

The Role of Church and Faith-Based Organizations in Rural Justice and Crime Prevention Efforts

by Mark A. Small

Churches and other faith-based organizations have a long history of involvement in promoting safety within their communities. In many rural areas where resources are scarce, churches and other faith-based organizations may be one of only a few social institutions capable of galvanizing a community into action and providing a place for community safety services to take place.

Most of the rural church led efforts to increase community safety focus on prevention and intervention activities. Programs by church and faith-based organizations may directly relate to crime prevention, but operate more often indirectly by aiming to reduce the factors that place youths, adults, and communities at risk for crime. Examples of programs might be reading and mentoring programs, substance abuse prevention, and poverty reduction programs.

Recent changes in federal legislation have increased the opportunities for churches and other faith-based organizations to become involved in providing safety related services to community members. The expansion in service ministry was made possible for many churches by the Welfare Reform Act of 1996, which provides monies to churches and other faith-based organizations to develop programs to help move people from welfare to work. Although slow to get started, many churches have taken advantage of this new opportunity to expand outreach programs beyond simple charity by customizing new programs to meet the personal and community needs of congregations.

Despite the opportunities, not all communities are benefitting equally; some states have been more aggressive in partnering with faith-based organizations than

others. Moreover, significant obstacles remain before interested churches and faith-based organizations can take advantage fully of these new opportunities. The most successful stories have come from urban areas where churches with large congregations (and significant resources) have gotten involved. In more rural and often more desperate areas, the challenges are formidable. A lack of knowledge, leadership and resources combine to create barriers that may be overcome only with a concerted effort by government and community officials.

The current political climate favors government funding of church and faith-based organization community services. For rural areas, the challenge will be to build on or expand the existing capacity of churches. For many interested church and faith-based organizations this will require building new partnerships. Fortunately, as news spreads of the potential for churches and faith-based organizations to adopt new roles to address safety issues, universities, law enforcement, courts and corrections agencies are beginning to team-up to explore how best to facilitate program development. With proper research and guidance, the expanding roles for churches and other faith-based organizations to address violence problems holds considerable promise.

Here are some websites that may help you to discover further how churches and faith-based organizations are getting involved in community development with crime prevention and safety activities.

American Prospect Online

www.prospect.org/

This site explores answers to the question raised by many faith-based organizations: Can Churches Save the Cities? The site also gives in-depth information on how faith-

based organizations need to structure their social service programs to avoid problems with church and state separation statutes.

American Youth Policy Forum

www.aypf.org/

A YPF provides learning opportunities on youth issues for policy makers in faith-based organizations and other community organizations. Forum briefs on partnerships between churches, schools and community based models are also available at this site.

Bipartisan Work Group on Youth Violence

www.house.gov/frost/youthviol

This site provides recommendations to faith-based organizations and other community groups based on data gathered from an in-depth study by Federal legislators. The site includes models of successful partnerships between families, schools, churches, law enforcement, and healthcare agencies.

Carter Center: IHP Net

www.ihpnet.org/4model-1

The Carter Center, in partnership with Emory University, has done extensive research in the area of children and firearms. This site contains research data, models and recommendations on how to address the growing problem of youth and crimes committed with firearms.

Center for Rural Church Leadership

www.seorf.ohiou.edu

The CRCL site provides written articles and other bibliographical resources that will provide encouragement to rural pastors and laity in their ministry to small towns and rural churches. Topics covered include rural evangelism, rural poverty, rural cultures and rural church health.

Christian Community Development Association

www.cdda.org

CCDA provides biblical practical principles evolved from years of living and working among the poor. CCDA is dedicated to working with grass roots and church based efforts to meet felt needs through ministries that focus on relocation, reconciliation, holistic evangelism, social action, leadership development and empowering the poor.

Congress of National Black Churches

www.cnbc.org

CNBC's efforts in crime prevention through faith-based organizations can serve as a guide to establishing a youth crime prevention program at any church. This site contains models of programs that promote justice, wholeness and fulfillment through child and family development programs, church rebuilding, anti-drug and violence campaigns and leadership development training.

Conquest Offender Reintegration Ministries

www.conquesthouse.org

This web site provides ministries with information on how to reintegrate ex-offenders back into society successfully through mentoring, employment training, Bible study and other support services. The "MatchPoint" project, which deals with restoring at risk youth before they become chronic offenders, is one example of the models included in the site.

Family Connections

www.familyconnection.inc.org

This site focuses on ways to create and maintain healthy family relationships through collaborative efforts between faith-based organizations and the government. One excellent example of successful collaboration is the partnership between the federal government and the state of Texas.

Institute for Research Poverty

www.ssc.wisc.edu/irp

This Institute is a national university-based center for research into the causes and consequences of social inequality in the US. The site contains an overview of definitions of poverty, poverty guidelines and sources of information on trends in welfare and poverty.

Interfaith Voices: Church Council on Justice and Corrections

www.interfaithvoices.org/ify/directory

CCJC is a coalition of 11 national churches (representing 14,000 congregations) that address the needs of crime victims and offenders through programs on mutual respect, accountability, community involvement and crime prevention. The criminal justice committee of CCJC is composed of 17

national partners that can be accessed at this site for details on resources, educational materials, and successful models.

