

City Hall and Religion: When, Why and How to Lead

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1. 1. Introduction

There is nothing new about faith communities performing social welfare interventions in U.S. cities. These faith-based services may be due to the government's failures and neglects or, at other times, the result of government initiative. Over the last several years, however, efforts by mayors and governors, and attention by the President, to these relationships has been more explicit.

This paper examines the work of several large-city mayors considered to be national leaders in the creation of successful collaborations with faith communities. They include Mayors Manuel Diaz of Miami, Glenda Hood of Orlando, Patrick McCrory of Charlotte, Martin O'Malley of Baltimore, William Purcell of Nashville, Graham Richard of Fort Wayne, Indiana, R.T. Rybak of Minneapolis, and Anthony Williams of Washington, D.C. The goal of the paper is to provide useful information for public officials interested in exploring and developing similar relationships. In particular, the paper explores the types and purposes of mayoral/faith-based collaborations, and discusses some of the strategies used by mayors as well as some of the pitfalls they sometimes face.¹

2. Purposes of Mayoral Engagement with the Faith Community

Interaction between faith-based communities and city hall often occurs in an ad hoc way, as when a particularly interested or upset religious leader engages city hall around a specific issue or problem. Those frequent occurrences provide an important part of the civic infrastructure. This paper, however, focuses on efforts by mayors as leaders who initiate relationships with faith communities. The purposes of this engagement, as outlined by the mayors discussed here, can be grouped into five broad categories: enhancing communication, providing youth services, stretching public resources, strengthening community ties, and geographic renewal. The section concludes with a discussion of political aspects.

Enhancing Communication

When Mayor Diaz took office in November 2001, the City of Miami suffered not only significant drug and crime problems but also historically problematic relations between residents and the police. Diaz needed to introduce a new police chief to the community and also to gain the community's support in fighting crime. He also needed to deal with the problem of

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¹ To gather these insights, telephone or in-person interviews were conducted with five mayors: Diaz, Purcell, Richard, Rybak, and Williams. The paper also draws upon remarks by several mayors at the Kennedy School Executive Session on Faith Based and Community Approaches to Urban Revitalization. These mayors include Hood, McCrory, O'Malley, Purcell, and Rybak, as well as the former mayor of New Orleans, Marc Morial.

so called “cafeterias” which advertised themselves as restaurants but were actually drug and prostitution dens. Addressing these problems though community policing required open flows of information and an atmosphere of trust between the police and the community. Achieving this level of communication provided a crucial purpose for the faith/city intersection promoted by Diaz.

Mayor McCrory of Charlotte also faced tension, early in his tenure, between police and the community. In particular, a series of police shootings, with white officers and black victims, had created “a very tense community” as McCrory explained. To communicate with a distrustful constituency, the city used churches as intermediaries that helped create and maintain exchange of ideas and information. McCrory underscores the overarching importance of communication by noting, “Usually if there's a breakdown in the city, it's not in policy or money, it's a breakdown in communications.”

Faith communities also provide mayors with important channels of information and feedback. Mayor Williams, for example, noted how faith-based groups in Washington D.C. “offer us a sounding board for thinking and analysis that...you sometimes don't get from government.” Mayor Diaz's Chief of Staff, Francois Illas, explained that faith leaders help city hall understand “what are the things that hinder them as they try to go and deal in this community as it relates to interacting with government. They're very honest about it. And they don't hold back. It helps us figure out what's really working in government.”

Providing Youth Services

Too often in low income neighborhoods, young adults lack the same breadth of positive family, neighborhood and peer influences found in more affluent neighborhoods. Creating healthy, supportive communities for all young people is an overwhelming challenge for city government by itself. Government can, however, increase its reach by supporting, and working with, nonprofits and faith-based organizations that provide youth services.

Mayor Williams provided several examples from Washington, D.C.:

A big effort where [faith-based groups] can be helpful certainly and where I'm engaging them most importantly is in my scholarship initiative...Another area where we've worked with the clergy—“East of the River Clergy” we call them here—is in reduction of youth homicide. Another key area is with...the Washington Interfaith Network. We've now developed \$30 million in after-school programs for kids on the basis of that model.

In Baltimore, Mayor O'Malley is working to stop teen violence by “recruiting mentors from our churches [located]...right there in the neighborhoods where the kids are being recruited by...the drug organization.” O'Malley says of the mentoring: “...if we do this with 400 or 500 kids, those kids are going to be far more likely to survive their teenage years than they would without that positive adult influence.”

