Faith-Based Organizations In Philadelphia: Neoliberal Ideology And The Decline Of Political Activism

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ABSTRACT: Faith-based organizations are linked in different ways to the discourses of states, corporations, and professions. In recent years, as traditional moral understandings have converged with the rise of neoliberal free market ideology and the concomitant withdrawal of state-sponsored social welfare programs, external pressures on faith-based organizations to secure stable funding and recruit more volunteers have increased dramatically. This article examines how one organization (located in Philadelphia) has responded to these pressures by shifting its mission, social composition, and hierarchical structure. Once proudly focused on collective community empowerment for social justice, this program has been reduced to being an assembly line for "training" individuals as separate labor units. In the process, collective interactions and understandings have been replaced by hierarchical ascriptions of differential worth, largely based on criteria of race, class, and gender. The cultural-experiential distance between givers and receivers has widened, competition and efficiency are valued above community concerns, and superficial marketing images are honored over substantive demonstrations of spirituality and goal achieve-

ment. These are unintended consequences of neoliberal policy for some faith-based organizations in U. S. urban settings.

Introduction

The efficacy of faith-based organizations in addressing social problems is currently itself an article of faith. Legitimized in federal policy during the Clinton years when Charitable Choice was added to the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), more widely known as "welfare reform," further attention was given to faith-based participation in state-funded social service provision when one of Bush's earliest acts upon taking office in January 2001 was to announce the creation of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.[1]

Using faith-based organizations for this purpose fits well with current popular discourse and beliefs about the causes and solutions of social problems. The oft-quoted core idea of Alexis de Tocqueville that "the network of voluntary institutions and activities constitute a principal source of America's distinctiveness and strength" (cited in the National Commission on Civic Renewal 1998) fits the common sense belief that the loss of volunteerism and civil participation is producing social breakdown. This idea is embedded in and reinforced by the currently popular and influential writing on social capital by political scientist turned "public intellectual" Robert Putnam (2000). In his conception, U.S. social problems are produced and exacerbated by the decline of social capital generated by participation in the non-state voluntary structures of civil society, including the church. Reviving the role of faith-based structures becomes a key social solution in this discourse (e.g., Call to Renewal, "a national network of churches, faith-based organizations, and individuals working to overcome poverty in America" [http://www.calltorenewal.org/index.cfm] or the

publications of the Council on Civil Society 1998). Such ideas for a "post-welfare" society resemble an idealized recollection of a 19th century, pre-welfare state reliance on voluntary charity heavily laden with the moral reform of the poor (Katz 1986).

Such a recollection of the past is superficial. Neoliberal common sense, which dominates the present moment, may appear to resemble that of earlier periods of social reform (by emphasizing individual blame and uplift through personal responsibility and entrepreneurship), and may appear to converge with traditional religious attention to moral and spiritual revitalization. In fact, the post-welfare reinvention of such beliefs is not a simple reproduction of old beliefs but is itself a rejection of Keynesian social provisioning based on a different logic of relationships between political economy and the state and between private accumulation and the public good. Neoliberal cultural beliefs focus on the efficacy of the unfettered free market as a mechanism for solving social problems by reforming individuals into entrepreneurs and consumers. The new relationship between the economy and state (public) institutions produces a withdrawal of state-funded social provisioning in favor of the market. As the state is withdrawn from social services, tax revenues are diverted toward the subsidization of private enterprise through public-private partnerships and publicly funded subcontracting to the private sector of social services (e.g., education, health care, housing, and incarceration). Private companies are run for profit according to market logic that takes priority over any notion of public good.This has changed the way in which individuals, communities, and organizations make political demands (Goode and Maskovsky 2001).

As the space of civil society becomes more entangled with both the state and market, Tocqueville's vision of a civil society, which features entities independently operated by virtuous, civic volunteers, fails to represent today's structural relations. Faith-based interventions operate within new structural link-

ages and constraints from the state (funding, surveillance, and regulation), as well as through linkages to the market. Their activities are embedded in a milieu of professionalized medical and corporate discourses which reflect the political, economic, and cultural environment in which we live.

Assumptions About Faith-Based Organizations

Cnaan (1999) and others view faith-based organizations as ideal social service providers. Church programs are envisioned as working at two levels: (1) they reform individuals into successful worker citizens through spiritual and psychic renewal, and (2) they build "communities" or collective social capital through urban ministries. As one local minister expressed it to me: "We have a special knack for galvanizing people and communities." Most public criticism of charitable choice does not question this presumed fit; rather, it focuses on the breach in the wall between church and state, especially with regard to employment discrimination against non-coreligionists and proselytizing among recipients of services. An unintended consequence of neoliberal ideology is that many conservative religious organizations find themselves opposed to the new federal faith-based initiatives. They have discovered that the weight of bureaucratic procedures and constraints on their programs may offset the potential value of easier access to federal funds.

The question of the practices and efficacy of faith-based organizations is not itself the subject of systematic empirical research. For example, Ram Cnaan's THE NEWER DEAL (1999), a central text advocating faith-based social services, merely catalogues official church-run programs. He uses simple measures of financial investment rather than providing an in-depth analysis of processes and outcomes. We learn nothing about what programs do and how well they work.

