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Comparing Neighbors: Social Service Provision by Religious Congregations in Ontario and the United States

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NOTE: At the time of publication, author Femida Handy was affiliated with York University. Currently November 2006, she is a faculty member in the School of Social Policy and Practice.

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Abstract

Although religious congregations in the United States constitute a significant part of the nation's safety net (Cnaan, Boddie, and Weinburg, 1999), questions still remain: are religious congregations in the United States unique in their involvement in social service provision? To answer this question, we need to compare them with congregations in countries similar to the United States. Congregational social and community involvement in the United States is attributed to several factors: the unique separation of state and church, a pluralistic ethnic society, and the market economy of religion in the United States. If these factors explain the impressive involvement of local religious congregations in helping people in need and in enhancing quality of life in the community, then we should expect similar findings regarding congregations in other countries with similar characteristics.

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Comparing Neighbors: Social Service Provision by Religious Congregations in Ontario and the United States

RAM A. CNAAN and FEMIDA HANDY

Introduction

Although religious congregations in the United States constitute a significant part of the nation's social safety net (Cnaan, Boddie, and Wineburg 1999), questions still remain: are religious congregations in the United States unique in their involvement in social service provision? To answer this question, we need to compare them with congregations in countries similar to the United States. Congregational social and community involvement in the United States is attributed to several factors: the unique separation of state and church, a pluralistic ethnic society, and the market economy of religion in the United States. If these factors explain the impressive involvement of local religious congregations in helping people in need and in enhancing quality of life in the community, then we should expect similar findings regarding congregations in other countries with similar characteristics.

Our country of choice to carry out such a comparison is Canada, specifically the province of Ontario. Although the provincial government of Ontario fully supports parochial Catholic schools, it does not favor any particular religious group with public support. Furthermore, unlike Europe but similar to the United States, the government provides no public support for clergy or congregations. However, unlike the United States, which does not require congregations to register or file income tax, Ontario requires congregations to register with Revenue Canada. In both countries congregations receive no support from the public sector but are eligible for certain exemptions and reductions from taxation. Furthermore, both the United States and Canada have a pluralistic society, composed of numerous ethnic, cultural, and religious groups.

In a cross-national comparison of congregational involvement in social and community services, it is important to remember that the needs of people in one country may differ from those in the other. In Canada, for example, every citizen is eligible for government health insurance whereas, in the United States, in 1997, the number of people without health insurance was 43.4 million (Carrasquillo, Himmelstein,

Woolhandler, and Bor 1999). Canada, which experiences severe winter weather in all cities, provides greater public assistance in housing than the United States, a country where homeless people can drift to the sunny south. As a result, homelessness is less of a problem in Canada than it is in the United States. However, under the leadership of Brian Mulroney, who was the prime minister of Canada from 1984 to 1993, Canadian national policy began to emulate Reaganism while, more recently, Premier Mike Harris and his Conservative Party in Ontario, have moved the province rapidly into devolution and retrenchment (Ontario Social Safety Network 1996). As a result, Ontario provides fewer social services now than in 1990, and the needs of urban residents in the province are slowly becoming more like their those of their counterparts in the U.S.

It is also important to note that, in Canada, income tax and many other taxes are much higher than in the U.S. This is an important factor for two reasons: first, this leads to disposable income being lower, on average, in Canada than the U.S. and, second, people expect the government to provide more public goods and services than they do in the U.S. Canada also has one important cultural and political distinction: a strong collectivist identity and orientation. The United States is distinguished by individual rights, economic individualism, and fewer collectivist arrangements. In contrast, Canadian history and politics are replete with struggles and attempts to achieve unity by balancing competing claims of different groups such as the Francophones, the Inuit, and other indigenous peoples. Furthermore, the government in Canada is more trusted to solve social problems on behalf of residents than in the United States. However, given that Ontario in particular, and possibly Canada as a whole (excluding Quebec), manifests many characteristics similar to those of the U.S., it is reasonable to ask whether Canadian and, in particular, Ontarian congregations are similar to those in the United States. Do they also help people in the community to the extent done in the United States, and do they have a similar impact on the quality of life of people in their communities and beyond?

Our article proceeds as follows. In the next section we examine religiosity and religious involvement in Canada and the U.S. to set the context within which we introduce our hypothesis: Ontario urban congregations will differ significantly from their counterparts in the U.S. in social services provision and in the impact they have on civic society at large. In the third section we provide a brief methodological note describing the samples and instruments used to conduct the study. Next, we re-

port our findings: first we give the demographic and other relevant characteristics of the congregations in our samples; then we report on our findings on the areas of social-service provision that congregations are engaged in, their budget allocations for social service provision, and details for five representative programs from each congregation. These details include findings on who benefits from the programs and how much it costs congregations to provide the programs. Finally, we put forth our conclusions showing that, although Ontario congregations do engage in surprisingly substantial social service provision, they differ significantly from their counterparts in the U.S. in the type and value of services and in their impact.

Religion and Religiosity among Two Neighboring Countries

In this section we present the religious participation and contribution to congregations in the United States and Canada, with special reference to the province of Ontario. In 1994, there were 71,413 charities registered in Canada. Of these, 36 percent (25,458) were classified as "places of worship," making them the single largest category of charities (Hall and Macpherson 1997). Of all places of worship in Canada, 9,253 (37 percent) are registered in Ontario. Despite their predominance among Canadian charitable organizations, congregations account for only 6 percent of the \$90.5 billion revenues received by all registered charities. Charitable organizations overall receive a sizable portion (60 percent) of their revenues from the government, but congregations receive only one percent. Congregations receive the bulk of their revenues from private giving (81 percent) and the remainder from earned income (18 percent).