Partnerships around mentoring are also taking place in Charlotte. Mayor McCrory explained how he received an important plea from a school superintendent: “‘I have thousands of [at risk] kids in my school,’ the superintendent said, ‘and if they don’t get role models, we’re going to lose them [as dropouts].” McCrory soon realized, however, that “we don’t need another mentoring program. We’ve got...at least 70 [nonprofit or faith-based] programs out there...the problem was finding mentors...” The Mayor helped form an alliance—including faith-based mentoring programs—to pool resources for marketing. The city also supports these mentoring programs through its new Mentoring Training Institute which provides training as well as security background checks for prospective mentors.

Finally, then Mayor Hood of Orlando described how an increasing number of programs originally run solely by the Community and Youth Services Department in her city are now being run in conjunction with faith organizations. In fact, these programs are often housed in facilities provided by these organizations. This collaboration is valuable, she explained, “because we know that we can’t possibly have enough neighborhood centers across the community to be able to serve all those needs.”

Stretching Public Resources

Mayors appear to be consummate pragmatists, looking for any reasonable and ethical way to stretch limited resources. Thus, city hall frequently looks to the faith community as co-producers of public goods. In Miami, for example, city officials determined that many residents who were eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) were not receiving it. Mayor Diaz solicited the help of churches to increase awareness among their parishioners about these under-utilized tax credits. As a result, EITC payments to city residents rose by \$42 million, an increase that “could be considered one of the largest investments in our city in a one-year period,” according to Diaz’s chief of staff.

When Mayor Purcell of Nashville came to office in 1999, he faced an affordable housing shortage of 40,000 units. As a result of the shortage, “everybody from folks who were newly in the workforce to my own firefighters and police officers were leaving the City of Nashville.” Purcell established an Office of Affordable Housing, but he realized that available city and federal funds could not bridge the housing gap. To encourage assistance from nonprofit and faith-based organizations, he established “requests for proposals” for home rehabilitation: The city would provide up to \$3,000 per home in building materials if the organization would provide the labor. As Purcell explains, some congregants from Brentwood Baptist Church “had experience in this area [of home rehabilitation] and found their calling to do this work, set up their own 501(c)3...and applied for the grant money...[They] recruited churches across the whole city. They have about 150 churches now involved providing this year 1,700 volunteers. In the first year, they rehabbed about 91 homes.” Today, five organizations are helping to rehabilitate houses, including one faith-based group connected to the Episcopal Diocese. A total of 5,575 homes have been rehabbed through the program.

Mayor Rybak was elected mayor of Minneapolis in 2002. Early in his term he began to consider the role of the faith community in helping the civic city meet its obligations to the needy. In his view, “...the challenge is to channel the good intentions of faith-based

organizations...and focus them on some very specific outcomes. How do you connect the missionary zeal to zoning issues, for example?...How do you move from advocacy to results?" Other challenges Rybak identified were "finding ways of tapping into volunteer networks; framing a vision of affordable housing and neighborhoods that engages many different kinds of people...; identifying a model program that can be shared with different housing-oriented nonprofits to avoid 'reinventing of the wheel' administratively and technically...; [and] taking successful community based initiatives to scale."

The co-production of services, of course, often involves more than simply hammers and nails. As Mayor Purcell explains, "There is a recruitment of resources in construction [by faith-based groups], but there is also an engagement or involvement in the recruitment of people to live in the house, the support of the family in the neighborhood during the critical early days of ownership, occupancy, and citizenship."

Strengthening Community Ties

Mayors sometimes engage the faith community to produce more of, or improve, a specific service or good such as housing. At other times, they reached out to this community to improve and strengthen broader community ties within their cities. Using the terminology of social scientists, they work to enhance "social capital".²

Mayor Diaz has tried to build closer ties, or social capital, among faith leaders through his periodic pastoral roundtables. As he explained, "One of the long-term benefits that I hope comes from this [the roundtables], aside from the actual delivery of services, is the connection between the various denominations and races, to bring people together and let them begin to talk."