His information comes from clergy and administrators, thus reflecting the biases and assumptions of those who define and promote the programs. In contrast to Cnaan's position, quantitative evaluations fail to support President Bush's opinion that faith-based groups are more effective than their secular counterparts (Hutcheson 2006). Moreover, discussions which treat faith-based organizations as if they were uniform ignore significant variations like scale and sponsorship (e.g., mainline mega-church-sponsored inner city ministries or independent storefronts) and theological underpinnings (e.g., Christian churches or Islamic mosques).

In this article, I will demonstrate such variation and argue for specific attention to the critical salience of differences produced by the linkages between faith-based organizations and the state and market. In the current neoliberal moment, such linkages produce contradictions to the popular assumption that such organizations are removed from the "moral weaknesses" of politics and commerce. New relationships and their connected discourses raise concerns about more than the mere efficacy of service delivery. The very nature of solidarity and political activism for social change which formerly characterized the faith-based organizations discussed herein has been transformed.

Faith-Based Organizations in Philadelphia

Faith-based initiatives in Philadelphia are embedded in a variety of different networks that vary in their links to external systems of power and sources of funding. These links produce different forms of patronage which can transform organizational missions, governance, internal hierarchy, bureaucracy, and ideology. These transformations can, in turn, significantly affect relationships with local constituents.

Following an overview of two major citywide networks, I look closely at the social and cultural processes of one congregation-sponsored program to document the ways in which its organization (social composition, board, staff, community consumers, and its relationship to external political economic structures) shaped the beliefs and actions of the organization. I demonstrate the ways in which missions, structures, and practices are shaped through time by critical moments of choice related to external pressures on resources (funds and volunteers), as well as critical events related to misunderstandings of race and class.

Philadelphia has played a key role in the development of faith-based social service initiatives. Churches in Philadelphia have often been cited as the models for these efforts. John DiIulio, the first head of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, based his work on the transformative role of churches on his experiences growing up and living in Philadelphia (DiIulio 1997). Cnaan's survey also used Philadelphia as a special focus. Both DiIulio and Cnaan helped found the Center for the Study of Religion and Society at the University of Pennsylvania, from which emerges significant local outreach. The Philadelphia-based Pew Foundation has recently made religion and society one of its major program areas.[2]

Church Activism and the Politics of Social Justice

During the civil rights and welfare rights/War on Poverty eras of the 1960s, and into the neighborhoods movement of the 1970s, clerical and congregational networks in Philadelphia were centers of political action in which strong moral claims were made for social justice. In a city evenly divided demographically between white and black (with 10% new immigrant populations added in recent years), a core coalition of

progressive black clergy joined the emerging black political class in the struggle against structural racism. In the process, they created a political action network that brought blacks into city government and onto the national and global stage.[3] Progressive white clergy and congregations joined this coalition to fight for integrated communities and schools.[4] Civil rights rhetoric linked job access to political economic structure and advocated for changes in access to both skills and cultural capital through educational opportunity.[5]

Clergy representing their local congregations also were major players during the 1970s and 1980s in the place- and class-based neighborhoods movement, which fought dislocation by the interacting destabilizing processes engendered by actions of the state and market: deindustrialization,; suburbanization; white flight; urban renewal; and gentrification.[6] The activist neighborhood-oriented clergy of that period represented poor congregations within mainstream denominations.

In the racially mixed area of Philadelphia where I did research in the 1980s, clergy often represented mixed congregations (although much of the rest of the city was extremely segregated residentially). Thus, their struggles deemphasized race and emphasized class and place. They tended to use the theories and tactics of Saul Alinsky,[7] who came to believe that churches (which he saw as commanding trust, respect and loyalty) should be key building blocks of community activism. Toward this end, he created the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) to support city organizations of activist clergy. In Philadelphia, a branch of this movement still receives support from congregations and other organizations.

The belief in the efficacy of clergy as community leaders reinforced clergy networks and leadership of the citywide neighborhoods movement. In the 1970s, one of the two city-wide umbrella organizations of the neighborhoods movement was headed by a cleric.[8] Many of these congregations were officially designated as "urban ministry" churches by larger

central church bodies of the Catholic, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches. Others were informally adopted by suburban congregations whose large "outreach" budgets created patron-client relationships between the suburbs and the inner city.

The Logic of the Market, Family Values, and Individual Moral Redemption

Today, as the expanding global income gap is reflected in class-polarized Philadelphia, the number of poor congregations has increased substantially. For example, at a recent meeting with a faith-based organization, Episcopalian Bishop Bennison stated that the number of poor congregations had more than doubled since the original ten urban ministries were officially designated.

As the gap widens, national discourses blaming poverty on poor people's behavior are again in ascendance, often produced by social scientists and celebrities within the broader public debate.[9] In reaction, both black and white church networks in the city have shifted their analysis and strategies for desirable social change. They have moved from making claims for social justice through public demonstrations (such as civil disobedience and vigils) to calling for the reform of individuals through market-oriented individual entrepreneurship and/or strong patriarchal family values.

In the discussion below, I describe two important social spaces (one white and one black) in which analysis of social problems gives priority to moral redemption, rather than to recognizing inequality and making claims for social justice. One network promotes the restoration of patriarchal families; the other encourages the teaching of market-oriented technical skills. Both networks and their respective discourses, although developed by particular clergy, have become familiar to many clergy and congregants through their participation

in large-scale events. For example, the large network of black churches, basic to electoral politics since the civil rights era, often exchange ministers and participate in each other's celebratory events. Recent participation in the Million Man and Million Woman marches has led to several citywide conclaves. Similarly, the white discourse found in many large suburban mainline Protestant congregations is enacted in citywide conferences focusing on urban ministries.[10]

A Black Church Network: Family Values, Patriarchy, and Moral Redemption

In one large black church network, there has been a shift in the dominant discourse. A large and visible middle-class black population has been produced in the last three decades. Philadelphia's restructured economy is dominated by health care and educational institutions (often referred to as "Meds and Eds"), thus creating a new middle class of teachers, professors, and healthcare professionals. In addition, since the 1980s, black political ascendance and entry into civil service and patronage jobs in city government have played roles in the formation of this class.

