

THE SEARCH FOR THE HOLY GRAIL IN OKLAHOMA: PARTNERING WITH FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS TO DELIVER SOCIAL SERVICES

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Oklahoma should be fertile ground for faith-based social service initiatives. This bible-belt state fares poorly on numerous economic, health, and social indicators. Despite the overwhelming optimism that initially inspired key leaders to involve faith organizations in helping to solve Oklahoma's pressing problems, the results so far have been less than dramatic. New financial relationships with faith-based organizations in Oklahoma appear minimal. The honeymoon for charitable choice implementation in Oklahoma is over. The state is now focusing on non-financial collaborations with the faith community.

More than most states, Oklahoma should be fertile ground for successful implementation of faith-based initiatives. Many Oklahomans describe their state "as the buckle of the Bible Belt" and with good reason. Out of the fifty states and the District of Columbia, Oklahoma

ranks sixth in terms of regular church attendance (U.S. Census Bureau 2003b, 56). Furthermore, the opportunities to make a difference among Oklahoma's disadvantaged groups are immense. On many economic, health, and social measures, the state fares rather poorly. According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau's three-year average (2000-2002), the percent of Oklahomans living in poverty is 14.7 percent compared to a national average of 11.7 percent (2003a). Hence, Oklahoma ranks among the bottom ten states on this key measure. The United Health Foundation's 2002 State Health Rankings reports that 20.3 percent of children in Oklahoma live in poverty. In the same study, Oklahoma ranks among the bottom five states in overall health, health insurance coverage, and support for public health care. Oklahoma also appeared third on a list of *Worst Welfare States* released by the National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support (2002). Oklahoma received unwanted national attention after being ranked as a state with one of the highest divorce rates—second only to atypical Nevada, already well known for its relaxed marriage and divorce provisions (Ross 2002, 1-A). Domestic violence is also a severe problem in Oklahoma. According to an analysis of 2001 homicide data, Oklahoma ranked 10th in the United States for the rate among females murdered by intimate males (Violence Policy Center 2003, 26). In the recently released *Means to a Better End: A Report on Dying in America Today*, Oklahoma received average to failing grades on several palliative care measures (Last Acts 2002). Finally, public transportation in the state is extremely inadequate to fully address the needs of individuals who do not have access to private transportation due to economic circumstance or disability (Sharp 2001, 10-11). State metropolitan areas are geographically dispersed and merely getting to a job can be an extremely difficult challenge. These problems are interrelated and state leaders from all political persuasions have begun to address them with renewed vigor.

Charitable choice and the president's faith-based initiative generally received a warm welcome among Oklahoman officialdom. Oklahoma's former congressional representative, J.C. Watts, was one of the earliest proponents of a national faith-based initiative. At the state level, recognition dawned early that the challenges were so great that a full partnership among all levels of government, businesses, faith-based organizations (FBOs), and non-profit agencies would be required. Involving the faith community in addressing public policy problems is

not without precedent in Oklahoma and is now becoming an increasingly important strategy for addressing the disturbing social issues facing the state.

Former Governor Frank Keating appointed a faith-based liaison to coordinate that effort and even issued an executive order calling upon state agencies to actively collaborate with faith communities. Despite the overwhelming hope and optimism that initially inspired key leaders to involve faith organizations in helping to solve Oklahoma's pressing problems, the results so far have been less than dramatic. Although some encouraging progress has been made, those on the frontlines of community action are experiencing battle fatigue in their attempts to involve new faith partners. The honeymoon for charitable choice implementation in Oklahoma appears to be over. The serious, hard work necessary to fully engage FBOs in social service partnerships is just now beginning.

OKLAHOMA'S POLITICAL CULTURE

Oklahoma is a very complicated state in terms of its efforts to deliver social welfare services. These complexities are more clearly understood when placed within the overall context of Oklahoma's culture. The state has been undergoing a steady transition in terms of its political and social orientations over the last few decades. Oklahoma is noted for its socialist, populist, and progressive heritage (Bissett 1999; Markwood 2000, 22-23). Yet, modern conservatism increasingly influences its politics and policies. Once a stronghold of the Democratic Party, Oklahoma has become an arena for intense partisan competition. In addition, forceful rural interests have surrendered some power to new urban and suburban political muscle (Birdsong 2002). The state is quite diverse with a substantial number of Native Americans and African Americans along with a rapidly growing number of Hispanics. Identifiable Asian communities have also formed within major urban areas.

Oklahoma's constitution was formed during the Progressive Era. As such, it fragments executive authority among numerous elected officials. The state constitution also promotes ample opportunities for democratic expression through referendums and initiative petitions. One major consequence of the state initiative process has been to limit the

power of the state legislature to increase taxes without either a statewide vote or an approval by a super-majority of legislators. These political cleavages and constitutional limitations hamper the state's ability to confront social service issues in a coherent fashion. Moreover, encouraging coordination and building capacity for community action are difficult tasks when the state faces severe revenue shortfalls (Krehbiel 2003, A21). Politically, raising revenues at the state level is nearly impossible. Cutting programs and services usually remains as the only remaining feasible response to limited resources.

