

Building a Faith-Based Human Service Agency: A View from the Inside

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ABSTRACT. Interest in faith-based organizations has increased substantially since the Bush administration made them a priority in the presidential campaign of 2000 and established a special office in the White House to promote their involvement in government supported human services. The primary goal of this initiative is to encourage faith-based organizations, usually understood to mean congregations, to engage their members in supporting services to those most in need. While most research on faith-based organizations is limited to the past decade or two, very little is known about how they operate. This case study of Community Ministries of Rockville, Maryland (CMR) is designed to address this issue. CMR differs from most faith-based organizations in that it neither represents a single congregation nor the traditional faith-related social service agency like Catholic, Jewish, or Lutheran Social Services. The case study features the twenty-five year history of the Executive Director of a faith-based human service organization supported by twenty congregations. It concludes with the identification of major challenges and lessons learned. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2005 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]*

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Recent interest in faith-based human service organizations can be traced to the welfare reform legislation of 1996 (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act) and the Charitable Choice provisions that granted religious organizations opportunities to compete for government contracts. In fact, the involvement of religious organizations in the field of social welfare dates back to ancient times when caring for the poor and disenfranchised were originally incorporated into religious doctrine. In more recent times in the United States, sectarian social welfare agencies have been actively involved in serving the needy among us for over a century.

The provision of Charitable Choice was given increased prominence with the 2000 election of President George W. Bush and the establishment of a White House Office for Religious-based and Community Groups (Executive Order 13198 and 13199). It called for: (1) the elimination of obstacles (regulatory and contracting) to the participation of faith-based organizations in delivering social services, (2) the incorporation of this provision into all related social welfare departmental policies and procedures, and (3) the development of demonstration programs to increase the participation of faith-based organizations (OFCI, 2003). The *untested* premise for the charitable choice initiative includes the views that: (a) faith is a missing element in the provision of social services (e.g., the dangers posed by social problems, such as crime and drug abuse, outweigh the threats to the separation of church and state) (Monsma, 1996), (b) local faith-based organizations are more responsive to local needs, more flexible, less costly, and less bureaucratic, and (c) faith-based organizations are better able to promote civic responsibility through volunteers and fundraising. In essence, faith-based organizations are seen as more effective in changing the human behavior of individuals than traditional nonprofit agencies (Kennedy & Bielefeld, 2002).

However, the Faith-Based Initiative can affect the behavior of organizations by creating competition where little currently exists between congregations and community ministries. The ultimate outcome of the Initiative is to shrink the amount of government funding by encouraging congregations to compete with other faith-based services including community ministries, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, and others. In contrast, community ministries stress cooperation over competition between faiths and denominations for the sake of strengthening the local community.

This article is a case study of the development of a faith-based human service organization, the Community Ministries of Rockville, Maryland (CMR).

It describes the evolution of the organization from the perspective of its long-term executive director, the Reverend Kasey Kaseman, and reported with the assistance of the second author. Throughout the case study, Kasey is referred to in the third, rather than first, person. The case study captures only his perceptions, possibly giving the impression that he alone is the agency when, in fact, many others (staff and board members) play significant roles in promoting the success of the organization.

BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to capture the essence of the expanding literature on faith-based organizations over the past several decades, this literature review is divided into three domains: (1) historical perspectives on faith-based organizations, (2) the role of congregations, and (3) the nature of social ministry.

Historical Perspectives

As Gibelman and Gelman (2003) have noted, religious groups have historically implemented their charitable missions by providing services through their congregations or have established social service agencies (e.g., Catholic Social Services, Jewish Family and Children's Services, Lutheran Family Services, Salvation Army, etc.). While many nonprofit social service agencies have religious origins, the faith-based sectarian agencies have become independent communal organizations that engage in contracting with a wide variety of public and nonprofit organizations (Gibelman & Demone, 1998). As Gibelman and Gelman (2003) note:

Sectarian services tend to be favored under two circumstances: when the need for service providers exceeds current levels (as during the Depression and the 1960s) or, alternatively, during conservative political eras when social need moves from center stage [politically] and emphasis is placed on community structures, including religious groups, as the primary source of service provision. . . . Locally based religious bodies are able to address community needs in times of plenty, but their resources are insufficient to resolve major social, economic or psychological problems, particularly in times of economic downturn. (p. 10)

They conclude their historical review by noting that there has been a long-standing relationship between sectarian faith-based organizations and government and that congregations have generally not been major social service providers except for short-term emergencies. A possible exception to

this assessment is the historic role of the church in African American communities (Billingsley, 1999) where such faith-based organizations have been continuous providers of various social services.

The Role of Congregations

Chavis and Tsitsos (2001) summarize the growing literature on the relationship between congregations and social service organizations. In order to place this case study in a larger context, it is useful to include the typology developed by Cnaan et al. (1999) for religion-based social service organizations that is “based on the geographic locus of service and, by default, the organizational complexity” (p. 27). They identify the following six types of faith-based organizations: (1) congregations, (2) interfaith agencies and coalitions, (3) sectarian agencies (city/regional), (4) national organizations/ projects, (5) advocacy and relief organizations (unaffiliated but religiously motivated), and (6) international organizations (religiously affiliated). This case study features #2 as they define an interfaith agency to include: organizations of local congregations from different religions and denominations that join together for purposes of community solidarity, social action, and/or . . . service provision . . . beyond the scope of a single congregation (p. 32).

