



## Congregations who care for children

*This is a second of two articles reporting the findings of a national study of 101 congregation-based child care (CBCC) programs and of in-depth interviews with congregational leaders, CBCC program administrators, teachers, and parents. Congregations affiliated with mainline denominations are more than twice as likely to provide CBCC as other congregations. Most congregations are motivated to provide CBCC to meet the educational needs of children, not to recruit new members to their congregations. A large majority of programs (n=70) reported that faith was evident in how they loved and cared for the children and their families and more than half (n=57) indicated that religious content was part of the curriculum. The authors explore the benefits and challenges of child care programs hosted by congregations. Only 31% of the surveyed programs require the director and 12% require the staff teachers to be members of the congregation, and only 10% require that the director have any formal education in religion or congregational leadership. The authors conclude that child care professionals and congregational leaders need more preparation and resources for developing the potential of CBCC as congregational ministry. Authors: Diana R. Garland, Michael E. Sherr, Jon E. Singletary, and M. LeAnn Gardner.<sup>1</sup>*

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Photos by Sterling Severns

In most American families with young children, both parents are in the workforce. A significant proportion (20% to 33%) of their preschool children spend the majority of their days in group child (day) care<sup>2</sup> programs of congregations (Adams, Rohacek, & Snyder, 2005; Administration for Children and Families, 1999, p. V 19; Chaves, 2004; Cnaan, 1997; Cnaan, Boddie, Handy, Yancey, & Schneider, 2002; Hodgkinson & Weitzman, 1994; Orr & Filback, 2004). The landmark Child Care Project conducted more than 25 years ago discovered that for every child in Sunday School on Sunday, there were nine children in a church-housed child care center Monday through Friday (Lindner,

Mattis, & Rogers, 1982). There are indicators that the numbers of children in congregation-based child care (CBCC) are actually on the rise today (Bogle, 2001; Neugebauer, 2005).

Congregations providing child care have a unique opportunity to play a very influential supportive role in the lives of young families. Young parents – as well as grandparents and foster parents and all those who raise young children – need the supportive communities that congregations can be for them. Child care programs have the potential for being the hub of a whole array of ministries designed to strengthen families (Garland, 1999). Those ministries can include everything from parent and family life education to workforce education for low-income families. In fact, as we reported in an earlier article (“Who Cares for the Children?” *Family and Community Ministries*, Vol. 22.1), more than a third of child care programs (including but not limited to CBCC) offer family recreational events, drop-in care, in-home child care after hours by center staff, summer day camp, a resource library, and emergency support services. Some offer family counseling and parents’ night out, and a few provide care for sick children, family enrichment programs, and divorce recovery programs (Garland, Sherr, Dennison, & Singletary, 2008).

The challenge to family ministry leaders and child care providers, then, is how to help congregations to envision and develop the potential of CBCC as part of a larger ministry with families in their community. This article will present findings from a study of congregations that host CBCC, that explored what motivates congregations to provide CBCC, the kinds of care they offer to children and their families, the benefits and challenges that congregational leaders and early childhood educators face when congregations provide child care, and the ways faith is or is not integrated into CBCC programs. The article concludes with implications for congregational leaders and child care providers who seek to make CBCC an effective and significant support and hub for other supports for vulnerable families with young children.

## **WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP OF CONGREGATIONS AND THEIR CHILD CARE PROGRAMS**

CBCC programs are related to their host congregations in three ways: (1) direct operation, with the staff of the center employed directly by the congregation and the congregation assuming direct fiscal responsibility; (2) as a separate nonprofit organization, with accompanying protections to each entity from liability for the other and congregational representation on the center’s controlling board; and (3) congregation as landlord and a separate nonprofit child care organization that simply rents or leases space from the congregation with no other ties (Neugebauer, 1998, 2000). Cross-faith partnerships such as the Ecumenical Child Care Network have encouraged CCBC programs to incorporate separately, believing that they can more single-mindedly develop quality programs than can a congregation that also has competing interests. Also, few congregational leaders have the knowledge and skills to direct early childhood education programs (Bogle, 2001).