OKLAHOMA'S SOCIAL SERVICES SYSTEM

The major overhauling of Oklahoma's welfare system was actually initiated a few years before passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996. As Kim Hoffman explains,

In 1992, the Democratic governor of Oklahoma requested that the Oklahoma Commission for Human Services develop recommendations for reforming the welfare system Early in 1993, the Oklahoma Department of Human Services created a task force to study welfare reform and make recommendations to improve the delivery of welfare services. . . . From this study came 47 recommendations, of which most were authorized for implementation in the Oklahoma Welfare Reform Law of 1995. . . . The Oklahoma Department of Human Services requested waivers from the federal government to implement the 1995 legislation. Some of the key provisions of this waiver included a family cap, requirements for the enrollment of children in early childhood education programs, school attendance through age 18, childhood immunizations, an extension of transitional Medicaid and child care, and a time limit on assistance. . . . In 1997, welfare reform legislation was essentially "clean up" legislation to conform with the new federal law (2000, 16-17).

Like most states, Oklahoma's social services system is best described as a patchwork of agencies and programs. The largest and most important institution in this area has been the Department of Human Services which is given general responsibility for helping "individuals and families in need" to "lead safer, healthier, more independent and

productive lives” (Hamilton 2001, 256). The Department of Human Services offers several programs and services such as Adult Protective Services, Aging Services, Child Care, Child Protective Services, Commodity Distribution, Day Care, Family Support Assistance, Food Stamps, Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, Medicaid, Nutrition Program, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF).

Likewise, the Oklahoma State Department of Health has the broad mission of protecting and improving the health of Oklahoma citizens. Specific responsibilities include childhood immunization, disease control, vital statistics, tobacco use prevention, health education, elderly services, nutritional programs, health care oversight, prenatal care promotion, injury prevention, consumer protection, and statewide health care planning. Both the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health operate separate county extension offices throughout the state.

The Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services is charged with caring for individuals with mental disabilities and operates several programs addressing domestic violence, alcohol and drug dependency, and residential care. The Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services operates three hospitals and nineteen Community Mental Health Centers (Hamilton 2001, 274).

The Workforce Investment Act is administered through the State of Oklahoma Workforce Investment Board which has divided the state into twelve workforce investment areas, each overseen by Local Workforce Development Councils. One-stop centers comprising a cross-section of public and private agencies are well distributed throughout the state.

The Oklahoma Department of Commerce is responsible for managing several human development programs such as Community Food and Nutrition, Emergency Shelter Grant Program, Homeless Assistance Program, Community Services Block Grant, Oklahoma First Start, and Oklahoma Head Start. Other agencies that address specialized human services needs in Oklahoma are the Office of Juvenile Affairs, Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services, Oklahoma Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of Handicapped Concerns, Oklahoma Health Care Authority, Oklahoma Center for Rural Development, and the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency.

FUNDED FBO PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL SERVICES

Although no significant legislative initiatives in Oklahoma came after the national welfare reform efforts in 1996, the executive side of Oklahoma state government began to take the lead in this area. In 1998, the Director of the Department of Human Services for the State of Oklahoma, Howard Hendrick, asked a local pastor named Brad Yarbrough to attend a series of conferences related to the changing role of FBOs in social service delivery. At Hendrick's request, Yarbrough prepared and submitted a "Planning Document" emphasizing the need for the creation of a state liaison's office to help encourage collaboration among state social service agencies and FBOs. Jerry Regier who was then Governor Keating's Cabinet Secretary for Health and Human Services read the document and with the Governor's support, used it as a basis to establish Oklahoma's Office of the Faith-Based Liaison. In July 2000, Regier appointed Yarbrough to serve as the first director of the new office. Yarbrough's office was initially located in the Oklahoma State Department of Health but was funded by the federal TANF program. Money for the fledgling program was arranged through a \$173,633 contract with the Department of Human Services. Because the office began to broaden its mission, the name of the office was changed to the *Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives* when the contract was renewed the following year. The office established a home web site (www.faithlinks.state.ok.us) and has held annual conferences in both Tulsa and Oklahoma City.

Then Governor Frank Keating (Republican) later issued Executive Order 2001-18 on May 17, 2001 with this command to state agencies:

Make all necessary changes to actively engage in collaborative efforts (in the form of contracts, grants, vouchers, or other forms of disbursements, or volunteer programs) with FBOs for the provision of social services on the same basis as other non-governmental providers.

When the new Governor Brad Henry (Democrat) succeeded Frank Keating in 2003, he issued an Executive Order 2003-7 which listed the previous executive orders that would remain in full force and effect. Keating's Executive Order 2001-18 concerning charitable choice implementation in the state was not included and is therefore officially

no longer in effect. However, the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) remains active. It has moved from the Health Department to its original funding agency, the Department of Human Services. Howard Hendrick who initiated the administrative efforts in this area was reappointed in the new administration. According to Brad Yarbrough, the status of his office was never involved in any significant politics related to the change in political parties (personal interview, August 22, 2003). It appears to have the full support of the current Democratic administration.

