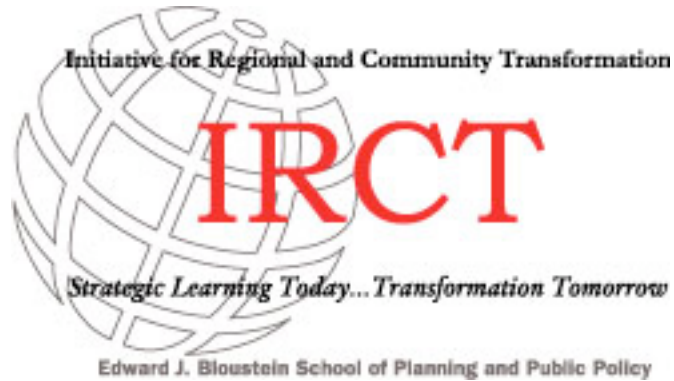


**Briefing Paper: Personal and Institutional Needs of  
Faith Leaders Rebuilding the Gulf Region**

Summary of a Policy Convening Hosted by

**The Jesse Ball duPont Fund, the Annie E. Casey Foundation,  
and the Ford Foundation**



**July 10-11, 2006  
At the Ford Foundation  
320 East 43<sup>rd</sup> Street  
New York, NY**

## **Introduction**

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita caused great destruction in the Gulf Coast region. The challenge to rebuilding and transformation is tremendous for all the affected communities but especially so for communities of faith. By many accounts, congregations and other faith institutions were the first and best responders after Katrina. These churches and other organizations were positioned to carry out relief work because they were local, they were known, and they were trusted.

These faith institutions, in many cases, were part of established regional or national networks through which they were conduits for donations and other important services. As the needs of the survivors continue beyond the immediate, many faith institutions are going to the next step of participating in local planning for long-term rebuilding and the provision of services.

The Jesse Ball duPont Fund, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, noting that there are so many important leaders thinking about and participating in the rebuilding process, asked the Initiative for Regional and Community Transformation (IRCT) at Rutgers University to convene a meeting on July 10 and 11, 2006, at the Ford Foundation. The IRCT invited a cross-section of local and regional faith leaders from the Gulf region to discuss a variety of issues attendant to the personal and institutional needs of the faith leaders.

### **Meeting goals:**

- To learn more about the needs of clergy and key faith leaders affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita as these needs relate to their personal readiness to resume community and congregational leadership roles.
- To nurture a community of learners and committed practitioners who control power and resources that can be wisely invested to rebuild communities marked by equity and justice in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.
- To provide substance and context for recommendations to organized philanthropy and others concerned about communities and congregations devastated by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

The funders realized that while faith institutions had a long history of outreach and community development, this was a unique set of circumstances that taxed the personal and institutional capacity of faith leaders working in the region. Responding to the needs of the faith leaders would take careful thinking and consultation to produce a set of strategic recommendations to help these leaders continue their important work.

## Summary of the Faith Consultation

### Emerging Themes

- The challenge of investing in a parallel process of restoring hope and congregational life while preparing faith leaders, denominational heads, and engaged clergy and laity to advocate for the marginalized as decisions are being made in a vacuum that will have long-term implications for people and communities.
- The playing field for providing widespread help to faith leaders is not level. There are complicated issues that fall along lines of congregations that are part of a larger denomination versus independent congregations; white versus black; rural versus urban.
- There is a tension (though not without solution) in the challenge of investing in the parallel process of supporting pastors' emotional renewal and crisis-skill management while not losing sight of long-term leadership development training for them as they prepare to help rebuild the region.
- Existing local and regional networks and institutions must be central in assisting faith leaders.
- Short-term crisis must be understood as long-term investment opportunity.
- The overarching issue of clergy renewal, with some attention to the culture and context of African American congregations. Meeting participants were clear that African American clergy involved in Gulf response and recovery bear a special burden given the preexisting challenges in their communities such as the prevalence of HIV and poverty and mental health issues. Many African American clergy were struggling to find the right way to address these issues within their congregations before the storm and found resistance. These issues are now compounded, with no new ways to discuss them productively with their congregations.
- Accurate and reliable information is needed about the number of churches and clergy involved in recovery and rebuilding, along with an assessment of resource needs.
- Investments must honor and support the development of indigenous leaders and tap into community organizations.