Diaz also noted how his work with faith leaders, and the resulting personal relationships that developed, helped create productive working relationships, even when there were important differences of opinion: "Last year we had a human rights ordinance on the ballot about sexual orientation. Several Hispanic Episcopalian groups and Presbyterians [were on one side of the issue and]...I was on the opposite side of it. But, you know, we got past it. I think that trust is a very important thing for that reason, because this was not just some politician to them taking a stand on an issue. This was a guy that was with them all the time who happens to differ on this issue... [We said:] 'Ok, we'll fight over this one but then go back to work.'"

Mayors also engage faith groups to help strengthen broader community ties. For example, Mayor Richard of Fort Wayne notes:

We decided to have a neighborhood international festival, since one apartment complex, and nearby, we had well over 20 different cultures, languages, ethnicities....We had 5,000 people attend the festival. Then, after September 11th, there was the need for understanding and tolerance as people began to

² Social capital has been defined as the "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit." See Robert D. Putnam "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital" *Journal of Democracy*. January 1995.

become more fearful...we turned to, again, the faith community and found a tremendous opportunity for understanding, sharing communication, clarification.

Geographical Renewal

Collaboration between mayors and faith groups often focuses on the physical improvement of blighted or poor neighborhoods, or providing other forms of help to residents in those neighborhoods. In some cases, it was the mayor who encouraged a faith-based organization or coalition to focus geographically. In other instances, a faith group already has this type of geographic focus, but reaches out to the mayor for support or guidance.

In Minneapolis, Mayor Rybak encouraged a collaboration of Lutheran-based organizations called “Faith in the City” to focus on a specific neighborhood and, in fact, to begin by focusing on a particular school within that neighborhood. As he explained: “Their original agenda was well intentioned but very broad...As I looked on a map, I recognized that the parts of town where they all grew up connects through Franklin Avenue, one of the areas with the highest crime, greatest health disparities, and the worst education and housing problems. And I said, ‘How about showing...[the impact of Faith in the City] on one street.’ But the solutions became so large that we then focused even more...[on] a community school.”

In Indianapolis I viewed the city’s effort as one to create a “civic switchboard.” Rybak described his role in similar terms meaning that he helps connect resources together to benefit communities. Describing this approach with Faith in the City, he remarked: “Fairview Hospital will not be able to solve the health disparities of the entire community, but they can work with the parents of children in the community school, often immigrants, to create tangible health improvements. We can’t solve all the issues of recreation, but the baseball team from Augsburg College can come over and do volunteer work in the park and also do some student teaching.”

Political reasons

None of the mayors cited political reasons as one of their motivating factors for collaborating with the faith community. Yet politics is surely connected to some of this type of work, even if not a primary factor.

One mayor, for example, noted that “some politicians are very, very active politically in using the church or the faith community. It’s not the church and state [issues that concern me], it’s the politics.” He also noted: “We have some churches that are becoming very active politically from the pulpit on both the right and the left. And therefore, the issue of if a grant is rejected or approved, will that start influencing the political races of the city council members, especially in a district race?”

Another mayor explained that, not surprisingly, funding decisions can raise political questions:

“When you are in an elected position, particularly as mayor, you are dealing with interest groups, their agendas and the exchange of ‘if I give them money, do they support me? If I don’t give them money, will they blast me?’ I mean, it’s an issue you deal with whether

you're dealing the churches, whether you're dealing with your chamber, whether you're dealing with unions, whether you're dealing with universities...If your values as an elected official are intact [you will say]... 'I'm going to support what I'm going to support, because I have made a fundamental judgment that it's in the best interest of the city.'”

Finally, Mayor Rybak spoke about another issue related to politics: The concern among some religious congregants about the possible political motivations of faith-based partnerships. Those concerns, he noted, may have caused parishioners to avoid getting involved in these types of partnerships:

“I’m trying to go to [and visit] a number of congregations across ideological lines but especially some of these that I think have been sitting on the sidelines—extremely well-intentioned, progressive congregations who are very worried about church-state issues, playing into what they see as an agenda to do a back-door attempt to get rid of core social services in the government.”

3. Types of Mayoral Leadership

Mayors support, encourage, and shape collaborative efforts with faith-based groups in several ways. These included providing (or finding) funding; providing rhetoric or idea articulation; using their authority; tapping their ability to convene individuals or groups; and promoting cumulative small success. Often mayors employ several of these categories of leadership at the same time.