The main mission of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives is to promote both funded and unfunded collaborations among government agencies and FBOs in meeting the needs of Oklahoma's poor and needy. This Office has statewide jurisdiction and oversees statewide activities and programs related to charitable choice and involvement of faith organizations in social services delivery. The staffing is minimal with only two full-time employees: the Director and the Executive Assistant. The state's liaison to the faith community gives numerous presentations to interested parties about governmental funding of FBOs and other related issues. The Office also sent a statewide survey out to over 6,000 churches, congregations, synagogues, mosques and other community outreach ministries to try to obtain an overall picture in the state concerning the role that these organizations believe should be played by FBOs. By April 15, 2001, 751 FBOs had responded (Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives [OFBCI] 2001).

This FaithLinks survey cannot be considered scientific since there is no way to determine if the respondents are systematically different than non-respondents. With a response rate of less than 13 percent, making any meaningful generalizations would be speculative. The results are nonetheless revealing of the sentiments of at least some of the FBOs operating in the state. The overwhelming majority of denominations that responded are variants of the Christian faith—certainly not a surprise in Oklahoma. Baptist denominations make up almost a third of the denominations that responded. A little over two percent of the responses are from Catholic churches. Only two Buddhist and one Jewish group were represented. The survey covered three general areas: services provided, marriage issues, and governmental collaboration.

A few FBOs in the survey provided support groups such as parenting classes (23%), grief counseling groups (19%), aging services

(12%), drug and alcohol counseling (12%), and divorce counseling (12%). In contrast, less than five percent of the respondents offered any programs to address domestic violence (p. 7). Private counseling was much more common among the FBO respondents. Over seventy percent provided marriage counseling. Other types of personal counseling included personal/family crisis counseling (58%), youth issues (53%), grief counseling (51%), personal finance (23%), career guidance and employment (12%) and legal counseling (4%). The respondents offered a wide variety of life skill classes in such areas as marriage (38%), parenting (30%), abstinence (22%), anger and conflict resolution (14%), personal finance (13%), tutoring (10%), and literacy/language (9%). Less than five percent of the respondents offered life skill classes in homemaking skills (4.8%), careers and employment (4.1%), and GED equivalency (3.8%). In terms of community services, Oklahoma FBOs appear to be focused on limited programs and outreach to individuals who are homebound or in nursing homes. Most of the visits to nursing homes and shut-ins may be directed to those persons already affiliated with the FBOs. The second part of the survey dealt with marriage issues. This information was used in conjunction with the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative discussed in greater detail below.

Perhaps the most interesting results of the survey cover issues related to church and state. The survey results indicate that among the FBOs that responded, about three-quarters supported a collaboration among religious organizations and governmental agencies and wanted to see the creation of a national Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Somewhat fewer respondents indicated support for receiving governmental funds (68%). Only seven percent had already received government funds. Almost ninety percent of the respondents were not familiar with charitable choice at that time. Despite the overwhelmingly favorable response to faith-based initiatives, these FBOs still expressed significant concerns. Among these concerns were possible compromising of faith missions (82%), intrusion into the faith organization's internal affairs (71%), excessive red tape (62%), over-dependence on governmental funds (44.2%), and violation of First Amendment rights (28%).

Toward encouragement of FBO collaborations, the state contracts with two intermediary organizations. The state is divided regionally into the eastern and western halves for purposes of assigning the two faith-

based intermediaries. The Tulsa Cornerstone Assistance Network is responsible for Eastern Oklahoma. The Oklahoma City Cornerstone Assistance Network is responsible for the central and western sections of Oklahoma. Since both of these organizations were inspired by a similar venture in Fort Worth, Texas, they share the same name and purpose. Yet they are legally separate and independent. The Tulsa Cornerstone Assistance Network receives approximately \$40,000 annually to serve as the faith-based intermediary for Oklahoma's eastern counties. The Oklahoma City Cornerstone Assistance Network receives approximately \$60,000 annually to serve as the faith-based intermediary for Oklahoma's western counties.

Each is charged among other duties with helping "congregations find available financial resources" in order to build capacity for assisting in the delivery of social services. According to Chris Beach, Director of the Tulsa Cornerstone Assistance Network, the typical process is to sponsor a forum in which interested parties come to learn about the basics. Some organizations then become extremely interested. They are then connected with "experts or consultants with good reputations" so that they can advance even further in their quest for funding. When the two intermediary organizations became operational, their role expanded the ongoing activities in terms of strategic outreach to the faith community. They have also participated in numerous and wide ranging forums addressing charitable choice issues, have distributed brochures and promotional materials, provided consultative services, and have acted as the mechanism to funnel grant monies to eligible organizations.

Broad charitable choice language has not been incorporated into Oklahoma statutes. Furthermore, Oklahoma is one of the states that has a so-called Blaine Amendment in its constitution [Oklahoma Constitution Article II, § 5]:

No public money or property shall ever be appropriated, applied, donated, or used directly or indirectly, for the use, benefit, or support of any sect, church, denomination, or system of religion, or for the use, benefit, or support of any priest, preacher, minister, or other religious teacher or dignitary, or sectarian institution as such.