As newly middle-class families move away from poor neighborhoods, they often remain commuter congregants, coming back to their original prestigious congregations to worship and to do good works in the local community. Throughout Philadelphia, one of the signals of prosperity is new church construction, from the renovation of historic buildings to new stadium-size mega-church replacements. These congregations deliver a prosperity gospel. While this new class shares racial identities with the local community, class-based paternalism and an emphasis on respectability and concern about image and representation encourages a discourse of individual blame and a rejection of behavior perceived as criminal, disrespect-

able, and befitting long-held stereotypes. This hyper-moralism (which one informant referred to as "Bill Cosbyism") replaces political analysis based on structural racism with personal responsibility, moral uplift, and discipline ("tough love"). A zero tolerance for welfare, teen pregnancy, and criminality is often mentioned. Patriarchal family values are viewed as a taken-for-granted solution in this call for self-reform (Goode 2002).

Many clergy and congregation members still give priority to opposing structural racism and classism as sources of inequality, and they work collectively to protest the overrepresentation of blacks in prison and as victims of HIV-AIDS. However, the message of discipline, patriarchy, and hetero-normative family values has come to dominate most special events. At one interfaith civil rights service in a core civil rights congregation, the written collective prayer (which continuously repeated the vow to "work, vote, and pray for social justice") was followed by a guest minister's fire and brimstone sermon about the value of corporal punishment for teaching children discipline and strong values. While the assembled all dutifully stood and read the prayers, they enthusiastically shouted out assent to the moralist sermon. A year-long series of Post-Million Man March conferences defined poverty as a result of personal moral failings and exhorted women to help their husbands to be restored to the position God intended for them, as the (breadwinning) heads of their households. Absent from discussions were any reference to structural inequality in power or economic access; nor was there any critique of the negative effects of patriarchal gender relations. While there was no explicit mention of "market magic," the message was clear: once individuals changed, God and/or the market would make things right.

Suburban Missionaries and Urban Ministries

White mainline clergy engage in urban ministries through which wealthy suburban Philadelphia congregations transfer hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to poorer inner-city congregations. In turn, the local programs have followed the neoliberal development turn and shifted away from an emphasis on community action through organization and demands on the state toward those which teach the poor to be self-sufficient and entrepreneurial.

In addition, white suburban clergy and volunteers in these ministries have different understandings of race and class than do the residents of the target communities, and this affects relationships between these communities. It is not surprising that suburban residents overvalue the efficiency of the market for resolving social problems. As well-educated corporate managers and business owners, they bring different cultural assumptions and different lived experiences to their patron-client relations with inner-city residents.

We observed two years of meetings and discussions about challenges to mainline denominational urban ministries among two Alinsky-type, white clergy networks in Philadelphia. During this period, we witnessed a marked diminishing of a political economic structural analysis of social problems.[11] Partly as a result of the availability of welfare reform funding and a rising discourse of *capacity* (or *asset*-building[12]) most participants shifted from collective community-building strategies to programs designed to reform individuals in order to attach them to the prevailing labor market, without regard to the issues of low wages, contingent work, and lack of career ladders. In addition, targeting the "community" for change gave primacy to middle-class notions of physical disorder. Unsightly neighborhoods were seen as signs of immorality; they represented slovenliness, lack of discipline, and criminality. Such neighborhoods no longer were seen as being

the result of private and public disinvestment (e.g., redlining, landlord neglect, and predatory mortgage lending in the private sector; failure to repair streets, enforce codes, and deal with crime issues by government agencies). In this shifting ideological context, rehabilitating neighborhood esthetics and appearance emerged as the major focus of reform. As a result, both clergy networks became significant forces in pushing for an anti-blight policy. The leader of one group stated in a newspaper commentary:

> Philadelphia may be …. the national capital of abandoned buildings and broken windows … Modern police theorists, including our superb police commissioner, John Timoney, subscribe to the "broken window" theory of urban renewal. A broken window in a community, if left unrepaired, leads to other acts of vandalism and crime (Royster 2001: A19).

This statement as well as the "broken window" theory of crime is based on simplistic and decontextualized assumptions that the mere appearance of disorder incites vandalism and crime in poor neighborhoods. This belief is laden with strong pre-existing assumptions about the weak characters of poor and racialized populations.

Community Church[13]: From Activism to Neoliberalism, Paternalism and Patriarchy

The following case study explores the way in which one specific urban ministry moved away from its early activism to become an organization based on the convergence of morality, individual responsibility, and market efficiency. Paralleling the mission shift was a shift from a flattened hierarchy with increasing closeness and trust between the white suburbanite leaders and local residents of color to an organization with

new fault lines developed along the axes of class, race, and gender.