Issues 2000

www.heritage.org/issues/chap10

Faith-based organizations can play a vital role in building strong families, strong communities and in preventing/ decreasing crime in the home and community. The combination of religion and family stability is the foundation of successful crime prevention models highlighted at this site.

Manhattan Institute: Center for Research on Religion and Urban Civil Society

www.manhattan-institute.org/html/faith_based_outreach.htm

The Manhattan Institute has several programs that illustrate how partnerships with the community, especially faith-based partnerships, can serve as a deterrent to crime. These programs include religious commitment to reduce drug use and crime, local religious commitment and neighborhood conditions that affect teen drug use and crime.

National Commission on Civic Renewal

www.puaf.umd.edu/civicrenewal

The Commission conducts research on “troubling trends in life”. This site provides scholarly and practical work already underway, summaries of national discussions on crime, and forms alliances that can assist in carrying forward the work of the commission. Current faith-based partners include the Urban Institute, Points of Light Foundation; Coalition for America’s Children and the Healthy Communities Network.

National Youth Development Center

www.nydc.org/preventing

This youth site provides information on preventing crime: what works and what doesn’t. NYDC has a database with details on over 500 crime prevention programs available for use by communities and churches.

NebGuide: High Risk Youth

www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/family/g1322

The NebGuide defines relationships between youth and high risk behaviors and provides strategies for faith-based

organizations based on the asset building framework. Specific topic areas at this site include crime and violence, family violence, adolescent depression, developmental changes of youth, and helping strategies for parents.

Police Executive Research Forum

www.policeforum.org/faithbased

This site provides strategies that faith-based organizations can be use to form partnerships with law enforcement to help reduce crime and break the cycle of drugs and crime. The forum describes the public safety act, the 21st century law enforcement plan, punishing and preventing crime and protection of crime victims.

Public Funding of Faith-Based Social Services

www.execpc.com/

Faith-based organizations can find potential funding partners to initiate or expand programs for crime prevention and other social ministries. Topics addressed include increasing government aid to religious social service providers, the national social service agenda, local community politics and church-state separation.

Public/Private Ventures

www.ppv.org/content/faith1

PPV recognizes that many high-risk youth in poor communities are served primarily through churches and other faith-based institutions. PPV has many written and internet resources available for churches to begin crime prevention efforts. This site contains two powerful models of resident involvement in successful community change that decreased crime.

Rural & Agricultural Human Services Consortium

www.migration.usdavis.edu/rhr

Rural faith-based organizations can benefit greatly from this site which targets improving the delivery of human services in rural and agricultural communities. The site also contains funding opportunities for projects to explore both youth and adult crime prevention.

Search Institute

www.search-institute.org/congregations

Reaching youth through congregations through the framework of asset building is the focus of this site. The site has models that provide church leaders with strategies

to find renewed dedication and strength to continue the war on crime.

United Methodist News

www.gbmg-umc.org/mission/news/umns111899lbbm

The United Methodist Church in Boston, in partnership with the Ford Foundation and Others, has initiated a model program for reducing juvenile crime through faith-based efforts. This site also includes information on “restorative justice”, peace with justice through greater interpersonal involvement of the church.

Urban Institute

www.urban.org/family

This site provides statistical data on at risk youth and recommendations on how to identify potential at risk youth for prevention and/or early intervention. The site also includes reports, books and research studies to bridge the gap between research and practice.

US Department of Justice: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/gedreg/122099

Faith-based organizations can gain great insight by reviewing federal goals and program plans to decrease crime. Focus areas of this site include gang-free schools, juvenile delinquency prevention, public protection and potential program funding sources.

U.S. Department of Labor

www.icesa.org/articles/template

This site provides information on grants and contracts for funding faith-based organizations’ youth demonstration projects utilizing funds from the Work Force Investment Act. Rural projects that have received funding in the past and present include the Georgia Department of Labor, Lumberton NC River Council, the state of Hawaii and the Louisiana Enterprise Community Corporation.

Welfare Policy Center of the Hudson Institute

www.welfare-reformer.org/articles

This site focuses on a variety of frameworks that can be used in discussions on the role of faith-based organizations in crime and justice. Areas discussed include community beliefs and practices, the positive influence of decreasing crime through community and religious involvement, and research on the effect of faith-based organizations in reducing crime.

World Vision Churches At Work: Crime Prevention Index and Church Mobilization Index

www.worldvision.org

The World Vision site provides individuals, churches and other community groups with information on resources to help empower the needy. The site has more than 100 examples of successful faith-based programs. The database is divided into the following categories: activities, beneficiaries, community and methodology.

Youth Entertainment Studios: National Ten Point Coalition

www.yesamerica.org/

through a multidisciplinary model which includes the arts. Successful models include the national ten-point coalition project, Project Truth, and the Yes America Music Boot Camp.

Youth Ministry Resources

www.pastor2youth.com

This site is a link to over 1000 resources available to assist youth ministers in conducting programs. Materials include textbooks, leadership training, youth ministry games, and publications of youth ministry papers.

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