For purposes of contracting with FBOs, this section of the Oklahoma Constitution is not viewed as prohibitive by any relevant legal authorities.

Included among the standard contracting language for state invitations to bid and state contracts is the following section addressed specifically to charitable choice providers:

Providers who are members of the faith community are eligible to compete for contracts with the State of Oklahoma on the same basis as any other provider. Such providers shall not be required to alter their forms of internal governance, their religious character or remove religious art, icons, scripture or other symbols.

The standard contracting language also prohibits providers from discriminating “against clients on the basis of their religion, religious beliefs or clients’ refusal to participate in religious practices.” According to the State Purchasing Director, Tom Jaworsky, FBOs are not allowed to commingle monies and they must open up their accounts as far as state and federal money is concerned; but the state does not have to audit the whole FBO, just as much as is sufficient per contract (personal interview August 29, 2003). According to Jaworski, no specific efforts have been made to simplify or streamline the contracting process for faith-based providers. The contracting FBOs must maintain records and documentation associated with federal and state contracts for up to 3 years even after contract termination. Contractors are also required to adhere to nondiscrimination in employment by agreeing to the following standard language issued by the Department of Central Services Central Purchasing Division:

The Contractor is an Equal Opportunity Employer, a provider of services and/or assistance, and is in compliance with the 1964 Civil Rights Act, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended and Executive Orders 11246 and 11375. The provider assures compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (Public Law 101-336), all amendments to, and all requirements imposed by the regulations issued pursuant to this act.

The official position is that religious preference for hiring by FBOs is consistent with these laws even with federal funding.

Recently, a legislative initiative originated in the Oklahoma House of Representatives related to funding of FBOs. House Bill 1811, proposed during the first sessions of the 49th Legislature (2003) pertained to nondiscrimination in service delivery. The bill stated in part:

Any faith-based organization contracting with a state agency shall not discriminate against a person or entity with respect to rendering assistance funded under any state program on the basis of religion, a religious belief or refusal to participate in a religious practice or on the basis of race, age, color, sex, or national origin. Proven discrimination shall be grounds for termination of any contract with the state agency.

However, this bill died in the Rules Committee.

Currently, child care in Oklahoma runs like a voucher system in that clients may select their own provider among licensed day care facilities. The state uses an electronic card system to reimburse the facilities directly. In addition, a new law has been passed effective November 1, 2002 and is still in the implementation stage. It states, in part:

The Department of Human Services shall establish a service delivery system under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program that provides for redemption of voucher for TANF services at participating private faith-based providers and federally recognized Indian tribes if they are effective and competitively prices for the results achieved. . . . The vouchers shall be made payable, on behalf of the TANF recipient, for the provision of TANF services that include, but are not limited to, subsidized and unsubsidized hourly employment, work experience, on-the-job training, assisted job search, job readiness assistance, job skills training, community service, substance abuse treatment, literacy and adult basic education, vocational-educational programs, and child care. . . . The Department shall establish a procedure whereby a qualified private faith-based provider that wishes to provide services to TANF recipients may register with the Department (*Oklahoma Statutes* Section 56-230.77).

The faith-based intermediaries cover the restriction on proselytization at length in their training workshops and during informational forums. The language covering this is also built into their contract. Judging by statements from various program administrators, enforcing this restriction is probably a weak point in the Oklahoma system. Typically, recipients of social services are informed about religious activities but not required to attend. According to a volunteer at a food pantry conducted by the Northwest Praise Center, “We always let them know, ‘Now if you want to hear about Jesus Christ, we’d love to tell you. But if you don’t, God bless you still’” (Helping the Helpers 2001, March 10). The boundaries about what is permissible do not seem to be drawn sharply in Oklahoma. Problems would come to the attention of relevant authorities only if recipients made complaints, which has not yet happened.

Three recent laws have been promulgated dealing with charitable choice and faith-based issues:

(1) the Oklahoma Center for Rural Development has been granted the power and duty to build the capacity of FBOs in promoting rural economic development (OK Statutes §70-4807);

(2) the Department of Human Services is authorized through Oklahoma statute to contract with FBOs for the TANF program (OK Statutes §56-230.62); and

(3) the state Department of Corrections and private prisons are encouraged to offer faith-based programs in their institutions (OK Statutes §57-614).

In addition, a well-established support institute called the Center for Nonprofits (www.centerforprofits.us) regularly hosts workshops on grant writing specifically for FBOs as well as other charitable entities. At some of their conferences, they have allowed participants to choose from two parallel tracks: one for FBOs and other for more secular nonprofit agencies. Finally, the Interfaith Alliance, a state faith-based coalition has sponsored forums to help faith communities understand what is meant by “faith-based funding” and “charitable choice.”

