Self-reported outcomes of service in the lives of congregational volunteers

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This paper explores the consequences for congregational volunteers of being involved in five types of community social services. Findings draw on in-depth interviews with 29 congregational leaders and 25 individual volunteers from 35 Christian congregations. The paper concludes with implications for congregational leaders and social service professionals who seek to increase the positive impact of volunteer service on volunteers.

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> "When people serve, they get into a spot where I think it forces their faith to grow. . . . The problems are too complex; the families are too broken; thinking is too distorted. Volunteers realize, 'I can't fix this on my own.' They are forced back to reliance on God to do anything, to change people."   ---Baptist church pastor in a Southwestern city

Researchers document the substantial contributions of American congregations to the web of social services in their communities. Researchers differ in their reports of the capacity and even the nature of congregational social services, however, due in large part to differences in their research methods (Chaves, Konieczny, Beyerlein, & Barman, 1999; Cnaan, 2003; Cnaan, Kasternakis, & Wineburg, 1993; Cnaan, Wineburg, & Boddie, 1999; Cnann, Boddie, Handy, Yancey, & Schneider, 2002). An ongoing national political and social scientific conversation draws on these various studies, fueling the debate about what role congregations and faith-based organizations should play in government social policy (Administration for Children and Families, 1999; Branch, 2002; Chaves, 2003; De Vita & Palmer, 2003; Dionne, 1998; Farnsely, 2004; Farris, Nathan, & Wright, 2004; Hoover, 2002; Kuzma, 2000; Loconte & Fontuzzo, 2003; Morse & Gillespie, 2002; Prins & Ewert, 2002; Sherman, 2002; The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy, 2001; Trulear, 2000; U.S. Department of Alcohol and Drug Administration, 2000; Upchurch, 2002; Wallace, Thornton, & Rice, 2003; Wineburg, 2001a, 2001b, 2003). As a consequence of both the research and the socio-political conversation, researchers and social policy analysts increasingly regard congregations as social utilities, discussing ways to establish reasonable performance standards, increase capacity, and measure outcomes of their service (Streeter, 2001). Congregations are seen as vital resources for addressing the social and economic needs of persons and families, particularly those who are poor, and for strengthening the social fabric of their communities.

Most congregations run their social service programs with little or no paid staff, using volunteer labor, as well as contributing large pools of volunteer labor to other community social service programs (Garland, Rogers, Singletary, & Yancey, 2005). Despite all the research interest in congregational community services, however, only scant attention has been given to the impact of community service on congregational volunteers themselves. They prepare dinners with tablecloths and good dishes on a Thursday night and sit down with people who are homeless for a meal. They deliver meals to the homebound. They tutor children and mentor teenagers who might otherwise fail in school. They teach computer literacy and workplace skills to young single mothers so they can find decent jobs. What impact do these activities have on those who serve? Understanding their impact seems vital to discovering what sustains or depletes congregations' involvement in their communities. Congregational leaders who urge their members into service as an expression of their religious faith may wish to know of the various effects such service can have on their members and in the life of the congregation itself. Leaders of these programs and community social service providers who rely on congregational volunteers would benefit from knowing the outcomes of service in the lives of volunteers, and how those outcomes sustain, deepen, or deplete their ongoing involvement.

Congregational volunteers are a limited resource

Understanding the impact of volunteering on volunteers has particular importance because the common assumption that congregations are bottomless buckets of volunteers appears to be false, at least based on experiences of some researchers. Cosgrove described the difficulty predominantly Anglo Roman Catholic parishes encountered in attempting to recruit reliable volunteers for parish social ministries with African-American youths (Cosgrove, 2001). African-American churches providing mentoring programs for youths at risk for violence experienced similar difficulties (Branch, 2002). An interfaith coalition program that relied on volunteers providing elderly community residents telephone reassurance calls, home visits, and transportation in their own homes had to close more than half of their programs because of difficulty in recruiting volunteers (Pepper, Herrera, & Leviton, 2003). In a comparison of faith-based organizations (including congregations) and secular organizations in New York City, Seley and Wolpert (2003) found that secular organizations had an easier time recruiting volunteers than faith-based organizations—including congregations. Faith-motivated volunteers are in fact a limited resource, and so the outcomes of volunteering that keep them coming back to serve need to be understood.