In the U.S., the exact number of congregations and the amount of money generated are not known since they are not required to register with the government or file tax forms. Estimates of the number of congregations range from 250,000 to 450,000, with an accepted estimate of 350,000 (Hall 1990; Warner 1994). In 1994, the United States had a population of 261,602,000; Canada had a population of 29,619,000. Based on these figures, the United States has one congregation per 745 residents; Canada has one congregation per 1,163 residents. These numbers suggest that either Canada has larger congregations or fewer Canadians participating in organized religion. As we show below, Canadian congregations are often smaller in size and religion tends to play a lesser role in the life of Canadians.

Lipman (1999) compared the financial giving and membership of American and Canadian Protestant churches. On average, members in

the United States contributed \$498.47, compared with C\$288.17 in Canada. Lipman also reported that, in 1997 in the U.S., close to fifty million people were registered church members compared with 2.5 million in Canada. This gives a membership ratio of 25:1 whereas the population ratio is only 9:1. When population size is controlled, membership size and financial support in United States Protestant churches is three times that of Canadian Protestant churches. Furthermore, Canadian churches are more hierarchical than those in the U.S., which tend to be more congregational in nature (Lipset 1990).

Almost 90 percent of Canadians who reported themselves as religious belong to the three mainline Christian denominations: Catholicism, Anglicanism, and the United Church (Lipset 1990). None of these churches can be viewed as fundamentalist and/or anti-institutional. This finding implies that, in Canada, a small percentage of churchgoers are affiliated with fundamentalist or anti-institutional congregations, which are more likely to focus on evangelism and proselytizing. In contrast, in the U.S., congregations are more diverse and include many fundamentalist groups and independent congregations (Bedwill and Jones 1997).

In the mid-1970s, Fallding (1978) found that there were 223 different religious denominational bodies in the United States, compared with only sixty-three in Canada. A later review, based on the *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches 1997*, found that, in the mid-1990s, there were 203 different religious denominational bodies in the United States, compared with eighty-five in Canada. Findings from these two different time frames indicate that organized religion is much more diverse in the U.S. than in Canada.

In a survey conducted by the Angus Reid Corporation in 1996, three thousand Americans and three thousand Canadians were asked about their social and religious involvement. The findings from this study indicate that Americans are much more religiously active than Canadians, at a ratio of almost 2:1. For example, 40 percent of Americans reported regular or frequent church attendance, compared with 20 percent of Canadians (Smidt, Green, Guth, and Kellstedt 1998). In addition, while 22.5 percent of Canadians agreed with the statement that "the concept of God is an old superstition," only 9.6 percent of Americans agreed. The authors concluded that: "Regardless of whether one examines belief in God, specific beliefs related to the Christian faith, or relative significance of a particular religious faith, Americans were significantly more likely to provide 'religious' answers to the questions than were Canadians"(7).

What religion means to people also differs in the two countries. In the United States, religious education implies a moral obligation to do good. In Canada, the link between the church and good deeds is moderated by the state's responsibility to help those in need. Congregations are assumed to be secondary to the state in the quest to help those in need, even by their own members (Lipset 1990; McRoberts 1993). Additionally, there is a historical link between the provinces and parochial education as evident in the funding of Catholic schools in Ontario, which is unparalleled in the U.S.

The World Value Survey measured participation in voluntary activities cross-nationally for twenty-two countries during the years 1981 and 1983, and it was designed to compare values and behaviors (Inglehart et al. 1990). Using these data, Curtis, Grabb, and Baer (1992) compared voluntary participation in the United States with that in other countries, particularly Canada. When all types of voluntary activity were combined, they found that people in the U.S. were much more active in voluntary associations (72.7 percent as compared with 58.2 percent in Canada). However, when church participation was excluded from the analysis, the two countries showed striking similarities in voluntary participation: 47.1 percent in the U.S. and 44.3 percent for Canada. In other words, the United States' voluntary participation is more frequently rooted in active religious participation. These authors noted that "our data indicate that 55 percent of Americans have church or religious memberships. Except Northern Ireland at 52 percent, every other nation is at least 20 percentage points below the American figure..." (145). These findings tell us that Americans not only feel more religious, but also are more likely to belong to an organized religious community, most commonly a congregation.

What the literature shows is that, compared with Canada, the U.S. has more people who belong to local religious congregations and that these people, on average, contribute at least twice as much to their congregations. Hence, the combined potential impact of congregations in Canada on their society is likely to be less than that of congregations in the U.S. Furthermore, due to differences in social and political structures and in levels of public sector services in each country, it is likely that congregations in the U.S. will be more actively involved in social service provision than their counterparts in Canada. Thus, in this article we test the hypothesis that Canadian urban congregations—at least those in Ontario—differ significantly from their counterparts in the U.S. in social service provision and in the impact they have on civic society at large.

Methods

Our sample for congregations in Canada (forty-six) comes from three highly urban areas: London, Kingston, and Toronto. In the U.S., our sample of congregations (251) also comes from urban areas: Chicago, Houston, Indianapolis, Mobile, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. For each of these cities, we obtained a list of all congregations listed in the Yellow Pages and White Pages and the list provided by the local Council of Churches. From the combined lists for each city, we generated a random list of congregations to be studied. We telephoned the clergy, described our research project, and asked them to consent to be interviewed. This was followed with a letter and information on the project and research team. The interviews were scheduled on church premises and included clergy, lay leaders, and church members most involved in service provision.