A similar typology was developed by Rahn and Whiting (1965) that includes three categories: (1) church-related agencies/programs (drug abuse counseling, job development), (2) autonomous agencies (administered by board members from a church or denomination), and (3) inter-denominational agencies (administered by groups representing various faiths with a common ecumenical purpose focused on community needs). This case study features aspects of all three types as it provides church-related programs in the context of an autonomous and inter-denominational nonprofit organization.

In addition to identifying the types of faith-based organizations, it is also important to categorize the types of services they provide. Ammerman (2001) developed six types of outreach categories: (1) direct services to people in need (food pantries and soup kitchens, shelter, clothes closets, child care, health screening, financial aid, transportation), (2) educational and cultural activities (substance abuse prevention, tutoring, youth camps, job counseling, senior centers), (3) community development (neighborhood outreach and support groups, self-help groups), (4) public advocacy (civil rights, coalitions on environmental or health and social service issues), (5) evangelistic outreach activities (home and abroad), and (6) humanitarian efforts for third world countries. This case study reflects the first four types of outreach services.

The Nature of Social Ministry

As Macarov (1978) has noted, all major religions have stressed, to some extent, the importance of shared responsibility, kindness towards and justice for the needy, and the achievement of self-fulfillment through service to others. Dolgoff et al. (1993) explored some of the roots of Christian social ministry in the tenets of the Old Testament and related liturgy that have guided the Judeo-Christian approaches to social welfare (e.g., clothing the naked, feeding the poor, visiting the sick, caring for orphans and the elderly, consoling the bereaved, and burying the dead). To complement the moral teachings and the concepts of justice found in the Old Testament, the Christians added an emphasis on love and compassion that led to the following twelve areas of social ministry: care of widows, orphans, sick, poor, disabled, prisoners, captives, slaves, victims of calamity, burial of the poor, meals for the needy, and employment services for the unemployed (Brackney & Watkins, 1983).

Clearly the moral principles buried in social ministry provide a foundation for the practices and principles that guide faith-based organizations. As Ortiz (1995) observed, faith-based organizations are a natural site for delivering accessible services, identifying community needs, and using the untapped resources of volunteers to meet pressing needs. There is also growing recognition in the field of social work that faith-based organizations are important service providers to racial and ethnic minorities as well as to highly stigmatized populations (substance abusers and prisoners). The work of faith-based organizations clearly builds upon the values that guide the provision of public and voluntary social services (Netting, 1984, 1986; Lewis, 2003).

TRACING THE ROOTS OF A SOCIAL MINISTRY

Historical Background

Community Ministries of Rockville was formed through the merger of Presbyterian Church USA with a United Church of Christ congregation in 1967. The goal was to initiate an ecumenical social justice ministry while also sustaining more traditional parish ministries. The first community minister was the Reverend Donald Maccallum who moved out of the church and into commercial property in the center of Rockville, MD. The point was to demonstrate commitment in serving the greater community and to establish a coffeehouse for the addicted, delinquent and troubled youth of that time. The United Church Center for Community Ministries included this social center, a counseling service to parents and youth, and an advocacy program with city

and county government as well as the Board of Education. Don's success is reflected in his being named Director of the new Department of Substance Abuse formed by Montgomery County in response to his advocacy in 1975.

The Reverend Al Winham arrived in 1976 from the National Council of Churches Delta Ministry in Mississippi to be Don's successor. His expertise in race relations was an important factor in the need to respond to the growing unrest in local high schools and a desire to empower an old pre-Reconstruction African-American neighborhood known as Lincoln Park. Al played a major role in raising the conscience of local political leaders and helped the city of Rockville create its first Human Rights Commission, which he chaired and through which he organized annual Martin Luther King, Jr. observances that continue today. Al also created an advisory board of lay leaders who volunteered but were not officially elected or appointed from nine congregations in Rockville. It was an informal organization without minutes or officers. By the time Al retired in 1978, however, this organization had helped establish Rockville FISH (a voluntary emergency service program), a chapter of the Grey Panthers, a community center in Lincoln Park and three affordable housing programs in Lincoln Park and two other neighborhoods.

The Reverend Mansfield "Kasey" Kaseman arrived in January 1979 with an agenda emphasizing political advocacy for impacting the systems that in turn determine the quality of life for constituent groups. Rather than being issue-oriented like his predecessors, who focused on youth, substance abuse and race relations, Kasey was determined to develop a viable non-profit organization (IRS501c3) with a board consisting of representatives elected or appointed by the highest authority in member congregations. The overarching goal was to maximize the effectiveness of CMR by identifying a larger range of unmet human needs and matching them with the increased resources of participating congregations.

Dual Roles: Parish Pastor and Community Minister

Kasey's salary, like his predecessors, was entirely covered by Rockville United Church that called for him to invest 80 to 90 percent of his time in community ministries. Within two years, however, the church ran into other leadership and financial difficulty that threatened the demise of the CMR. The resolution to the difficulties was to have Kasey assume the dual roles of parish pastor and community minister, which he had done since his student days in Boston and subsequently in New Haven and Tallahassee. He thought the balance between parish and community ministries strengthened both institutions. It more aptly fulfilled the mandate of the Christian gospel, involved empowerment of lay ministries, encouraged spiritual formation (working on one's in-

ternal relationship with the divine over time), and necessitated sound administration that led to growth for both the parish and community ministries.

