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Congregational Aid: North American Protestant Engagement in International Relief and Development

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ABSTRACT *A review of large North American Protestant congregations (n = 423) engaging in global relief and development, or 'holistic mission' (HM), suggests that half engage in HM activities per year, with the majority of those activities focused on human and physical sectors. Most activities are led by religious NGOs or missionaries and about half are short-term. A mix of proximity, poverty, population, and policy variables direct short- and long-term aid. Findings provide a benchmark for enhancing learning and partnerships among churches, NGOs, and development scholars, ultimately enhancing the efficacy of Protestant aid.*

1. Introduction

For centuries, local religious congregations have engaged in international charitable works, being dubbed in recent times as invisible NGOs because of their grassroots and ubiquitous activity in the global South (Hearn, 2002).¹ Although they operate as non-specialist organisations (Develtere & De Bruyn, 2009), congregational financial, human, and cultural resources are considerable – a point which has not escaped non-governmental organisations (NGOs) seeking their partnership. As civil society organisations, they utilise grassroots funding and operations and engage in a broad range of development sectors. Several insightful case studies of Christian congregational aid have been published (Elisha, 2011; Freidus, 2010; Gramby-Sobukwe & Hoiland, 2009; Scheffler, 2008; Wuthnow, 2010), but without cross-sectional surveys, understanding and improving congregational aid is limited.

The aim of the present study is to address this gap. We use a sample of large (2,000+ members) North American Protestant congregations to: describe congregational aid; explore whether groupings of congregations differ in the aid they provide – whether black, mainline, or evangelical Protestants or denominational families (for example, Baptists and Presbyterians) differ in their engagement²; and identify factors influencing aid allocation.³ Throughout our discussion, we use the term 'congregational aid' as 'relief, justice, and development activities supported by individual religious congregations for the stated purpose of alleviating poverty'. Assistance from Catholic parishes, Jewish temples, and other religious communities is included in this definition, although due to sheer size, the scope of the present study is limited to Protestants. Because faith-based organisations are a diverse collection of entities (Unruh & Sider, 2005), we use the term 'religious non-governmental organisation' (RNGOs)

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to designate ‘faith-affiliated relief, justice, or development organisations operating beyond the oversight of denominations’, an example being World Vision or Tearfund. We use the term ‘church agency’ to refer to ‘relief and development agencies closely affiliated with a congregation or denomination’, examples being World Renew, the Presbyterian Mission Agency, or the United Methodist Committee on Relief; and ‘mission agency’ to designate ‘organisations focused on recruiting, training, and placing missionaries’ such as Africa Inland Mission or CMF International. Because awareness of congregational aid is limited, we begin with a brief description of its history, resources, and structure before proceeding to describe study hypotheses, methods, and results. Limitations and possible future research avenues conclude the paper.

1.1. A Brief History

During the North American second great awakening (1790–1840), many Protestant leaders emphasised with some urgency the necessity of caring for the spiritual and physical needs of the poor as Christ’s imminent return was expected (Harley, 2011; Smith, 1957). They also breathed in the optimism of opportunity and progress afforded by abundant resources, political independence, and divine providence. Although war, industrialisation, urbanisation, and economic volatility challenged this idealism, Protestants remained committed to save people from savagery, whether spiritual or physical, domestic or global. In the early decades of the twentieth century, recognising that an ideal North American social order had yet to be realised in North America, some Protestant theologians and clergy began applying Christian teachings as a prophetic critique of social, political, and economic systems, and as a call to work toward justice. This ‘social gospel’, as it was called, was commonly linked with other controversial issues such as critical views of scripture and membership in the Federal (later, National) Council of Churches. Exacerbated by northern and southern regional antipathies, the social gospel and its accompanying issues slowly divided Protestants inside denominations. Liberals leaned toward modernist social reform in this world while conservatives embraced a personal theology of salvation in the next.⁴

Many conservative Protestants shared materially with others at home and abroad during the great depression (Curtis, 2011). Repelled by the social gospel, many privileged spiritual needs over physical ones and generally sought social progress through individual rather than social regeneration. From the early 1900s, conservatives increasingly channelled their mission support through independent mission agencies, disapproving of the liberal theology of denominational mission agencies (Carpenter, 1980). Liberals advocated for socialism, pacifism, and public ethics to deal with new-found scientific powers (Dorrien, 1995) with much of their agenda focused on the domestic front. Liberals’ engagement in foreign mission waned as contributions and interest in evangelism, declined. Conservatives – today’s evangelicals – pressed onward with global missions, while liberals – today’s mainlines – continued advocating for economic and social action.⁵

Black theologians and pastors in North America followed a third path. Many resonated with the call for liberation and justice of the social gospel but they believed the traditional theology of the conservatives. In large part they were marginalised from both groups due to tacit or outright racism (Dorrien, 1995; Trimiew, 2001). Martin Luther King, Jr. and black theologians and leaders began focusing in the 1960s on the American black experience in oppression, injustice, and identity (Dorrien, 1995). The spiritual-physical dichotomy over which conservative and liberal whites differed, did not materialise in black theology. Lifting up the black community through black experience became the emphasis (Unruh & Sider, 2005).

During in the two decades following World War II, several influences nudged evangelicals to reengage in social and political issues. Included among these was leadership by influential leaders such as Carl F. H. Henry, the diffusion of television and its coverage of global need, an expanding economy, and increasingly active RNGOs. In the 1960s and 1970s, the US civil rights movement and Vietnam War would further prompt Christians to respond to issues of race, poverty, and war. Mainlines and evangelicals responded financially to global needs, expanding the budgets of existing church agencies such as Lutheran World Relief and spawning scores of RNGOs such as World Vision, Compassion

International, and World Concern – the vision of world-traveling evangelists who returned to the United States and Canada with stories of need (King, 2012; Pierce-Dunker, 2005). Mainlines' concerns about declining membership and greater government and evangelical engagement in social issues prompted an identity crisis and more emphasis on outreach (Unruh & Sider, 2005; Withnow, 1998). Historic mainline church agencies continued evolving in development thought, eschewing paternalistic and aid-only models in favour of development and witness, often utilising words such as 'holistic' and 'transformation'.

With their growing engagement in global aid and earlier rejection of the social gospel, evangelicals needed a robust theological rationale for holistic outreach. After several years of campaigning by Latin American delegates, global evangelical leaders met in 1982 at a conference in Grand Rapids, Michigan to draft a document that endorsed what today is called transformational, integral, or holistic mission (we'll use the latter term and the abbreviation, 'HM') (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1982; Swartz, 2012; Woolnough, 2011).⁶ The document – *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment* – attempted to heal the division between evangelism and social responsibility, asserting that they were 'two blades of a pair of scissors or two wings of a bird' (n.p.). The document claimed that while social gospellers imagined that 'by their social programmes they could build God's kingdom on earth' (n.p.), HM is motivated by recognising and emulating the compassionate nature of God. The document maintained the pre-eminence of evangelism over social responsibility and allowed for collective action to achieve social justice. Despite it being a milestone document known to some evangelical leaders, most evangelicals would have had limited awareness of *Evangelism and Social Responsibility*. What the document indicates, however, is the growing tension of evangelicals engaging in global compassion without an accompanying theology. Although clear distinctions remain in theology and approach, what seems apparent is that North American mainline, evangelical, and black Protestant congregations indeed are active in relief and development, domestically and/or globally. Their degree and pattern of engagements, however, have yet to be explored.