### Strategic Role for Philanthropy

- Supporting additional convening and dialogue around the issue of support for clergy in the Gulf region.
- Reliable common communications strategy to alert the broader public about the important work that Gulf clergy is accomplishing in difficult circumstances.
- Short-term skill development in the areas of disaster and crisis management coupled with a longer-term view to leadership development skill in aid of social, economic, and community development.
- Commissioning timely, usable knowledge that Gulf clergy can use in their challenge to recover and rebuild.
- Facilitating local and regional network development and the formation of national partnerships and collaborations to support leadership development and clergy retreats and reflection.
- Support financial stabilization programs for Gulf Coast faith institutions.

### The Special Case of Clergy Self-Care

Meeting participants spent a great deal of time discussing the need to provide a structured way for clergy in the Gulf region to pause, reflect, and renew their personal spirit in the face of events over the last year. The dialogue surfaced the need for further exploration of the following:

- Establishing a base of knowledge of good practices (and the gaps in provision) to help clergy reflect and renew.
- Establishing a networked pool of resources to help clergy reflect and renew.

### Recommendations

Meeting participants identified the following recommendations to help clergy in the Gulf region play an effective role in recovery and rebuilding coupled with attention to their need, as faith leaders, to reflect and renew:

- *Support knowledge sharing:* Faith-based organizations need to know what other efforts are being made so that they can best direct their spiritual and material

resources. Sharing knowledge through regional conferences and fact-finding trips is essential.

- *Provide funds for staff and space:* With the office space of many faith groups and coalitions destroyed and with the necessity to launch new programs to meet the needs of the citizens of the region, faith groups require support for staff and space. Most donors want their resources targeted to direct services. But without resources for overhead costs, the effectiveness of service delivery is compromised.
- *Provide technical assistance and funds to build capacity:* Such assistance can be provided through state or regional networks such as the Mississippi Faith-Based Coalition for Community Renewal. Types of support include ongoing training for grant writing and supplying computers with Internet access so that smaller organizations can find out about and communicate with potential partners and funders.
- *Support churches and pastors:* For congregations to help their communities rebuild, they need church buildings and pastors with reliable incomes that enable them go about the work of ministry. Fund pastors' incomes for the long term, twelve months or more.\*

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\*These recommendations flow from the meeting discussion, but they are fully fleshed out in a paper by Fredrick A. Davie, President of Public Private Ventures. The paper is called "The Role of the Faith Community in Relief, Recovery, Rebuilding and Transformation," in Envisioning a Better Mississippi (<http://www.policy.rutgers.edu/irct/publications.php>).

**Appendix**  
**Address by Dr. Robert Franklin to Meeting Participants**  
**July 10, 2006**

**THE FAITHS AND FACES OF GULF COAST CLERGY**

**REBUILDING THE GULF COAST: A CONSULTATION WITH FAITH LEADERS**

Robert M. Franklin, Ph.D.  
Emory University

Convened by Ford Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and the Jessie Ball DuPont Fund, facilitated by the Initiative for Regional and Community Transformation, Ford Foundation, New York City, July 10, 2006.

Background to a Tragedy

On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina, a category 4 storm, slammed into the Gulf Coast region of the U.S., flooding the city of New Orleans and heavily damaging the entire Gulf Coast region, including the cities of Biloxi and Gulfport, Mississippi, and Mobile, Alabama. The storm will be the costliest in U.S. history, and has been labeled the greatest natural disaster in U.S. history. Vulnerable because it is below sea level, New Orleans residents and government officials have long known that the threat of flooding in a great storm existed, but they were ill equipped to cope with the devastation caused when Hurricane Katrina caused breaches in the levee system designed to keep the city safe during such storms.

The people of this region tend to be poorer than the national average. And, as we know from many studies, the poor tend to be more voracious consumers of religion than their affluent counterparts. This represents an important, strategic opportunity for those of us who care about alleviating poverty and enabling people to live better lives.