## **CONGREGATIONS’ MOTIVATIONS FOR PROVIDING CHILD CARE**

Bogle (2001) has suggested that the post-World War II building boom of church educational wings occurred at the same time increasing numbers of mothers of young children were entering the workforce in the United States. Congregations were building the new child-friendly buildings in order to accommodate the Sunday School needs of the baby boom generation, and then both congregational leaders and advocates for young children began to eye these buildings, idle during much of the week, with a view to putting the space to additional use. Child care was a natural fit, and, for some, it also had the potential for contributing to the cost of the buildings or even generating income for the congregation. From the perspective of child care providers, the location of congregations in the heart of neighborhoods and towns placed them both near family homes and places of work, and their tax-exempt status made them ideal locations.

The Child Care Project conducted by the National Council of Churches in 1982 found

that congregations developed CBCC for reasons beyond cost effective use of their buildings (Lindner et al., 1982), however. First, providing care for young children is congruent with the mission of many congregations. Second, CBCC is a means of providing care for families within the congregation. Third, some congregations developed CBCC as a community service, believing that they have responsibility to care for the needs of neighbors beyond the congregation's members. Fourth, some congregations saw child care as another aspect of their religious education, providing religious program content as well as an environment that nurtures the spiritual and religious growth of children. Finally, some congregations were motivated by a commitment to social justice, reaching out to vulnerable populations such as low-income families or children with special needs.

Of course, most congregations probably have multiple reasons for providing CBCC. The 1982 study concluded that the community service motivation was most dominant. In more recent years, some have observed that religious education of children and evangelizing their families appear to be increasingly common reasons for congregations to develop CBCC programs (Bogle, 2001; Neugebauer, 2005). Goals of fostering love, sharing and cooperation, and a sense of positive self-worth were dominant 26 years ago (Lindner et al., 1982); recent studies suggest that spiritual development has also become an important goal for many congregation-based centers (Neugebauer, 2000).

At least in part, congregations may be attending more to the religious education of children in their CBCC programs because leaders in the field of early childhood education are emphasizing children's spiritual development in all child care, not just religious settings (Scott, 2003). Publishing houses began marketing curriculum materials for child care programs that had religious and spiritual development as their goal (Collins, 1990). Moreover, observers have

found that the everyday religious practices of life together, such as praying before eating, are frequently engaged in by teachers, whether or not there is a formal curriculum (Bone, 2005).

#### **THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF CONGREGATION-BASED CHILD CARE**

There appears to have been no study of the perceived benefits and challenges of locating child care programs in congregations. It would seem that congregations are unique settings for providing early childhood education that would present both possibilities and problems. Congregations present particular challenges, constraints, and opportunities that are different from other private and public social service or educational settings (Garland, 1992). Anecdotal evidence suggests that, unless early childhood education administrators are knowl-

edgeable about congregational life as the ecology of their work and skillful as congregational leaders, the early childhood education programs they lead may be peripheral to the life of the congregation, not a program central to the life and mission of the congregation and centerpiece for the congregation's family resource services. Consequently, when these programs become removed from the central life and mission of the congregation, they may lose touch with the vision and, more

important, the calling that likely prompted them to begin offering CBCC programs in the first place.

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This article reports findings from the Congregation-based Child Care (CBCC) Study, which used a national sample of licensed child care centers to: (1) compare CBCC programs with programs in other organizational contexts; (2) identify the reasons congregations provide CBCC programs; and (3) describe the relationship between CBCC programs and the congregations in which they are housed.

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### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This article attempts to answer the following questions specific to child care in congregations:

1. What are the denominational affiliations of congregations providing CBCC?
2. How are CBCC programs organizationally related to the congregations in which they are housed?
3. What are the reasons congregations provide child care programs?
4. What role does religion or faith play in CBCC programs?
5. What are the benefits and challenges of CBCC?

### SURVEY INSTRUMENT

From December 2005 through April 2006, the first author conducted in-depth, structured interviews with the program director and pastor, as well as teachers, congregational staff members, and parents from each of the four programs. In all, 30 key informants in the four CBCC programs were interviewed. All four centers were located in urban areas: Chicago, New York City, Atlanta, and Dallas. They were purposively chosen to represent as much denominational, congregational, and cultural diversity as possible in order to maximize the range of experiences of these centers and congregations (Garland, et al., 2008).