1.2. Resources

Protestants constitute a sizable sub-group of North America. They are the largest group of religious affiliates in the US, numbering 167 million adults (73% of the adult population) and assembling in 335,000 congregations (United States Census Bureau, n.d.). In Canada, Protestants are second to Catholics, numbering 4.7 million (28% of the population) (Statistics Canada, n.d.). Although global aid captures only a small percentage of the average Protestant congregation's annual budget, nearly half (45.9%) of US religious congregations report a congregational interest group or activity focused on 'religious or charitable work abroad' (Chaves, Anderson, & Byassee, 2007, p. 32). Many Protestants volunteer as well, with an estimated 1.5 million people volunteering in short-term missions annually (Monsma, 2007; Priest, 2008; Priest, Dischinger, Rasmussen, & Brown, 2006).

McCleary (2009) estimated that in 2005, evangelical NGOs (supported in large part by Protestant congregations and their members) had revenues of \$2.97 billion, capturing 40.5 per cent of US RNGO revenues and 18.7 per cent of total US NGO revenues. World Vision's private cash contributions alone in 2014 totalled \$600 million (World Vision international, n.d.). Funding to missionary societies was estimated to be \$3.75 billion US in 2000 (Clarke & Jennings, 2008), and Canada and the United States sent 135,500 missionaries abroad in 2011 (34% of all missionaries) (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2013). In terms of aid delivery, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that together, faith-based organisations delivered health services to 43 per cent of the population of 10 African nations in 2005 (Banda, Ombaka, Logez, & Everard, 2006). Together, these data suggest that although congregational aid is substantially smaller than other development flows and often operates at the fringes of mainstream development, congregational aid offers financial and human resources which impact millions of aid recipients.

Several channels are utilised in deploying congregational aid (Figure 1). Congregations may assist beneficiaries directly or through a variety of intermediaries and partners, such as mission agencies,

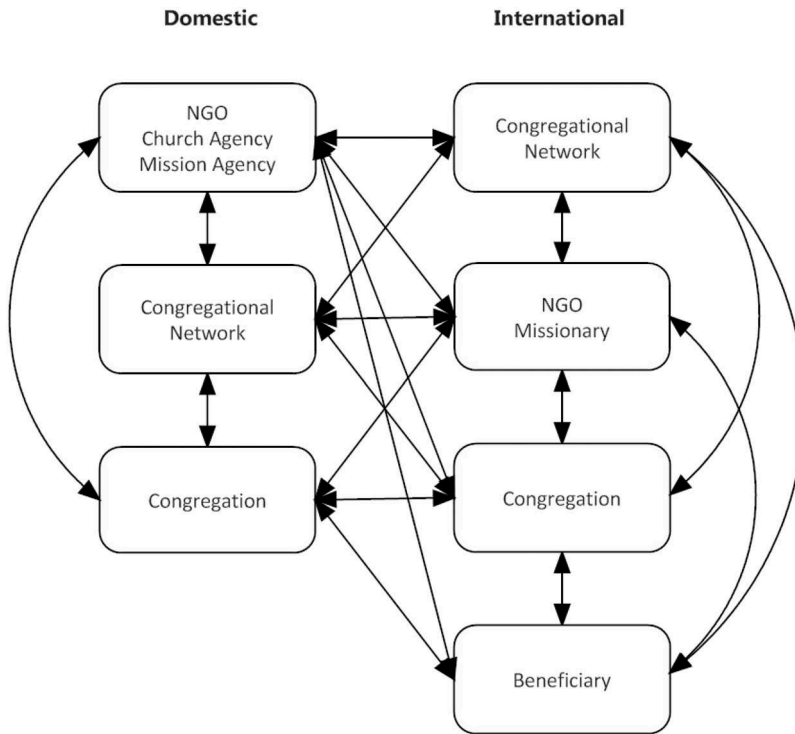


Figure 1. Aid channels.

church agencies, sister congregations, NGOs, and others. Aid channels can be complex when multiple intermediaries are involved.

1.3. Concerns

Religion has been recognised as important in development (Deneulin & Rakodi, 2011; Marshall & Van Saanen, 2007; Tomalin, 2013), yet mixing religion and development is not without concern (Ruerd, 2011). Congregations operating at arm's length from mainline development may have little awareness of aid architecture, development policy, or project implementation (Burchardt, 2013; Duraisingh, 2010; Harries, 2013; Smith & Hackett, 2012; Taylor, 2012).⁷ Well-meaning congregations can harm rather than help, as popular books warn (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009; Elisha, 2011; Farrell, 2013; Freidus, 2010; Priest, 2008; Probasco, 2013; Smith, Laurie, Hopkins, & Olson, 2013). In sum, congregational aid offers considerable assets, but it also carries unique challenges.

2. Research Questions and Hypotheses

As mentioned in the introduction, this exploratory study has three goals: to report descriptively on Protestant congregational aid; to identify whether congregational groups differ in their degree of HM engagement; and to explore how Protestant congregations allocate aid. Because the first research question is descriptive in nature, hypotheses are not needed. For the second goal of comparing Protestant groups, one prominent question is whether evangelical and mainline engagement in holistic mission is similar. Individual variables such as religiosity and the appeal of the cause, impact giving and volunteering, as do social factors such as social networks (Casale & Baumann, 2015; Monsma, 2007; Paxton, Reith, & Glanville, 2014). Although religiosity measures are often higher for

evangelical than mainline Protestants, mainlines exceed evangelicals in public policy interest and engagement (Smidt, 2007). Overall, we suspect that the historic social gospel emphasis of mainline denominations will result in these congregations engaging in holistic mission more often than evangelicals. Thus:

Hypothesis 1a: Mainline congregations engage in holistic mission significantly more than do evangelical congregations.

Sparse data are available on the mission activities of black Protestant congregations. Domestically, Barnes (2005) found that 90 per cent of black congregations engaged in community service, supporting food pantries, substance abuse prevention, and voter registration. Other observers agree that black congregations focus on domestic issues (Owens, 2007; Warnock, 2013; Wilmore, 1983). Referring again to historical patterns, we suspect that:

Hypothesis 1b: Evangelical congregations engage in holistic mission significantly more than do black congregations.