In Tallahassee, Florida, for example, he founded a new church on the principal of investing 50 percent of all income in social justice ministries. The commitment included spending half his time organizing the Florida Impact Program that brought 16 different faith communities together for advocacy within the State Capital. Their concerns included migrant workers, public education, health care, capital punishment and juvenile justice. Both the Impact Program and the United Church in Tallahassee grew largely in thanks to those people that Kasey calls "religious refugees": namely, mature people of faith who had almost given up waiting for a church that reflected the full mandate of the gospel that combines inspiring worship with relevant social ministries.

The key factors needed to sustain the dual roles over time include the following: (1) sound biblical and theological rationale for all forms of ministry, (2) open and clear communication between lay leaders and the clergy, (3) explicit delegation of responsibility and authority for lay leaders and staff, (4) annual planning conferences for boards and staff that establish goals and priorities democratically, (5) developing and sustaining a mission that is translated into a calendar and a realistic set of strategies for implementation, (6) setting aside days for Sabbath rest and renewal for both staff and lay leaders, (7) annual evaluations of staff and frequent evaluations of programs, (8) weekly staff meetings to maintain communications, (9) ongoing pastoral care offered by a team of volunteers that includes the pastor, (10) continuity of both lay and clergy leadership, and (11) fostering community credibility based upon the performance of volunteers and clergy. For Kasey, sustaining the two roles also involves periodic sabbaticals, conference attendance, and regular consultation sessions with a spiritual director.

Naturally there is creative tension surrounding the dual roles. It can seem to the parish that Kasey prefers community ministries and vice versa. The pace of his busy schedule sometimes makes people hesitant to seek an appointment. Pastoral emergencies always take precedence, which can leave the staff in community ministries hustling to cover unexpected responsibilities. The breadth and depth of support and experience among colleagues are critical to success, but his role is a challenge. The tightness in scheduling sometimes leads to tension. For example, one spring day Kasey was out in the community organizing a demonstration at a local housing subdivision. A housing developer had received public funds to renovate a housing project that required the builder to serve the public interest. At the time, there was neither access to their records nor to those of the residents. The request to come onto the property to interview residents was met with the threat of arrest. Negotiations had

failed and a confrontation was set to occur that included threats of arrest, all within hours of the annual parish planning conference that Kasey was expected to convene. Kasey was confident, based on conversations with the Police Chief, that arrests could be avoided at the last moment. Yet several parish elders and colleagues were upset that Kasey had put the planning conference in potential jeopardy by this confrontation.

The dual roles do generate problems. Spending time with CMR obviously takes time away from the parish. For this dual arrangement to work successfully, a supportive staff and lay leaders are needed to feel empowered to assume more responsibility and authority than is typical for most congregations. Consequently, the congregation of 250 members attracts persons who are committed to social justice and committed to investing above average time, talent and commitment. The members of Kasey's congregation are, for the most part, "religious refugees" and have chosen a worshipping community because it offers a more relevant form of social ministry led by its pastor.

Building on a Base of Community Support

In 1979 the budget of CMR was \$3,200, which only covered a very part time secretary and office supplies. The office was in a Victorian home, adjacent to and owned by Rockville United Methodist Church. The process of organizing a viable board included a financial commitment from every member congregation. By 2003, the annual budget exceeded \$1.6 million that included contributions from twenty congregations that ranged from \$200 to \$10,000 per year.

The coalition of congregations includes all the mainline denominations, the well-established African American congregations, all Roman Catholic congregations and the Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is. The degree of participation varies depending largely on the representatives sent by the member congregations. All congregations have representation, but some are more invested than others depending on the issues and programs. There is also some support from nonmember congregations such as the Seventh-Day Adventists (who are not allowed to join our type of organization) and Jewish congregations that have not joined the board but are board members at large.

Over a twenty-five year period, Kasey had increased the number of participating congregations from nine to twenty. Currently the board consists of 29 members representing 20 congregations and they meet bi-monthly. The Executive Committee consists of 9 members who are officers and chairpersons of various committees. It meets monthly with the Executive Director, Managing Director and Director of Development. The Board is primarily responsible for setting and monitoring policy as well as annual goals and current priorities.

The Executive Committee takes care of the routine administrative tasks. The members of the Board as well as the Executive Committee share responsibility for fundraising and strengthening ties with the congregations and greater community.

Building on this base of congregational support, the first advocacy initiative was to lobby the County government and Board of Education for replenishing funding and staff for substance abuse prevention. An emergency assistance program was implemented in response to the drastic cuts in human service programs by the Reagan administration. Kasey was successful in getting the Mayor and Council to promise, "no resident of Rockville would ever go without the basic human needs for food, shelter, and appropriate health care." This is a promise CMR has extracted from every candidate for the Mayor and Council since 1982. The emergency assistance program is administered by CMR in partnership with the Department of Human Services.

CMR worked together with Community Ministries of Montgomery County (that was organized five years following CMR and given space in the same facility) in documenting unmet human needs throughout Montgomery County. This led to organizing the Manna Food Center and Habitat for Humanity, which operate as independent organizations. Tension between the police and residents of Lincoln Park led Kasey and the Board to meet with the police and organize a ride-on program that grew to include disgruntled residents. Subsequent changes were made, beginning with a new Chief of Police, that have gained Rockville the reputation for developing a model community policing program.

By the mid 1980s the Board established advocacy for the homeless as its new priority and hired Adrienne Carr as a part time associate. After helping St. Martin's Roman Catholic Church establish what is known today as Stepping Stones Shelter and helping Catholic Charities to open the Dorothy Day Shelter, it was time for CMR to address the need for the first shelter for men in Montgomery County. Chase Partnership Shelter represented a significant breakthrough for CMR by moving beyond strict advocacy and into direct service provision.