As a series of critical events unfolded, choices were made that moved the organization further away from its original mission and toward activities which parallel welfare-to-work goals of preparing people for the low-wage labor market through moral uplift and superficial training in technical skills. At every point, a restructuring of the board, staff, and relations with community consumers occurred, leading to greater social distance and loss of trust within the organization. Yet, it is these choice points that represented openings for change. With different responses, alternative pathways could have been followed. Thus, an analysis of process helps us identify strategic openings.

I do not wish to demean the well-intentioned, energetic and enthusiastic volunteers whose commitment and personal sacrifices (intended to ameliorate inequality) were truly amazing. I merely want to point out the power of neoliberal common sense to shape and limit people's understandings of problems and possibilities.

Community Church is located in one of the most multiracial neighborhoods in Philadelphia. The neighborhood housed long-time, working-class, white residents, whose incomes were declining; vulnerable, native-born people of color who had recently breached the residential color line; several Asian populations and new immigrants predominantly from Central and South America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean.

The locality long had been an area of active, involved residents who were willing to organize to demand better schools, services, etc. from the government. In recent years, these organizations had been weakened by the sudden and rapid population turnover. Through many years of doing fieldwork in the neighborhood, I had developed an appreciation of the importance of women's activism (Goode 2001), long before

Community Church opened its program there. Since the 1970s, urban ethnographers have been developing an alternative view of poor women which differs from mainsteam, paternalizing stereotypes of the poor. These studies revealed complex family survival and social reproduction strategies through networks of extended and fictive kin (Edin and Lein 1997; Lomnitz 1977; Safa 1995; Sharff 1998; Stack 1996), as well as a heavy engagement in community building and political activism in an era of state service withdrawal (Bookman and Morgen 1988; Susser 1982). These analyses link this community work to "activist mothering" (Mullings 2001; Naples 1998) in which women see their tasks as extensions of their nurturing roles, and rely on expanded informal networks to participate in collective action. As they move beyond family to participate collectively, they have made claims on the state for better schools and city services, and an increased role for community organizations and tenant management in public housing (Hyatt 1997, 2001).

In the early 1990s, two resident activists, confronted by the sudden loss of a vibrant community center,[14] brought the program to the attention of a newly assigned minister of a local congregation within another denomination. Energetic, dynamic, and selfless, the new minister undertook the mission of developing a relocated children's program which had become the core activity of the old center. The program accomplished many goals within a broad framework of community uplift. The goal was to strengthen collective relationships within a community containing many new residents, while simultaneously providing services and political leadership skills. It provided day care for working mothers, tutoring for students, and a site for the maintenance of a network of mothers drawn into the organization formally and informally.

As was customary in such situations, the church congregation provided space, utilities at below-market rates, and many volunteers. Since so many funds were available in the

welfare-to-work era, a small initiative focusing on programs to teach human capital skills (literacy and computers) was added. The fieldwork which supports this analysis consisted of participant observation of everyday activities, special occasions, and board meetings over a 4-year period.

A series of critical events shaped the urban ministry at Community Church. The events below show a process through which external pressures produced a mission shift, followed by a change in the board and staff. This, in turn, produced internal fault lines and unresolvable contradictions as well as further changes in ideology and practices. The shift from a program emphasizing community empowerment to one transferring technical skills to isolated individuals was accompanied by a power-evasive understanding of individual entrepreneurship and attachment to the labor market as goals.

The organizational structure also shifted from one with a flattened hierarchy, informal skill learning, and personal relations to a more formal organization that used depersonalizing rhetoric embedded with economistic rational choice models and organizational technologies such as strategic planning, the heavy use of consultants, outsourcing, and other corporate strategies. These ideas represented common sense thinking to the suburban volunteers from the patron churches. Unfortunately, their "common sense" interfered with any critical understanding of the structural production of poverty, the existing local knowledge and political subjectivity of the "consumers," or the reality of the program participants' daily lives.

Community Church's community program, like most suburban-supported programs, involved boards and volunteers who were overwhelmingly white, with an occasional professional class black or Latino member. A handful of community residents were appointed to represent the community. The organization served clients who were predominantly poor/

working-class people of color with very different lived experiences and understandings of how the world works.

Beginning as a woman-dominated board composed of clergy, active church workers, and local residents, membership slowly shifted to a board dominated by men from the professional managerial class (lawyers, bankers, insurance agents, and owners of small business service companies). Their interpretive frameworks were infused with corporate business models. During the period of the woman-dominated board, the differences in perspective narrowed as these women worked closely together with a shared vision of activist mothering. As the board became more male and more corporate in its ideology, the gap in interpretive frames widened instead of being bridged.

Understanding Race and Class Differently

With their suburban, middle-class, white perspective that denies difference, the representatives of Community Church were determined to be egalitarian. As a result, the organization developed a universalist attitude that silenced any discussion of class, race, and gender differences. Moreover, public civility and conflict avoidance were strongly valued. While promoting racial diversity, the professional people of color on the board did not represent the discourse of strong anti-racist activists in the city. Anti-racist discourse reflects expectations of white racism and produces tactics to ward off or to engage directly the expected disrespect by whites (Goode 2003). It was unusual, in racially divided Philadelphia, to find community arenas with an absence of awareness of this discursive environment, since city and school district activities were based on a common understanding of and accommodation to overt race-talk and anti-racist discourse.