Those interviews identified significant con-

structs and variables from the perspectives of those closest to the issues of early childhood education, enabling the research team to construct a survey instrument using language appropriate to those we would be surveying. National experts in early childhood education as well as local child care providers then critiqued the draft survey. The final survey included 33 items divided into five sections. Questions in sections one through four

included items relevant for all child care programs on the topics of types of services provided; whether or not programs are accredited and by what entities; program purposes; demographics of children and families served, the role of religion, faith, and spirituality in programming; and staffing. The final section provided opportunity for those programs connected to congregations to describe that relationship. The team mailed the finalized survey to center administrators in October 2006.

### THE SAMPLE

We developed a representative sample of licensed child care programs in the United States by selecting one state from each of the 10 federal regions of the country: Alabama, Georgia, California, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin. We randomly sampled 1,800 child care providers from the entire listing of licensed providers in the 10 states. A total of 418 providers returned surveys, although we subsequently eliminated 30 because they were incomplete. The final sample included 388 child care programs, a response rate of 21.5%. There were 101 programs located in congregations.

### CASE STUDIES

To explore further the meaning of the survey findings from these 101 CBCC programs, the team visually scanned incoming surveys

to identify those that appeared to be engaged in services to the families of children in their CBCC programs, such as parent education, family recreational programs, and educational newsletters. The team identified 20 congregations with child care programs for further study. We developed phone interview protocols and one team member completed 10 interviews with center directors and four of the pastors of those centers. The team member wrote 10 case studies, with identifying information carefully changed to protect the anonymity of respondents. We have used those case studies, plus the 30 initial interviews, to illustrate findings from the national survey.

#### FINDINGS

In the earlier article, we reported our comparisons of CBCC programs with those in private nonsectarian and public (“other”) settings (Garland, et al., 2008). CBCC programs are significantly more likely to be located in suburban areas than are other programs (31% vs. 14%), and although they are almost as likely to be located in small cities and towns (30%), other programs are significantly more likely to be located there (48%).

CBCC programs also serve significantly more children from families with annual incomes of more than \$80,000 and significantly less from families with incomes of less than \$20,000 than do other programs. They charge significantly more fees from families and are much more likely to charge a flat rate for families (85% do so) than to depend on government financial resources. Only 6% of CBCC programs accept government funding, compared to the 30% of other centers. Finally, CBCC staffs are significantly more stable over time, even though their salaries are comparable to other centers. A teacher’s reason for working in CBCC illustrates this stability:

*It is a personal call. It is not just for money. . . . I am happy here. I like the people we work with . . . . What I really like in this place, too, it is a church. It’s Christian-based and I was Christian-raised, but it is not like you are under*

*pressure of teaching religion all the time and it is pretty open and you know, that’s what I like. I really like relaxed.*

#### DENOMINATIONAL AFFILIATION OF SPONSORING CONGREGATIONS

More than a quarter of all child care programs (26.4%, n=101) are located in congregations. The congregations represent 19 different denominations (see Table 1). Interestingly, half (n=50) of the CBCC programs are located in congregations affiliated with mainline denomi-

nations<sup>3</sup>, even though only 23.4% of American congregations are affiliated with these denominations, and these denominations represent the congregations of only 21.8% of Americans who are active in congregational life, according to the National Congregations Study (Chaves, Konieczny, Beyerlein, & Barman, 1999). In other words, congregations affiliated with mainline denominations are more than twice as likely to provide CBCC than other congregations. In contrast, the three largest affiliations of congregations – Roman Catholics,

Southern Baptists, and “nondenominational” churches – are church home for 48.8% of American attenders and are the identification of 41.2% of congregations in this country, yet they provide only 26% of the CBCC of those congregations in this study.

#### THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CBCC PROGRAMS AND CONGREGATIONS

Congregations are involved with CBCC programs in several different ways. Respondents indicated that 70% of the CBCC programs are incorporated separately from the congregations that host them. Nearly 60% (n=58) of the centers have members of the congregation serving on their controlling boards. Almost a third (n=31) have congregational leaders chairing their boards. In addition to organizational oversight, nearly half (n=49) of the child care directors were considered staff members of the congregation. One example is a child care center

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**Congregations affiliated with mainline denominations are more than twice as likely to provide CBCC than other congregations.**

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**Table 1**  
**CBCC Programs by Denomination**