CMR was also committed to empowering congregations to develop their own outreach programs by identifying effective lay leaders, gaining support from their pastors, and helping them match unmet needs with their particular gifts and interests. In several cases small clusters of motivated people working with CMR leadership were able to organize themselves, become incorporated, and obtain outside funds. "The key," according to Kasey, "is always to remain focused on the client and to care less about who gets the credit. Everyone wins under these conditions."

For example, there are three shelters and a daycare program for homeless women that have incorporated (with IRS501c3 certification) and are funded from a variety of sources within member congregations. CMR celebrates the fact that each congregation is unique in terms of personality, governance, theology, and resourcefulness in serving the greater community.

To further support these and all human service programs, CMR organized the Caregiver's Coalition. It consists of the directors of all private and public human service agencies providing food, health care, child care, elderly care, emergency assistance, immigrants, homeless, juveniles, and unwed mothers. It exists to facilitate first-name relationships, increase everyone's understanding of various programs, identify unmet and/or changing needs, coordinate client services, raise funds, and build coalitions for advocacy. Members of the coalition monitor and testify before the county council on issues of the budget and human services. After 20 years, the coalition includes 28 organizations and departments of county and city government continuing to meet about 6 times a year. In addition to its involvement in the Caregiver's Coalition, CMR also has a representative on the Maryland Interfaith Legislative Committee that recently helped to defeat the Governor's initiative on gambling and continues to monitor issues related to affordable housing and welfare reform.

At about the same time the Coalition was launched in the mid-1980s, the City Manager of Rockville asked Kasey to help the understaffed Commission on Seniors find a credible group of people to develop a senior center in a vacated public school. These individuals (working with a local Delegate to the Maryland General Assembly, Jennie Forehand) were able to gain control of the school property and turn a shoestring budget into a thriving multi-million dollar city-operated senior center with a fleet of buses.

Once the Senior Center was launched, Kasey and others realized that 75% of the people using that facility were residing in local senior housing projects. To reach the elderly living throughout Rockville's neighborhoods, Kasey organized and helped train laypersons to go door to door in teams of two to educate the elderly about the various programs being offered seniors. Within his congregation, he identified a 62-year-old woman who helped to document the needs and interests of the elderly that emerged from this outreach program. The needs assessment results were taken to the City of Rockville that had just hired its first director of Senior Services. The women in his congregation who coordinated this effort moved on to become the first CMR Director of Elderly Ministries Program that focused on those needs not being met by City programs. Twenty years later, CMR is hiring a part time assistant to care for homebound individuals and help administer a budget close to \$100,000. The program today provides home care that maintains services for those in independent living situations. It includes matching volunteers (who provide emo-

tional support, assist with medication management and offer telephone reassurance) with homebound individuals. Volunteers do repair and renovation and home care services are provided by contract. The annual median income of those served is \$8,700 a year. Without this assistance, the cost to the community would be far higher.

The budget cuts of the late 1980s and early 1990s meant that low-income affordable housing was becoming a bigger problem for the community. So CMR put together the first pilot project in Montgomery County entitled "Personal Living Quarters," which became a designation in the zoning law to allow up to 6 unrelated individuals to live together. At that time, Kasey learned that an old parsonage was about to be rented to a cleaning business. Subsequently, he met with the pastor and persuaded him to work with CMR to get similar rental income but from a different kind of business, namely a non-profit housing program. Kasey indicated that CMR would raise the money to renovate the facility, and the congregation could be proud of the creative use of this beautiful place. He demonstrated that the rent derived from Section 8 housing for low-income renters would produce as much income as the laundry business with far less traffic congestion. Subsequently CMR raised \$160,000 to renovate the facility, secure a change in the zoning ordinance to allow for the development of a new model of service for previously homeless men that is now known as Jefferson House.

In the early 1990s, the Latino community began to grow significantly, especially refugees and immigrants from Latin America flowing into the DC/metropolitan area that includes Montgomery County. With a significant group of Latino professionals working in Washington, DC and living in Montgomery County, the concerns of the Latino community had more visibility in Montgomery County. Even though a Latino had been appointed to the Human Rights Commission of Rockville, more grassroots support for Latino issues was needed. As a result, Kasey organized a meeting to develop a strategy that included getting a second Latino appointed to the Human Rights Commission, helped to get the obstructionist Chair of the Commission removed, and helped to organize the United Hispanics for Rockville by finding a meeting facility free of charge. He also identified some key people in the community who could be involved in supporting the organization. The first set of meetings focused on inviting Latinos to come to a series of meetings to talk about their needs and aspirations, and to plan the use of a small amount of funding that Kasey and others had secured for that organization.

At that time, a Latina staff member at CMR helped to identify the need for programs related to English as a Second Language (ESL) and helped put together the Latino Outreach program that today has some 200 adults and about 70-80 kids with a waiting list. The program involves volunteers and paid

teachers in a variety of services as well as citizenship classes and health seminars. Those who successfully complete the ESL program attend a special CMR graduation ceremony in which the city council president and the mayor present them with their certificates. This event also helps to raise the consciousness of business and political leaders, as well as for donors to the program.