No systematic review or audit has been conducted concerning the state's contracting statutes and procedures. During an interview with Brad Yarbrough, the state's faith-based liaison, he reported that the Department of Central Services had assured him that contracts are in compliance with charitable choice guidelines (August 22, 2003). However, the State Purchasing Director, Tom Jaworski, reports that to his knowledge, the state has not conducted a sweeping audit or performance review. According to Jaworski, the state of Oklahoma has moved away from a strategy of evaluating the performance of every contract because it became nothing more than a clerical exercise. Now, the attention of those evaluating performance is directed to those programs demonstrating obvious problems. Reviewing the performance of FBOs is the same for secular counterparts in Oklahoma. The Department of Central Services has its own Office of Inspector General and of course there are program monitors assigned throughout all of the numerous social service delivery efforts. More likely, any attention paid to potential accounting irregularities and performance problems has been by program monitors and through internal audits. According to Jaworski, the Oklahoma Department of Health does not usually conduct internal audits in this area. In contrast, the Department of Human Services has established its own Office of Inspector General. Staff there reported no general review of the state's contracting statutes and procedures related to charitable choice compliance (Mike Fair, personal interview, August 29, 2003). One specific program was audited for Fiscal Year 2002 and found to have no problems related to charitable choice. That program was Oklahoma's Marriage Initiative Contract which involved several faith-based organizations.

In a separate effort, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services awarded a \$37,000 grant to the nonprofit organization Domestic Violence Intervention Services in order to coordinate a community training and education project involving congregations and FBOs in the Tulsa area so that they can team together to respond to domestic violence problems.

Some of Oklahoma's faith initiatives have been undertaken at the local level. Last year for example, the City of Tulsa entered into partnerships with local churches to take over daily management of a few of its community centers. In response to budgetary pressures to scale back services or even close facilities operated by the City's Parks

Department, Mayor Bill LaFortune proposed expansion of community center management by three churches and another faith-based organization. Families of Murdered Children, an FBO founded in 1997 by Edith Shoals in honor of her 18-year old murdered daughter, operates Amos T. Hall Community Center. Paradise Baptist Church operates the Ben Hill Community Center. Both of these FBO partnerships began under the previous mayor. LaFortune expanded these existing arrangements and used them as a model to partner with Redeeming Faith Church to operate the B.C. Franklin Community Center and Sanctuary Evangelistic to operate Owen Park Community Center. The City of Tulsa used Community Development Block Grant funds to maintain and improve these park programs (Lassek 2002, July 21).

The full scope of Oklahoma's efforts in funded partnerships with faith organizations is almost impossible to determine. The data in Oklahoma are simply not tracked in a manner that allows the identification and matching of social service contracts with FBOs. This has been a matter of concern to the faith liaison Brad Yarbrough who has complained about it during repeated interviews. Similar frustrations have been expressed by other participants in the process. The 2001 FaithLinks Survey does provide some overall perspective on the FBO activity throughout the state although no inquiries were made about actual monies involved. The response rate is also only about 12.5 percent and makes the findings suspect. Beyond the more longstanding charitable organizations and the highly visible Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, new financial relationships in the state of Oklahoma appear minimal.

THE OKLAHOMA MARRIAGE INITIATIVE

Former Governor Keating instigated the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative (OMI), a continuing effort that has received significant national attention. OMI was funded through TANF funds totaling approximately ten million dollars and was driven by the goal to lower Oklahoma's extremely high divorce rate (Oklahoma Marriage Initiative 2003a). The rationale for OMI was that it addressed expressed TANF Goals. The first TANF Goal of "providing assistance to needy families so that the children may be cared for in their homes or in the homes of relatives" (Fagnoni 2001, 1) is addressed by the OMI research-based supposition

that “children do better in healthy, two-parent family arrangements” by being “healthier, more likely to attend college, less likely to get pregnant out of wedlock, do drugs or end up in prison” (OMI 2003a). The three remaining TANF Goals are specifically related to marriage:

ending the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; preventing and reducing the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families (Fagnoni 2001, 1).

The initial goals of the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative were to reduce the divorce rate, number of out-of-wedlock births, alcohol and drug addiction, and child abuse and neglect (Johnson, Stanley, Glenn, Amato, Nock, Markman, & Dion 2002, 5).

Oklahoma’s effort to address marriage as a weapon against poverty and other social ills is based on a wealth of research. First and foremost, Oklahoma State University’s Bureau of Social Research conducted a large-scale Baseline Survey in order to understand the culture of both marriage and divorce within the state. Two separate, random samples were drawn for the survey. “Subjects in the first sample are [2,020] adult residents of randomly selected households in Oklahoma” (Johnson, et al. 2002, 41). The second sample was comprised of 303 current Oklahoma Medicaid clients Johnson, et al. 2002, 41). Some of the key findings revealed by the survey results include the following:

- Oklahoma is a marrying state, with 8% of adults having been married at some point compared to 73% nationally.
- Oklahoma is a divorcing state with 32% of all adults having divorced compared to 21% nationally.
- Oklahomans marry an average of 2.5 years younger than the national median age at first marriage.
- Over one-third of married respondents considered their marriage to be in serious trouble at some point and of these, 92% said that they were glad they were still together.