Providing, or Helping to Secure, Money

A direct way to support partnerships is through funding. As Mayor Diaz described, engaging the faith community is about “bringing the right folks together and giving resources where needed.” These resources can take many forms. Some mayors provide community groups with direct support from city funds or through community development block grants, while others help these groups apply for federal, foundation, or state grants. The City of Miami, for example, provides a range of assistance to organizations seeking funding. Mayor Diaz explained:

“If they need a 501c3 we’ll help them set one up. We’ll bring in lawyers and accountants and help them through that process. We’ve got three different city departments [that provide support]: my office, the economic development office, and our grants director. We help them write the grants...and for those who successfully secure grants, we continue working with them to ensure that grants are administered properly and that they don’t get into operational or bookkeeping problems.”

In Orlando, Mayor Hood uses a matching grant program. “The purpose of our faith-based and community grants program,” she explained, “is to instill the value of community service in young people through character development and building civic

responsibility. In 2001 we had 530 youths participate, including in mentoring programs as well as programs associated with character development and team building.”

Using Authority

Mayors also use their authority and position to catalyze collaboration with the faith-based community. Some of this is personal authority that derives from leadership by example. Mayor McCrory used his participation as a big brother to encourage others. Mayor Hood underscores this when she adds that her: “own personal involvement as mayor and my use of the bully pulpit makes sure that we include our faith organizations.”

However the public authorities also engage faith communities through more explicit use of authority. Indianapolis encouraged court sanctioned referral programs where the faith community provides options for placement, in lieu of more serious sanctions. Juvenile Court Judge James Payne, with city hall, reached out to faith-based groups in order to secure more numerous and constructive alternative placements to jail for certain first offenders. Judge Payne placed young offenders in faith settings, subject to parental consent and pursuant to court ordered conditions. Thus official authority ratified and enforced the relationship. Authority can be “loaned” in a variety of ways. For instance, in many cities the process of certifying a community development corporation carries with it advantages in terms of neighborhood authority and funding, and the use of city hall authority to recognize a faith based CDC is of substantial importance.

Convening

In some cases, faith-based groups approach a mayor for support or input. In other cases, mayors take the initiative to call faith leaders together to hear mutual concerns, to address specific problems, or to discuss potential common areas for future collaboration. For example, Mayor Diaz began his faith-based initiative by “putting together a list. What churches do we have? What synagogues do we have? And we created a database. I didn’t want to make that decision of who to invite and who not to. I wanted it to evolve...I think that’s hard to [be selective about whom to invite] anyway. Miami is a young city with a lot of immigrants and a lot of new clergy...So just because a Haitian priest or pastor hasn’t been in town for more than five years, how can I leave him out?”

Sounding a similar theme, Mayor Williams of Washington D.C. explained “When you’re mayor you have to be comfortable with processes where there are casts of thousands. On the one hand you’re trying to get things done as quickly as possible, and on the other hand you’re trying to involve as many people as possible. They sound mutually exclusive but you have to do it.”

Sometimes city hall will pick the best-known or loudest local players. Other times it might do a comprehensive survey of faith assets utilizing local databases and software. Indianapolis began its effort with a comprehensive mapping in partnership with Indiana University of faith based organizations in the cities most hard hit neighborhoods. Mayor Purcell on the other hand notes: “When we started there wasn’t a list. You certainly couldn’t say there

was a list of FBOs that had ongoing programs. There absolutely was no list about who was successful in doing it or who was capable of doing it. For us the answer was first, a combination of who came to us combined with, in essence, the informed outreach within the neighborhood to likely suspects.”

Convening can also occur for specific purposes. Mayor Richard explained how a particular neighborhood in Fort Wayne wanted a new library and needed new locations for its after-school program (run by the Urban League) and a Head Start Program. Richard invited the relevant players to his conference room, including representatives from the prominent Catholic and Lutheran churches in the neighborhood. “By using the convening authority,” he explained, “and by tapping the commitment of the Catholics and Lutherans [who jointly owned a plot of land]...we created a new initiative which is a campus with a library, an after school program, a Head Start Program, and the Urban League Headquarters.”

Richard reflected on the important role of convening: “Convening authority is one of the most important assets that a mayor has in a community—just getting people to come in a room who have never met each other or talked to each other because they're in their silos of service...And all of a sudden they start saying, ‘Well, I didn't know you were doing that...what if we started to look together.’”