<i>Denomination</i>	<i>CBCC Programs (n) N=101</i>
United Methodist	21
Lutheran	12
Nondenominational	11
Catholic	9
Southern Baptist	6
National Baptist, USA	6
Presbyterian, USA	5
Churches of Christ	5
Progressive National Baptist	5
American Baptist	4
Episcopal	3
Baptist Bible Fellowship	3
African Methodist Episcopal	3
Lutheran, Missouri Synod	2
Assemblies of God	2
Pentecostal Assemblies of the World	1
Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints	1
National Baptist, America	1
National Missionary Baptist	1

director who also serves as the administrative assistant to the pastor. Although a quarter of the centers (n=25) receive financial support from their congregations, 41 centers pay rent and/or utilities to the congregation.

The families they serve also connect CBCC programs to their congregations. Two-thirds (n=66) of the programs have children from the congregation attending child care. More than half (n=53) of the centers encourage families of children in care to attend congregation-sponsored activities (programs, classes, recreation, etc.). Moreover, in 28 centers, members of the congregation interact with children and families receiving child care. For example, one center director described how the pastor and other staff members frequently “hang out” in the center in the afternoons when parents are arriving in or-

der to greet and come to know families, and older adults “adopt” center children as “adoptive grandkids” and send them birthday cards and accompany them on field trips.

One pastor interviewed stated his belief is that they are separate entities, but accountable to church. He added, “I’m not so sure it’s a good thing or a necessary thing for church to be involved ... perhaps support, but not get involved.” He believes that they should function as separate entities, although the congregation should see the CBCC as an opportunity for outreach.

Nevertheless, 10% reported none of these formal or relational connections to their host congregations.

**REASONS CONGREGATIONS PROVIDE CHILD CARE**

From a list of 12 items identified by the initial qualitative interviews, administrators ranked the reasons they believe that their congregations provided child care. They chose three items most often. More than half (n=52) want to ensure quality education for children; 45 wanted to serve the community; and 35 wanted to provide children with religious education. Twenty-nine administrators said that congregations offered CBCC to demonstrate love for children and parents.

Only 18 see CBCC as a way to bring new families into the congregation. If some initially were motivated by that possibility, the interviews indicated that they either were disappointed or developed new reasons for providing the program. One pastor, whose congregation had been providing child care under his leadership for 25 years, described his early experience:

*Our selling point with the congregation was, ‘Our church is going to grow, because people are going to come for day care and stay for church.’ And that wasn’t true. We didn’t know. Instead we found that many people that came to this program already came out of faith traditions and were active in one of the*

churches nearby. There weren't any free-floaters, free agents, or there were very few. It did have an indirect impact on church growth, however. People saw kids playing in the play lot and got intrigued. They thought this might be a place where something is happening. So, that's where the real church growth occurred.

One CBCC is located directly across the street from a public school. Their after-school program began because of the need they saw in the community for children who had nowhere to go in the afternoons. The director believes that because the church also recognizes this need, they support their church housing a program that will help address this need.

Very few administrators (n=8) said that congregations were motivated to provide CBCC in order to help with general expenditures or turn the liability of an empty building into an asset (n=7).



#### **ROLE OF RELIGIOUS FAITH IN CBCC**

Religion or faith plays a vital role for most of the CBCC programs, although 14 administrators responded that religion or faith had no role in their programming. A large majority of programs (n=70) reported that faith was evident in how they loved and cared for the children and their families. As a Baptist pastor said in response to the interviewer asking him what his goal is for the program:

*It is saying to parents that we don't care about your race, your socioeconomic background, your sexual orientation, your religious background or lack of it. If you give us a chance, we will love your children.*

Another pastor was asked the strength of having a CBCC located in the congregation he pastors. He replied, "Because of our large immigrant population, some children who attend preschool here have never heard the Gospel. They hear it for the first time here and after they leave here they go on to public school. We may

be the only place they hear about Jesus."

Of the 101 CBCC programs, more than half (n=57) indicated that religious content was part of the curriculum, and 45 had sacred objects, texts, and pictures on their walls. Almost half (n=49) of the programs included a regular time of worship and 47 indicated that staff members pray for and with the children and their families.