Characteristics of volunteers

We know much more about the variables that correlate with volunteering than we do about its impact. For example, church attendance is the best general predictor of involvement in volunteer service (Gerard, 1985; Greeley, 1997; Hoge, Zech, McNamara, & Donahue, 1996; Nelson & Dynes, 1976; Park & Smith, 2000; Smith, 2004; Wuthnow, 1995). Those who attend more than once per week spend far more hours each month (5-9 hours) volunteering than those who attend only once a week or less (0-5 hours) (Hoge et al., 1996). Other factors that positively predict congregational volunteering, when contrasted with non-volunteers, include: more education (Chambre, 1984); higher socioeconomic status (Gronbjerg & Never, 2002; Park & Smith, 2000); less than full time work status (although retirement has no impact) (Gronbjerg & Never, 2002; Park & Smith, 2000); being married rather than single (Uslaner, 2002); previous volunteering experience (Caro & Bass, 1997; Chambre, 1987; Dye, Goodman, Roth, Bley, & Jensen, 1973); a religious identity passed on from parents (Park & Smith, 2000); having altruistic rather than self-promoting motivations for volunteering (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Wuthnow, 1991); being more reflective in disposition, less concerned with material aspects of life, and having a greater need for contemplation and prayer (Gerard, 1985); better health and a greater preference for active pursuits rather than spending long periods watching television (Gerard, 1985); and having an attitude of forgiveness toward others (Wuthnow, 2000). Finally, someone simply asked the potential volunteer to become a volunteer (Bowman, 2004; Park & Smith, 2000; Roehlkepartain, Naftali, & Musegades, 2000). The directionality of some of these variables is not always clear. For example, do people who volunteer also involve themselves actively in a congregation, or does congregational involvement lead to volunteering, or are these variables interactive? Do more reflective and altruistic people choose to spend their time volunteering or does volunteering make people more reflective and altruistic?

Service learning and volunteers

Perry and Katula (2001) searched nine databases and identified 37 empirical studies of the relationship between volunteerism and citizenship. In examining those findings, they concluded that volunteering leads to subsequent

giving and volunteering, and that "service-learning" produces the most consistent results. Service-learning is an approach to working with volunteers, often high school and college students, that seeks to make service and learning interactive, with service accompanied by reflection and study of the meaning of the service for the volunteer. Studies of service learning outcomes within educational settings focus primarily on cognitive and affective changes reported by the student volunteer who is involved in community service, as preparation for civic and social responsibility (Eyler & Giles, 1999). The Search Institute has applied the service-learning approach to the church, combining the methods of experiential Christian education with service to the needs of the neighborhood or larger community (Roehlkepartain, 1993). Their subsequent research indicates that young people who are involved in service are much more likely to be firmly bonded to their churches and much less likely to drop out of school. They are less likely to engage in behaviors that put them at risk, such as using drugs and alcohol. Moreover, people involved in service as children and teens are much more likely to be involved in service as adults. If such positive outcomes of service learning have been documented for young people, what might be expected as the outcomes of service for adults?

The study of faith as a research variable

If volunteers serve in response to their religious beliefs and faith perspectives, then it is important to understand the consequences of that service for their faith. Much of the current public emphasis on faith-based services sees "faith" as an independent variable. That is, volunteers and faith communities bring their religious faith as an element in services that have some impact on the effectiveness of services rendered (e.g., Trulear, 2000). The literature from within the church suggests, however, that faith and service are in a dynamic, transactional relationship with one another, that faith is also a dependent variable (Davidson, Johnson, & Mock, 1990; Watkins, 1994). Not only does service have the potential for making an impact on the world; it also has an impact on the believer: "Involvement in social ministry nourishes faith as it seeks to grasp the full reality of God's activity in the world" (Nelson, 1990, pp. 240-241). Lee has pointed out that the study of faith is not the exclusive province of theology but the province of all the sciences that study human nature and functioning (Lee, 1990). The sciences make no attempt to answer the "validity question," i.e., whether there is a God and whether God is rightly characterized by the holder of faith. Rather, the sciences are interested in how faith is enacted (Malony, 1990).