Encouraging “Small Wins”

Several mayors described their efforts to encourage faith-based initiatives to focus on—and produce—tangible, near-term results. In other words, these mayors emphasized the importance of “small wins,” meaning modest early achievements rather than loftier but potentially unrealistic goals.³

Interestingly, the mayors cited different reasons for having this focus. For example, Mayor Diaz discussed the link between creating small wins and developing trust with faith leaders. In particular, many faith leaders were initially wary that the Mayors’ pastoral roundtable would simply be a “photo-op.” The prevailing attitude, Diaz explained, was “Here’s another guy coming by and saying that he’s going to do wonderful things for the community, and sure, we’ve heard that before.” To build trust and confidence with these leaders, Diaz set up on-going, regular meetings with the roundtable, but he also emphasized small wins as a way to *show* the roundtable that he was committed to action. Specifically, he began by asking the roundtable: “What kinds of things are low-hanging fruit right now that we can get our hands around?” The result, he explained, was that “We began working on specific things where they would see that we were responsive.”

Mayor Rybak, on the other hand, emphasized small wins as a way to build and maintain the energy of participants in the “Faith in the City” initiative. Speaking to the group early soon after it was formed, his message was: “Great, everybody wants to help. Let’s think of ten tangible things that can happen right now.” Rybak continued: “I also focused them, at least in

³ The mayors did not use the term “small wins,” but their focus on near-term results fits this concept (popularized by psychologist Karl Weick) very well. See Weick, K.E. (1984). Small wins: Redefining the scale of social problems. *American Psychologist*, 39, 40-49.

the case of Faith in the City, on a specific geographic part of town. If you have a lot of people with energy to do things you can only sustain that so long unless there are tangible actions and tangible results....There needs to be, I think, a very tangible victory.”

A related reason for focusing on small wins, articulated by Mayor McCrory, was that this type of goal represented the only feasible type of change—or, at least, visible change. As he explained: “As mayor, I’ve found that you can’t win wars or create world peace or solve world hunger, but if you can do it a block at a time, or a neighborhood at a time, or an individual at a time. I feel those are much more measurable results.” Likewise, Mayor O’Malley in Baltimore noted how the faith community’s efforts represented “really decent, hardworking people that are taking responsibility for changing their piece of the world one kid at a time. That’s a very positive thing and we’re hoping to make it bigger.”

Finally, Marc Morial, former Mayor of New Orleans and now President of the Urban League, spoke about how a focus on tangible results could help create a more empowered, problem-solving outlook among the faith community:

“You have to break the dependency mindset in a lot of our communities that somebody else needs to fix the problem. And while they don’t have the expertise today, with training and money, they can have that expertise tomorrow or have it in the subsequent year....[For example,] there’s an organization in New Orleans ...which uses a community-based organizing model. One of their congregations focused on the abandoned housing problem near their church. I said, ‘I’m going to give you some money and management training. I want you to set up a CDC...and find the ten worst houses. We’re going to help you acquire them and you fix them up. You can either rent them or sell them to your congregants...’ We can sit here and fuss ad infinitum about who’s responsible. Why don’t we come together and get on the side of solving the problem?”

4. Strategic Issues

In speaking about their work with the faith community, several mayors discussed their approaches to dealing with issues such as agenda setting, determining who gets invited, promoting accountability, and dealing with divergences between secular and sectarian interests. Examples of these approaches, or strategies, are discussed here.

Who Sets the Agenda

In some cases, it is the mayor who asks, or challenges, the faith community to address a specific topic or problem, from housing to crime. In other cases, the process is reversed: The faith community solicits the mayor’s support or involvement in a certain area. Finally, in still other cases, mayors and faith leaders come together to discuss, or “brainstorm,” about common areas of interest and possible plans to work cooperatively together in those areas.

In Miami, Mayor Diaz purposely emphasized the latter model in his faith-based initiative, coming together with the faith community to *form* an agenda rather than presenting his own agenda. He did this, he said, to gain the trust of faith leaders that his priority was longer-term, collaborative work rather than short-term political gain. (As discussed above, a lack of trust by faith leaders toward politicians was an early challenge Diaz strived to overcome.) The “open agenda” format he used for the pastoral roundtables were meant to convey this priority. As Diaz explained:

When we started this process, the first part of it was to make it clear that, first of all, I didn't have a specific agenda, so this was not a political thing. I'm not bringing together the groups right now because there's a problem in town of that nature. I'm bringing the groups together because I think that the agenda, in terms of the quality of life and helping people in our city, is something that we all share and we should all come together and work on. So there's an easier buy-in to that kind of a program particularly on a long-term basis, not a one-shot deal.