In one case, a Latina teacher had been dismissed for what was seen as a bad attitude. This led to an EEO complaint, which was settled. What surprised and angered the board in this case was that, when they appealed to a formerly collaborating Latino partner organization, they were rebuffed. The other group, known for its anti-racist advocacy, supported the Latina's position. In this and other racially tinged terminations, the transgressions of employees were discussed in terms of personal behavior and morality such as dishonesty, or emotionality, with no recognition of the racialist underpinnings of the board's actions.

The initial centerpiece of Community Church outreach (the children's program) involved both local parents and children. The program was run by a young, racially sensitive Asian American who had experience both with poor communities and with "racially" different populations. She hired mostly local women to staff the program and facilitated their move up the ranks from parent participant to staff and administrative roles. Within the program, parents were encouraged to share parenting advice with each other, rather than being "trained" to be better parents by authorities and experts. People talked constantly of the place as nurturing, safe, and belonging to the community. Local residents were a visible presence on the staff and board. Celebratory meals were held frequently throughout the year, thus bringing together staff, board, and residents. There was a real interest in the careers of "graduates," who often became teacher's aides in the afterschool program. A point of pride, mentioned frequently at fundraising and celebratory occasions, was the 200-family waiting list for participating in the program.

The Asian-American executive director and one active clergy volunteer were the only participants with experience-based sensitivity to the complex interpretations of racial misunderstandings. When the executive director left, competition for funds and board patronage developed between the

community-centered youth programs and the individually oriented programs promoting human capital development: literacy and computer training. Unlike the community-building core, these activities processed individuals through an assembly-line skill training. The division between the two programs produced conflict between the white working-class "home-grown" administrator of the youth program and two suburban college-trained directors of the skills training programs. The skills training program had easy access to funds and to programs that donated "volunteer" time and effort. Moreover, its non-interactive structure produced none of the occasional "disorderly" behaviors that occurred within the community-based youth programs. Not surprisingly, the skills training program grew, while the other languished.

Ultimately, the leadership was forced to take sides and the up-from-the ranks director of the children's program was fired summarily. As a result, all but one of her paid staff (all working-class people of color) resigned in protest and wrote letters to the board.[15] Most of the parents and children left in anger. A highly valued community program with a long waiting list found itself scrambling for community participants.

At this point, the literacy training and computer components became dominant. These programs processed isolated individuals in an assembly-line fashion. Unlike the children's programs (which provided a community social space, jobs, and vertical mobility for local residents as well as intimate cross-class social relations), these activities were run mostly by suburban white women. They relied on subcontracted teachers from established university programs as well as a cadre of high turnover volunteers from newly mandated high school community service programs and service learning college students.[16] These volunteers, who had direct contact with students, were buffers shielding the staff and board from social interaction with local residents. Moreover, irregular time commitments produced by high school and university class

schedules as well as the brief, non-continuous duration (from one month to one semester) meant that this more direct social contact was temporary, shallow, and not conducive to community building.

Nonetheless, such people-processing programs were popular with foundations and with partnering congregations. Funding for these activities proliferated as welfare-to-work programs were established. Success appeared more tangible and easier to monitor through expandable unit (headcount) measurements. It was harder to measure the less tangible increase in trust and building of cross-class social networks in the after-school program. Furthermore, this after-school program, less-structured, more labor intensive, and limited by space, could not be as easily expanded by adding new time slots.

An even more significant factor underlying a preference for skills training was its appeal to the paternalism of the suburban congregations that provided more than half of its funding through individual and congregational donations. The board and its supporters saw their mission as uplifting individuals. The aphorism that teaching people to fish was better than giving them fish to eat was often quoted. This mindset converged well with the current neoliberal policy of adapting people for the market through instilling work ethics, skills, and self-sufficiency. Local knowledge of the real constraints on residents' lives and their past experience with political mobilizing was unknown, and unlikely to be known as social contact diminished. While the skills programs produced no outcomes measures or student follow-up data to provide evidence of its success, the impressive visual symbol provided by the shiny new computer lab[17] created an image of success, and the increasing headcount tallies demonstrated growing efficiency in unit production.

Seeing paternalism disguised as false egalitarianism, one informant critiqued the rhetoric she had just heard from a cler-

gyman about the reciprocal relationships between suburban and city congregations. The statement had been made that the two parties were "sharing gifts" with the "gifts" from immigrant and minority communities described in terms of sanitized multicultural performances and food. Seeing through this false assertion of symmetry, the resident board member said: "They say we are sharing, but its really one-way, and I don't like that. I have too much pride."

The staff problems also emanated from violations of the organization's expectations. Participation required enthusiasm and a "can-do" attitude. Frequent pep talks occurred. There was no space for critique. At many points in the shifting travails, the board chair asked for comments and critiques but none ever were offered.

After the unhappy episodes in the children's program, one early founder resigned from the board. She expressed her alarm with the board's actions to me, but wrote a letter to everyone stating that she had asked God for advice and that he had led her to her decision to leave. Her use of the divine to avoid generating conflict allowed the maintenance of the aura of can-do civility, while leaving unspoken the contradictions and conflict emerging in the program. Steeped in the hyper-civil expectations of the community, she felt this was the best course.

The Encroaching Corporate Business Model

At the beginning of the program, there was a strong belief among the staff and board that their exceptional will and energy, sacrifice and prayer were sufficient resources to accomplish their goals of community uplift. As the program shifted mission and became more dependent on outside funding, on subcontracting teaching services, on recruiting, and on managing and showing appreciation to volunteers, the focus and

composition of the board shifted toward corporate training and marketing. Concerns were soon expressed in terms of a masculinist, corporate concern with formal contracts and rules. This shift was further supported by the demands of state and foundation funders who require a more professionalized model.