Because mainline congregations more often have centralised denominational structures and may be comfortable engaging secular non-governmental organisations (SNGOs), we suspect that mainline congregations partner more often with church agencies and SNGOs than do evangelical congregations. Evangelical congregations frequently employ missionaries, engage in short-term missions with indigenous congregations, and lead their own activities (Priest, 2008). Finally, because many RNGOs are faith-permeated (Unruh & Sider, 2005), and fewer evangelical groups have church agencies compared with mainlines, we suspect that evangelical congregations more often partner with RNGOs than do mainline congregations:

Hypothesis 2a: Mainline congregations partner with church agencies and SNGOs more often than do evangelical congregations.

Hypothesis 2b: Evangelical congregations partner with missionaries, indigenous congregations, indigenous agencies, and lead activities themselves more than do mainline congregations.

Hypothesis 2c: Evangelical congregations partner with RNGOs more often than do mainline congregations.

The third research goal deals with aid allocation. Considerable research has investigated how governments, NGOs, and corporations select aid beneficiaries (Alesina & Dollar, 2000; Berthélemy & Tichit, 2004; Clist, 2011; Koch, 2009; Masud & Yontcheva, 2005; Metzger, Nunnenkamp, & Mahmoud, 2010). Congregations likely differ from these institutions for several reasons, including in their goals and their relatively small size. Partners also likely influence geography and aid sectors. To gain insight on these various factors, we borrow from Clist (2011) who grouped aid predictors into four categories: poverty, population, policy, and proximity. Poverty refers to the level of economic and human need in a country; population suggests the magnitude of need; policy refers to donor interests; and proximity refers to donor-beneficiary similarity in terms of culture, history, language, and/or geography. In the case of congregations, because they often utilise congregational members in short-term HM, proximity may be pertinent. Policy might include locales with few religious adherents ('unreached'), or regions growing in Christian belief ('receptivity'). We suspect that these variables will impact aid differently depending on whether congregational aid is short- or long-term. Specifically, long distance and high threat will deter short-term HM and high population, poverty, and growth will attract long-term HM:

Hypothesis 3a: Proximity impacts congregations more in short-term holistic mission activities than in long-term.

Hypothesis 3b: Poverty, population, and policy impact congregations more in long-term holistic mission activities than in short-term.

3. Methodology

3.1. Data

Large North American congregations (Canada and United States) were selected for study because they have participated in HM conversations and activity on a relatively large scale. The Hartford Institute for Religion Research (2014) lists 23 Canadian and 1,641 US Protestant congregations with 2,000 or more members. From these, we selected all 23 Canadian congregations and a random sample of 361 US congregations – the minimum adequate sample size to generalise to the population (confidence level = 95%; confidence interval = 5). Any denomination having at least one but fewer than five congregations in the sample was supplemented by a secondary, stratified random sampling procedure whereby a total of at least five congregations from each denomination were selected at random, if that number was available (see Table A2 in the Online Appendix for the denominations sampled). Denomination-level sampling added 40 congregations to the sample, making the final sample 23 Canadian and 400 US congregations ($n = 423$).

Data on holistic mission was extracted from congregational websites on the assumption that large congregations use websites to communicate to members and they keep these sites current and accurate. On each webpage, we navigated to ‘missions’ or ‘outreach’ sections and searched for terms like ‘missions’, ‘global’, or ‘outreach’. We also checked staff listings and calendars for mission personnel and events to gain a comprehensive list of HM activities. The author then transcribed the data into a structured coding form for analysis.

3.2. Variables

Variable definitions are available in Table A1 (Online Appendix), but a few merit highlighting.

3.2.1. Holistic mission percentage (HM%). The dependent variable used in most analyses is the percentage of a congregation’s sponsored international activities containing one or more human, social, natural, physical, or financial components, divided by the congregation’s total number of international outreach activities.⁸ An average percentage is calculated for denominational groups (black, evangelical, and mainline) and denominational families (such as, Baptist, Pentecostal).

3.2.2. Livelihood Sectors. HM activities were categorised into one or more of 44 sectors, such as, ‘construction and building’, ‘environment and energy’, ‘food and food security’, and ‘water, hygiene, and sanitation’. To identify the relative emphasis on livelihood sectors, we judged each of the 44 sectors according to its perceived contribution to five livelihood assets – human, social, natural, physical, and financial (UK Department for International Development, 1999). ‘Construction and building’ activities, for example, were identified as contributing 100 per cent to physical assets. Given their frequent use of group lending models and social goals, ‘microfinance’ activities were coded as enhancing financial assets (67%) and social assets (33%). ‘Disaster response’ activities were labelled as enhancing human and physical assets at 50 per cent each, and so on.

3.2.3. Congregational groups and families. The denominational affiliation of each congregation was recorded according to the Hartford Institute for Religion Research (2014) database. Denominations were coded as black, evangelical, or mainline according to Steensland et al. (2000) with the exception that if a congregation was largely black in membership as communicated by its website, it was coded as black.⁹ Denominations were grouped into denominational families (such as, Anabaptist, Lutheran, Holiness) following the genogram offered by the Association of Religion Data Archives (n.d.).

3.2.4. *Geographic concentration.* The geographic concentration of a congregation's mission activity was computed using a weighted average of the mission activities within geographic sub-regions (United Nations, 2013):

$$GC = \sum_{i=1}^n \left(\frac{r_i}{t} \right)^2 \quad (1)$$

where:

n = the number of geographic sub-regions in which a congregation has HM activities

r = the number of congregational HM activities within a sub-region

t = the total number of congregational HM activities

A congregation engaged in four activities in East Africa, for example, and one activity in South Asia would have a geographic concentration of 0.625. A congregation with two activities in two regions would score 0.5. A congregation sponsoring 10 activities in 10 different regions would have a geographic concentration of 0.1.

3.2.5. *Short-term and long-term activities.* Activities less than one year in duration were coded as short-term. Examples include: a 10-day mission trip, Christmas gift boxes, and disaster relief donations. Activities that were on-going in nature were labelled as long-term, with examples being child sponsorships, fair-trade stores, and on-going support of a school or orphanage.

3.2.6. *Aid allocation.* Adapting Clist's (2011) model of poverty, population, proximity, and policy, we defined and measured aid allocation variables as follows:

- (a) Poverty, or the notion that need may attract aid, was measured by:
 - (1) Gross domestic product per capita, PPP (current international \$) (log) (World Bank, 2014a).
 - (2) The total number of people affected by disasters, 2004–2013 (EM-DAT, 2014; Strömberg, 2007).
- (b) Population, or the notion that magnitude attracts aid, was measured by national population (log) (World Bank, 2014b).
- (c) Proximity, or the notion that physical, cultural, linguistic, or historical affinity attracts aid, was measured by:
 - (1) Distance: bilateral distances from the United States to the country receiving aid, taken from Mayer and Zignago's (2011) GeoDist gravity variable dataset.
 - (2) Political Terror: the Political Terror Scale (PTS) (Gibney, Cornett, Wood, & Haschke, 2014) indicating the level of state-sponsored perceived threat within a country. The PTS consists of a 1–5 rating (from 1, a secure rule of law, to 5, country-wide terror) based on state-sanctioned killings, torture, disappearances and political imprisonment, coded from annual reports by Amnesty International and the US State Department.
- (d) Policy, or the notion that strategy attracts aid, was measured by:
 - (1) Per Cent Unevangelised: the population that does not self-identify as Christian (Johnson, 2014).
 - (2) Christian Growth: the number of Christians in 2005 compared with the projected number in 2015, minus the death rate and exceptional migration (Johnson, 2014).