By the mid 1990s, it became clear that more attention needed to be given to the rising recidivism rate among the men of Jefferson House. After the men left the shelter with a job, they tended not to make it on their own in the community and returned to drug abuse. So with more fundraising CMR was able to add a case manager to work with the residents through weekly house meetings to monitor their work behavior, addiction, and/or studies at Montgomery College. Success is defined as maintaining one of these individuals in a healthy and happy pursuit of their goals, helping them make a contribution to the community, and in some cases being reunited with family, getting married, and/or moving out on their own.

In the early 1990s, a group of women within the Coalition for the Homeless perceived CMR as having the credibility to help them get short-term funding to open a shelter for women. Today it operates as Sophia House with a budget of approximately \$300,000 that comes primarily from county and city funds as well as contributions from our congregations, local foundations, and individual donors. It provides breakfast and dinner for 365 days a year and has acquired a very broad base of community support.

From Developing Services to Promoting Advocacy

In addition to establishing new service programs, CMR was committed to advocating for a wide variety of human needs. In the mid 1990s, Kasey was able to convince the mayor of Rockville who was leaving office to appoint a Taskforce on Unmet Human Needs. Kasey declined to serve because of his reputation as an advocate for human services and recommended that the mayor appoint a cross-section of community members including conservative critics. It was assumed that the needs assessment would take nine months but it took eighteen. When the taskforce completed its work, there was consensus for supporting the formation of a Human Services Commission.

The actual appointment of members was delayed as city officials wrestled with the political consequences of establishing a commission that would remind them of unmet human needs and therefore the increased commitment of the city to the provision of human services. Subsequently, Kasey met privately with the power brokers to clarify the issues and went on to encourage the Mayor and Council to act upon the Task Force's recommendations or face

public criticism. Within weeks, the Council approved the establishment of a Human Service Commission, but the new Commission members, being appointed by the Mayor and Council, were reluctant to address unpopular issues.

Fortunately, Kasey was able to recruit an intern at CMR to address the needs of young children in Rockville and he arranged for the Commission to sponsor a conference in conjunction with the local association of day care providers. To prepare for the conference, the intern gathered data on child health services, after-school programs, and day care. The Mayor and Council members attended along with the media and approximately eighty community leaders. The conference was a success and helped the Commission gain perspective, courage and confidence. Since that experience, the Commission has been far more willing and prepared to monitor and advocate on behalf of the unmet human needs of the city. They now regularly survey community needs and, along with the Caregivers Coalition, produced a series of videos (funded by the city) that address family services, emergency assistance, shelter programs, and senior services. These videos bring these programs right into people's homes when they appear as public service announcements on local cable TV.

Kasey also continues to quietly monitor the work of elected officials in Rockville. Occasionally this means getting others to testify on pending legislation and responding to issues of immediate importance. During a citizen forum, for example, a man addressing the adverse impact of the war in Iraq demanded that the city support the families of reservists who had been called up. His claim that nothing was being done was met with silence until Kasey reported to the Mayor, the Council, and the viewing public that this concern had been anticipated and CMR was working in partnership with the Department of Human Services in caring for affected families.

At other times, unfortunately, there is a need to speak uncomfortable truth to those in power. For example, Kasey and CMR are currently dealing with a new and relatively uninformed Mayor and Council that attempted to pass an amendment to a city ordinance that would adversely impact religious institutions. After speaking privately with the Mayor, writing to the Mayor and Council and testifying unsuccessfully against the action, Kasey convened a meeting with clergy and city staff to clarify the issue. Within less than a week, the chambers of city hall were packed with the largest demonstration of citizen opposition that anyone could remember. The amendment was tabled and elected officials agreed to meet with clergy and lay leaders within their respective offices to learn more about the role of religion in community life.

CMR can claim a victory in this case, but public confrontations cost political capital that could be better spent on other issues. CMR typically wins far more through private persuasion. In fact, the greatest gains in monitoring city

hall come from the relationships that are formed and nurtured with city staff, engineers, attorneys, contractors, business leaders, and citizen activists. Kasey has become an informal chaplain to many without religious affiliation who call on him during times of loss and celebration, which includes weddings. As Kasey noted,

I can't put a high enough value on these kinds of relationships. No matter what your title is, you're not going to get access to the vital information you need without paying attention to the importance of people getting to know you, liking you, and trusting you.

Kasey's other important relationship-building activities include coordinating the monthly Ministerial Alliance meetings, serving on a committee of the Chamber of Commerce, speaking regularly at the meetings of the Rotary and Kiwanis service organizations, and consulting with the Rockville historical preservation organization.

The Changing Context of Community Ministries of Rockville

The great majority of people moving into Montgomery County in the last several years have been ethnic and racial minorities. Montgomery County has the largest population of Latinos in the state of Maryland. In the city of Rockville, between 1990 and 2000, the Latino population had already grown to 8.2% by 1990, and ten years later it was 11.7%, and today in 2003 it is closer to 13%. The Asian-American population in 1990 was 9.7% and ten years later it was 14.8% and in 2003 it is closer to 17%. Rockville is the third or fourth largest city in Maryland and has a current population of approximately 50,000. Montgomery County is nearly 2,000,000. Today, one-third of the CMR staff is Latino, one-third is African American, and one-third is Caucasian.

In addition to the ongoing CMR advocacy program that continues to serve as the centerpiece of the organization's mission, CMR's largest service program involves housing (approximately 40% of a \$1.6 million budget). It includes the Chase Partnership House for men recovering from substance abuse along with transitional and permanent living for them in Jefferson House and Anchor House. Sophia House is for women being treated for domestic violence and/or substance abuse and Saris House is for women making the transition to self-sufficiency.