In carrying out this study, we used a comprehensive range of research instruments to determine the congregation's role in the provision of social services.¹ The first instrument asks for general descriptors of the congregation such as denomination, location, membership, ethnicity of members, governance, history, future plans, staff, and budgets. The second instrument elicits the breadth of the community and social services provided by the congregation. We asked interviewees whether their congregation had provided, within the past twelve months, any of the programs listed. The list consisted of some two hundred programs that had been identified from congregational literature, previous work of the research team, and consultation with many experts in the field. We included only nonreligious programs. That is, the program could not be exclusively religious, such as in communal prayers, bible classes, or worship services. It should be noted that this approach measured only: first, areas of service in which congregations were involved; second, whether the program was held on their property or elsewhere; and, third, whether the congregations ran the program alone, in cooperation with another provider, or only provided space for the program. This measure, however, does not provide information regarding the magnitude of involvement in terms of budget allocated and scope of the program. The third instrument asked each congregation to identify up to five programs that were most representative of their social and community involvement. For each of these, respondents were asked to identify the nature of the program, how it was funded, where it was carried out, and whether the congregation derived

any income from it. We also asked for data on the specific hours of volunteer and paid time, who and how many benefited from the program, who initiated the programs, the reasons for initiating the program, and space provisions. We limited our data collection for up to five social programs to reduce the response burden on our interviewees. Yet because many congregations had more than five programs, our findings underestimate the social and community service provision of local religious congregations. We also asked the congregations what percentage of their annual budget was allocated to social programs and to helping others. This measure assesses the financial contribution of congregations in helping others and takes into account the unequal budgets and strengths of congregations.

Findings

In the following sections, we report our findings regarding the demographic characteristics of the congregations and social service delivery by forty-six congregations in three Ontario cities and compare them to 251 congregations in seven U.S. cities.

Demographics of the Congregations

Membership varied widely among the samples. The mean membership for the Ontario sample was 328 members, whereas in the U.S. the mean membership was 571. This difference was not statistically significant. Size of membership varied considerably. The number of members in the Ontario sample ranged from a low of 39 to a high of 5,500 (S.D. = 599), compared with a low of 10 to a high of 14,400 (S.D.=1368) in the U.S. United States congregations were not only larger in size, but also attracted significantly more people for weekend prayer services. On average, 387 people in the United States attended a weekend service, compared with 225 in Ontario.

Many congregations were composed solely, or primarily, of one ethnic group. However, the United States sample included sixty-nine (27.5 percent) congregations with 75 percent or more black members, while the Ontario sample included only one such (2.2 percent) congregation. This is not surprising given the large black populations in urban areas in the U.S. as compared to Ontario. In both samples, the dominant group was Caucasian.

Comparison of the two samples showed no significant differences in political and theological orientation, except for theological fundamental-

ism. Forty percent of congregations in the U.S. reported themselves as theologically fundamentalist, compared with 25 percent of the Ontario sample. When conservative and fundamentalist orientations were combined, the percentages were more similar (56.2 percent in the U.S. and 58.2 percent in Canada). When asked, the United States sample reported being politically liberal slightly more often than the Ontario sample. This difference, although not statistically significant, is explained by the higher frequency of black congregations in the United States sample. Moreover, blacks tend to be more supportive of publicly funded social programs. As expected, the Ontario sample included a higher proportion of Anglican and United Church of Canada congregations. In the United States no one denomination dominated the sample. Due to the low frequency of any one denomination in the United States sample, denominational-based analysis was not possible.

There was no significant difference in annual operating budgets (excluding building funds and school budgets) between the two samples. An overwhelming majority of congregations (93.6 percent) in Ontario reported annual budgets between \$50,000 and \$500,000, compared with 71.2 percent of congregations in the U.S. Most notably, 16.7 percent of congregations in the U.S. reported annual budgets of more than \$500,000, compared with 4.3 percent of congregations in Ontario. It is important to note that the Canadian budgets were measured in Canadian dollars and the U.S. budgets in U.S. dollars.²

The number of full-time paid clergy is another indicator of congregational strength. There were no statistically significant differences between the samples, although only 15.2 percent of the congregations in Ontario reported no full-time staff, compared with 20 percent in the United States. However, when we compared the number of full-time paid clergy positions in the two samples, a significant finding was revealed. On average, congregations in the U.S. had 1.63 paid clergy positions, compared with 1.17 positions in Ontario. This finding indicates that, in addition to higher operating budgets and higher financial support by members, congregations in the U.S. also employ more clergy. These factors are critical in explaining the following findings on social and community involvement.

Areas of Congregational Social and Community Involvement

As indicated, all interviewees were asked to review a list of some two hundred programs and to indicate whether or not their congregation had

provided such a service over the past twelve months. If the answer was affirmative, we asked whether the service was provided as a formal program or on an "as-needed" basis. For example, if one or more families had approached the clergy for counseling, but the congregation had no formal family-counseling program, we excluded the program from our analysis. In other words, our purpose in this analysis was to identify only those areas of social and community service in which congregations in the U.S. and Ontario are deliberately and formally involved.

The areas of social and community service which we defined as formal programs include: first, programs run by the congregation on its property; second, programs run by another provider on congregational property; third, off-site programs run by the congregation; and, fourth, support for denominational, interdenominational, and public programs carried out elsewhere.