For aid allocation regression equations, we test the ability of independent variables to predict short- (ST) or long-term (LT) aid. Specifically:

$$\begin{aligned} Aid_{st} &= \alpha + \beta_1 Proximity_i + \varepsilon_i \\ Aid_{lt} &= \alpha + \beta_1 Poverty_i + \beta_2 Population_i + \beta_3 Policy_i + \varepsilon_i \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Findings

US congregations constituted nearly 95 per cent of the sample (Table 1). Approximately three-quarters of the congregations had 4,000 or fewer members with a median congregational size of 2,593. All black congregations in the sample were located in the United States. Black congregations constituted 17 per cent of the sample, mainlines 10 per cent, and evangelicals 73 per cent. Congregations from 49 denominations were included (Table A2, Online Appendix). Non-denominational congregations constituted about one-third of the sample; Baptists and Pentecostals represented sizable segments as well.

Descriptive findings are reported in Figures 2–7 and Tables 2–5. Table 2 shows that 54 per cent of the congregations engaged in at least one HM activity over the most recent 12 months. Across all Protestant congregations, this averages 2.2 holistic activities per year, or, four activities per year when grouped across only those congregations engaging in HM. The 237 congregations with at least one HM activity engaged in 475 total partnerships with 328 unique RNGO, secular NGO, and church agency partners for an average of two partnerships per congregation. Not included in this count are congregations working directly with missionaries and international congregations. Congregational size did not correlate significantly with a congregation's number of HM activities ($r^2 = 0.063, p = 0.103$).

Table 1. Sample characteristics

Category	Characteristic	Congregations in sample	Per Cent of sample
Congregation Location	Canada	23	5%
	United States	400	95%
Congregation Size	1,750–2,067 members	106	25%
	2,068–2,599 members	106	25%
	2,600–4,023 members	108	26%
	4,024–43,500 members	103	24%
Congregation Group	Black Protestant	72	17%
	Evangelical Protestant	310	73%
	Mainline Protestant	41	10%
Total		423	100%

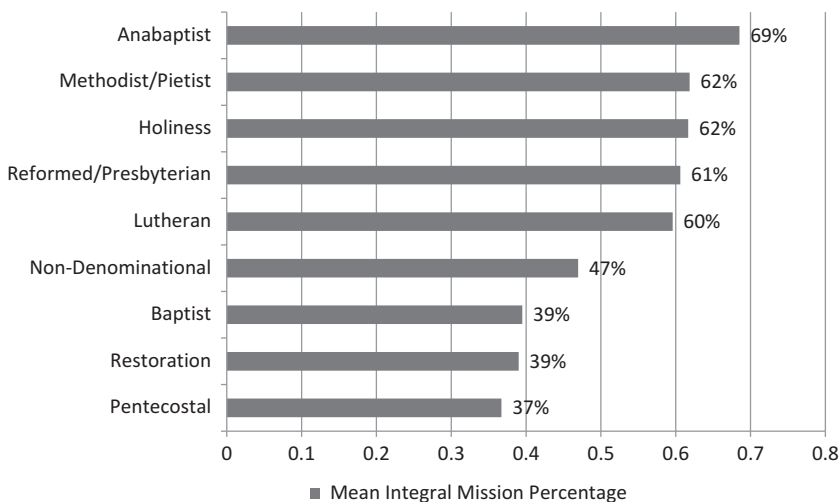


Figure 2. Mean holistic mission percentages from congregations in denominational families.

Notes: Adventist, Anglican, and Congregational sample sizes were excluded due to small sample sizes.

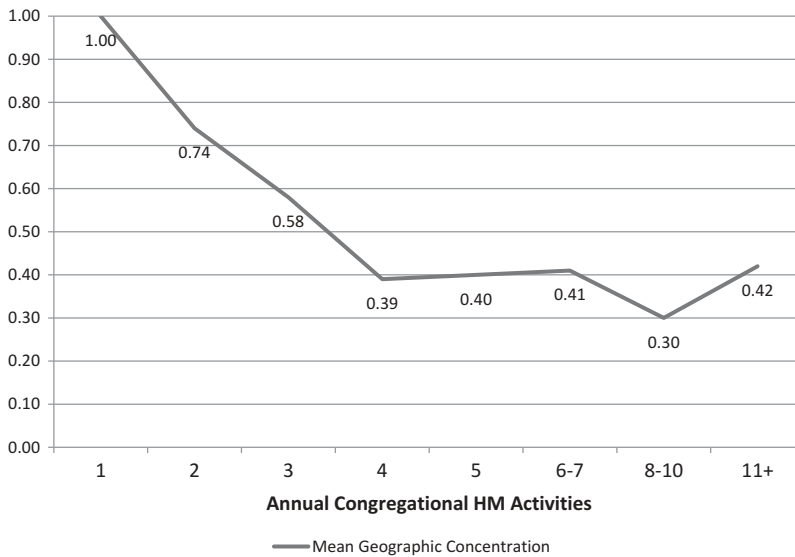


Figure 3. Mean geographic concentration by holistic mission activities.

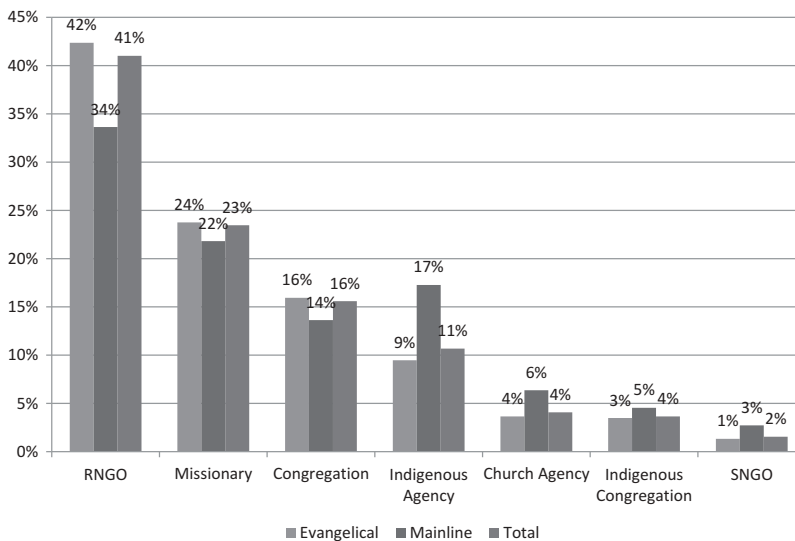


Figure 4. Project facilitators for holistic mission.