- Most ever-divorced Oklahomans (78%) have a child from a previous marriage that ended in divorce. (Johnson, et al. 2002, Executive Summary)

Neither the survey nor the analysis of its results mentions Oklahoma's gay citizens. The Oklahoma Marriage Initiative does not address the issue of same sex marriage. In fact, some of the participants in Oklahoma's marriage initiative are openly hostile to homosexuality. For example, among the longstanding organizational members of the OMI Steering Council is the Oklahoma Family Policy Council. It recently hosted a variety of pro-family workshops, conferences, and other events. The Oklahoma Family Policy Council also recently recommended a conference called *Love Won Out* billed as a "dynamic one-day conference addressing, understanding and preventing homosexuality" (Oklahoma Family Policy Council 2003).

Oklahoma's unprecedented, comprehensive approach for addressing marriages among its population seems a logical policy extension of the federal government's desired direction for social interventions. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Katherine Boo has recently spent several months in Oklahoma observing close encounters with Oklahoma's marriage program. She is sympathetic to a policy initiative addressing marriage and asks,

Why wouldn't governments want people to marry? The economics are terribly seductive . . . marriage is probably the most cost-efficient antipoverty instrument a society possesses (Davidson 2003).

However, Boo delivers a powerful critique of the implementation of Oklahoma's marriage initiative in a recent story published in *The New Yorker* magazine (2003). She follows two of only five women who show up for a marriage workshop sponsored by OMI—no men bother to attend. The workshop takes place in Sooner Haven, a public housing project in Oklahoma City. Boo's article centers around two very different African American women. They are best friends helping each other with daily life in and out of the project. Kim Henderson is an attractive 22-year-old single woman trying to escape the projects for what she hopes will be "a healthy, wealthy, normal-lady life" (p.105). Corean Brothers is a 49-year-old divorced mother of five. This disturbing story

portrays how these disadvantaged but nevertheless ambitious women face everyday indignities, both large and small: pizza parlors that won't deliver to certain parts of town (p. 107); interested employers contacting the ladies for job interview appointments at telephone numbers disconnected for outstanding bills (p. 110); bus drivers who routinely "bypass would-be riders in very poor neighborhoods, and blacks in less poor ones" (p.110); pregnant women about to give birth turned away from hospitals (p.111); and the threat of a year's jail time for what started out as a bad check for \$12.18 (p.116).

Pastor George E. Young, Sr. of Holy Temple Baptist Church in Oklahoma City served as the leader of the marriage workshop at Sooner Haven. Boo describes Young as having a better grip on the reality of Oklahoma's underprivileged than the developers of the state's marriage curriculum, psychologists Scott Stanley and Howard Markman of the University of Denver. With some support from the National Institute of Mental Health, they have been developing the Prevention and Relationship Enhancement Program (PREP) curriculum for the past 25 years. PREP is geared toward typical couples that are either contemplating marriage or are already married. As part of Oklahoma's adoption of the PREP program, the state supplies a video showing such vignettes as a spouse hogging a home computer or a spouse procrastinating about cleaning a guest bedroom (Boo 2003, 109). Trainers readily admit that there can be an obvious cultural disconnect for TANF participants facing the more immediate challenges of poverty, substance abuse, or domestic violence (Robinson 2003, 6). Even more distressing for eventual program success, is that half of the target audience is usually missing—men. As one Oklahoma City pastor who is deeply involved in social service programs stated, "Most of the problem facing these [disadvantaged] women is bad relationships with men and their unwillingness to break from that" (Steve Kern, personal interview September 9, 2003). Boo quotes Young as saying,

I wish I could get more men into this room, instead of asking you [women] all to go out and be the messengers for a what a meaningful, committed relationship might be . . . but for now it's up to you to go out and teach the men (2003, 110).

Encouraging marriage within a subculture that resists the inherent constraints and responsibilities will require more than tinkering with

existing public policy. As a working woman attending the Sooner Haven workshop asked, “How do you get a man to talk about marriage when you’re pretty sure he’s still sleeping with his baby’s mother?” (Boo 2003, 109). In particular, the percentage of African American men in Oklahoma who are chronically unemployed or even incarcerated is staggering. As Boo states,

In northeast Oklahoma City, the question ‘Where he away at?’ is widely understood to mean, In what prison is he serving time? Nearly one in ten black men is a prison inmate—one of the highest incarceration rates in the country (2003, 117).

On the other hand, the state of Oklahoma may have greater chance for success at strengthening existing marriages and preventing unworkable marriages. OMI calls upon members of the faith community in particular to cooperate in helping couples contemplating marriage. They are asked to sign the Oklahoma Marriage Covenant in order to confirm their pledge to hold off performing marriage ceremonies until couples complete at least four to six premarital counseling sessions. In addition, they pledge to train “mentoring couples to assist young couples during the crucial first years of marriage” (OMI 2003b). According to Kendy Cox, Director of the Training and Resource Center for the Oklahoma Marriage Initiative, over 1,200 faith leaders have signed the Oklahoma Marriage Covenant as of October 1, 2003. In fact, she states that the Oklahoma Marriage Covenant has had very little resistance. According to Cox, most of the faith leaders who have not signed have been worried about whether they had sufficient resources to meet the level of counseling and training required (personal interview, October 1, 2003).

