

Sustaining Vital Connections between Nonprofits and Their Faith Communities:



Curriculum Module General Information

Background and Purpose

This curriculum aims to give faith community leaders a theoretical framework and practical guidance for relating effectively to nonprofits as a way of furthering the work of the church in the world. It draws on the Faith and Organizations Project (www.faithandorganizations.umd.edu), which looked carefully at the relationship between diverse faith communities (congregations, denominations, religious bodies and/or networks) and faith-based organizations.

Many religious traditions in the U.S. have a legacy of compassion and justice with deep spiritual roots. The role of faith communities in providing social services, healthcare, education, and community development has been well-documented. Much of this work is done through independent nonprofits. A growing body of practical materials on developing in-house congregational ministries and faith based organizations (FBOs) is now available. However, little attention has been given to how faith communities can effectively maintain these organizational connections as they offer guidance, support, and spiritually-grounded motivations for the work of faith-based nonprofits.

The Faith and Organizations Project was launched to deepen our understanding of the important relationship between communities of faith and the nonprofits that they initiate and sustain. Based on case studies from 81 nonprofits and faith groups, this project has learned about the diverse ways that faith communities and their nonprofits develop constructive relationships. These connections help FBOs to provide quality services while faithfully reflecting the faith community's goals, values, and character. The project compared strategies for maintaining ties across six religious traditions (Mainline Protestant, Evangelical, African American churches, Catholic, Quaker, and Jewish).

The research highlights that each faith tradition has developed its own strategies for organizing ministries of justice, charity and community development. Solutions crafted for one faith tradition will not always work for others. It is therefore important that religious leaders understand both the similarities across religious traditions and the unique characteristics specific to their own faith community. Faith leaders should also be equipped to explore the role of theology and religious culture in shaping these patterns of service. By exposing students to multiple theological models and practical strategies for service, the material encourages students to reflect critically on their own faith tradition.

This curriculum module presents key learnings from the Faith and Organizations Project and related research, highlighting the relevance of this material for faith community leaders. The supplemental reading material, discussion questions and optional assignments are designed to stretch students' awareness of the body of knowledge in this field and to help them apply this information to their specific ministry context. The overall goal is to prepare religious leaders to be faithful, effective stewards of their faith community's connections with the nonprofits that will form an important and inevitable part of the landscape of their ministry.

Intended Use

This curriculum module is designed for students in seminaries, Bible colleges, and ministry certification and leadership training programs. It may be a stand-alone seminar or integrated into another course. Examples of courses where this module could supplement other curriculum include:

- The mission and ministry of the church
- Christian perspectives on social work, community development and justice advocacy
- Leadership for Christian ministry
- Social ethics
- Urban ministry
- Management of Christian organizations
- Ecumenical / interfaith ministry or comparative theology
- Contemporary issues in Christian service

Intended Audience

The majority of U.S. churches collaborate with local nonprofits to serve the community. In fact, the average congregation provides some form of support to a total of 6 community outreach organizations (Nancy Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith*, 2005). Thus developing robust, faithful relationships with faith-based ministry partners is a relevant skill for anyone preparing for church leadership.

Students who might particularly benefit from this curriculum include those who:

- Are serving or plan to serve in churches whose connection with FBOs is an integral part of their mission;
- Have a background or planned future in organizational leadership;
- Plan to work in disadvantaged communities with a high concentration of nonprofits;
- Have an interest in a particular social concern, such as education, health or poverty;
- Minister in congregations where many members work for nonprofits; or
- Have an interest in or calling to ecumenical / interfaith ministry.

As the Faith and Organizations Project shows, in the Protestant tradition churches and nonprofits are often closely interrelated. Growing numbers of pastors are seeking training in social work and nonprofit management, and many seminary graduates end up serving in nonprofits. The material in this curriculum represents an area of proficiency that is under-covered, but increasingly vital for effective leadership in our contemporary ministry context.

Curriculum Module Contents

- Instructor's notes.
- Assigned reading with discussion questions, along with a list of supplemental sources relating to the community service work of churches and faith-based organizations.
- Power point on the findings of the study, with integrated questions for discussion.
- A set of more detailed notes to accompany the power point presentation.



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