The Latino Outreach Program comprises about 15% of the CMR budget and involves about 200 adults and 70 children in English as a Second Language program, tutoring for children, and courses in naturalization, healthcare occupations, and smoking/drug prevention.

The third major CMR program today involves the elderly (approximately 10% of the budget). The primary goal is to maintain low-income individuals with an annual median income of \$8,700 in their independent living situations. In addition to providing home help services (personal care, bathing, cleaning, or arranging for food), services include matching them with a friend who checks in on a weekly basis. Block grant funds are secured to buy supplies and volunteers from civic associations provide the person power. In addition, a volunteer architect goes into homes to see what needs to be done (widen a door for a wheelchair, build a ramp to enter the house, or redesign a kitchen or bathroom), a service that saves everybody a lot of money.

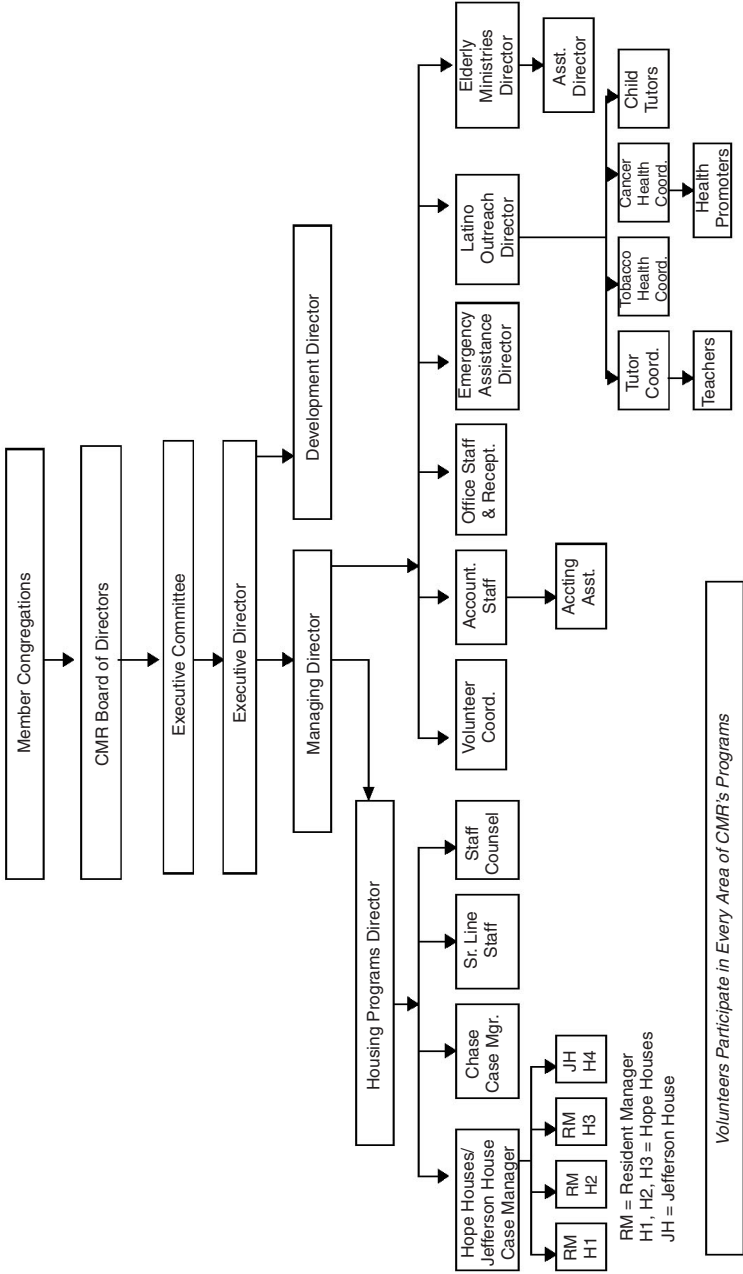
The fourth program initiative is the Rockville Emergency Assistance Program (approximately 10% of the budget) that is designed to guarantee that no resident of Rockville would go without shelter, food and appropriate health-care. For the last number of years CMR has been spending \$70-80,000 helping people by covering utility bills, paying for prescriptions, baby formula, and generally making it possible for people to make ends meet. Since this is done in partnership with the city, each case must be documented along with a plan for self-sufficiency.

The fifth major program of CMR is volunteer service coordination. In 2002, over 6,000 volunteer hours were documented and included consultants for planning conferences, telephone reassurance for the frail elderly, housing renovations, teaching English as a second language and training the homeless for job interviews. The total of in-kind service is 22% of the annual budget of \$1.6 million or the equivalent of \$350,000. The organizational structure to support all the programs is reflected in Figure 1.

The Board of CMR continues to represent a work-in-progress and securing the involvement of more churches, synagogues, and mosques is the agenda. Two examples illustrate the challenge. One is a Southern Baptist congregation and the other a Jewish congregation. It took three years of conversation for a southern Baptist pastor and subsequently his church leaders to join CMR due, in part, to the involvement of Unitarians on the board of directors. Fortunately the wise pastor used the parable of the Good Samaritan to suggest Jesus might consider Unitarians to also be good neighbors. Upon reflection, they learned an important lesson about being an inter-faith organization, which generally includes some creative tension.