The statewide discussion on marriage inspired the Oklahoma House of Representatives to pass a covenant marriage bill during its 2001-2002 legislative session. A similar law in Louisiana served as a model. However, the state senate ultimately failed to pass its version of the bill. The proposed covenant marriage provision would have created a marriage option that would require premarital counseling and the obligation to seek marital counseling if difficulties arose within the marriage (OK House Bill 2641).

UNFUNDED FBO PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL SERVICES

Oklahoma has had the most success in establishing and developing rewarding collaborative efforts with the faith community in the non-financial arena. For a variety of reasons, both the director of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and the state intermediaries report that their current emphasis is on building effective non-financial arrangements. According to Brad Yarbrough, the faith liaison, “The promoting of unfunded collaborations has been one of the primary strategies of Oklahoma” (personal interview, August 22). In explaining this, he cited his recent attendance at a national grant review in which over thirty panels of reviewers were each assigned about 30 grant applications each. That of course left many of the reviewers with only 4-5 hours of sleep each night. Yarbrough’s point is that if you begin to make grants more widely available and encourage even the smallest groups to apply you will presumably have a much greater number of candidates from which to choose awardees. However, he points to the downside:

If you have all of these groups taking the time to develop what they hope will be a winning proposal, and in the process discovering that in most instances they will not receive—how many times will such groups spend the 40-50 hours of preparation time, plus associated expenses to write a grant proposal before they decide it’s not a fruitful exercise?

Yarbrough believes that preventing discrimination in the awarding of grants and contracts as well as building up the technical expertise of FBOs to apply for funding is still important—it just should not overshadow the longstanding success that the state of Oklahoma has already enjoyed in developing and maintaining productive partnerships between the state’s social service agencies and FBOs (personal interview, August 22, 2003).

Likewise, Chris Beach, who directs the faith intermediary organization for Eastern Oklahoma says that the biggest challenge is to find out what the government is not able to do, and then to train FBOs to help close the gap by delivering those services to the needy. He describes a capacity-building strategy. For example, when a congregation expresses a desire to enter into the social services arena, it will often

choose something basic like developing a food pantry. He'll try not to discourage its interest even though numerous food pantries already exist in the region. Often, the same FBO will return a few months later discovering that the food pantry is not accomplishing what it had hoped. The FBO is often disappointed to find that the same patrons are visiting the pantry on a regular basis with little real progress. Even so, Beach says that the experience helps to build the confidence of these FBOs and that they will likely want to take on a greater challenge. Maybe five years down the road, according to Beach, these FBOs may need government assistance to help them accomplish a worthy goal. Until then, they are developing experience and technical expertise. What he fears most in this area are FBOs jumping into the grant-writing game without developing a track record; they will likely find themselves awarded a responsibility that they are not equipped to fulfill. For these reasons, his intermediary group emphasizes non-financial relationships, at least initially. State agencies have been open and flexible on partnering with FBOs. For example, Beach spoke openly about how cooperative and supportive the professionals working with the Oklahoma Department of Human Services have been.

The most interesting analysis of the current state of faith-based partnerships in Oklahoma comes from Scott Manley, Director of the Oklahoma City Cornerstone Assistance Network. He says,

I think everybody's a lot more optimistic and euphoric about the situation than from how it appears at grassroots level. Seeing a church come alive and getting more involved is so far more in the talk than in the action (personal interview, September 8, 2003).

In other words, the positive attention paid to faith-based partnerships has yet to translate into significant change on the frontlines of social services delivery. The practical aspect is that charitable choice leveled the playing field for FBOs to go after government funding on an equal basis; but according to Manley, the government's clarion call for faith involvement has not lead to a stampede for the money—at least not among FBOs in Oklahoma. The simplistic understanding among many of the faith groups is that the government has set aside a separate pot of money for their use. “So when FBOs call up and they say, ‘Show me the money,’” says Manley, “it demonstrates gross ignorance or at least

a lack of understanding. Having said that, the faith groups aren't ready for the money even if it were there. They're not at a point even to request it." In Manley's perspective the FBOs have allowed their "muscles to atrophy" over the last century, especially after Roosevelt's New Deal and Johnson's Great Society programs. He declares that most churches do not have socially active programs that go much beyond the walls of the church.

Dr. Steve Kern, a pastor at Olivet Baptist, an urban church active in the Oklahoma City community, agrees: "I'm afraid that for a lot of churches the bottom line is how many members a program brings into the church or helps to contribute to the support of the church." Kern states flatly, "You don't do things because you're going to get paid back for it; you do things because they're the right things to do" (Personal Interview, September 9, 2003). Kern and his church receive wonderful accolades for their community programs. Unfortunately, as Kern points out, "I get lots of pats on my back, but not a lot of people are jumping on the bandwagon."

Both Kern and Manley point to the history of American Christian churches in which there was an early split between the evangelical churches and the activist churches; or as Manley describes the "Word People" and the "Deed People" respectively. Manley explains,

The evangelical church—or Word People—just want to tell people about Jesus. The Deed People—the social gospel folk said, 'Okay, you go ahead and do that but there are real people out here with problems and Jesus would do something about that.' They lived and acted out the message. Perhaps what we're experiencing here is a drawing together of these two poles.