Notes: Black congregational data was insufficient to report with confidence.

Figure 2 shows the mean HM percentage for congregations by denomination family.¹⁰ Denomination families with at least half of their international activities containing an HM component have historically emphasised HM and/or are constituted mostly by mainline denominations. Denominations with the highest percentage of HM represented in their international activities are Anabaptist (69%), Methodist/Pietist (62%), Holiness (62%), Reformed/Presbyterian (61%), and Lutheran (60%). Those with less than half of their international activities in HM are made up mostly of evangelical denominations and those without a significant emphasis on holistic mission in the past. These families are Non-denominational (47%), Baptist (39%), Restoration (39%), and Pentecostal (37%). Black congregations appear in families high and low in HM percentage groups.

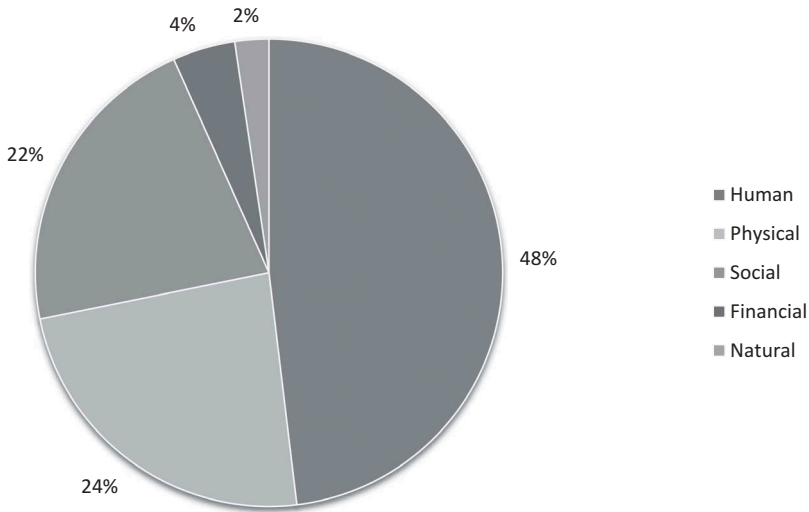


Figure 5. Sectors of engagement in holistic mission.

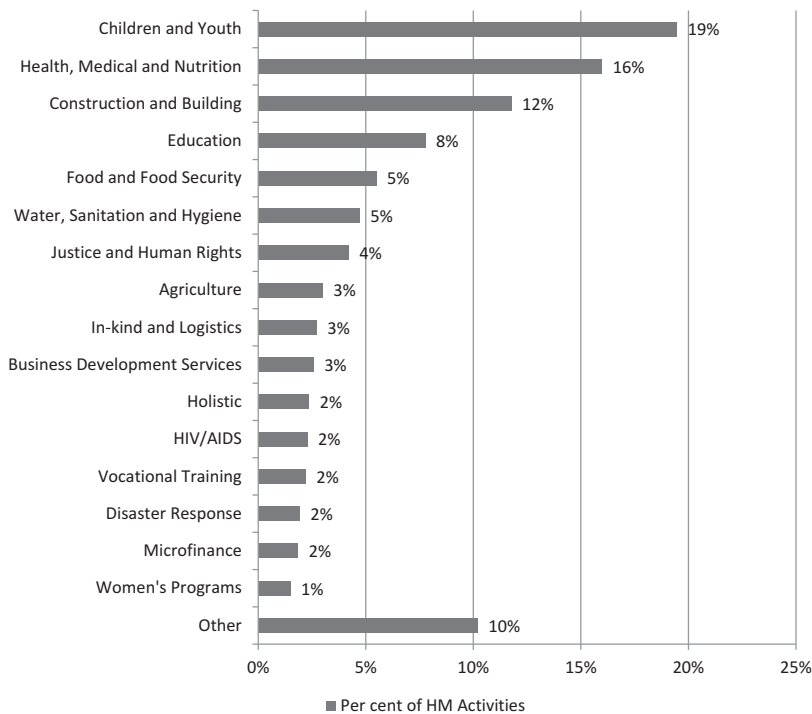


Figure 6. Per cent of congregational HM activities by detailed sector.

Geographically, Latin America, the Caribbean, and Africa attract the largest share of North American congregational aid (Table 3).¹¹ Low- and lower-middle income countries attract 69.5 per cent of HM activities (Table 4). Congregations tend to move to a new region with each new activity until they reach four, when they begin reinvesting in regions (Figure 3). In terms of partners, RNGOs lead 42 per cent of the activities and missionaries orchestrate 23 per cent (Figure 4). Indigenous churches or agencies facilitate 14 per cent of HM activities. Secular NGOs facilitate least often (2% of activities).

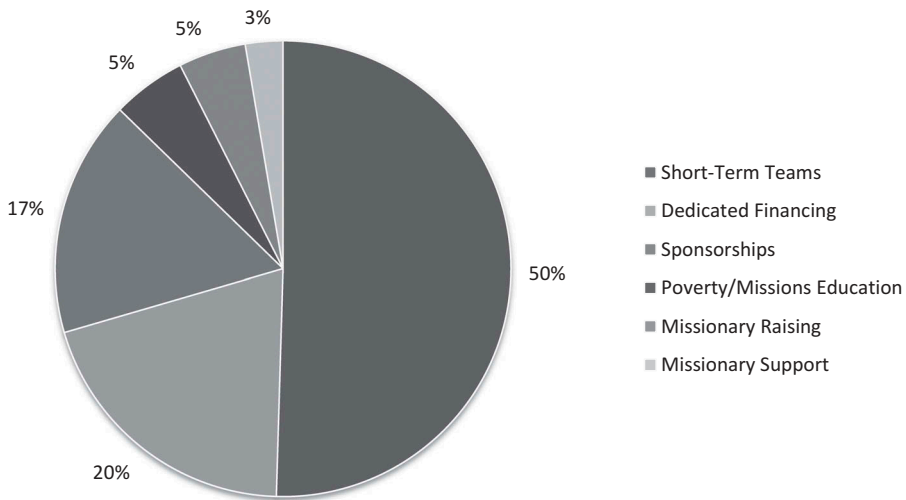


Figure 7. Congregational member participation opportunities in holistic mission.

Table 2. Holistic mission activities and partnerships per congregation

Category	Number
Holistic Mission (HM) Activities	
What per cent of congregations report at least one HM activity?	54%
Black	14%
Evangelical	82%
Mainline	69%
What per cent of international activities are HM?	50%
Black	69%
Evangelical	47%
Mainline	67%
What is the average number of HM activities per congregation?	2.2
What is the average number of HM activities in congregations with >0 HM activities?	4.0
Partnerships	
How many total partnerships did congregations engage?	475
How many unique organisations were represented in congregational partnerships?	328
What per cent of congregations with >0 HM activities, partnered?	85%
What is the average number of partnerships across congregations with >0 HM activities?	2.0

Only 23 partners appeared three or more times in the sample (Table 5). Four large RNGOs – Compassion International, World Vision, Samaritan’s Purse, and International Justice Mission – facilitated nine or more activities. Four RNGOs with a regional focus counted among the top partners as did three organisations specialising in short-term mission. Four denominational agencies made the list, one of which (Business Partners International) is tied to a congregation, one to a denomination (International Ministries), and the other two (World Relief and Church World Service) are interdenominational.