Some parents expressed appreciation for the religious education of their children. As one mother said in an interview:

*My son's first song was "Jesus Loves Me." We sing it at home, too. He's in the Superman, Batman, Robin Hood phase, and last week he was Goliath, one of the foes of the biblical stories.*

The interviewer asked a director in a Baptist congregation's center how one would know that the CBCC is a place of faith. She replied, "Music, posters, toys, books, the teacher's attitude." She went on to say that the children hear Bible stories every day, read by teachers who are committed to the truths they hold, and children learn religious songs and Bible verses. A pastor of

another congregation with a child care program explained:

*We're not heavy-handed. It's not recruitment evangelism at all. On the other hand, we are not apologizing for the fact that we are just not another nonprofit day care center. We are a church.*

More than half (n=52) of administrators reported that religious faith was more evident in the milieu of the programs than in specific curriculums, songs, or readings. A Lutheran pastor said that the church has chosen to “serve rather than speak their concern for the well-being of the community.”

One CBCC director believes that teaching and embodying the fruits of the spirit are the primary ways faith is modeled in the preschool. Although Bible stories are included in the curriculum, the director believes that “proselytizing is not developmentally appropriate.”

Very few programs (n=12) required CBCC program teachers to be members of their congregation as staff and none limited their programs to families in their congregations or families with the same religious beliefs.

#### **BENEFITS FOR CHILD CARE PROGRAMS OF A CONGREGATIONAL LOCATION**

Table 2 summarizes the benefits of CBCC programs for centers and congregations. Center directors said that the program benefits mainly from the use of the congregation’s physical facilities, an improved community image because they are located in the congregation, and help with marketing their services. Other benefits include religious content for the centers.

Intergenerational contact with congregation members and a ready pool of volunteers are also benefits that almost a fourth of the directors named. In interviews, directors described how volunteers mend books, decorate the facility, provide “adoptive grandparents” for children and their young parents, send birthday cards to

children, provide special treats, and purchase needed supplies or equipment.

Child care programs often provide other supportive services to families of children in their care. Several CBCC directors described how their families are invited to participate in recreational activities of the congregation (a Father’s Day car show, a fall carnival, game nights, Easter egg hunts, parent banquets). Some offer before- and after-school care for school-age siblings. Interviewed parents described how much they appreciate the Wednesday night church supper; the center staff encourages them to come for the meal, even if they do not stay for the educational or worship programs that follow.

Some congregations offer parenting classes and include CBCC parents; one congregation offers their classes at the public library as well as in their facility. That congregation has also placed a webcam in each of the classrooms so that parents with computers in their offices can link remotely to the child care center and see “live” what their children are doing during the day and the care they are receiving. A United Methodist congregation offers to CBCC parents English as a Second Language courses, debt management courses, divorce recovery workshops, and an online newsletter.

Many congregations provide emergency assistance to persons in their community, and that includes families in the CBCC program. As one director said, “Church members are primed and waiting to hear what the needs are in the preschool; for example, when a family’s freezer broke, the church gave me gift cards to replace the spoiled food.” Staff members, too, provide help to families in a pinch. One direc-

**Table 2**  
**Benefits for Centers and Congregations**

<i>Benefits for Centers</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>Benefits for Congregations</i>	<i>n</i>
Facilities	77	Community Image	66
Community Image	52	Members	62
Marketing	44	Opportunity to Serve	52
Religious Content	25	Financial Support	46
Intergenerational Contact	22	Improved Facilities	36
Volunteers	21		
Competitive Salaries	15		

tor described how a teacher takes a child home with her two nights a week because the parents work late, and another teacher took a parent to help her buy a car. The director noted these activities are “against policy” but also insisted that they will keep engaging in such activities because what they do is ministry, not just child care. That same congregation has an “encourager committee” that commits to praying for the needs of the child care program and also provides various forms of support for families. For example, when a pregnant mother was confined to bed and so unable to transport her child to the center, a member of the encouragement committee provided daily transportation.

Beyond these programs and services, the atmosphere of the child care program can be an important support to parents. A group of parents in a focus group said that they feel known, as though they are not alone in caring for their children. The evidence they gave for this is that the whole staff knows their children, not just their teachers:

*They can talk to you about the child and they'll tell you things that you know, because you're the mom, but they know it, too. They have spent time with them. They know their habits. And [the center director] even knows all the children. They know all the kids; they are all theirs.*

In turn, parents know the teachers and the other children; there is stability over time because there is lower staff turnover than in other centers (Garland, et al., 2008). One director interviewed talked about a nursery worker who had been in that particular CBCC for 10 years. The parents and the teacher worked collaboratively on issues that arose with the children and the parents trusted the worker – because of her experience and because she had cared for other children in the family.

