewforum.org>]

Is Charitable Choice a new idea?

“No. Charitable Choice does not represent the birth of involvement by faith communities in the social service arena – groups like Catholic Charities and Lutheran Social Services have a long history of receiving government funds to provide services. But, charitable choice does change previous practice through new federal law that specifically addresses the participation of religious social service providers. It permits all religious organizations to compete for government funds, regardless of their degree of religiosity. It does not set aside tax funds for religious organizations.” [<http://www.pewforum.org>]

How do Americans feel about Faith-Based initiatives?

According to a recent study conducted by the Pew Forum, the American public expresses strong support for the idea of faith-based groups receiving government funding to provide social services - with many reservations, however. For example, most Americans oppose funding non-Judeo-Christian religious groups including Muslims, Mormons, Buddhists, Scientology, etc.

- 75% have an overall favorable opinion.
- 68% worry that faith-based initiatives might lead to too much government involvement in religion.
- 60% expressed concern that religious groups would proselytize among recipients of social services.
- 78% oppose government funded religious organizations hiring only those who share their beliefs.
- 75% think that churches and other houses of worship contribute significantly to solving America’s social problems.
- 72% cite the care and compassion of religious workers as an important reason for supporting faith-based initiatives.
- The sharpest divides in opinion are over whether secular or faith-based groups could best mentor young people, counsel teens, and treat drug addiction.
- In the last year, Republicans have become more approving of faith-based initiatives, while Democrats have become somewhat less enthusiastic.

FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES ***Review of Policies and Proposed Legislation***

Compiled from The White House (<http://www.whitehouse.gov>) and
The Pew Forum on religion and Public Life (<http://www.pewforum.org/issues/charitablechoice.php3>)

Clinton Administration

- **1996:** *Charitable Choice* provision, developed by Sen. John Ashcroft (R-MO) was passed as part of 1996 welfare reform law (PRWORA) to cover state and local spending of TANF funds to obtain services
- **1997:** Congress placed the new specialized *Welfare-To-Work Program* for hard-to-place recipients under *Charitable Choice* provision.
- **1998:** Congress added *Charitable Choice* language when it reauthorized the *Community Services Block Grant Program* funded by the *Health and Human Services Reauthorization Act*.
- **2000:** Extended *Charitable Choice* to cover *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration* federally funded substance abuse prevention and treatment services.
- **2000:** *Charitable Choice* provision included in the *Community Renewal and New Markets Act*.

Bush Administration

- **2001: (Jan.)** Pres. Bush creates White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.
- **2001: (Jan. 29)** Pres. Bush issues Executive Order 13198 establishing Centers for Faith-Based & Community Initiatives in 5 Cabinet Departments: Health and Human Services (HHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Education (ED), Labor (DOL), and Justice (DOJ).
- **2001: (July 19)** House of Representatives passed H.R. 7, “the Community Solutions Act of 2001” by a vote of 233-198. *Before a vote on final passage of the legislation took place, amendments to ban religious groups that receive federal funds from discriminating on the basis of religion in hiring with regard to tax-funded employee positions were defeated. Under H.R. 7, religious groups could apply for federal money to provide social services. They would be allowed to consider a person’s religion when hiring employees and would be exempt in certain circumstances from state and local anti-discrimination laws.*
- **2001:** The bill was sent to the Senate where Senators Santorum (R-PA) and Lieberman (D-CT) are attempting to develop a compromise bill. *Some in the senate would prefer to separate the charitable giving incentives from the larger bill and vote on that aspect of the legislation.* Charitable giving, is an aspect of the legislation that encourages philanthropy to provide private funding for social services by offering various tax incentives. This aspect of the legislation is reported to have broad bipartisan support in Congress. The *Charitable Choice* component of the legislation is to be reworked by the Bush Administration.
- **2002:** Pres. Bush proposes plan to expand Americorps, domestic volunteer service, by opening it up to faith-based organizations and churches.

The complete Text of the Santorum-Liebermann legislation can be found on Thomas
(<http://www.thomas.loc.gov>)

FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

“Pros”- Proposed benefits and advantages

(Taken from White House Report: [Barriers to Faith-Based Organizations Seeking Federal Support](#))

Charitable Choice attacks the anti-religious bias that pervades too many statutes, regulations, and practices, ensures that groups use government funds for public purposes, and provides a clear set of guidelines to discipline and structure these needed collaborations. Further, it accomplishes the following:

