

Government and Faith-Based Social Service: The Good & the Ugly

Why do we need a new White House Office of Faith Based Programs? What is its purpose? I ask this because I wonder if it is established in order to (a) appeal to certain constituencies or (b) to serve people in need with church-based services. I ask also because I would have thought that the Departments of HUD, HHS, Education would have *already* been working with faith-based service agencies. Why do they need the White House to add another layer of bureaucracy? Is the value of religious organizations being ignored, and are federal public servants not doing their jobs? I don't know if either is true today, but some of both motivations (a) and (b) above were evident in my own experience in government.

For eight years I worked with many church organizations when I was making Maryland the first state in the nation to mandate service learning as a graduation requirement. African American Churches, Catholic Charities, Associated Jewish Charities were eager to have the high school students help out at the food banks, senior citizen homes, or after school programs that they ran. They also found them to be effective advocates when they needed more funding in front of the legislature!

As Lt. Governor, I continued to work closely with a variety of religious organizations that provided an enormous number of services. Originally, I had responsibility for the State Police, Juvenile Justice, Department of Corrections, Parole and Probation, the Office of Service and Volunteerism, the Office of Children, Youth and Families and the Office of Crime Control and Prevention which gave out over \$125 million worth of grants. In this capacity, it was natural that these offices would work hand in glove with faith-based programs who ran drug treatment programs, helped with our anti-crime efforts, with our foster care work, with the reintegration of prisoners into the community. A number of the African American Churches helped their constituents start businesses as they knew who would be most likely to pay back.

Catholic Charities operated assisted living facilities, homeless shelters, operated food banks. Of course, we used them. When I ran a Summer Corps, the Corps members were housed at Loyola College---a Jesuit College. A number of the Corps members worked at the Julie Community Center which was established by the Sisters of Notre Dame—and they provide GED classes, childcare training programs, after school programs, leadership training for teens, a food pantry...to name just a few of their services.

I could go on and on. The point is that NO ONE ever complained, made a fuss, said this was an inappropriate mixing of church and state. *The reason?* Because these churches served people, they helped out, they did not discriminate, nor did they proselytize.

At the federal level it is a different story. For ten years, I chaired the Institute of Human Virology at the University of Maryland. This was at the time that President George Bush started the

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PEPFAR program which provides about \$17 billion for HIV/AIDS treatment to Africa. It was tremendous and saved many lives. The push for this money came from Evangelical Christians who saw the need for health care as they were preaching the gospel.

Our Institute was one of the largest recipients of the funds. We treated more than a million patients in Africa and had over 250 sites in Nigeria alone. I visited Abuja for a week to see the work that we were doing there. Northern Nigeria is a Muslim area, and all the men wear white robes. The only males in suits were from the west.

As we drove out of Abuja to visit one of the health sites, I saw billboard after billboard saying...

"MEN KEEP YOUR ZIPPERS UP"

Of course, very few of the men spoke English, and as the doctor at the site told me, no one knew what a zipper was!

That is an example of faith-based money that is more interested in serving the donor rather than those who really need the help.

This exercise has made me reflect on President Kennedy and my father's relation to the Catholic Church. Rather than giving money, they asked for funds. Cardinal Cushing donated a million dollars to the effort to release the prisoners who had been captured during the Bay of Pigs fiasco. The Church also contributed to the money that had been raised to open a school in Prince Edward County, Virginia when the racist school Board closed it down for five years.

The relation between our family was not just based on money. When my father was in college he heard Father Feeney's racist rants and he went to Cardinal Cushing to get him defrocked. Cardinal Cushing did. (It may have helped that the Cardinal's sister was married to a Jewish gentleman!) When my father was the Attorney General and met with the Pope, he urged him to get the Catholic Church more engaged with poverty and civil rights.

In fact, President Johnson followed that same path. When he was trying to get the Civil Rights legislation passed, he called in the ministers to ask for their help.

I think that if the White House office is used for social justice, to ask that we help the left out and left behind, not just in making sure that church organizations get money, but that they are rallied to a cause that teaches that we are all God's children, and that we can all be part of the Beloved Community, that then a White House Office serves a valuable purpose.

So, I end this essay where I began. Who is the White House Office on Faith Based Programs Serving now?

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