#### **BENEFITS FOR CONGREGATIONS THAT ACCRUE FROM SPONSORING CHILD CARE PROGRAMS**

Congregations benefit mainly from an improved community image (n=66) because they are serving families, which is related to the CBCC providing the congregation with opportunities to serve its community (n=52),

as the volunteer opportunities described above illustrate. Although church growth is not a predominant motivation for providing CBCC, in fact, 62 program directors indicated that the congregation had added members as a result of the child care program.

The child care program has also resulted in financial support for the congregation (n=46) and improvements to the congregation's physical plants for more than a third (n=36) of these programs, although interviews indicated that improvements are often paid for by the congregation or are made with volunteer congregational member labor.

One director interviewed remarked that the financial status of the CBCC can heavily influence board members' opinions of the center. She stated, “When the center makes money, it's a great thing. When we lose money, they (board members) are quick to threaten closure.”

#### **CHALLENGES**

Despite the advantages of improved physical space, there are also legendary challenges created when educational space is shared between the weekday child care program and the weekend religious education programs run by volunteers for a different group of children; 55 respondents indicated that sharing space was a challenge. Illustrations include one program using another's supplies, changing bulletin boards and replacing the art work of one group of children with another, or leaving a room in disarray.

There are a number of other challenges presented by CBCC programs. The primary challenge was keeping salaries and benefits adequate (n=59). As noted above, however, very few programs reported problems with staff turnover (n=8); in fact, CBCC programs have significantly more stable staffs than child care programs in other contexts (Garland, et al., 2008). The fact is that salaries are woefully low in early childhood education. A study in 2004 found that the average director of an early childhood center earns \$35,000 per year, a lead teacher earns an average of \$23,000 per year, and a teacher aide earns an average of less than \$17,000 per year (Neugebauer, 2004).

### RECRUITING A DIVERSITY OF FAMILIES

Other significant challenges included recruiting a diversity of families of all socioeconomic groups (n=42) and maintaining adequate enrollment (n=31). As noted earlier, CBCC programs serve very few low income families. They are significantly more likely than other centers to serve families with annual incomes of more than \$80,000 and significantly less likely to serve families with annual incomes of less than \$20,000.

### FISCAL SUPPORT

Staying fiscally sound is a challenge for more than a fourth (n=28) of programs. But even those that rely solely on parent fees at least occasionally find ways to help financially strapped families. As one director explained:

*I have one high school-age mother who came to us from Katrina [hurricane evacuee]. We do everything for free for that family. We have continued since she came through our doors. Then I have another young teen who is in high school who had a baby and can't afford care so we do for free. If a family has a financial need, then we may take that child for a while. We work it out.*

A few of the directors interviewed indicated that they receive either contracts, grants, or vouchers from government entities so that they can serve low-income families. Some indicated that they therefore do not include any religious content in their program. Another director who received state funds said that they have religious content in the curriculum and that the children participate in regular chapel time and prayer. The funding does not require that they omit religious content; if it did, she said that they would have refused it.

Others who received government funding complained that it was not adequate to meet their costs. One director noted that they would not be able offer the same quality of services if they had many children on government subsidy; the full-fee children are essentially “subsidizing” children whose fees are paid by government programs.

One congregation interviewed received no less than six grants to fund various programs within the child care center. For example, there

is a full-time nurse on staff whose salary is paid by federal grants as well as a full-time community outreach staff member who focuses on home visits and counseling staff at the center. Forty percent of this center's operating budget is grant funded.

At the same time, almost half of administrators (n=46) indicated that location of the program in a congregation provides financial support as a benefit. Some interviewees indicated that the center was a line item in the congregation's budget, and that if there is a financial shortfall, the congregation will provide help.



### KEEPING THE CONGREGATION INFORMED AND INVOLVED

Almost 25% of program directors indicated on the survey that they found it challenging to keep key congregational leaders involved (n=24). Several directors indicated in interviews how important it is to be included in congregational staff meetings, where communication among various congregational programs takes place and any challenges in sharing space or other resources can be addressed.