- It clarifies and codifies the right of faith-based groups to participate by clearing away misperceptions and doubts about whether religious groups may deliver federally funded social services;
- It replaces government suspicion of religious providers with a welcoming environment by giving a “green light” to expanded collaboration with government and making such partnerships plausible and possible;
- It ratifies and gives a legal foundation to current flexible practice by clarifying that the Constitution does not require 100% secularism, but neutrality and equal opportunity instead;
- It overcomes anti-faith barriers in Federal programs by overturning restrictions on participation and activities that are not necessitated by the Constitution;
- It has enriched the mix of service providers where it has been implemented by states, like Democrat-led Indiana and Republican-led Texas that have been able to offer people a wider variety of providers;
- It enables formerly excluded groups to offer their effective services by freeing local officials to create new collaborations that involve faith-based charities that had earlier been wary of partnering with government;
- It helps current religiously affiliated providers to better fulfill their service mission by permitting established groups like Lutheran Social Services to get rid of of the excessive government-imposed limits that have wrongly hobbled services offered by religious groups and thus kept from better integrating a moral dimension into their programs; and
- It builds on successful principles in other areas of federal funding – including internationally – by borrowing fruitful lessons from other federal models where the charitable choice principles of accountability, performance, pluralism, and religious liberty are valued and applied.

FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

“Cons” – Proposed dangers and disadvantages

(Taken from Texas Freedom Network: [Concerns About ‘Charitable Choice’](#))

Massive Cuts in Services

- Bush proposes that \$8 billion in tax dollars be moved to religious organizations to provide social services. Where will the \$8 billion in corresponding cuts in services come from?

Threat of Religious Discrimination

- This initiative could result in widespread discrimination based on religious belief. People in need could be denied vital social services because they refuse to participate in faith-based programs.

Playing Religious Favorites

- Who decides which churches and which faiths get funded and which are excluded? Government would be in the position of playing politics with faith-based social services, which could result in a distribution of funds based solely on the preferred religious dogma of our elected officials.

Threats to Nature of Religious Mission

- The faith-based spirit of volunteerism and altruism that leads churches to provide social services could be jeopardized by a reliance on public funds. The true mission of religious institutions would be replaced by paid employees and facilities dependent on government dollars.

Competition Among Churches

- The nature of faith-based compassion for those in need which leads churches to provide services could be replaced with an environment of competition between churches for limited tax dollars. Large churches with greater resources to market their programs would win out over the small church on the corner.

Separation of Church and State

- The initiative proposed by Pres. Bush would send tax dollars to church-based programs that proselytize to their clients. This is a clear violation of the separation of church and state.

Setting Up our Churches to Fail

- Many churches fear that undue pressure would be placed on them to “pick up the slack” left by the elimination of government programs, even if they lack the expertise and structure necessary to do so.

Threats to Religious Liberty

- Government oversight of religious institutions threatens religious liberty and the integrity of churches.

Denying Our Common Responsibility

- It is the role of churches to remind citizens that caring for those in need is the responsibility of ALL of society, not just the faith community. Cutting government-provided services and relying on churches to fill the gap denies our shared responsibility.

FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES

References and Suggested Readings

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FAITH-BASED AND COMMUNITY INITIATIVES
Web Resources

FEDERAL

[White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives](#)

*Jim Towey, Director The White House
Washington, DC 20502
(202) 456-6708*

Available Reports: [UNLEVEL PLAYING FIELD: Barriers to Participation by FaithBased And Community Organizations in Federal Social Service Programs](#).

[RALLYING THE ARMIES OF COMPASSION](#)

Centers for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in Cabinet Agencies:

[Health and Human Services](#) (HHS)

Elizabeth Seale-Scott, Director [see: [Fact Sheet](#)]

[Administration for Children and Families](#)

Funding goes to faith-based organizations through Head Start, programs for refugee resettlement, runaway and homeless youth, independent living, child care, child support Enforcement, and child welfare.

[ACF's Office of Child Support Enforcement](#)

Produced a video on the benefits of child support and faith-based partnerships.

[Health Resources and Services Administration](#)

Has established the [Faith Partnership Initiative](#) designed to foster and build partnerships between federally funded community health centers and faith-based organizations.

[National Child Care Information Network](#)

Provides information on faith-based childcare resources.

[Office of Public Health and Sciences-Office of Adolescent Pregnancy Programs](#)

Provides grants to support health, education and social services for pregnant and parenting adolescents at the community level. Also, provides grants to support abstinence education. The office has 19 grants with faith-based organizations as part of Healthy People 2010 pilot program.

[Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration](#)

Became first agency to undertake specific faith-based initiative. SAMHSA has more than 800 faith and community partners.

[Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#)

Steven Wagner, Acting Director - Center will oversee initiative to establish partnerships with faith-based and community groups designed to fight homelessness.

[Justice \(DOJ\)](#)

Carl H. Esbeck, Director

[Education \(ED\)](#)

John Porter, Acting Director- Center seeks to empower faith-based organizations to provide educational services to those in need.

