Churches and other faith-based organizations have a long history of involvement in their communities. In many areas where resources are scarce, churches and other faith-based organizations may be one of only a few social institutions capable of galvanizing a community into action and providing a place for community programs to take place.

Recent changes in federal legislation have increased the opportunities for churches and other faith-based organizations to become involved in providing social services to community members. A major impetus to the use of churches and other faith-based organizations to develop communities came with the passage of the Welfare Reform Act of 1996.

Up until 1996, anybody who wanted to partner with the government to provide services could do so as long as they did so in a secular manner, that is, in a non-religious way. In 1996, welfare reform legislation incorporated a “charitable choice provision.” The provision was intended to encourage faith-based service providers to cooperate with public welfare programs by ensuring that they will not have to attenuate or abandon their religious character or style of service.

To encourage partnerships between faith-based organizations and public partnerships under “charitable choice” without violating constitutional principles, certain conditions must be met. One condition is that states may not exclude religious organizations from participation solely because they are religious if they contract with other private service providers. In an effort to protect their religious character, churches and faith-based organizations are guaranteed the liberty to keep “religious art, icons, scripture, or other symbols” in places where services are provided and are allowed to restrict the reach of financial audits by segregating program funds in a separate account.

To encourage the proper separation of church and state when providing services, churches and faith-based organizations are not to discriminate against clients on the basis of religion, and are prohibited from using funds for religious worship, instruction, or proselytization. Moreover, those in need of services have the right to receive services from a non-religious provider if they object to a faith-based organization.

Although slow to get started, many churches have taken advantage of this new opportunity to expand outreach programs beyond simple charity by customizing new programs to meet the personal and community needs of congregations. Faith-based organizations usually have strong connections to the community. This positions them to work with other organizations in the community to help low-income families access the services that they need to become self-sufficient.

Despite the opportunities, not all communities are benefitting equally; some states have been more aggressive in partnering with faith-based organizations than others. The state of Texas, under former governor George Bush, took the lead in developing partnerships with church and faith-based organizations to provide services for families to move from welfare to work. Building on the Texas experience, President Bush recently established the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in the White House. The Office will work with centers in five federal agencies (Justice, Housing and Urban Development, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Education) to facilitate the use of churches and faith-based organizations in community development.

The charitable choice provision originally allowed faith-based organizations (e.g., churches, congregations, religious groups, national religious networks) to have the same opportunities as nonprofit agencies to compete for contracts to deliver welfare reform services. Under new
federal legislation (i.e., Children’s Health Act 200), faith-based organizations will be able to expand services to include substance abuse and mental health counseling. Combined with the newly established White House Office, there is likely to be a great deal of opportunity for faith-based organizations interested in community development.

Despite government’s enthusiasm, significant obstacles remain before interested churches and faith-based organizations can take full advantage of these new opportunities. Some of the obstacles for faith-based organizations include the lack of working capital to absorb performance-based contracts, inexperience in writing grant proposals, concerns about government intrusion, lack of record keeping and reporting skills, and concerns about enforcement of contract obligations.

In fact, there is little indication that most churches and faith-based organizations will be in a position to take advantage of new opportunities made available by the Bush administration. Most simply lack the capacity. Given that churches typically operate small-scale support services with limited resources, it is unrealistic to expect large-scale operations.

In more rural and often more desperate areas, the challenges are formidable. A lack of knowledge, leadership, and resources combine to create barriers that may be overcome only with a concerted effort by government and community officials. For rural areas, the challenge will be to build on or expand the existing capacity of churches. For many interested church and faith-based organizations this will require building new partnerships.

Dr. Andrew Billingsley, University of South Carolina professor and author of *Mighty Like a River: The Black Church and Social Reform*, conducted an historical review of social programs within mostly large-scale African American churches. His work and the work of others suggest that these churches and other well-organized faith-based organizations are the ones most likely to prosper under the new rules.

What follows are a list of web sites with further information about how churches and faith-based organizations are getting involved in community development.

**WEB SITES**

**American Prospect Online**  
[www.prospect.org/archives/35/35kramfs](http://www.prospect.org/archives/35/35kramfs)  
This site explores answers to the question raised by many faith-based organizations: Can Churches Save the Cities?

**American Youth Policy Forum**  
[www.aypf.org/forumbriefs](http://www.aypf.org/forumbriefs)  
AYPF provides learning opportunities on youth issues for policy makers in faith-based organizations and other community organizations. Forum briefs on partnerships between churches, schools and community based models are also available at this site.