In a study of the faith experiences of Christian families, Garland (2003) explored the impact that actions grounded in faith have on faith itself. Actions motivated by religious beliefs produce outcomes that in turn have an impact on the beliefs that motivated the actions. In turn, then, the beliefs themselves are sometimes altered. For example, if a volunteer believes that fervent prayer will lead to healing of an addiction, the volunteer may act on that belief by praying fervently for a client. If the client seeks diligently to "work the program" to reach sobriety, and still relapses into substance abuse, the volunteer's understanding of prayer and the ways in which God answers prayer may be challenged. In an earlier study, Swezey (1990) explored how community service within campus religious life can support and challenge students' spiritual development, and, in particular, their faith development. In that study, students said they have experienced transformation of their attitudes and values. Some expressed feelings of being uncomfortable or of being inspired. Some posed questions about larger issues of social injustice that they have encountered. All reported attempting to find meaning in their volunteer experiences and that they were shaped or transformed by the challenge (Swezey, 1990).

Working with people who are radically different, who live in poverty or are homeless, can feel uncomfortable and shake a volunteer's understanding of the dynamics that create and hold people in poverty. Cosgrove commented that none of the volunteers—all Anglo Roman Catholics—involved in Long Island (NY) Catholic parish ministries he studied had experienced the continuous exposure to the depth and extent of human suffering that they encountered in their volunteer service. "For some, their work was a radicalizing experience, leading them to identify with people very different from themselves" (2001, p. 342).

> Core workers spoke several times of trying to place themselves in the position of those who had to ask for help . . . . Another way of facilitating the workers' ability to relate, which was mentioned in both groups, was to "see Christ" in the face of those they helped. This was one of the ways in which faith entered into the work of Outreach staff. It was their faith that led them to and sustained them in the work (Cosgrove, 2001).

In short, there is certainly theological support and some limited research evidence to indicate that involvement in service through community ministries has the potential for significant impact on volunteers. In order for that potential to be realized, however, those who work with volunteers—whether leaders in the congregations or staff members of community social service agencies—need to focus not only on meeting the needs of the recipients of

service in the community, but also on understanding how the possible outcomes of service for volunteers themselves can sustain and deepen their involvement over time.

Methods

This project involved a purposive sample of 35 Christian Protestant congregations located in primarily four regions of the United States—Michigan (n=8), South Carolina (n=8), Texas (n=13), and Southern California (n=6). The research team included six faculty members from universities in the study's four regions: Baylor University (TX), University of South Carolina, Calvin College (MI), and Whittier College (CA). The project surveyed 7,403 church members, as well as a subgroup of 946 active volunteers, in order to understand the relationship between service experiences, demographic variables, and faith practices; those findings are published elsewhere (Hugen, Garland, Myers, Sherwood, & Sheridan, forthcoming). In addition to the surveys, the research team conducted in-depth interviews lasting from one to two hours each with 29 congregational leaders and 25 individual volunteers who had been involved in community service programs. This paper explores the outcomes of service the leaders and volunteers described in those interviews.

Congregational leaders identified volunteers in their congregations for interview. The researchers were not seeking a random sample of all volunteers but rather volunteers who represented as much diversity as possible demographically, theologically, and in the types of services in which they were engaged. Seventeen of the 25 individual volunteers were female and 8 were male. Eighteen were white, 5 were African-American, and 2 were Latino. The median age for the individual volunteers was 53 with a range from 30 to 85. Their congregations were Evangelical Protestant (n =14) (e.g., Southern Baptist, Cooperative Baptist, Missionary Baptist, Seventh Day Adventist, Christian Reformed, Assemblies of God, nondenominational) and Mainline Protestant (n =11) (e.g., United Methodist, Presbyterian USA, Episcopal). Open-ended interviews included questions about the nature of the service, the volunteer's motivations for serving, factors that sustain or create barriers for service, ways in which their congregations do and do not support their involvement, the relationship of the service to volunteers' faith practices, and the impact of the service on their lives. Interviews lasted from one to two hours and were recorded and transcribed.

With 25-35 single-spaced pages of text per interview, the interview databases include 1,650 pages of transcripts. The six research team members worked individually, coding and developing new codes for their own and one another's interview transcripts, then presenting their work to one another in lengthy conference calls that required consensus on the code list before going to the next round of individual work, with the goal of developing theory grounded regarding the experiences of interviewees (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Weiss, 1994). Each interview was coded both by the researcher who conducted the interview and by another member of the team, using the software package ATLAS-Ti. With periodic pauses, the team continued a rhythm of coding and phone conferences on a biweekly basis for more than two years. This process resulted in 725 carefully defined codes organized into 25 major categories (e.g., volunteer motives, ministry types, congregational supports, results). Our analytic methods have been reported in full elsewhere (Garland, O'Connor, Wolfer, & Netting, forthcoming).