[Labor \(DOL\)](#)

Brent Orell, Director – Center allocates Charitable Choice funds to faith based Welfare-To-Work programs.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

The following groups support and/or endorse Faith-Based and Community Initiatives:

Boys and Girls Town

Founded in 1917, provides “help, hope and healing to abused, abandoned, neglected, handicapped and otherwise troubled children. *Our mission is to change the way America cares for her at-risk children*”

Center for Public Justice

An Independent civic education and policy research organization. Grounds its research, publications, training and advocacy in a comprehensive Christian political perspective. [Available for download: [Charitable Choice Resources.](#)]

National Association of Evangelicals

...“we believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential”...

Salvation Army

“To preach the Gospel of Christ and to meet human needs in his name.”

Several press releases and discussions of charitable choice found on website.

National Center for Neighborhood Enterprise

The mission of NCNE is to empower neighborhood leaders to promote solutions that reduce crime and violence, restore families, revitalize low-income communities, and create economic enterprise.

reports: [Grassroots Alternatives for Public Policy](#) and

[NCNE Faith-Based Substance Abuse Treatment Report](#)

North American Association of Christian Social Workers

“A vital Christian presence in Social Work”

Faith-Based Community Initiatives

An informational website. “*Our vision is to educate and assist new and existing faith-based and community groups to apply and qualify for competitive federal funding*”

Focus on the Family

Publishes an online newsletter, [Citizen Link](#), which consistently addresses faith-based initiatives.

Catholic Charities USA

“*People of faith helping people in need achieve self-sufficiency*”

Habitat for Humanity International

Christian Legal Society – Center for Law and Religious Freedom

“*Through litigation, legislative advocacy, friend of the court briefs, and public education, Christian Legal Society’s Center for Law and Religious Freedom works to protect the religious liberty of all Americans and the sanctity of human life.*”

[Available for download: [A Guide to Charitable Choice](#)]

[United Jewish Communities](#)

[See: [UJA's Statement on Bush Administration's Faith-Based Programs Initiative](#)]

[Lutheran Social Services](#)

"A national network of social service and long term care programs serving people regardless of race, religion, gender or creed."

[Available for download: "[Windows on the Faith-Based and Community Initiative](#)" – a brief, easy-to-understand series from the LSA Public Policy Office.

The following groups have issued statements of caution and/or opposition concerning Faith-Based and Community Initiatives:

[Americans United for the Separation of Church and State](#)

"Since 1947, Americans United has worked to protect the constitutional principle of church-state separation, a vital cornerstone of religious liberty. Americans of all faiths and political viewpoints, individuals from all walks of life, have come together to defend freedoms."

[see: [Pres. Bush's 'Faith-Based' Initiative: An Americans United Response](#).]

[Anti-Defamation League](#)

"Fighting Anti-Semitism, Bigotry and Extremism since 1913"

Visit the ADL's [Legislative Action Center](#) for information on Charitable Choice.

[Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies](#)

"It is our mission to assure, through service to our membership agencies and our own policy and program efforts, the social and economic well-being of the people of New York."

Visit FPWA's [advocacy page](#) for statement on Faith-Based proposals.

[Interfaith Alliance](#)

"Our mission is to promote the positive and healing role of religion in public life through encouraging civic participation, facilitating community activism and challenging religious political extremism."

Visit the Alliance's [Legislative Advocacy Center](#) for in depth discussion of Charitable Choice.

[Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism](#)

See: [Reform Jewish Movement Disappointed Over House Passage of Faith Based Legislation](#)

[People For the American Way](#)

"PFAW believes that religious freedom is guaranteed to all Americans. America must sustain a public life which can accommodate as many different faiths as there are people, but this can only exist when religion and government are kept separate."

Visit PFAW's [Religious Freedom](#) pages and [H.R. 7 Fact Sheet](#)

[National Gay and Lesbian Task Force](#)

George W. Bush's program of faith-based initiatives poses a threat to the GLBT community on several fronts..."

Visit NGLTF's [Federal Advocacy](#) pages for statement on Faith-Based Initiatives.

[National Association of Social Workers](#)

See: [NASW Position on Faith-Based Human Services Initiatives](#)

[American Civil Liberties Union](#)

[Texas Freedom Network](#)

“A mainstream voice to counter the religious right.”

Visit TFN’s [Charitable Choice](#) pages.

[Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network](#)

“Creating Safe Schools for Gay, Lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.”

See: GLSEN’s [Position Paper on Faith-Based Initiatives](#) – from their Office for Public Policy

[Unitarian Universalist Association](#)

“Affirming the Inherent Worth and Dignity of Every Person.”

Faith-Based Initiatives widely addressed on this website, see: [UUA Expresses Concern over Bush’s Faith Based Initiatives](#)

Other Organizations:

[Cato Institute](#)

[National Council of Churches](#)

[Welfare Information Network](#)

[The Working Group](#)

[Public/Private Ventures](#)

[Urban Institute](#)

[The Pew Forum](#)