In terms of the types of livelihood sectors engaged (Figure 5), nearly half (48%) of congregational HM is directed toward enhancing human assets. Physical- and social-enhancing activities constitute nearly a quarter each (24% and 22%, respectively). Only 4 per cent of congregational aid targets financial assets and; natural assets attract 2 per cent. Sectors attracting the most activity were: children and youth (19%); health, medical, and nutrition (16%); construction and building (12%); and education (8%) (Figure 6).

Table 3. Congregational aid activities by country sub-groups

Region	Count of HM activities	Per cent of total HM activities
Africa	244	31.0%
Eastern	158	20.1%
Middle	10	1.3%
Northern	7	0.9%
Southern	26	3.3%
Western	31	3.9%
Unspecified	12	1.5%
Latin America and the Caribbean	344	43.7%
Caribbean	90	11.4%
Central America	202	25.7%
South America	52	6.6%
Asia	160	20.3%
Central	1	0.1%
Eastern	18	2.3%
Southern	64	8.1%
South-Eastern	61	7.8%
Western	10	1.3%
Unspecified	6	0.8%
Europe	37	4.7%
Eastern	24	3.1%
Northern	1	0.1%
Southern	11	1.4%
Western	1	0.1%
Oceania	2	0.3%
Australia and New Zealand	1	0.1%
Melanesia	1	0.1%
Micronesia	0	0.0%
Polynesia	0	0.0%
Total Aid	787	100.00%

Table 4. Congregational aid activities in country income

Region	Count of HM Activities	Per Cent of Total HM Activities
Countries by Income		
Low-Income Countries	267	36.3%
Lower Middle-Income Countries	244	33.2%
Upper Middle-Income Countries	203	27.6%
Upper-Income Countries	21	2.9%
Total Aid	735	100%

Figure 7 summarises the ways congregations invite members to participate in HM. Half of the opportunities extended are short-term mission trips. One-fifth of the opportunities are invitations to earmark financial gifts, and an additional 17 per cent are financial sponsorships, generally for children. Five per cent of the opportunities are missions and/or global poverty classes or opportunities for members to become long-term missionaries. A small number (3%) are opportunities to join a support network for missionaries.

4.2. Hypotheses

Four unique qualities of the website count data impacted the analyses of hypotheses: several variables were ordinal (Table A1, Online Appendix); donor country and denomination sample sizes varied

Table 5. Frequently occurring partner organisations

Partner organisations	Type	Count
Compassion International	Global Development	21
World Vision	Global Development	14
Samaritan's Purse	Global Development	11
International Justice Mission	Global Development	10
Amor Ministries	Short-term Missions	8
World Relief	Church Agency	7
Living Water International	Global Development	6
A21 Campaign	Global Development	5
Food for the Hungry	Global Development	5
International Ministries	Church Agency	5
My Contagious Generosity	Regional Development	5
Africa Inland Mission	Missions Agency	4
e3 Partners	Short-term Missions	4
Back2Back Ministries	Global Development	4
Business Partners International	Church Agency	3
Children's Cup Ministries	Global Development	3
Church World Service	Church Agency	3
Convoy of Hope	Global Development	3
Global Outreach	Global Development	3
Mission of Hope Haiti	Regional Development	3
Ten Days	Short-term Missions	3
Videre	Regional Development	3
World Hope International	Global Development	3

considerably; because several congregations had no record of international or holistic mission activity, the distribution of the key dependent variable (HM%) was j-shaped and could not be normalised without significant distortion; and variances across denominational groups were not homogeneous (Nonparametric Levene's test: $F = 5.83$, $df = 2$, $p = .003$) (Nordstokke & Zumbo, 2010). Given these data qualities, nonparametric Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis tests were chosen to test Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2.

Hypothesis 1a predicted that mainline congregations would engage in HM significantly more than evangelical congregations. This hypothesis was supported ($U(df = 322) = 3942.5$, $z = 3.00$, $p < .002$). Most evangelical congregations engage in holistic mission (82% compared with 69% of mainline congregations) but HM captures a smaller share of the average evangelical congregation's international activities (54% of evangelical activities compared with 69% for mainlines) (Table 2). In other words, many evangelical congregations include HM in their international outreach portfolio but HM captures a larger share of mainline activity.

Hypothesis 1b predicted that evangelical congregations engage in HM significantly more than do black congregations. This hypothesis also was supported ($U(df = 346) = 4716.5$, $z = 6.13$, $p < .001$), although again we have a difference in incidence and prevalence. A relatively small number (14%) of black congregations reported international activity, but those which did, tend to choose HM. About two-thirds (69%) of black Protestant activities are holistic.

For the second hypothesis, the appropriate level of analysis was HM activities rather than congregation counts. Although some differences exist in the facilitators of HM activities (Figure 4), Fishers exact test showed no significant difference in the use of church agencies and SNGOs (mainlines were slightly higher) (Hypothesis 2a: $p = 0.07$), or in the rate of partnering with other congregations, indigenous agencies, or missionaries (Hypothesis 2b: $p = 0.22$). Evangelicals did, however, partner significantly more with RNGOs than did mainline congregations (Hypothesis 2c: $p = 0.05$).

The final hypotheses predicted that congregations emphasise proximity when targeting short-term activities (Hypothesis 3a) and poverty, population, and policy when targeting long-term activities

Table 6. Zero-inflated negative binomial regression of aid allocation by proximity, poverty, population, and policy.

Variable	Short-term holistic mission				Long-term holistic mission			
	Coef.	SE	z	p	Coef.	SE	z	p
Proximity								
Distance (Ln)	-2.12	.63	-3.35***	0.018	-1.57	.58	-2.70**	0.007
Political Terror	.18	.26	0.69	0.491	.06	.18	0.31	0.756
Poverty								
GDP (Ln)	-.34	.43	-0.80	0.424	-.75	.35	-2.11*	0.035
Disaster (Ln)	.55	.24	2.29*	0.022	.22	.16	1.39	0.167
Population								
Population (Ln)	-.12	.32	-0.05	0.959	.79	.29	2.72**	0.006
Policy								
Unevangelised	-1.31	.084	-1.57	0.115	-.98	.70	-1.41	0.158
Christian Growth	2.06	13.79	0.15	0.652	14.67	10.87	1.35	0.177
LR $\chi^2(8) = 31.19^{***}$, $p < 0.0001$, n = 160, nonzero obs = 51 log-likelihood = -145.29				LR $\chi^2(8) = 37.36^{***}$, $p > 0.0001$, n = 160, nonzero obs = 58 log-likelihood = -134.21				

Notes: b = beta coefficient; SE = standard error; * $p > 0.05$; ** $p > 0.01$; *** $p > 0.001$.