Findings: Types of Community Ministry Involvement

These congregational leaders and volunteers identified 53 types of community ministry (CM) in which they were involved. There were many of the emergency feeding and clothing distribution programs so pervasive in congregations that serve poor communities, but then there were programs and services tailored to the needs of communities and the concerns of individual congregations: prison ministries, gang ministries, gay and lesbian ministries, camps, micro-enterprise development, substance abuse programs, health services, services for the hearing impaired—and many more. The research team grouped these 53 types of community ministry into five subcategories, based on the focus of the ministry (neighborhood/community or national/global) and intensity of relationship with individual service recipients, resulting in a continuum from particular and intense (e.g., weekly tutoring an adult immigrant learning English) to global with little or no direct relationship with recipients (e.g., raising money for disaster relief). The five categories were: (1) social and economic justice programs (e.g., social/political advocacy for fair wages, studying and developing congregational responses to global concerns); (2) program development and administration (e.g., organizing volunteers for Meals on Wheels or a temporary homeless shelter in church buildings during cold weather); (3) emergency relief and distribution of basic necessities (e.g., serving food or distributing clothing to those in need); (4) group educational programs (e.g., teaching weekly

English as a Second Language or budgeting classes); and (5) one-on-one sustained relationship-based services (e.g., tutoring one or more hours a week with a child working on reading and math skills, or mentoring an unemployed mother learning job skills) (see Figure 1). The researchers expected each volunteer to be engaged in one, possibly two service programs. Most volunteers were engaged in an array of service programs. In addition, each program often had multiple dimensions. For example, emergency relief and distribution of basic necessities was sometimes as "simple" as serving in a homeless feeding program, or as involved as delivering food to homes and so forming relationships with those served over an extended period of time. A Baptist senior adult who delivers Meals on Wheels twice a week describes how the service is more than handing a hot meal through a screened door. It often means staying for conversation and prayer:

> A lot of times they never leave their homes unless they're going to the doctor or something like that; and the only way, a lot of times, you can reach people is by visitation and especially with delivering food. You may be the only person they may see in a month, and sometimes all they want to do is have a listening ear. Sometimes they're hurting, and they want you to pray for them. It could be anything.

Results of community ministry for volunteers.

The team defined 150 codes to describe the results—or consequences—of the various forms of service for the volunteers themselves. To give a taste of the diverse kinds of results these leaders and volunteers named, those codes include: "own children socialized," "community renewal," "commitment to ministry," "developed self confidence," "congregation is energized," "congregational membership increases," "de-centering of myself," "faith crisis," "frustration," "goal unmet," "leader knows members better," "political networking," and so on. The personal change these volunteers and leaders identified were grouped into the following subcategories.

Knowledge

The knowledge volunteers reported gaining through service included deeper understanding of Christian faith (e.g., the Bible, God's love, prayer, evil, other Christians), of self (self awareness and personal strengths), and of those they served. Most of the volunteers described a better understanding of their own faith as a consequence of their service. A married journalist teaching budgeting and job skills in a homeless shelter noted:

> There was a man named Bob who very much wanted to be in the ministry. He was at the shelter, he had come out of prison I believe, had been through detox [detoxification], was putting his life back together, and was very involved in his church. Bob and I spend most of our employment counseling time actually talking about God and the scriptures and searching out meanings and trying to apply them. That was just a wonderful give and take. Bob had all of his life experiences to bring to bear upon his interpretation of the scriptures which I could not relate to in the same way but hearing him discuss them from his perspective enlightened me. It was so clear, you know, as we sat across from each other in these counseling sessions that we were just two souls trying to understand and apply God's word to our lives. That was just a really beautiful thing.

An Episcopalian minister describes seeing volunteers who ran a feeding program for homeless persons gain a deeper understanding of the persons they serve—and of themselves—resulting in greater compassion and generosity:

> They have a hands-on experience with what God's compassion feels like and therefore are more peace-filled because they know it's for them, too. They have a sense of God's compassion because they've gotten to exercise it. They can more easily claim for themselves the compassion that God has for them because they've exercised it towards another. And they know it's not that hard to do. I'll be honest. Churches often get very co-dependent people as volunteers who have all sorts of issues and they're trying to earn their way into relationships and to love, into heaven. And I'm hoping that through this kind of work—and I've seen this at least in a couple of people that are articulate and open enough to talk about it, that they've discovered that they don't have to earn it. Since they've had the experience of exercising generosity, it's much easier for them to put God into their place and realize that God would exercise generosity towards them.