Of the forty-six congregations in the Ontario sample, all provided at least one formal program. Of the 251 congregations in the United States, four (1.6 percent) provided no formal program. This indicates that, with very few exceptions, congregations in Ontario and the U.S. provide a minimum of one program either on their own or in collaboration with another congregation or organization.

The number of service areas in which the U.S. sample was involved ranged from zero to 175, with a mean of thirty-eight areas per congregation. The number of service areas in which the Ontario sample was involved ranged from two to seventy-two, with a mean of thirty-four areas per congregation. These differences were not significant. These high percentages of involvement are similar to those found by the Gallup organization in a study commissioned by the Independent Sector (Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1993).

For the sake of brevity, Table 1 includes only those program areas reported by at least 25 percent of the congregations in either sample. Table 1 consists of separate panels, 1a to 1m, each containing a specific set of service areas. It should be noted that the number of program areas listed in Table 1 does not represent the actual number of programs provided by local religious congregations. In some cases, a program was reported more than once because it involved several program areas. For example, a homeless shelter program might also include a soup kitchen and a mental health care unit. Although the congregation may consider all these services to be a single program, the instrument required that they identify these services separately under program areas.

Table 1: Programs areas reported by at least 25% of congregations in either Ontario or the United States

1a) Counseling/ families

Program	Canada total +	U.S. total +	Canada support @	U.S. support @
Marriage encounters	16 (34.8%)	77 (30.7%)	11 (68.8%)	29 (37.7%)*
Single-parent programs	5 (10.9%)	66 (26.3%)*	3 (60.0%)	11 (16.7%)*
Parenting skills	15 (32.6%)	97 (38.6%)	3 (20.0%)	13 (13.4%)
Teen pregnancy	12 (26.1%)	53 (21.1%)	11 (91.7%)	24 (45.2%)*
Intergenerational programs	20 (43.5%)	68 (27.1%)*	—	—
Loss of spouse – Support groups	14 (30.4%)	37 (14.7%)*	9 (64.3%)	10 (27.0%)*

+ indicates number and percent of program areas carried out formally by congregations in sample
 @ indicates number and percent of program areas listed on the left side of the table that are offered only as supporting the work of some other organization. The service is not provided directly by or on the congregation's property.

* indicates a statistically significant difference at the .05 level.

** indicates a statistically significant difference at the .01 level.

*** indicates a statistically significant difference at the .001 level.

1b) Programs for seniors

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Recreational programs	21 (45.7%)	77 (30.7%)	2 (9.5%)	6 (7.8%)
Visitation — buddy program	21 (45.7%)	109 (43.4)	—	—
Organized tours	8 (17.4%)	75 (29.9%)	1 (12.5%)	6 (8.0%)

1c) Educational opportunities (Adults)

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Scholarships for students in need	13 (28.3%)	75 (29.9%)	4 (30.7%)	12 (5.3%)

1d) Children and youth

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Day care (preschool)	10 (21.7%)	76 (30.3%)	1 (10.0%)	10 (13.2%)
Mothers' morning out	15 (32.6%)	39 (15.5%)*	1 (6.7%)	5 (12.6%)
Summer day camp	25 (54.3%)	132 (52.6%)	11 (44.0%)	29 (22.0%)*
After-school care (Recreational)	2 (4.2%)	73 (29.1%)*	2 (100%)	5 (6.8%)*
Tutoring	19 (19.6%)	98 (30.1%)*	4 (21.1%)	16 (16.3%)
Scouts	21 (45.7%)	79 (31.5%)	—	—
Recreational programs (children)	22 (47.8%)	119 (47.4%)	2 (9.1%)	9 (7.6%)
Recreational programs (teens)	31 (67.4%)	132 (52.2%)	3 (9.7%)	11 (8.3%)
Summer programs (teens)	20 (43.5%)	111 (44.2%)	5 (25.0%)	21 (18.9%)
Scholarships for students	16 (34.8%)	118 (47.0%)	3 (18.8%)	13 (11.0%)

Table 1: continued

1e) Homeless and poor people services

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Shelter for men	26 (56.5%)	72 (28.7%)*	24 (92.3%)	51 (70.8%) *
Shelter for women/children	25 (54.3%)	71 (28.3%)*	23 (92.0%)	57 (80.3%)
Day mission programs	17 (37.0%)	41 (16.3%)*	15 (88.2%)	25 (61.0%)
Clothing closets	36 (78.3%)	141 (56.2%)*	20 (55.6%)	64 (45.4%)
Food pantries	38 (82.6%)	163 (69.9%)	19 (50.0%)	58 (35.6%)
Soup kitchen	28 (60.9%)	89 (35.5%)*	19 (67.9%)	47 (52.8%)
Financial assistance	20 (43.5%)	76 (30.3%)	2 (10.0%)	26 (34.2%) *
Street outreach	16 (34.8%)	74 (29.5%)	13 (81.3%)	17 (23.0%) *

1f) Serving people in need

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Programs for refugees	13 (28.3%)	28 (11.2%)*	9 (69.2%)	19 (67.9%)
International relief	37 (80.4%)	133 (53.0%)*	32 (86.5%)	112 (84.2%)
Prison ministry	14 (30.4%)	92 (36.7%)	4 (28.6%)	32 (34.8%)