According to one Associated Press report:

The Africa American population in the New Orleans metropolitan area, which includes several largely white suburbs, dropped from 37 percent to 22 percent, while the white population grew from 60 percent to 73 percent of the total that remained. The Census Bureau was unable to provide race or socioeconomic data limited to the city of New Orleans because officials were unable to survey enough people there to generate reliable data.

Hurricanes Katrina and Rita drove an estimated 450,000 people from their communities along the Gulf Coast last year. The Census Bureau released population estimates in June [2006] for 117 counties and parishes along the Gulf Coast for the period before hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and for January 1, about four months afterward. The counties—all in Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas—had been designated for hurricane assistance by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The data showed 40 counties and parishes losing a total of 450,000 residents. The remaining 77 counties and parishes—most of them farther inland—added 200,000 people. Census officials cautioned that there were not many people to count in some areas four months after the storm, creating larger margins of error than in most census studies. Also, the region has changed since January, with more residents returning to some areas. Steve Murdock, a demographer at the University of Texas at San Antonio, said: “It’s a mistake to think that these numbers provide a comprehensive look at the effects of Katrina. They provide a certain snapshot, but they are clearly only a partial picture.”

### The Faiths and Faces of Clergy

It may be useful to begin with a wide-lens overview or map of American religion from which we can focus on religious traditions in the Gulf Coast area.

According to Independent Sector, there are approximately 354,000 houses of worship in the United States, one-fourth of the nonprofit sector.<sup>1</sup> Duke University

sociologist Jackson Carroll reports that of that number, the vast majority—320,000—are Christian churches.<sup>2</sup> Most are located in residential neighborhoods in metropolitan areas, while 14% are in rural communities. America's two largest Christian denominations are Catholics (51 million) and Southern Baptists (18 million). Note that Louisiana is that rare thing, a Catholic stronghold in a southern state surrounded by Protestants.

Virginia Hodgkinson (IS) has noted that 20% of American congregations have less than 100 members (small congregations), 52% have between 100 and 400 members (medium sized and the modal congregation), and 28% have more than 400 congregations and are considered "large congregations." The recent book by Arizona sociologist Mark Chaves, Congregations in America, notes that a disproportionately high percentage of Americans worship in these larger congregations. Only a small percentage of churches are mega-churches with more than 1,000 members.

While our focus tends to be on Christian manifestations of religion in public life, Christianity is rapidly declining as a dominant, hegemonic cultural force. One may understand much of the Religious Right's stridency and aggressive organizing as a desperate attempt to recover Christian dominance of American public life.

In her wonderful book, A New Religious America: How a Christian Country Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation (2001) Harvard Divinity School professor Diana Eck observes that:

"We are surprised to find that there are more Muslim Americans than Episcopalians, more Muslims than members of the Presbyterian Church USA, and as many Muslims as there are Jews—that is, about six million. We are astonished to learn that Los Angeles is the most complex Buddhist city in the world, with a Buddhist population spanning the whole range of the Asian Buddhist world from Sri Lanka to Korea."



This new diversity is beginning to find its way into the Gulf Coast region particularly as new Americans (immigrants) arrive to take advantage of educational and employment opportunities. I'd like to note that thanks to the Ford Foundation, I was able to visit South Asia and East Asia just days after the tsunami. I was especially struck by the fact that significant numbers of Asians were coming to the U.S. and bringing with them religious traditions that should not be ignored. I made the following recommendations:

1. African American religious and community leaders who possess firsthand knowledge and experience of membership in a marginal population in the U.S. can and should initiate dialogue with immigrant neighbors from Asia, Africa, South America, and other locations. These leaders can be important sources of information about other communities during times of tension and conflict. And, they can play a role in diffusing potential conflicts between their respective communities.
2. American religious communities should continue to be deliberate about planning and implementing interfaith activities (worship, dialogue, classes, youth activities, etc.). These activities should not await distress but should provide the context in which new problems may be interpreted and resolved.
3. Local, regional, and national sources of philanthropy should invest in building interfaith organizational infrastructure in each community where diverse populations reside. Such proactive efforts contribute to the common good.