At the same time, the daily activities and staffing needs shifted. External funding required full-time attention to applications and compliance activities. A major share of staff time had to be allocated to serving the needs of volunteers. Increased reliance on a large number of consultants and trainings captured an increasing percentage of the budget. The "one-size-fits-all" techniques to promote problem solving, strategic planning, conflict resolution, and (most of all) non-profit fundraising failed to address any of the local particulars of the program.

A budget crisis resulted from a change in national (FASB) standards for non-profit accounting. This crisis, which affected many such organizations, created a period in which cash flow could not be monitored and the payroll might not be met. The organization went scrambling for any resources available. As the board became more bottom-line oriented, men with business experience were recruited to the board and replaced community representatives and non-professional women volunteers on the board.

Paternalist false egalitarianism that ignored class and racial differences, as well as the privileging of "business practice," accompanied this shift in board membership. Not only did suburban men replace suburban women, but community representation changed as well. In an attempt to exhort the board to contribute more, the amounts of their individual donations were made public among the other board members, as is the practice for many elite boards with members of equal status. Once again, such false egalitarianism served to sharpen the axes of difference. The few community residents (mainly,

parents of children from the program) still loyally attending board meetings were embarrassed by the public display of obvious differences and, while they did not say anything, they never came to another meeting.[18]

In their place, a new "community member" was appointed. A resident of a nearby, more affluent neighborhood, he was a white male whose style of dress and speech resembled the dominant suburban pattern. He was "authenticated" as a community member because he had taken one of the computer skills courses. As the owner of a small company, he had taken the course here because he was embarrassed by his lack of skills in front of his young employees. He had seen an ad for the program at the local supermarket, and took the course in a place where nobody he knew would see him. In a way, he better symbolized the new consumer than the mothers who remained from the community building days. In fact, his very reason for coming to Community Church (to be socially invisible) makes a strong statement about the move away from community building to anonymous processing of people. Having satisfied the requirement for "community representation," he rarely attended.

The budget crisis ratcheted up the development of a publicity machine directed at marketing the program to potential donors. Much staff and board energy was directed toward promotion and image making through desktop printing, press releases, and promotional videos. These activities and the overall stress of the pressures felt by the organization led to accentuated cheerleading and an aura of overweening self-congratulation as one of the model programs in the city. As one board member proclaimed: "If everyone could see what we are doing here, we could save the city." The internal solidarity, in which critique was not tolerated, created a further boundary between the insiders and the "community."

Fundraising became a central activity taking up everyone's time. While the group was linked to major foundations and

state literacy programs, the core funds came from suburban congregations who "partnered" with the urban church. These congregations were used to recruit board members and individual donors, as well as contributions from church outreach funds. Special presentations of awards and plaques to these churches, as well as ceremonies of farewell to the ever-changing college student volunteers, filled the monthly program calendar. Weekly schedules involved daily visits to program spaces from potential donor individuals and congregational representatives. Programming was shaped toward constructed performances and visual emblems (including elaborate murals) of success. Visits also were scheduled to potential partner parishes.

As the close and continuous relationships with community residents disappeared, so did the board's ability to keep tabs on everyday activities and to relay examples of people who really had been affected by the program. Since there were no more testimonies to the successful uplifting of community youth and their families, the new narrative in fundraising brochures shifted to testimonies *by volunteers* regarding the rewards for participation *as volunteers.* This demonstrates the convergence of the valorization of giving for the *donor's* sake in Christian discourse with that of *civic engagement* in neoliberal social capital discourse. Student interns would talk about what they had learned and how much the experience had transformed *them*. Local transformation was no longer a key issue.

The Displacement of Protest and Demand Politics with Technologies of Moral Reform

Moral certainty and judgments derived from it pervaded the remaining political activities. The clergy and congregational leaders continued to talk about "community empowerment,"

but this conversation took place in the context of a neoliberal citywide ideology that the best hope for neighborhoods was to make them more attractive as targets for private development capital (Goode and O'Brien 2006).

The mayor's blight removal program began as a response to local CDCs and activists who accepted the premise that the city's only hope was to market the downtown and residential neighborhoods to capital investors as sites for the professional managerial class (residences, recreation and consumption). It was believed that such a strategy ultimately would create jobs for the poor. Removing blight (aesthetic disorder) would improve the social order and clear the way for development. Bolstered by the belief that blight itself was the *cause* of criminality and other forms of immorality, localities began to compete with each other for local housing and commercial programs which favored developers and merchants over local residents.

Community Church's urban ministry situated itself in this discourse. There was little analysis beyond the belief that simple exposure to literacy and computer skills (even without follow-up placement activities) would solve community problems. Neoliberal "common sense" taught that bad individuals were responsible for neighborhood decay and that, if the mayor's blight plan was carried out and the physical environment was fixed, criminal behavior would disappear. This, in turn, would pave the way for local economic development. Ultimately, all individuals with new human capital skills would get jobs in the newly developed neighborhood.