(Hypothesis 3b). The appropriate unit of analysis for this hypothesis was countries with the number of HM activities per country constituting the dependent variable. Because countries not receiving aid need to remain in the analysis (McGillivray, 2003, 2004), and because some countries attracted over 50 HM activities, the count data was characterised by excessive zeroes and high dispersion. These conditions suggested that zero-inflated negative binomial regression (ZINB) was an appropriate test (Walters, 2007).¹² Vuong tests for data dispersion confirmed the appropriateness of ZINB over Poisson or standard negative binomial regression (respectively: $z = 13.18, p < .0001$; $z = 9.27, p < .0001$).¹³

Tests for aid allocation show that close physical distance (a proximity measure) and recent disasters (an indicator of poverty) attract short-term congregational aid (Table 6). Long-term congregational aid is attracted by close proximity in distance, large population, and high poverty.¹⁴ Possible unobserved heterogeneity in logit modelling makes comparing coefficients across models problematic, but the coefficient for distance is higher in short-term compared with long-term HM, and those for poverty and population are higher for long-term HM. Thus, limiting the comparison to these variables, Hypothesis 3a and Hypothesis 3b appear to be generally supported (see Allison, 1999; Mood, 2010). The proximity variable of political terror was not significantly associated with short- or long-term HM, nor was the percentage of the population that was unevangelised or the rapidity of Christian growth.

5. Discussion

This study uses congregational website data to explore how large (2,000+ members) North American Protestant congregations engage in international relief and development aid, or 'holistic mission' (HM). To date, religious congregations have not been studied extensively despite their frequent engagement in international aid and development. About half (54%) of large Protestant congregations engaged in an average of 2.2 HM activities within a 12-month period. Most evangelical (82%) and mainline (69%) congregations reported HM activities; fewer black congregations did (14%), although attenuation bias may plague the latter.¹⁵ The historic social emphasis of black and mainline congregations is evident as most (69% and 67%, respectively) of their international outreach has a holistic component. Slightly less than half of evangelical congregational activities (47%) have a holistic component. In sum, regarding the question of whether evangelicals engage in international aid, the answer is, 'yes, considerably so',

although about half of their international activities are not holistic mission. As to whether mainlines retain a strong emphasis on HM, the answer again is ‘yes’. Most black congregations and pastors may not engage in international activities, but when they do, HM is emphasised.¹⁶ When extrapolated to the population, these data suggest that nearly 900 North American Protestant congregations of 2,000 members or more engage in a total of 1,980 (900 congregations x 2.2 activities) international congregational aid activities annually. The magnitude of resources deployed or the duration or impact of aid remains unquantified, but this represents a considerable force among non-specialist development organisations. Many of these activities are delivered through NGOs, as we shall see.

Historical emphases continue to be evident in the congregational aid prevalence across denominational families as well – from a high of 69 per cent of all international activities for Anabaptists to a low of 37 per cent for Pentecostals.¹⁷ Nevertheless, one-third to nearly one-half of international activities for congregations at the lower end of the scale included an HM component in their international outreach (Figure 2). These data suggest partial convergence of liberal and conservative Protestants in congregational aid activity, recognising that differences likely exist in the goals and approach behind these activities due to institutional and historical idiosyncrasies.

RNGOs have effectively partnered with Protestants by facilitating 41 per cent of their HM activities (Figure 4). This figure suggests that more market penetration among congregations is possible but the high degree of fragmentation among RNGOs in aid implementation remains a concern. Congregational preferences for in-group partners (Schnable, 2015) create challenges in aid coordination, efficiency, and overall impact just as it holds potential opportunities for innovation. The high degree of fragmentation across congregations, however, may prevent learning from diffusing from one denomination or congregation to another unless information networks share such innovation (see Ammerman, 2005).

That congregations disperse aid to up to four regions before reinvesting (Figure 3) is likely influenced by multiple factors. Congregations may offer a lower limit of locales to their members to satisfy varying interests, or they may be limited by their partners. Likewise, an upper limit may be provided by financial, institutional, and logistical complexities. Even four geographic locales, however, may dilute HM efficacy in scalable impact compared with reinvestment in fewer locales (see Uvin, Jain, & Brown, 2000). Given that scant impact data was available on congregational websites, evaluation data does not appear to be a driving factor in congregational aid allocation.

Short-term HM in the United States tends to occur closer rather than farther from home and where disasters have occurred. Proximity makes sense as an appeal for short-term volunteers in terms of travel time and cost. The disaster attractor is consistent with the direct labour and aid orientation of congregations and bandwagon effects with disaster aid are possibly in play as well (Fink & Radaelli, 2011). Given that short-term activities often are focused on churches and villages, the size of the population would not seem to be a strong determinant of aid. The large representation of human and physical sectors (72%, Figure 5) in aid activities suggests strong congregational inclination toward relief rather than development. In part, this may be due to limited development opportunities for short-term activities which constitute half of HM activity. These findings do not differ significantly from domestic aid activities where Chaves et al. (2007, p. 12) conclude:

congregations are perhaps society’s best providers of small groups of volunteers to carry out well-defined, limited tasks on a periodic basis, [but] the small-group voluntarism in which congregations specialise cannot solve social problems [...] Nor can it be expanded beyond its current levels.

Significant questions have been raised about the efficacy of short-term aid and development (Ver Beek, 2008). Advances in thinking about short-term HM exist (Priest, 2008) but it is unknown how extensively these have informed congregational short-term activities.

Long-term HM tends to occur in closer locales and in poorer, populous countries which suggests a potential emphasis on development over relief and increased attention to large-scale poverty.¹⁸ This long-term emphasis is relatively distinctive in development in that some congregational activities and relationships endure beyond a short-term duration and beyond a three to five year long NGO project.

Although engagement longevity has raised questions about dependency, it lends itself to development benefitting from long-term personal relationships. This is a distinctive aspect and potential competence of congregational aid. Relatively few congregations engage in advocacy, financial, or environmental efforts, each of which obviously constitutes a sizable development sector.¹⁹

The emphasis of congregational aid on relief may have a theological or logistical rationale but it raises questions about aid efficacy. Additionally, with over a third (39%) of congregational aid activities being led by the congregation or a missionary, potential concern exists regarding development expertise. The concern over efficacy is even broader given that one-half of one per cent (2 of 423) of the congregations posted impact data. Aid coordination is another key issue given the thousands of congregations and partners. The degree to which short-term aid can be decoupled from congregational aid without lessening commitment to international development, remains a question. In sum, the majority of large North American Protestant congregations appear to be engaging in international relief and development activities. Assuming that poverty reduction is a primary goal, significant room for advancement exists in aid efficacy and impact. Their long-term endeavours are a potentially unique, distinctive competence.