### Religious Responses to Tragedy

Let me illustrate some of the things I've heard from religious leaders in the region.

- The people who were too poor to leave are now too poor to return. Many have joined the existing underclass of other urban centers.
- Eighty percent of churches were destroyed. People fled to many places such as Houston, and Atlanta. They are now traveling hundreds of miles for what has become a touching weekend ritual. On Saturdays, many displaced residents pick through the remains of their destroyed house. At night, they sleep in their cars, if they cannot stay with relatives. On Sunday, they go to church for reunion and therapy. People drove that far just to see who survived and to be touched by old friends and neighbors. "It has become [the] center of their lives and they had not been abandoned."

- Houses of worship that were involved in various networks fared better than “stand alone” congregations (for example, Catholic Church, United Methodists, AME, Full Gospel Baptists).
- Many pastors are not practicing ministry, they are mothballing their congregations and contemplating going to Wal-Mart to take the “greeters” job.

### The Congregation as a Locus of Social Capital and Social Power

Congregations are sources of people power in communities. They have track records of service, credibility, revenue streams, armies of potential volunteers, talented leaders, meeting space, a positive social environment and fellowship culture, positive messages of self-improvement, and the political and economic leverage to change a community.

Imagine a chart composed of five distinct but overlapping zones of activity that represent the different phases of faith-based community activity. I’ve tried to develop this analysis in a little book titled Another Day’s Journey. At each level, the congregation extends its resources further beyond the walls of the sanctuary or worship space.

Phase one would be basic charity and mercy and relief. These are ministries of direct, immediate relief to people in need. Following Katrina most congregations mobilized to provide food, shelter, money, and other forms of assistance that were understood to be short term. On a day-to-day basis, most congregations make some effort to respond to the person or family that shows up at the door asking for food or assistance.

Phase two represents ministries of support aimed at helping people move from dependence toward self-sufficiency. Here, we highlight the role of congregations as hosts of issue-group counseling and support groups such as AA, NA, and so on. People who need counseling and peer-group support can find assistance for a discrete period of time. This lasts longer than the ministry of charity and mercy but is not regarded as an open-ended provision.

Leaders are reporting that all of the hardware projects (rebuilding homes, businesses, and the hard structures that make a city and a region) must be done in partnership with the software projects, that is, ministering to the pain, loss, grief, and trauma that so many people feel. This may not be permanent work, but it will be long term for many people.

Here let me illustrate some of the spiritual wisdom that religious leaders have offered to Katrina survivors.

Lama Surya Das, Buddhist Teacher and Founder of the Dzogchen Foundation:

How to handle losing everything? No words will suffice. Yet Buddhist wisdom reminds us here again about impermanence and evanescence, and the benefits of being able to let go, patiently forbear and accept. One of the prime virtues of adversity is to take this naked moment to reflect upon what really matters and is most important in life, and learn to balance our grief, fear, anger, and loss with appreciation for the fact that we are alive at all. Let's realize that the most important thing, ultimately, cannot be lost; and that it is incumbent upon each of us to find and cleave to that, however we may conceive of it, beyond life and death.

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Founder, American Society for Muslim Advancement:

The Prophet Muhammad taught that among those receiving Divine grace are all who die by drowning, in an earthquake, in a fire, plague or epidemic. All these souls are considered to have witnessed the Truth, thus they receive a heavenly rank.

But God anticipates our next question pertaining to the survivors of such calamity and hastens to remind us: "We shall certainly test you by some [combination] of fear, hunger, loss of worldly goods, of lives and of [labor's] fruits...but assure those who are patient in adversity, who when calamity befalls them assert 'Certainly we belong to God and surely we are returning to Him [inna lillahi wa inna ilayhi raji'un]. Upon these shall flow their Lord's Prayers and Mercy; for they are the guided.'" This explains Muslims' urging their co-religionists touched by calamity to express patience [sabr]...