Miami's open-agenda approach led to a variety of topics being nominated by the community as important areas on which to focus. These included financial literacy, housing, and small business organization. In a single session, for example, twelve different issues were identified. While this approach might seem to differ from the “small wins” emphasis discussed above, it can also be seen as a precursor to deciding on which “small wins” to focus. That is, in Miami at least, the process began as a brainstorming session but later moved to a focus on concrete next steps.

Another example of a broad approach to agenda setting comes from Washington DC. Mayor Williams enlists several thousand city residents to take part in citizen summits to *create* goals for the city. These goals act as motivators for city agencies to involve the faith community in helping the agencies, and therefore the city as a whole, achieve the goals. As Williams described:

I've had two citizen summits. We've had about four thousand people at each summit. They set major goals for the city which we translate into a performance plan for the city and for individual neighborhoods. We use it to organize agency services at a neighborhood level. It's all metric based. An example would be ...after-school programming. There is a goal for the Deputy Mayor for Children, Youth and Families; there's a goal for the Director of Parks and Recreation for these kinds of programs. At the same time, the faith community helps contribute to that goal. We haven't gotten to the point where we have goals and outcomes for the...faith community themselves.

This process differs from where the Mayor has a goal around which he or she convenes the faith community. Mayor McCrory asked the faith group to convene around mentoring; Mayor Purcell to help with a housing deficit; and Indianapolis concerning teen pregnancy.

Should there be an Advisory Council

Several mayors initiated a formal advisory counsel. Others convened meetings with a relatively small number of ministerial leaders. Mayor O'Malley, on the other hand, decided not to designate a formal group or counsel in order to avoid the reaction from those left out and the negative affect that might come from the appearance that those selected had a special position.

Designating a group of religious leaders might trigger potential power struggles or "turf issues," Mayor McCrory noted "I have found out that there is turf among the churches... There are power struggles between... ministers trying to see who has got the most power in the community. And I may be on the receiving end of one side of that power struggle, and that's where the word politics enters into the equation."

How to Enforce Accountability but allow Flexibility

When governments provide grants and other funds to faith-based groups, these groups must, by law, be prepared to account to for how they use that money. Mayor Morial argued that this requirement provides an important reason for faith organizations to form separate enterprises to conduct their government-funded activities. That way, he explained, the government can maintain accountability for use of public funds without having to examine church operations (which would be separate from the enterprise):

"If someone wants to give Catholic Charities a two million dollar anonymous gift, you would accept it. But there's a possibility that the church could get audited because there's a grant they've got over from the government, and the grant accounting rules say that they may have to disclose everything. So there is a benefit to the churches or to the religious organizations to having separate enterprises. If I were their lawyer or their tax lawyer...I'd say, 'Pastor, set it up separately, because you certainly don't want the scrutiny.'

Mayor Williams mentioned a different concern related to accountability: When faith-based organizations become accountable to government—that is, when they collaborate with government or simply receive public funds—this beneficial help to the public sector can also have a cost to the community. In particular, he said, it *could* reduce creativity with which faith-based organizations approach social problems:

You're trying to balance the need for some standardization with the need for creativity and decentralization. What I mean by that is: If we could get a lot of the nonprofits and the faith community really aligned with what we're doing on a couple key priorities, we could really maximize community impact. At the same time, we would tend to create a lot of duplication and redundancy ultimately and stultify and real freethinking about what the needs are out there. So you're always trying to make that balance.

None of the Mayors studied viewed the accountability and management issues as overwhelming obstacles, but rather as matters to be identified in advance, so that the appropriate

performance measures could be adopted, and the right contract or partnership manager assigned. In the alternative, faith based groups where possible can accept vouchers awarded to a client thus minimizing the accountability issues; or, easier yet a relationship with no exchange of public dollars.