The private sector, as the ultimate source of free market solutions, was never criticized in any way. The ways in which the group blamed individual moral infractions for blight instead of indicting larger institutions of power emerged at one meeting. When someone tried to explain a new form of taxation as a way to reduce blight by decreasing speculation in real estate (with cycles of property turnover that left properties empty and undeveloped), one ministry leader replied as

if frustrated: "How will that protect our [the church's] property from criminals who vandalize it?" In her view of blight production, the culprits were limited to graft-seeking greedy politicians or criminalized poor people.[19]

Without local resident grassroots support, Community Church's "activism" was limited to participation in one of the citywide networks of clergy working against urban blight and for reform of the local high school. In both activities, issues of morality, class, and race converged with neoliberalism to lurk below the surface of the analysis of the problem. Interpretations of delays in the mayor's anti-blight program were limited to constructions of corrupt cronyist politicians (presumed to be largely working class and minorities). The culprits in the schools were selfish teachers who wanted to protect their privileges and did not care about the community.[20] The larger neoliberal structural context of these issues (the role of the state in wooing investment from private developers based on a trickle down theory and the morale-destroying effects of three massive, system-wide school district restructurings) were invisible in leaders' interpretations. Ultimately, the state took control of the school system and largely privatized it, thereby replacing the civic foundations of public education with the logic of the market.

Legal and business expertise were used to create authoritative rules and professional codes which were seen as enhancing the cultural capital of the organization. Ironically, while a discourse of moral certainty about good and evil supported layoffs and terminations, a sense of moral or community obligation receded. During the period of financial pressure, there was considerable staff instability as people were laid off or quit. In each case, their character flaws were invoked in board members' explanatory models. When participants were dismissed from the program for what was considered immoral behavior, a new rhetoric about "tough love" and personal responsibility was invoked. This allowed two dismissed staff

members with serious diseases to be cut off from their health plans and led a board member to ask if the program was legally required to provide COBRA information. The issue was discussed as a decision based on "business logic" and contractual-legal requirements, rather than in terms of moral obligation.

Ironically, a third incident of privileging individual entrepreneurship over collective values was *not* morally condemned, even though it had taken place in secret and was announced as a *fait accompli*. An African-American/Latino performing group had been developed by a teacher in the afterschool program. It frequently was sent to perform at affluent congregations as part of fundraising. When the teacher announced he had independently "privatized" the group (by contractually severing the performers from the organization in order to pursue recording contracts for them), the teacher's covert actions and his sudden resignation were seen as laudable entrepreneurship. His behavior was appreciated as an appropriate response to the program's goal of empowering individuals in the market, rather than being evidence of selfish greed in the face of the community's collective interests.

Despite the often-stated liberal reformist belief that greedy politicians constituted the powers who were destroying the neighborhoods, the board was willing to engage in an act of cronyism when the opportunity arose. Several members of the board attended a citywide meeting when John DiIulio came to explain the mission of the new White House Office for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. They were excited about the potential for funding, although at that time details and procedures still were sketchy.

A serendipitous temporary subcontracting relationship with a grant writer who worked for the mayor created a new opportunity. Impressed by the newly opened but understaffed computer lab, the consultant brought the program to the attention of the mayor's newly established office on faith-based

initiatives. When city representatives came to a board meeting to announce that the city had been invited to make a presentation at the White House office, there was an implicit indication that this urban ministry would be the first submitted for White House funding. Because of the sudden invitation, the program had been selected without a formal search and application process. Only one member of the board objected, a lawyer concerned with the separation of church and state issues. Nobody expressed concern with the lack of a transparent and fair process. In fact, the board took this as an affirmation of their accomplishments.

Conclusion

Over time, Community Church shifted its mission from community empowerment to individual uplift, which diminished cross-class interaction and increased the cultural-experiential distance between givers and receivers. Beginning as a continuation of pre-existing community organizing movements in which women of color and suburban white women attained a significant voice in identifying community needs for social reproduction and political organizing, the mission was transformed into a short-term assembly line for providing a superficial veneer of technical skills. As this happened, discourses of false egalitarianism reinforced hierarchical structuring along axes of difference (race, class, and gender). The Community Church came to value competition and efficiency over collective community concerns and idolized superficial marketing images over substantive demonstrations of spirituality and goal achievement. In the process, new ideologies about the "causes" of social problems were developed and new "therapeutic" practices were established. Ultimately, these contradictions between ideology and praxis contributed to the organization's demise.[21]

When circumstances threatened the mission, external pressures to expand in order to achieve stable funding, accompanied by a constant need to attract and reward volunteers, led to a new direction. Individuals as separate units were "trained," thus removing any sense of common history and community and any mutual understanding between locals and suburbanites. Rather than dealing with real experiences, knowledge, and understanding of community residents, there was an increase in the resort to a moralist discourse about *good* (deserving) and *bad* (undeserving) people, within the discursive repertory of the nation and the church. At the same time, sources of racial and class dynamics unfamiliar to the white suburban women were denied through false egalitarianism. Larger structures of power and the contradictions they were producing were invisible. The reliance on socially and experientially distant suburban sponsors centered in a masculinist corporate world furthered this shift, as did the professionalization demanded by foundations and corporate donors.

Short-staffed and under-funded, the well-meaning and self-exploiting board members did not experience low morale, but were buoyed by a hyper-sense of self-congratulation based on their belief in the power of positive thinking and reliance on prayer. They assumed that technical preparation with no follow-up or links to jobs was sufficient to change people's futures. Paternalistic practices unbalanced the historical reciprocity between donors and recipients. In the end, a boundary had been produced between the program and its constituents, so no trace of the original action for social change remained. The program became another attempt to liberate poor people to participate in the low-wage market. When the budget crisis continued, the ultimate corporate step (merger and acquisition) occurred when the program was absorbed into a larger structure.