1g) Health

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Sick/homebound	15 (32.6%)	106 (42.2%)	1 (6.7%)	3 (2.8%)
Health screening	1 (2.2%)	70 (27.9%)*	1 (100%)	11 (15.7%)
Health education	2 (4.3%)	69 (27.5%)*	—	13 (18.8%)
Drug & alcohol prevention	8 (17.4%)	79 (31.5%)*	4 (50.0%)	29 (25.3%)
HIV/AIDS programs	7 (15.2%)	63 (25.1%)	6 (85.7%)	27 (42.9%) *
AA	14 (30.4%)	71 (28.3%)	3 (21.4%)	13 (18.3%)
Blood drive	1 (2.2%)	77 (30.7%)*	—	14 (18.2)
Hospital visitation	25 (50.2%)	126 (50.2%)	1 (4.0%)	2 (1.6%)

1h) Community security

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Crime watch	3 (6.6%)	67 (26.7%)*	2 (66.7%)	21 (31.3%)
Cooperation with police	7 (15.2%)	73 (29.1%)*	—	12 (16.4%)
Space for police/community mtg.	5 (10.9%)	63 (25.1%)*	—	—

1i) Community economic development

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Disaster relief	18 (39.1%)	89 (35.5%)	11 (61.1%)	65 (73.0%)
Civic beautification/improvement	4 (8.7%)	64 (25.5%)*	1 (25.0%)	20 (31.25)

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Table 1: continued
1j) Art and culture

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Music classes	12 (26.1%)	79 (31.5%)	—	3 (.8%)
Music performances	23 (50%)	140 (55.8%)	—	—
Lecture series	9 (19.6%)	72 (28.7%)	1 (11.1%)	2 (2.8%)
Choral groups	29 (63.0%)	126 (50.2%)	—	—

1k) Community organizing / Providing space for other organizations

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Neighborhood associations	14 (30.4%)	114 (45.4%)	1 (7.1%)	11 (9.6%)
Interracial collaboration	6 (13.0%)	78 (31.1%)*	2 (33.3%)	10 (12.8%)
Interfaith collaboration	24 (52.2%)	101 (40.2%)	8 (33.3%)	16 (15.8%)
Neighborhood cleanup	4 (8.7%)	68 (27.1%)*	1 (25.0%)	16 (23.5%)
Sport activities	10 (21.7%)	103 (41.0%)*	—	12 (11.6%)
Holiday celebrations	21 (45.7%)	123 (49.0%)	2 (9.5%)	7 (5.7%)
Community bazaars/fairs	25 (54.3%)	111 (42.2%)	2 (20.0%)	13 (12.6%)

1l) Social issues

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Civil rights	5 (10.9%)	67 (26.7%)*	4 (80.0%)	26 (38.81%)
Social justice	18 (39.1%)	75 (29.9%)	8 (44.4%)	23 (30.7%)
Racism	7 (15.2%)	80 (31.9%)*	3 (42.9%)	29 (36.25%)
Interfaith relations	18 (39.1%)	102 (40.6%)	6 (33.3%)	26 (25.5%)
Pro-choice/pro-life advocacy	12 (26.1%)	63 (25.1%)	9 (75.0%)	29 (46.0%)
Women's issues	15 (32.6%)	64 (25.5%)	8 (53.3%)	4 (6.3%)
Family values	12 (26.1%)	85 (33.9%)	4 (33.3%)	12 (14.1%)*
Poverty/welfare rights/advocacy	16 (34.8%)	71 (28.3%)	8 (50.0%)	26 (36.6%)
Voter registration	6 (13.0%)	82 (32.7%)*	—	16 (19.5%)

1m) Housing for the needy

Program	Canada total	U.S. total	Canada support	U.S. support
Housing rehabilitation	5 (10.9%)	72 (28.7%)*	4 (80.0%)	43 (59.7%)
Habitat for Humanity	13 (28.3%)	75 (29.9%)	13 (100%)	61 (81.33%)
Collaboration with groups for housing	9 (19.6%)	66 (26.3%)	7 (77.8%)	41 (62.1%)

In the areas of counseling and programs for families (panel 1a), there were a few statistically significant differences between Ontario and the U.S. Ontario congregations were more involved in intergenerational programs and in loss-of-spouse support groups, whereas U.S. congregations were more engaged in single-parent programs. The latter may be due to the fact that the United States has a higher rate of single mothers than does Canada.

In the area of services for the elderly (panel 1b), there were no significant differences between Ontario and the United States. However, there were significant differences regarding services for children and youth (panel 1d). Ontario congregations offered significantly more programs for mothers of young children to socialize, while United States congregations offered significantly more after-school programs for children and teens. The programs in the United States may be a response to the higher rate of single parents and the need for children to have safe supervised after-school care when their parents are still at work. In Ontario, unsafe neighborhoods are less common and hence parental concern for children's safety is less of an issue. In the areas of services for homeless and poor people, both Ontario and the U.S. had high rates of congregational involvement. However, with regard to five specific areas of involvement with the homeless and poor people, the congregations in Ontario reported significantly higher rates of involvement than those in the U.S. (see panel 1e).

It is interesting to note that fourteen (5.5 percent) congregations in the U.S. provide services to seasonal workers, compared with none in Ontario. Conversely, Ontario congregations are more involved in programs for refugees and support for international relief compared with those in the U.S. (panel 1f).