Kern confirms Manley's thesis to a point. Coming from a traditional, evangelical church, Kern states,

We're not into the social gospel at all. It just seems to us that meeting needs is what Christians are all about. I think that's starting to change. There are opportunities that churches are beginning to see that help meet needs. The younger generation is starting to ask to be in a faith that requires more than sitting in a pew.

Olivet Baptist Church is involved with the Even Start program through the Oklahoma City Public Schools. The program is allowed to use the church facilities for a preschool program for non-English speaking kids. Their mothers are required to attend class with them because parental involvement is seen as a key to educational success. The mothers are challenged to help their kids learn to succeed. Olivet Baptist attempted to get involved with the Head Start program but lost by only a few points when another contractor was able to renew, at least in part, due to the built-in scoring advantage awarded for administering the previous contract. In spite of the current involvement with public programs and the recent attempt to get funding, Kern comments,

We really feel the church needs to learn how to do this stuff without government. We hope to be an inspiration for other churches, so when the churches start waking up and doing ministries, they will eventually work the government out of the entitlement programs that it's doing now. (Interview with author.)

The faith-based intermediaries also have instigated and coordinated several projects such as encouraging FBOs to establish medical clinics. They capitalize on the existing health service expertise already present in their respective congregations. Other projects have been auto-care clinics because Oklahoma communities typically lack feasible public transportation options. Therefore, efforts to employ disadvantaged workers often hit the major roadblock, almost literally in this case, of getting them to and from work. Getting older cars up and running has been an effective strategy in this area.

A particularly memorable example of state government's intentional recruitment of FBOs to help with a specific policy problem relates to the efforts to service the state's growing Hispanic population. The problem for one agency was that it had an insufficient number of Spanish translators on staff. The reality was that if a Hispanic individual came to the agency for services, that individual would often be placed at the bottom of the stack since it would take a while for translators to become available. The agency recognized the problem. After going through the faith intermediaries, the agency was able to partner with local FBOs to provide Hispanic translators and virtually solved the problem overnight at minimal cost.

A deliberate and consistent effort to include faith representatives on various welfare advisory committees does not appear to have taken place. However, there is at least one example: the governor has appointed Brad Yarbrough, the state's faith liaison to serve on the Governor's Advisory Committee on the Homeless.

Unfortunately, Oklahoma has had its share of disasters in the past decade including the bombing of the Murrah Federal Building and several major tornadoes tracking through densely populated areas. After these incidents and in preparation for future disasters, FBOs have played significant roles in terms of grievance counseling, support for rescue workers, providing shelter and medical relief to disaster victims, as well as a host of other related activities.

PROBLEMS WITH FBO PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL SERVICES

Participation by FBOs in public programs has not been without problems in Oklahoma. Recently, a minor scandal erupted in the El Reno School District (a suburb of Oklahoma City) when it contracted with Sacred Heart Catholic and First Christian churches in order to send students to a pre-kindergarten program. The district counted the pre-K students as its own and then subsequently shared monies from the state with the two participating El Reno churches. The State Department of Education discovered these irregularities and pointed to provisions that said that the children could not be reported as "public school students" since they were charged private tuition and taught religious tenets. El Reno's questionable arrangements were about to become a model for schools statewide who have had pressure to begin pre-K programs while at the same time facing incredible financial difficulties. Still, the problem here is not a matter of an FBO offering a secular service, but rather the state directly subsidizing religious indoctrination. This incident shows that despite the overwhelming dominance of Christian denominations in the state, there are some limits to proselytization.

During the City of Tulsa's deliberations over management of its community centers by FBOs last year, a minor controversy arose over the mayor's proposal to contract with the Tulsa Cornerstone Assistance Network to provide intermediary services similar to those provided to

the state. At issue among the City Council members was the question of the necessity for an additional layer of bureaucracy. Sandra Rana of the Islamic Society of Tulsa described the other source of controversy as a “clause that allows religious indoctrination to be provided on the permission of the person being indoctrinated or provided the service” (Lassek 2002, July 26). Ultimately, the Tulsa City Council decided not to fund Cornerstone’s intermediary services (Lassek 2003).

CONCLUSION

Governmental grant programs do not appear to discriminate against religious organizations in Oklahoma. In fact, the state has made a comprehensive attempt to engage the state’s FBOs in social service delivery. This effort has occurred at multiple levels involving numerous stakeholders in the process. In interviews with a wide variety of parties involved in the process, the consistent theme emerges that Oklahoma has always been willing to undertake partnerships between state government and willing supporters in the faith community. After the 1996 charitable choice provisions, these efforts became more intensified and formalized. The first wave of activities arose out of the creation of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. The participation by the faith liaison in forums throughout the state and attendant press coverage helped to publicize the governor’s efforts in this regard. In certain areas such as education, business interests have led the way for reform and improvement. The federal and state initiatives generated quite a lot of excitement, but reality is now setting in. The vision of Oklahoma’s faith communities being fully involved in addressing the needs of the state’s poor and disadvantaged may require a lot of handholding and mentoring by those who are already engaged in community action.

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