**Bipartisan Work Group on Youth Violence**  
[www.house.gov/frost/youthviol](http://www.house.gov/frost/youthviol)  
This site provides recommendations to faith-based organizations and other community groups based on data gathered from an in-depth study by Federal legislators. The site includes models of successful partnerships between families, schools, churches, law enforcement, and healthcare agencies.

**Carter Center: IHP Net**  
[www.ihpnet.org/4model-l](http://www.ihpnet.org/4model-l)  
The Carter Center, in partnership with Emory University, has done extensive research in the area of children and firearms. This site contains research data, models and recommendations on how to address the growing problem of youth and crimes committed with firearms.

**Center for Rural Church Leadership**  
[www.seorf.ohiou.edu](http://www.seorf.ohiou.edu)  
The CRCL site provides written articles and other bibliographical resources that will provide encouragement to rural pastors and laity in their ministry to small towns and rural churches. Topics covered include rural evangelism, rural poverty, rural cultures and rural church health.

**Christian Community Development Association**  
[www.ccdca.org](http://www.ccdca.org)  
CCDA provides biblical practical principles evolved from years of living and working among the poor. CCDA is dedicated to working with grass roots and church based efforts to meet felt needs through ministries that focus on relocation, reconciliation, holistic evangelism, social action, leadership development and empowering the poor.
CNBC’s efforts in crime prevention through faith-based organizations can serve as a guide to establishing a youth crime prevention program at any church. This site contains models of programs that promote justice, wholeness and fulfillment through child and family development programs, church rebuilding, anti-drug and violence campaigns and leadership development training.

This site focuses on ways to create and maintain healthy family relationships through collaborative efforts between faith-based organizations and the government. One excellent example of successful collaboration is the partnership between the federal government and the state of Texas.

The Manhattan Institute has several programs that illustrate how partnerships with the community, especially faith-based partnerships, can serve as a deterrent to crime. These programs include religious commitment to reduce drug use and crime, local religious commitment and neighborhood conditions that affect teen drug use and crime.

The Commission conducts research on “troubling trends in life”. This site provides scholarly and practical work already underway, summaries of national discussions on crime, and forms alliances that can assist in carrying forward the work of the commission. Current faith-based partners include the Urban Institute, Points of Light Foundation; Coalition for America’s Children and the Healthy Communities Network.

This youth site provides information on preventing crime: what works and what doesn’t. NYDC has a database with details on over 500 crime prevention programs available for use by communities and churches.

The NebGuide defines relationships between youth and high risk behaviors and provides strategies for faith-based organizations based on the asset building framework. Specific topic areas at this site include crime and violence, family violence, adolescent depression, developmental changes of youth, and helping strategies for parents.

Faith-based organizations can find potential funding partners to initiate or expand programs for social ministries. Topics addressed include increasing government aid to religious social service providers, the national social service agenda, local community politics and church-state separation.

PPV recognizes that many high-risk youth in poor communities are served primarily through churches and other faith-based institutions. PPV has many written and Internet resources available for churches to begin crime prevention efforts.

Rural faith-based organizations can benefit greatly from this site which targets improving the delivery of human services in rural and agricultural communities. The site also contains funding opportunities for projects to explore both youth and adult crime prevention.
Urban Institute
www.urban.org/family
This site provides statistical data on at risk youth and recommendations on how to identify potential at risk youth for prevention and/or early intervention. The site also includes reports, books and research studies to bridge the gap between research and practice.

US Department of Labor
www.icesa.org/articles/template
This site provides information on grants and contracts for funding faith-based organizations’ youth demonstration projects utilizing funds from the Work Force Investment Act. Rural projects that have received funding in the past and present include the Georgia Department of Labor, Lumberton NC River Council, the state of Hawaii and the Louisiana Enterprise Community Corporation.

World Vision Churches At Work: Crime Prevention Index and Church Mobilization Index
www.worldvision.org
The World Vision site provides individuals, churches and other community groups with information on resources to help empower the needy. The site has more than 100 examples of successful faith-based programs. The database is divided into the following categories: activities, beneficiaries, community and methodology.

Youth Entertainment Studios: National Ten Point Coalition
www.yesamerica.org/NTLF2
through a multidisciplinary model which includes the arts. Successful models include the national ten-point coalition project, Project Truth, and the Yes America Music Boot Camp.

Youth Ministry Resources
www.pastor2youth.com
This site is a link to over 1000 resources available to assist youth ministers in conducting programs. Materials include textbooks, leadership training, youth ministry games, and publications of youth ministry papers.

February 6, 2001