In the areas of health services (panel 1g), U.S. congregations were much more involved in health programs, compared to Ontario congregations. The most likely explanation is the difference in public health coverage in the two countries. Canada's publicly funded health system meets the health needs of most citizens. In the U.S., on the other hand, many hospitals and foundations work with the community for health education and promotion via congregations.

In the area of security, U.S. congregations were more active than those in Ontario. Again, this may reflect need. Given the higher crime rate—especially for violent crime—in the United States, many congregations tend to be involved in community safety issues (Dilulio 1997). Although not reported in Table 1 (panel 1h), twenty-three congregations (9.2 percent) in the U.S. were active in efforts to prevent police brutality, compared with none in Ontario. Similarly, forty-nine congregations (19.5 percent) in the U.S. were involved in community policing, compared to two congregations (4.3 percent) in Ontario.

In the area of community organizing and development (panels 1i and 1k), U.S. congregations were more involved in civic beautification/improvement, neighborhood cleanups, sport activities, and interracial col-

laboration than those in Ontario. Similarly, U.S. congregations were more involved in social issues such as racism, civil rights, and voter registration (panel II). The latter trend seems to be unique to the U.S., a country in which voting depends on active registering. In Canada, a National Register of Electors is maintained—a permanent record of voters, which is periodically updated from a variety of sources. Voters are therefore not required to register prior to the election; voting information and certification is mailed to citizens.

Compared with the U.S., Ontario not only provides more extensive public health provision but also more housing support, even after the retrenchment under the Harris government. The U.S. notion that the “government is not in the business of housing” is not prevalent in Canada where poor people, despite insufficient housing and long waiting periods, can expect public housing. Although not reported in Table 1 (panel 1m), U.S. congregations (fifty-six; 22.3 percent) reported significantly more building initiatives than congregations in Ontario (three; 6.5 percent). Homeowner/tenant repairs were organized by fifty-five (21.9 percent) congregations in the U.S., compared with five (10.9 percent) congregations in Ontario. Similar findings of higher involvement by the congregations in the United States were reported regarding zoning appeals, loans for housing, and advocacy for housing. As reported in Table 1, more than 25 percent of congregations in the U.S. were involved in rehabilitating housing, working with Habitat for Humanity, and participating in coalitions for housing. With the exception of working with Habitat for Humanity, fewer than 25 percent of congregations in Ontario were involved in these activities.

The emerging picture from the left side Table 1 (any type of formal involvement), is that in many areas congregations, regardless of the region, are socially active. The areas in which Ontario congregations were more active than those in the United States were: helping the homeless, loss-of-spouse programs, international relief, and programs for refugees. The fact that in these four areas Ontario congregations are more active does not counter our central hypothesis. First, the U.S. congregations were more active in many more areas than Ontario congregations (See Table 1). Second, as shown later, many programs offered in Ontario represented support for a program carried out by another provider and not an in-house program by the congregation.

In all remaining areas, congregations in the U.S. were equal or significantly more active than their counterparts in Ontario. Notably, con-

gregations in the U.S. were more active in single-parents programs, after-school programs, health-care programs, community security, neighborhood organizing, neighborhood cleanups/beautification, and housing. What the data show is that U.S. congregations are more active than those in Ontario in areas where need for services has increased due to decreased service provision by the government.

Over the course of the study, it became evident that programs supported by the congregation but carried out by another provider represent a lesser commitment by the congregation. For example, a denominational office may request financial support for a certain campaign, or a local social service agency may ask for volunteers to assist in a seasonal project. In these cases, the congregation makes a deliberate decision to assist, but has no control or ownership of the programs. Temporary or minimal support of another's program often requires the least investment from the congregation financially and otherwise. Thus, we wanted to determine whether congregations in the U.S. and Ontario congregations were more likely to carry out their own social and community programs or to assist in programs carried out by others.

Table 1 provides, in the right-hand columns, the number of formal programs supported by congregations but carried out by other providers. The percentage of these programs is based on the total number of formal programs offered by the congregations (see left-hand columns). For example, if in Ontario sixteen congregations reported to be formally engaged in marriage encounters, but eleven of these programs (68.8 percent) only offer the service by supporting the work of others, then these eleven are not considered as services provided by the congregation or hosting the service on the congregation's property.

There are sixty-seven areas of social and community involvement listed in Table 1. Of these sixty-seven areas in only ten areas (14.9 percent) did congregations in the U.S. report higher percentages of helping others' programs whereas in Ontario this figure was fifty-seven (85 percent). The trend to assist others rather than provide the service themselves is stronger in Ontario than in the U.S. We tested these sixty-seven differences using Chi square tests of association; only twelve comparisons were statistically significant. In eleven of these twelve comparisons, the U.S. congregations tended to take a more direct role in carrying out the programs and be less engaged in supporting others' social programs.

This finding agrees with our understanding that congregations in the U.S. often wish to maintain their religious independence and are suspi-

cious of cooperating with secular or government organizations, even if they are active in the same social field. Their ideology of economic individualism and isolationism explains the desire of congregations to own their programs. In contrast, Ontario congregations adhere more to the ideology of expecting the government to take responsibility for people's needs. Furthermore, this finding signifies that, in the U.S., congregations are more likely to be the initiators and sole providers of social and community programs, whereas, in Ontario, congregations are more likely to support programs initiated by others. For example, many services for the homeless reported by congregations in Ontario were not independent programs but rather support provided to programs being carried out by local coalitions.