The efforts to involve a Jewish congregation have proven to be more challenging. Kasey recently participated in an in-depth discussion with a well-respected rabbi who complained about the lack of support from Christians for Israel in contrast to their visible pro-Palestinian positions. Kasey listened, sympathized, and noted the free speech rights of congregations to take different positions on international issues. In the context of a tearful departure, the

FIGURE 1. Community Ministries of Rockville—Organization Chart



rabbi thanked him for being respectful and for the opportunity to be candid with one another. Both appreciated the sadness of that moment and the contentious times in which they were living. Kasey reflected on this exchange in the following way:

The sharing of strong, passionately-held differences can be upsetting to both parties. However, if this tension is apparent among those in community leadership positions, imagine the implications for members of our congregations. The challenge is to maintain one’s appreciation of the complexity and the tensions that surround the issues of our times. That’s why it’s so important to be grounded in the sanctity of divine justice and religious beliefs. Then you can feel legitimate sadness, frustration, and even anger without losing valued relationships with brothers and sisters of different faiths and experiences. Today it is especially important to nurture relationships across the lines of political ideology, religious dogma, and personal preference. If religious leaders cannot do it—what hope is there for the world?

The synagogue is not on the Board of CMR, despite Kasey’s continuing efforts. Like his work with other clergy who resist involvement in CMR, Kasey continues to seek out members of all congregations who contribute time, talent and resources. The current Board, for example, has several Jewish members in “at-large” positions who are members of various congregations but do not officially represent them.

TOWARD AN EVOLVING DEFINITION OF SOCIAL MINISTRY

Kasey provides a unique perspective on the meaning of social ministry. It is the natural embodiment of a life of faith. As a radical monotheist, he believes that there is one creative source, one creator or sustainer of life and that the world “hangs on an ethical hinge.” To worship and otherwise be connected with the loving and caring force of the creator leads naturally to seeing that one’s own welfare is essentially connected to the welfare of the greater community. Community ministries, then, are a natural way of demonstrating responsible citizenship. Kasey explained the theology that underlies community ministries with reference to the following biblical story:

The rationale for selecting the burning bush as the logo of CMR helps to remind us that it is God that calls us to relieve the suffering of our brothers and sisters. God is present, sympathetic and compassionate, and seeks our active assistance. It is also significant to note the bush burns without being consumed. For us to serve without burning out, we need to

be spiritually renewed. That is where the balance emerges between congregation and community, worship and caring for others. In Micah the question is raised, 'What does the Lord require of you?' And the answer is to 'love mercy, do justice and walk humbly with God.' In Christian scripture, Jesus tells the story of the Last Judgment in which one's eternal salvation is determined not by religious observance but rather by social service. The acid test comes in how one actually responds to the hungry, the naked, the sick, the prisoner, and the outcast.

It is unclear, however, why there are so few voices speaking out on behalf of society's victims, and why in a time of mounting human suffering budgets are being cut and staff that respond to such need are being laid off. Kasey speculates there are many reasons including fear, compassion fatigue and religious leaders colluding with the values of the dominant culture. From his experience, church and state have become so intertwined that when a religious leader criticizes the state it is considered un-American if not heretical. As he notes, "We seem to have forgotten that our founders established the separation between church and state out of respect for moral criticism. In the interests of the state, it was generally understood that religious people needed to be free to call the state back into accord with divine purposes."

The Implementation of Social Ministry

The implementation of social ministry involves staff and volunteers. For example, how is a staff meeting or supervisory conference in a faith-based organization different from one in non-sectarian organization? Here is how Kasey responds:

It is impossible to explain who we are and why we do what we do apart from a faith that is grounded in love. While we are committed to social justice, we come from different faith communities that carry a particular body of doctrine and vision of the Divine. What holds us together and renews us is the love that we are privileged to share. If our primary concern were to reach consensus on divine truth, we would waste precious time and utterly fail. Fortunately, our primary concern is responding in love to the needs set before us. As a result, we are free to borrow from a wide array of experience, traditions, rituals, scriptures, and prayers.

Spiritual leadership for the opening and closing of staff and board meetings is done on a rotating basis. Typically there is time for questions and discussion following a guided meditation, reading, or prayer. Frequently interest is expressed in the source of the material used and the experience of the leader. Never has there been an argument or criticism. We expect to live with some

creative tension as we borrow from different traditions and seek to honor the identity and integrity of these traditions that include Bahai, Christian, Islam, and Judaism.

Days for Sabbath rest and renewal are also organized by leaders on a rotating basis and take into account the traditions of all faiths present. In focusing on our common need for renewal and borrowing from several traditions, the experience proves to be far richer than sticking with a particular tradition.

Our interfaith culture is discussed in all job interviews, dealt with openly in staff meetings, and serves us well in fostering teamwork. It has yet to become a point of controversy within the staff or board. However, several clergy in the community have expressed serious reservations about supporting the interfaith mission of CMR and do not attend our twice-a-year interfaith services for the entire community. This simply underscores the fact that our work is a work-in-progress.

REFLECTIONS ON A WORK IN PROGRESS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Kasey’s leadership style is collegial rather than authoritarian and the success of CMR is directly related to the formation and maintenance of an effective team. He meets weekly with the Managing Director, who supervises all program directors, the Director of Development and the Staff Secretary. The senior staff and program directors meet monthly for updates, coordination and strengthening the bond that sustains us. They meet at least twice a year for spiritual rest and renewal and the staff meets at least once a year with the board for setting goals and priorities. Kasey maintains an overview of hiring but is personally involved in the interviews with only a few key positions.