Part of the challenge may be that only 31% of the surveyed programs require the director and 12% require the staff to be members of the

congregation. Moreover, only 10% required that the director have any formal education in religion or ministry to prepare them for effective congregational leadership. Most of the directors are not even participants in the host congregations, much less participants in the decision-making bodies of the congregation.

Directors who were interviewed who were members of the host congregations believed that their membership was vital to the relationship between the program and the congregation. As one said, "Being a member of the church helps me to lay hold of the vision of the church and the school." She makes announcements about the program in Sunday worship services of the congregation and attends deacons' meetings, which helps the church stay informed of the program's activities. She thinks membership is so important that all but one of the staff members of the school are also church members. In contrast, another director who is not a congregation member expressed her frustration that she does not have ready access to communicating with the host congregation. Consequently, the congregation knows little or nothing about the child care program, or that they have a special ministry for children with physical (e.g., cerebral palsy) and developmental disabilities (e.g., Down's syndrome). In interview after interview, directors said that communication with the church could be better.

Further complicating communication and leadership, very few church leaders are equipped to lead child care programs, even though many are serving as chairs of the centers' boards. As one pastor said:

*What I am learning is that I have never done church this way. I had no training for it. I had no education for it. It has been on-the-job training every day.*

#### **COMMUNICATING RESPECT FOR FAMILIES FROM DIVERSE RELIGIOUS BACKGROUNDS**

Some directors indicated that they struggle with finding ways to provide religious content while being respectful of families from different faiths (n=19). Directors who were interviewed often said that families find out about the center from other parents who have had their chil-

dren enrolled there and who have had good experiences with the center. Quality of care is of greater significance to parents than the religious beliefs of the host congregation. CBCC programs therefore often have children from diverse religious backgrounds. For instance, the Baptist church program whose director described teachers reading Bible stories and teaching religious songs enrolls children from Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist homes, as well as a diversity of Christian denominational backgrounds. Interviewed directors state that they explain the extent to which religious content is included in their program when parents apply to enroll their child(ren), but one director said that parents occasionally still express displeasure when their child is taught beliefs different from those of the parents.

#### **IMPLICATIONS**

Caution is in order in generalizing from these findings. Although the sample was drawn randomly from a representative sample of the United States, the 21% who returned surveys may not accurately represent all CBCC programs but rather those who are most invested in their work and in the connection between congregation and the CBCC program. Nevertheless, their responses have major implications for both congregations and early childhood educators. The mix of interviews and surveys allows us to understand some of the meaning behind the statistical analysis of the survey results.

Congregations affiliated with the mainline denominations are still twice as likely to provide child care programs as are other congregations, whereas Roman Catholic, Southern Baptists, and nondenominational congregations – the largest affiliations of congregations in the country – are only half as likely to be providing these programs as are other congregations. The impression that conservative and evangelical congregations are increasingly offering CBCC programs may be accurate (Bogle, 2001; Neugebauer, 2005), but if they are, they still are far behind mainline congregations. Although most centers are incorporated separately, they also have organizational ties to the congregations; most have boards controlled by the congregation, and half are represented by their director

on the congregation's staff. Moreover, many are financially supported by their congregations, either with direct funding (25%) or by rent- and utility-free use of building space (59%). It would seem that this kind of financial support would make it possible for congregations to offer lower-cost child care and even to make scholarship support available to children from low-income families. In fact, however, these centers actually charge significantly more. Likewise, they are more likely *not* to serve low-income families than the centers in other settings because they rely too exclusively on revenues from flat-rate fees and do not accept government funding.

If finding ways to use an empty building may have been an initial motivator for congregations to consider providing CBCC (Bogle, 2001), administrators from these centers do not see that motivation as being a significant continuing factor. Only eight indicated that congregations use their CBCC program to generate financial support for the congregation or help pay for its facility. The Child Care Project concluded that the community service motivation was the dominant motivation of congregations, but that congregations also were motivated to provide care for the children of families in the congregation, to provide religious education, and, finally, to work for social justice demonstrated in caring for children from impoverished homes or with special needs (Lindner, et al., 1982). Although those reasons are still the motivators for the host congregations in this study, their relative strengths have shifted somewhat. Now, two-thirds of CBCC programs include children from families within the host congregations, and congregations are far less likely to provide care for children from low-income families than are other child care centers. Moreover, only 18% of center directors indicated that congregations see CBCC as an attempt to attract families to join the congregation.