Those involved in program development and administration and in disaster relief and basic necessities, also described an increase in the knowledge they need to do the work, such as understanding recipients' needs and the

problems they face. A Christian Reformed pastor describes having experienced this with his congregational volunteers:

> Volunteers started out assuming that these people just didn't want to work, they didn't want to better themselves, didn't care about their children and their education. Then they come alongside and find out what it's really like for these families, and how hard some folks do work, and how generational poverty really is an issue, and the odds against somebody rising out of generational poverty and how staggering that is.

A volunteer coordinator of a cold weather shelter for homeless persons in a California city described an older volunteer who is "rough around the edges and a little grumpy" who volunteered to drive the bus full of "shelter guests" from an outlying church that was providing shelter back into the city the next morning:

> He was astonished that in his busload of twelve people, eight of them had jobs. They were actually working. He dropped some of them off for their jobs. When he came last night, he brought some work clothes for some of them, because he thought they needed better work clothes than they had. I don't think he would have thought that these are people who are working before, but they truly are the working poor. I mean, you can't survive if your take-home pay is $5.00 an hour.

This new knowledge takes root in changed attitudes and feelings such as tolerance, compassion, and even anger at the tenacity of poverty and social injustice.

Attitudes and feelings

Volunteers and leaders reported changes in attitudes and feelings concerning the volunteer work itself, toward the recipients, toward the larger world, and toward themselves.

Concerning the work.

Across the types of community ministry, volunteers experienced changes in their attitudes and feelings concerning the work. Nineteen of the volunteers (including all of those providing basic necessities) described their growing understanding of and commitment to the work. Along with that growing commitment came more realistic expectations of the outcomes in the lives of those they served. A married extension agent in her 80's described how she has learned to keep some emotional distance, based on the first woman she counseled in budgeting in the homeless shelter.

> She didn't make it. She got back into drugs, and I don't know what has happened to her. She had a huge impact on me, and I thought right then and there that I have to really find what success means. That is one of the lessons I learned right off the bat. Success doesn't mean this person's problems get solved or they absolutely make it back into a healthy, independent lifestyle. What does success as a volunteer mean for me in these situations? For me it just simply means that I show up every week and give them my full attention for that amount of time. I can't control very much more then that. That about broke my heart, when that one woman didn't make it.

She learned to redefine success in a way that keeps her committed to the work, giving her "full attention in that moment of time." Four volunteers said that they have felt inadequate to the task, but that they have learned to do what they can and leave the rest to God. Eight of the volunteers expressed some discouragement and sadness, and identified a lack of reward related to their work but rarely related to the service recipients themselves. Instead, these volunteers were discouraged by the bureaucracy of nonprofit organizations, a school system that tells children they are "dumb" even if they make progress in tutoring, and the overwhelming odds against clients. Interestingly, none of the volunteers talked about "burnout," although eight of the leaders did. As one Episcopal pastor said:

> You can invest loads of time, loads of energy, even loads of money, and 90% of those we contact will not join your church. After volunteers have made that kind of investment in people's lives, and sometimes been way put out in the process, they become disappointed, discouraged, and say "look at all we've invested in Bob and Cindy Jones, and now they are gone." The burned out factor is a major piece of community ministry. Right on the front end, you have to say, "Listen. Chances are that Bob and Cindy Jones aren't going to be here a year from now. But that doesn't mean that you can't be Jesus to them. I will help you to think through the establishment of appropriate

boundaries. You may need some recovery time on the far side of Bob and Cindy. And if Bob and Cindy become long-term, active members, praise God for it, but please be aware of what community involvement means. It probably means that you will give a lot and receive little. What you receive may be in the future, even in God's new kingdom, new heaven, new earth.

Concerning the Recipients

Sixteen of the volunteers, across the different kinds of CM, described how the work helped them to tolerate others who are different from them. A married Presbyterian journalist teaching budgeting skills in a homeless shelter explained:

> I am less quick to jump to conclusions. I am, I hope, more compassionate and more tolerant. I realize that people are where they are because of a lot of different things. There is a lot of history for each person and we typically don't have a clue. I don't have to know all that history. Rather than jumping to conclusions, or shooting off my mouth, or saying the first thing that comes to my mind, all of which are practices that have gotten me into a great deal of trouble in the past, I hope it is making me more aware that there is so much I don't know.