Kasey is working on a sustainability and continuity plan with a consultant along with a major fundraising study with two other consultants. While there is concern within the business community that CMR is overly identified with Kasey’s leadership, within the religious community other staff members are more prominent. With respect to Kasey’s successor, there is a recurring question about the need for an ordained member of the clergy. While Kasey does not think those qualifications are necessary, he admits that it does make a difference in terms of community visibility and credibility.

Successes are difficult to identify when so much of Rockville Community Ministry (CMR) is a work-in-progress. After 37 years, however, several examples emerge as they relate to building a faith-based human service organization:

1. CMR has had a significant impact on thousands of lives that will continue well into the future through helping to create community institutions, such as the Human Rights Commission, the Senior Commission, and the Human Services Commission.
2. Service on citizen advisory committees has led to changing the job descriptions and selection process of city managers and police chiefs and officers consistent with the social justice values of CMR.
3. CMR has come to enjoy remarkable solidarity within the staff and between the staff and board who share a common sense of mission and appreciation one for another.
4. Clergy have come to accept CMR by encouraging their congregants to support the values and mission of CMR.
5. Credibility based on sound administration of programs and community building has resulted in effective partnerships with business, political, and civic leaders.

In addition to the organizational successes, there are some important lessons that have been learned along the way for those who choose to develop and maintain faith-based human service organizations. They include the following lessons as they relate to social ministry, teamwork, and institution building:

The Nature of the Social Ministry

Lesson #1—Stick with the calling: If staff and volunteers are called to serve in a social ministry, they need to trust their instincts and moral compass. Since there are always more reasons to retreat than advance, they need to stick with the call by identifying with the poor and vulnerable and believing in divine justice and love.

Lesson #2—Incorporate spiritual renewal: In order to serve in community ministries without burning out, it is essential to be spiritually renewed. When staff meetings are opened with personal sharing, prayer, and/or guided meditation and concluded with a fellowship circle, they reaffirm a special connection between staff. Staff members need several days off per year for spiritual rest and renewal. Our ongoing communications include clear statements regarding the importance of a maturing faith.

Lesson #3—Spanning inter-faith boundaries: It is essential to pursue an interfaith mission despite the boundaries that divide and sometimes hurt. The motivation for bridging boundaries can come with a divine call to do God's work. Words are inadequate to describe the genuine spirit that can guide and inspire all those who serve. The motivation to span boundaries is based on a belief that God is accomplishing something good within and through volunteers and staff.

The Nature of Teamwork

Lesson #4–Support for senior staff: In the case of CMR, it is essential for Kasey’s spiritual well-being to continue with his congregational involvement as pastor of Rockville United Church that operates on a first name basis and keeps him humble and human. He credits the long-term success of CMR and his survival to the love and support of his congregation whose sabbatical program over the past 25 years has provide him with 16 months of traveling, studying, and enjoying family and friends.

Lesson #5–Trusting lay leadership: The ultimate success of CMR can be credited to the board of lay leaders who share a common sense of mission, value diversity, and love to work together. The highly collegial model makes staff feel welcome at board meetings and expected at planning conferences. Entrusting an executive committee with most administrative details allows the board to be more visionary and concerned with unmet needs, new opportunities, and celebrations.

The Nature of Institution Building

Lesson #6–Accountability: The credibility of CMR in advocacy and program delivery is built upon a model of accountability that includes annual staff evaluations and a rotating series of program evaluations. No annual report is published without the report of a certified auditor.

Lesson #7–Diverse board of directors: The effectiveness of community ministries is directly related to the involvement of a diverse board of directors that reflects the ethnic, racial, religious, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic structure of the greater community.

Lesson #8–Building and maintaining networks of support: The executive director needs to be preoccupied with fund-raising and developing and maintaining relationships within all sectors of the greater community.

Lesson #9–Staff continuity: Clearly the success of CMR is related to the twenty-five year longevity of the executive director and the eight-year tenure (on average) of the program directors. It takes time to acquire the trust and understanding of social systems, clients, and community leaders.

Lesson #10–Client focus: It is essential to remember that social ministries exist to serve clients. In remaining focused on their needs and aspirations the staff become informed and inspired to do their best.

The challenges that lie ahead include the following: (a) as Kasey approaches retirement, the congregation's salary for the pastor is insufficient to meet the market expectations of his successor and therefore a financial burden is pending that requires major reevaluation, restructuring, and fundraising, (b) while the CMR executive director who is a pastor cannot spend much time in member congregations on Sunday mornings, the positive consequences are that other staff and board members, known and involved in the life of the member congregations, become more actively involved, (c) the dual roles of director and pastor assumes a level of commitment and a sense of "calling" that is more typical of the older generation of clergy (today there is far less emphasis on ecumenical and interfaith work than years ago and clergy entering the ministry seek to secure a better life for themselves and their families, do not wish to be involved in controversial issues, focus their interests on building up their particular institution, and do not see either themselves or the mission of their congregation as an agent of reconciliation, change, and compassion within the greater community), and (d) securing adequate funding for needed community services is increasingly challenging due to cutbacks in government funding and reductions in United Way support.

CONCLUSION

This case study captures the evolution of a faith-based organization in an era when these institutions are receiving increased attention from the federal government. It features the unusual characteristics of a truly collaborative arrangement among local congregations. It is distinctly different from the traditional program approach of congregations as well as from those traditional sectarian organizations (Catholic Social Services, Jewish Family, and Child Services) that have been serving American communities for decades. It remains to be seen if the dual commitment to service and advocacy that characterizes the Community Ministries of Rockville will become the prototype for comprehensive faith-based human service organizations in the future.

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