6. Limitations and Future Research

6.1. Limitations

Appropriate care is needed in interpreting these exploratory findings. The data likely underestimate HM activities. Some multi-campus and cell-based churches, for example, decentralise missions which may not be reported on the main congregation website. Some congregations funnel donations to church agencies and do not record these flows on congregational websites. Congregations broadcast selected information and may remove past activities. All this suggests that attenuation bias is endogenous to the data source and cannot be corrected statistically.

On the other hand, without data on the exact duration, resources, or impact of aid activities, count data do not give a full picture of congregational aid. A single activity may be a one-off or a multiple-year commitment, small or substantial in investment or impact. Activity counts gloss over these differences in intensity. This suggests not only that count data is limited in what it can tell us, but also that its meaning should not be overstated.

The Canadian portion of the sample was small, potentially concealing differences between Canadian and United States congregational aid. We did not collect data on domestic aid, but this would have been an interesting comparison with international HM, especially for black congregations, which are often active in domestic community development. Cross-sectional data preclude insights into trends whereas panel data could show changes of HM activities over time as economic, social, geopolitical, and theological shifts occur. Knowing more about donor motivation, beneficiary characteristics, aid impact, and the human and financial resources engaged would provide additional insight (see Round & Odedokun, 2004).

6.2. Future Research

Future research questions abound. With half of the activities being short-term, questions about sustainable impact arise. Does HM result in mutual change in donor and beneficiary, as some church-based development approaches emphasise? Is constructing a church, running a sports programme, or teaching English, development? Can distinctive and effective short- and long-term models be identified (Farrell, 2013)? Do HM methods correspond to mainstream development practice? What types of partnership structures might enhance the coordination and impact of congregational aid? How well do congregations avoid dependency or patrimony (Malone, 2005; Taylor, 2012)? How well trained are those engaging in HM, both in congregations and in development settings? What cross-cultural issues are challenging and how well are they understood? What congregational characteristics differentiate effective from less effective HM practices? In the present study, Protestants are the focus. But how do Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, Islamic and other religious communities engage in poverty alleviation? NGO partners could be

studied by size, character, activities, and effectiveness to provide insight on congregational partnerships. On the theological and missiological side, what attitudes exist among missionaries, congregants, and church staff regarding HM? How well supported are long-term HM activities and what challenges do missionaries and RNGOs face (for example, Strand, Mellinger, Slusher, Chen, & Pelletier, 2013).

Multiple theories might be applied to explain congregational behaviour. How do congregational perspectives of poverty fit social science explanations (Vu, 2010)? What theological and historical questions remain in the conversation between spiritual and physical mission? In what ways are spiritual elements incorporated into aid development and with what impact? Are congregants who are active in HM drawn away from other forms of engagement, such as community service (see Morrison, 2014)? With five of the 10 largest national populations of Christians being in low- or lower-middle income countries (Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, India, Nigeria, and Philippines) (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 2013), and with the demographic centre of Christianity having shifted away from Europe and North America, what intra-national development activities exist? Needless to say, opportunities abound for further research in holistic mission.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes

1. 'Congregation' is used to indicate an 'organised body of believers in a particular locality'.
2. Baylor Institute for Studies in Religion (2006, p. 9) defines mainline denominations as 'historic Protestant denominations that are more accommodating of mainstream culture', and evangelicals as 'Protestant groups that emphasize the authority of the Bible, salvation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, personal piety, and the need to share the "Good News" of Jesus Christ with others (that is, to evangelize)'. It is possible for an evangelical-leaning congregation to exist within a mainline denomination, and vice versa. Denominational affiliation, however, is generally a meaningful identifier of belief and practice. Baylor Institute for Studies in Religion (2006, p. 9) defines black Protestant denominations as 'a strand of American Protestantism borne out of and specifically linked to the African American experience in the United States'.
3. Many major world religions contain rich traditions in aid (Clarke, 2013; Tomalin, 2013).
4. Prior to its appearance in North America, Scottish theologians debated social gospel notions (McKay, 2012).
5. This was far from a neat division. Today's Salvation Army, Wesleyan Church, American Baptist Churches USA, and Church of the Brethren historically blended conservative theology with social care. Conservative Protestants favouring divine healing often addressed ailments as an opportunity to demonstrate God's love and power. Denominations reacted to their own history as well. In an effort to escape the taint of colonialism, the United Church of Canada shifted from a focus on missions to one on development in the 1960s, but in so doing, lost support of conservative members and lost youth who joined secular development organisations (Brouwer, 2010).
6. The broadening of mission from the spiritual to the physical paralleled the broadening of development from the economic to livelihoods, human development, and wellbeing (Freeman, 2012).
7. For an example of successful partnerships see Scheffler (2008).
8. Outreach activities without livelihood sectors generally were evangelistic or catechetical.
9. Most of these were identified as non-denominational.
10. Data are aggregated at the congregational level.

11. As a rough comparison, the OECD reports 2012 ODA at 49 per cent for Africa, 10 per cent for Latin America and the Caribbean, 32 per cent for Asia, 8 per cent for Europe, and 2 per cent for Oceania. US congregations provide over four times as much aid to Latin America and the Caribbean, about a third less to Africa, Asia, and Europe, and approximately 85 per cent less to Oceania.
12. ZINB rather than conditional logit was employed since data were overdispersed (Cameron & Trivedi, 2013).
13. To simplify the analysis of distance and activity, only US data were included in aid allocation analyses. An ordinary least squares regression to check for multicollinearity produced variance inflation factor (VIF) scores below 2.5 for all variables except Disasters (2.61), Population (2.65), and Percent Christian (10.74). The latter variable had a -.94 correlation with unevangelised, so it was dropped from the analyses. Unevangelized (with the sign reversed) was used as a proxy for per cent Christian.
14. The Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) cannot be used to compare short-term and long-term scores since they cannot be used across two data sets.
15. It is unknown whether the lower HM percentage for black congregations is due to fewer international activities or less information posted on websites. Only 12 percent of black congregations reported any type of mission activity – A significantly lower percentage than either mainline (73%) or evangelical (67%) congregations. Thus, attenuation bias, or missing data, may affect the reported HM prevalence in black congregations.
16. We did not count domestic congregational aid but analysts have suggested that black Protestant congregations emphasise local community development (Owens, 2007; Wilmore, 1983).
17. Although North American Pentecostal congregations record the smallest percentage of holistic mission, their congregations in Africa and Latin America have not been silent about development (Freeman, 2012).
18. Regarding aid allocation generally, it is impossible to exclude endogenous feedback (Barrett, 1998). Aid may influence poverty and locations may change in their characteristics over time. These data represent only partial correlations.
19. Although advocacy is not limited to these activities, Chaves et al. (2007) estimated that 6 per cent of US congregations demonstrated, marched, or lobbied elected officials on international issues. Moyer, Sinclair, and Spaling (2012) report faith-based organisations (perhaps with congregational support) working in Kenya on environmental issues.

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