Dealing with Divergences between Secular and Sectarian Interests

Based on their comments, most mayors have not experienced serious conflicts, nor had important divergent interests, with faith communities. Yet conflicts can occur. For example, faith leaders, acting on principle, may be unable to achieve compromise with city hall. According to Mayor Williams, in fact, the nature of faith communities' point of view often leads to disagreements about, for example, how much government should be doing to solve social problems. As the mayor explains:

The faith community is obviously—and I don't mean this facetiously—answering to a higher authority. You're not dealing in relative terms, you're dealing in absolute terms: There is good and evil, there is right and wrong. From a kind of theological or principled or moral point of view, what is an acceptable amount of poverty or homelessness? None. I mean zero. So by that definition, every agreement that you may strike is always begrudging, it is always going to be temporary, and it is always going to be challenged later.

The desire of some faith-based providers to include religion as part of their service offering (when using public funds) presents another area possible point of conflict. This church-state issue is clearly the most high-profile concern about faith-based partnerships. Although much confusion exists concerning where the lines should be drawn when a faith organization accepts public money and basis its treatments on religion, the mayors interviewed here found few instances where proselytizing created a problem for city hall.

Former Mayor of Orlando Glenda Hood noted, however, that from her experience it was not easy to ensure that faith-based providers were not proselytizing. In fact, she argued that the expected level of scrutiny of faith-based initiatives was unfair:

I believe this [working with the faith groups] is the right thing to do. You're right, you can't police it. And quite honestly, that does not bother me. I mean, as long as they're sending their reports in and doing what they need to do -- and I have to go on a lot of faith that they're going to abide by the rules. I see something of a double standard in a lot of ways....because if you have a grants program as we do that's called faith-based, it raises a lot of these questions. But on the other hand, there are other partnerships...that are tied in very closely with the community and those have never been questioned in any way, shape or form.

In the eyes of mayors, are faith-based organizations significantly different in their abilities or approaches compared to other types of nonprofits that provide community services? Some mayors noted that the work of faith-based and secular groups were similar in many ways. For example, Mayor Rybak described the contrast between high-minded entreaties of faith

leaders and the down-to-earth reality of the work: “The irony is that [parishioners are called]...to do this in the most lofty way, and yet we’ll wind up in rooms of them talking about square footage of single room occupancy units...But there is a “calling” aspect in which people really stand back and say “Am I doing enough?”

Mayor Diaz agreed that both secular and sectarian providers had considerable similarities, but he emphasized the unique level of commitment among faith groups.

You know, it’s not like this is a nonprofit that works on substance abuse and I’m the executive director and tomorrow I quit and we disband the group. You don’t disband your church. Your congregation, your parishioners, keep coming in and saying, “I’ve got a domestic abuse problem at home and my husband is shooting up heroin, or something.” You [the church] can’t say, “No, we’re not dealing with heroin this week, come see me next year.” So I think that level of commitment is much stronger.

Of course, some unique aspects of faith-based providers proved to be somewhat challenging for mayors. As quoted above, Mayor Williams candidly described how the theological, principled view of faith leaders meant that “every agreement that you may strike is always begrudging, it is always going to be temporary, and it is always going to be challenged later.” Mayor Diaz also noted that faith-based groups often had less savvy and structure, given that the traditional nature of their work (unlike for nonprofits) was not service provision: “I think the nonprofit world just has more experience, structurally, in terms of working the grant process and administering programs. There’s a little more expertise in a lot of nonprofits.”

Finally, the geographic rooting of churches and other faith organizations, and the often holistic approach to problem solving they take, can give faith-based initiatives important benefits relative to other types of initiatives. In the area of housing, for example, Mayor Purcell spoke about the unique benefits churches provided in Hope Gardens, the first urban renewal program in Nashville.

There is a recruitment of resources in construction, but they are also involved in the recruitment of people to live in the house, the support of the family in the neighborhood during the critical early days of ownership, occupancy, and gaining citizenship. The church is there for them and for collaborative nonprofits. It provides a support system for that family and neighborhood that stretches long into the future. [The residents] may not be sure that I’m going to be there [years from now], but the church is going to be there.... And they are able to react throughout the day, the night, the week, to the needs of what is occurring in their neighborhood...”

Faith/city hall relationships undoubtedly present opportunities to urban communities but they present challenges as well. The mayors interviewed determined of course that explicitly developing and supporting these relationships produced value for their cities and residents. Their experiences suggest that no one correct model, nor any specific purpose, is inherently superior to others. However, the more explicitly public officials think through the issues and goals in advance, the more likely that success will follow.