The sacrifices made by board members, volunteers, and staff demonstrated a will and energy to take action. What could have

been done differently to avoid class and gender paternalism? Could a space have been created to breach the distance between the experiences and cultural understandings of the leaders and poorer local residents of color? At every critical point, there were seeds of opposition to the direction chosen. However, the actors in this drama were without a secure funding base, without tailor-made training specific for their situation, and without the time to reflect during the continuing crisis. Their experiences demonstrate that good will, energy, and a can-do attitude are insufficient to redirect the current widening of the income and wealth gap in the United States. Believing that this *was* possible created a problem that requires a more systematic understanding of the ways in which neoliberalism produces contradictions between the goals and interests of capital, the state, communities, and individual citizens, especially among the poor.

NOTES

1   The program got off to a rough start when the first director resigned. After a series of two more directors, a former deputy director stated publicly that the program was a "whisper of what was

promised," while blaming Congress and "minimal White House support" (Hutcheson 2006). According to Hutcheson's analysis of White House data, the federal grant money awarded to religious or faith-based programs increased from $1.17 billion in 2003 to $2 billion in 2004 to $2.15 billion in 2005.

2   A national foundation, Pew's headquarters are in Philadelphia, thus offering considerable local access and activity.

3   For example, one noteworthy civil rights minister, William Gray, became nationally prominent as a member of Congress and powerful committee chair. Another, Leon Sullivan, became an international spokesperson for rights and economic justice.

4   As the national headquarters of the Society of Friends, Philadelphia has long played an important role in civil rights and social justice issues (Goode and Schneider 1994). Christian and Jewish clergy were core actors in the Mount Airy movement which stemmed white flight and structured an interracial community (Ferman and Kaylor 2000).

5   Leon Sullivan's central program (Opportunities Industrial Council) worked to train black youth and connect them to jobs.

6   The citywide, clergy-based Center For Ethics and Social Policy organized conferences and produced volumes on capital flight (Raines et al. 1982). The Rev. Paul Washington, representing black North Philadelphia, also was a central figure in this effort.

7   Saul Alinsky, a local community activist in Chicago for several decades from the 1960s to the mid 1980s, literally "wrote the book" (1971) on neighborhood organizing. His training manual was extensively used in Philadelphia in the 1970s.

8   Two umbrella coalitions in the local neighborhoods movement were the Philadelphia Council Neighborhood Organizations (headed by a Catholic priest) and the Institute for the Study of Civic Values (headed by a former leader of Students for a Democratic Society).

9   In 2005, Bill Cosby made a widely quoted statement blaming black parents for the lack of discipline responsible for failure and criminality in youth, and exhorting the black community to take responsibility for developing more character. In the NEW YORK TIMES (March 26, 2006), Orlando Patterson, a black sociologist at Harvard, blamed social scientists for being "allergic" to behavioral explanations of poverty and crime and "relentlessly" committed to structural explanations.

10   These two networks are not exhaustive. There are many other networks, variously linked internally and externally, of Evangeli-

cal congregations, Catholic parishes, Jewish synagogues, Islamic mosques, and Spanish-speaking churches.

11   The Philadelphia Interfaith Alliance (PIA) is a branch of the IAF. The Eastern Pennsylvania Organizing Project (EPOP) is not officially an IAF affiliate, but has a similar philosophy.

12   At one conference, a heated debate occurred over the meaning of asset-building. One group argued that local community people themselves were assets capable of autonomous self-help. Others responded that they were more *political* assets who could be mobilized to seek external resources.

13   A pseudonym.

14   The once-vibrant program fell victim to the frequent transfers of clergy in congregations within centralized hierarchies. The founder of the program had transferred out; his successor experienced a family tragedy requiring a leave of absence.

15   The only person who stayed was one inexperienced new hire who had not developed the strong cohesive relationships of the rest of the staff and was cajoled into staying and picking up the pieces.

16   "Volunteers" were mostly those mandated by their institutions to do service. In the 1990s, along with the new national efforts to valorize volunteer service, the school district mandated a quota of community service hours for high school students. At the same time, the new service learning thrust in higher education became strongly institutionalized at the many Catholic institutions in the region; these provided the bulk of the volunteers.

17   It was easy to acquire donations of hardware and software from local high tech firms. However, the space needs for the computers generated the purchase of a nearby property and a capital campaign which ultimately added to fiscal woes. The lab, while impressive to potential donors, was understaffed and of limited use.

18   Participation by community residents, always difficult for poor women serving in the multiple roles of parent (frequently single) and part-time job holder, was limited by emergencies and decreased as the program moved away from children's needs.

19   The clergy's identification with property owners was associated with the risky purchase of a building to house the computer training program. Community Church was only able to do this only by becoming a Section 8 landlord for several units and by undertaking a capital campaign. As the board took on the role of residential property owner/landlord, it followed the logic of such a role by

providing only the minimum amenities required, and ultimately evicted several tenants.

20   The teachers were largely first generation, college-educated people of color.

21   Today, the old programs operate in a large social service entity. The computer and children's program have ended and the literacy programs continue. With the stable funding which comes from the resources of the larger structure (at least for the moment), they no longer need to rely on volunteers, but have a staff of trained teachers. They now operate exactly as do their secular counterparts, with whom they are in a coalition.

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