Percentage of Operating Budget Dedicated to Social and Community Care

The cost of social and community service provision as a percent of the annual operating budget is a good indicator of congregational commitment to helping others. This measure includes benevolence, designated budget for the service, support for others' social programs, collections for special projects such as flood relief and international relief, clergy's discretionary budget for the homeless and indigent, and indirect cost of providing space for social and community meetings/programs at no charge. Also included in this measure, where applicable, is the percent of the clergy salary earmarked for social services, which allows a member of the clergy to provide service for hospitals, nursing homes, prisons, and other community organizations.³

Of the 234 congregations in the U.S. and forty-five congregations in Ontario that reported the percentage of their budgets allocated to social care, only five (1.9 percent) in the U.S. and one (2 percent) in Canada allocated zero percent of their budget to social-service provision. The mean percentage of social and community service provision as a percent of the annual operating budget for U.S. congregations was 22.6 percent (S.D.= 18.7) and this figure for Ontario congregations was 20.2 percent (S.D. = 13.4). This difference was of borderline significance ($t=3.4$, $p=.067$). Even if the Canadian and U.S. dollars are taken at par, the average dollar support of a United States congregation for its community is higher than that of an Ontario congregation. Furthermore, as there are proportionately and absolutely more congregations in the United States than in Canada, United States congregations collectively infuse more support into their communities than do Ontario congregations.

Who Benefits?

We asked interviewees to list up to five programs that best exemplified their congregation's involvement in social and community service. The forty-six congregations in the Ontario sample reported a total of 190 programs, with a mean of 4.13 programs per congregation. The 251 congregations in the U.S. sample reported a total of 1005 programs, with a mean of 4.0 programs per congregation. Every congregation in Ontario reported at least one program, whereas seventeen (6.8 percent) congregations in the U.S. reported no programs. If we consider only the 234 U.S. congregations that reported at least one program, the mean number of programs would be 4.30 programs per congregation. The difference between the two samples is not statistically significant.

For the Ontario sample, the average number of participants per program provided by or housed in a local religious congregation was 142.2; for the U.S. sample, the average was 181.8. The average number of members benefiting from a program was 27.1 in Ontario and 39.5 in the U.S. The average number of nonmembers benefiting from a program was 115.1 in Ontario and 142.3 in the U.S.

The largest number of beneficiaries in both samples were nonmembers. For the Ontario sample, the ratio was 4.2:1 in favor of serving others; for the U.S. sample, the ratio was 3.6:1 in favor of serving others. The difference between these ratios is not statistically significant, which indicates that many programs offered by local religious congregations are primarily designed to benefit the community-at-large in both places.

What Does It Cost?

One way to fully capture the value of the social service provision by congregations is to assess its replacement value. In other words, we assess how much it would cost to offer the service by someone else with no congregational involvement. In this section we report these costs to present a comprehensive picture of the value of the social service provision by congregations.

We asked the respondents to assess, to the best of their ability, the following types of program costs: first, in-kind support (such as purchasing or donating food, use of the phone, providing transportation; materials for classes such as books, papers, notebooks, crayons, etc.; printing, photocopying; and postage); second, cost of utilities (such as heating, cleaning, supervising, maintaining, and insuring the property); third, financial support by the congregation (cash assistance from congregants for

the maintenance of the social program); fourth, clergy time (at \$20 per hour); fifth, staff time—including secretaries, program directors, and maintenance crew to assist in the social program (at \$10 per hour); sixth, volunteer time (valued at \$11.58 according to Hodgkinson and Weitzman 1993; Brown 1999; Handy and Cnaan 1999); and, seventh, assessed value of the space allocated to carry out the program (we asked respondents to assess the market value of the space that they provide for the programs).

In cases where respondents did not provide us with an estimate of cost, we assigned the value of zero. For example, a congregation that failed to assess its in-kind support was assigned a value of zero in-kind support. This approach underestimates the values we obtained. Further, we converted the assessed values to a monthly cost of the program, regardless of whether the program was offered daily, weekly, or annually to facilitate reporting. The results for the two samples are reported in Table 2.

Average Monthly Value of Congregational Programs

To assess the monetary value of social programs per congregation per month in each of our samples, we summed up the seven items associated with the overall cost of social service provision (see Table 2). For Ontario, the monetary value of congregational involvement in social and community care averaged \$12,396.11 per congregation per month; for the United States, the average was \$17,143.12. These impressive figures indicate major contribution and commitment by North American congregations to their communities. They also indicate that for every four dollars provided by U.S. congregations for social and community programs, three dollars are provided by Ontario congregations. It is important to note that we did not measure the actual cost to the congregations; rather we measured imputed values, or the replacement value of what congregations can give at no or low cost.

The above statistics indicate that congregations are actively and generously supporting their communities by providing services. It is therefore legitimate to ask: What do they receive in return? With the exception of intrinsic rewards such as “fulfilling our mission,” and “serving God,” congregations receive little material benefit in return. Few programs generate any income for the congregation. To assess the net congregational contribution to society, we deducted the total average monthly income from the total average monthly costs (see Table 2). For the Ontario sample, the value of a congregation’s social and community care averaged \$12,068.18 per month, or \$144,818.16 per year; for the U.S., the average

Table 2: Assessed averaged monetary monthly value per social program and per congregation