Like college exams, we go through divine tests to achieve the rewards that accrue from doing well on them: Thus the spiritual tests facing the survivors and the rest of us include: how will we respond? Will we be angry with God? Or will we be grateful for the ultimate grace God has promised those taken into His mercy? And how will we contend with our fear, hunger, loss of worldly goods and of the

fruit of our life-work? Can we remain steadfast in the face of adversity? Will we act in accordance with the best of what it means to be human: doing good, being compassionate and supportive to those who need our help?

Phase three represents the ministry of social service delivery where the congregation becomes a full-fledged service provider alongside secular providers. Typically, this involves establishing a separate CDC or 501.c.3 organization whose operations and budget are separate from the house of worship. This moves from the informal level of charity or sustaining support to the more formal, institutionalized mode of relating to the community. It entails greater intentionality and investment in legal and administrative regulations, and professional training of staff. Some congregations have first-class programs for children, elder citizens, former felons, people who are substance addicted and gang involved. These are among faith-based activities that attracted the Bush administration as it launched the community and faith-based initiative. The president declared that he wanted such faith-based ministries to be able to compete with secular providers for public monies to deliver services to citizens. However you feel about this collaboration, there are cautions that should be observed both to protect the integrity of religion and to ensure the accountability of government to serve all of its citizens in a nondiscriminatory way.

Phase four represents ministries of public advocacy and justice. This is when congregations amplify the voice of the voiceless within the public square. Despite our abundant generosity in many matters, Americans have the ability to ignore and/or erase the existence of poor people, people living with disabilities or chronic disease, people of color, immigrants and refugees, gays and lesbians, and other nonconformists. On their best days, congregations can take up the cause of marginalized people and be advocates for fairness, equity, and justice. This is where congregations can leverage their social,

political, and economic assets to advance the needs of other people instead of their own...self-focused interests such as securing a construction loan for a new building or a grant to deliver services.

So far, this level of engagement has been present but not at a scale or intensity that would move the needle of American apathy and public sector neglect.

Independent Sector reports that some congregations do participate in civic life and activities aimed at influencing public policy. To accomplish this, 35% worked in coalitions with other congregations, 28% held meetings with elected officials, 16% purchased advertising or marketing to express an advocacy message, and 16% hired personnel to lobby on their behalf.<sup>3</sup> Needless to say, fewer congregations engage in this level of public ministry, but black churches, liberal mainstream synagogues and churches, and Catholic parishes have done the best job of illustrating how religion can advance the cause of justice for all people.

Finally, phase five represents the ministry of comprehensive community transformation. Here, all the previous forms and styles of ministry are included and the congregation plays a leading role in guiding the transformation of the entire community, even the city or town. The congregation assumes the audacious but humbling role as a custodian of the soul of the city. Congregations or coalitions of congregations operate at multiple levels to work for renewed communities and empowered people.<sup>4</sup>

This is another way of talking about faith-based community organizing. Here, as congregations become involved in the comprehensive transformation of communities (the quality of their political leadership, the quantity and responsiveness of their business enterprises, the richness of their cultural institutions, the safety of their streets, the quality of their educational institutions, and so on), something fascinating occurs. The internal life of the congregation is transformed. People grow and become authentic moral agents

and better citizens. They become people who care about the next generation. Or, as Harvard developmental psychologist Erik Erikson used to put it, they become “generative adults” who display their maturity and fulfillment through their actions to provide for the next generation.

This is the role that C. T. Vivian and the “Churches Supporting Churches” New Orleans project is attempting to undertake as it identifies 36 churches with a community development track record, distributed strategically throughout that metro-region. These churches and leaders are to serve as nodes of community development and to provide training in this art for other congregations.

These are among the challenges before us. Some Gulf Coast religious leaders say that Katrina has given the faith community a new sense of mission and may become the basis of a new and shared interfaith mission to rebuild a city and a region. Perhaps our work together can encourage and support them in this life-saving mission.

## Notes

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1. "America's Religious Congregations" (Independent Sector, 1997), 5.
2. Presentation delivered at the "Pulpit and Pew" research briefing for clergy, educators, and funders at Duke University, September 22, 2004.
3. "America's Religions Congregations," 14.
4. Robert M. Franklin, Another Day's Journey: Black Churches Confronting the American Crisis (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997).