In this survey, a minority of center directors (n=45) indicated that congregations are motivated to serve their communities. More-

over, the communities they serve appear to be middle- and upper-middle class, not children in poverty. The focus may be on providing quality early childhood education, but it is not for the most vulnerable children in our society.

Part of the challenge for congregations is that location is critical to child care programs. Ideally, the program is located either near the families' homes or near the parents' employment or school. It is unreasonable to assume that low-income parents who rely on public transportation will be able to enroll their children in affluent suburban congregations, even if those programs accept government subsidies or vouchers. Congregations in aging buildings in the inner city may not have the resources to meet licensure requirements for providing quality child care. Partnerships need to be explored between congregations that are near children and families who most need child care and those that have the resources of funding, mission, and volunteers.

Religious education for young children was an important motivator for these host congregations, and that education appears to be predominantly taking place in intrinsic ways, in how children and families feel loved and cared for (a focus of 70% of programs) more than in religious content in the program (57%), regular worship (49%), or prayer (47%). The fact that only 12% of programs require their program staff to be members of the congregation suggests that religious education may not, in fact, be a primary motivation in most programs. This becomes clear by reflecting on how many of these same congregations would be willing to have persons who are not members of their congregation teaching their children's Sunday School.

The disconnection between staff and congregation has implications for support for the child care program. Although in interviews some directors expressed satisfaction and even relief that they and the program teachers are not required to be congregation members, and that they do not have to participate in congre-

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gational staff meetings, those who are members and who do participate indicate that this is a critical connection for making the program visible and central to the life of the congregation.

It appears from this survey and the interviews that there is a crisis of leadership of CBCC programs. Child care administrators may be outstanding professionals and knowledgeable about the education of young children, but they have not been prepared to serve as leaders for the congregations that seek to minister to their communities through CBCC. Many are not members of the congregational community, so that leading the congregation to envision its calling to support and care for young children and families is almost impossible.

At the same time, pastors may have a heart for children and families, but they have not been prepared to serve as chairpersons of CBCC program boards, or to negotiate the licensure and accreditation processes that ensure that they are providing quality care. Although there are resources available to help congregations negotiate these processes, they are very limited and not always easily accessible to congregations (California Council of Churches, undated; Freeman, 1987; Lawrence, 2006).

#### SUMMARY

If CBCC is to become the heart of effective support for vulnerable young families, with the needed financial support and involvement of the congregation, it needs to be grounded in the theology and calling of the congregation. That grounding would take place more readily if the center director and staff are members of the congregation and if volunteers and staff from the congregation were engaged in the center. Congregational and early childhood program leaders need educational opportunities and resources that will help them partner in leading a congregation's care for young children and families. At the same time, policies and procedures for accessing government funding need to be developed that will encourage congregations to seek and accept government funding to help subsidize the cost of quality child care. Finally, congregations in inner cities where there is need for child care can consider partnerships with suburban congregations, giving them opportu-

nity to invest in the lives of vulnerable young children and families that they otherwise cannot reach with care.

Congregations are ideal settings for wrapping family resource programs around early childhood education – parent education, parent support groups, family recreation, and community-building activities that further strengthen the ability of families to raise healthy, successful children with the support of a faith community (Garland, 1994). Involvement in the lives of children and families through child care services can be a revitalizing force in the lives of congregations. CBCC can also be marginalized, however, unless both congregation and child care providers continuously identify the children who live in the congregation's space from 30 to 45 hours a week as “our” children – and our responsibility as a congregation – just as much as those children who spend two or three hours on Sunday with us.

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#### ENDNOTES

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2. This article uses the term "child care" to refer to weekday child care in group settings, to be distinguished from literature that uses the term "child care" to refer to residential group care in foster homes, residential facilities, and mental health treatment programs.
3. We have identified as mainline congregations those with the following denominational affiliations: United Methodist Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), United Church of Christ, American Baptist Churches, Reformed Church in America, and Episcopal Church.