	Ontario per program	U.S. per program	Ontario per congregation	U.S. per congregation
In-kind support	\$79.45	\$97.52	\$328.13	\$390.08
Cost of utilities	\$76.46	\$142.16	\$315.78	\$568.64
Financial support	\$321.21	\$497.26	\$1,326.60	\$1,989.04
Clergy hours (@ \$20 hr.)	\$103.22	\$507.40	\$426.30	\$2,029.60
Staff hours (@ \$10 hr.)	\$233.98	\$563.90	\$966.33	\$2,255.60
Volunteer hours (@ \$11.58 hr.)	\$1,708.79	\$1,754.72	\$7,057.30	\$7,018.88
Value of space	\$478.37	\$722.82	\$1,975.67	\$2,891.28
Total	\$3,001.48	\$4,285.78	\$12,396.11	\$17,143.12
Cash income to congregation	\$43.97	\$59.80	\$181.60	\$239.20
In-kind support to congregation	\$35.43	\$399.30	\$146.33	\$1,597.20
Total support to congregation	\$79.40	\$459.10	\$327.93	\$1,836.40
Net value	\$2,922.08	\$3,826.68	\$12,068.18	\$15,306.72

was \$15,306.72 per month, or \$183,680.64 per year. When income received by the congregations for the services is taken into account, we find that for every five dollars provided by United States congregations for social and community programs, four dollars are provided by Ontario congregations. In other words, the gap between the congregations in Canada and the U.S. narrows. However, it can also suggest that congregations in the U.S. are more active in obtaining resources to support their efforts than Ontario congregations.

Conclusions

In this article, we assessed the involvement of United States and Ontario congregations in social and community services. Based on a sample of three urban areas in Ontario and seven urban areas in the U.S., we attempted to ascertain whether local religious congregations in the two countries differed from each other in the ways that they served their communities.

We noted that Ontario is similar to the U.S. in some key issues such as the disestablishment of church (no public support for churches) and a diverse cultural and ethnic society. We also noted that, compared with Canada, the U.S. is more religious with a greater diversity of organized religion including more fundamentalist groups. Furthermore, in the U.S. there is a less developed public welfare system, less trust in government, lower taxes, higher disposable incomes, more public safety issues, and an inclination to pursue citizens' initiatives through nonprofit arrangements.

Given these similarities and differences, it was our hypothesis that religious congregations in the U.S. would be significantly more involved in social and community service provision than in Ontario. Our hypothesis was supported by the data presented. We found that congregations in Ontario were actively involved in many aspects of social and community service provision. Given the collectivist nature of Canada and its national and provincial governments' involvement in the health and social arenas, we were surprised by the amount of social care provided by Ontario congregations. Every congregation in our sample was involved in at least one social program, and most were involved in many more. It is suggested that in both countries, when the burden is on the congregation to support itself and to encourage membership, congregations will venture outside the religious realm and attempt to make themselves more relevant to people's everyday lives and need, including participating in social service provision in the community.

We also found consistent evidence that U.S. congregations are more involved in social and community services provision than Ontario congregations. These findings are not surprising given that the United States government is less involved in welfare provision and the dominant ideology is one of economic individualism. Congregations in the United States reported, on average, more areas of involvement, a higher percentage of their annual budgets allotted to social programs, and a higher rate of involvement in social services provision. In all three measures of involvement used in this study (areas of service involvement, percentage of budget allocated to social services, and replacement value), U.S. congregations reported higher rates.

In the U.S., congregations are more involved in social service provision than Ontario congregations for several reasons. One reason is that all levels of governments are less involved in welfare provision in the U.S. as compared with Canada. As a result, U.S. congregations are particularly active in the areas of health care, community security, and housing—issues that receive limited attention from the government. Furthermore, the data also suggest that U.S. congregations are more inclined to provide their services independently whereas Ontario congregations are more inclined to partner with external groups, including their denominational offices and the government. In London, Ontario, for example, congregations that reported being involved in helping the homeless all supported a secular coalition to assist the homeless. Conversely, due to the ideology of individualism, most citizens of the U.S. tend to view federal, state, and local

governments with suspicion and little or no collaboration exists. Congregations in the U.S. tend to echo this sentiment and avoid collaboration with the government, so that they can control their own programs.

Another key issue, one discussed earlier, is that compared with Canada the population in U.S. has a higher frequency of belief in God, higher rates of congregational membership, and more congregations. These findings indicate that Ontario is more secular than the United States. Nevertheless, there exists a surprisingly high level of social and community services provided by congregations in Ontario although less than in the U.S. Given the significant larger religious participation in the U.S., the congregational involvement, and their substantial budgets, it is likely that they can serve as viable substitutes to public social services. In Canada, however, congregations are fewer in numbers, have fewer resources, and are less involved in social services provision; their work, as a result, can only be viewed as a complement rather than as a substitute for public services. In sum, the potential aggregate impact on society of congregations is less in Ontario than in the United States as there are fewer congregations per capita with smaller memberships in Ontario.

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NOTES

1. We used instruments by Cnaan (1997) for the U.S. congregations. These instruments were slightly modified for the Canadian context.

2. We did not take into account the exchange rate; instead we used the currencies at par. We did this for two reasons. First, given the volatility of the exchange rates (US\$1 = C\$1.35-\$1.50) during the two years (1997-1998) of the data collection, determining the exchange rate was problematic. Second, there was minimal flow of income or goods and services between the countries and the revenues collected were spent within

the local boundaries. Using the currencies par we simplified our analysis, but did not bias the comparative analysis.

3. Hodgkinson and Weitzman (1993) found that, on average, clergy in the U.S. (paid and volunteer) spent one week per month in community services. This is equivalent to a quarter of a full-time position.

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