A homemaker doing similar work with homeless persons said:

> I think it's easy to get along with people that are like you. That is not a challenge. It's comfortable. I think God calls us to sometimes be uncomfortable and still be accepting.

Nineteen of the volunteers described ways in which they had developed compassion; they represented all the subcategories of ministry. The mother teaching ESL and GED classes with Mexican immigrants illustrated the link between tolerance and compassion:

> I am learning to see people as God sees them, to have understanding and compassion and to forgive. It is easy judge people and their situation in life without really knowing who they are or what they've actually gone through. This (service) keeps me grounded. It gives me the ability to understand and tolerate others that I perhaps didn't have or wouldn't have otherwise.

Church leaders, too, made this link between tolerance and compassion. A Christian Reformed pastor in Michigan said:

> Folks who are involved in community ministry definitely find themselves looking at other people not with just mere toleration, but with more compassion. Social barriers really perpetuate unfounded assumptions we have at every class level. When you let your life be joined with other people who are different, then you have more of a bent toward tolerating.

Tolerance and compassion grow as volunteers face their own powerlessness to fix complex problems, and volunteers learn that what they may offer is presence, not solutions:

> You begin to recognize the common humanity that we have. When they suffer, there is a sense in which you hurt too because you can't fix it. All you can do is be there with them. Part of the deepening and understanding of faith is learning that "presence" in itself is a ministry—that solidarity, that willingness to be there with them in the midst of that suffering. It's not coming and saying "Now it will be better" but, "Ultimately in God's love, it will be better because God is at work in this. But it may not change substantially in front of us right now" (Texas Baptist pastor).

Concerning the world.

According to these volunteers (n=25) and leaders (n=13), regardless of the subcategory of community ministry, volunteers can expect to have their world enlarged. Not surprisingly, every single volunteer working in programs addressing basic necessities and social and economic justice described this experience of change. A married California woman who spends up to 40 hours per week arranging shelters in congregations for homeless persons during cold weather explained:

> I look at my own situation differently. Some nights when I go there, I am tired and cranky, you

know (chuckles). Somebody's done something which they know they're not supposed to do, and I have to be the disciplinarian. I feel sorry for myself. Then I look at them sleeping on a mat on the floor, and I get to go home to my nice warm house and a shower and good food and a bed to sleep in. So I think it has made me more grateful for my life, and maybe made me feel a bit selfish about my life, that I have so much and these people have so little.

Concerning self.

Three volunteers described feeling a greater sense of integrity. For example, a Presbyterian married homemaker with children who does national fundraising for homeless shelters said, "I'm practicing what I preach." Eleven volunteers said that the work gives them energy and joy but none of the eleven were those providing basic necessities. Instead, these eleven were those involved in program development and administration, as well as in group education. Ten of the volunteers spoke of learning patience and self discipline. These ten represented all the subcategories of community ministry except one-on-one sustained relationship programs. Seventeen volunteers also described a shift or deepening of their priorities:

> It has shown me that materialistic things have a proper place in life. You can't take it with you. You only have it because of the grace of God. It's only on loan to you. I'm grateful to be able to own a house, have a place to go to, have a car to drive, be retired from a job. It has given me a proper perspective of where those things came from and who is responsible for giving it to me. It's only on loan and it's only by the grace of God that I am able to enjoy these things in life (Missionary Baptist grandmother who prepares and delivers food to homeless persons on the streets).

Nineteen of the 25 volunteers gain satisfaction from, even feel gratified by, the helping process itself, as well as observing tangible improvements in the lives of recipients. This sense of satisfaction occurred across all the types of community ministry, and, in fact, was the most common result for those involved in tutoring and mentoring. Fifteen volunteers, involved in all the types of community ministry, said that they experienced meaning and purpose in their lives as a result of their involvement in CM.

Faith

Both volunteers and leaders reported changes in their life of faith. Those changes included "identifying with Christ," changes in their experience of faith, changes in their prayer lives, and basing their behavior on their faith. Service confirmed and strengthened faith for volunteers (n = 15) in every kind of CM. One volunteer said that the service "brings all of my philosophy of life and my faith into focus." A widow in her 50s, a bank manager, described her work on a home care team for person with HIV/AIDS:

> I've worked with a lot of people. I've stayed all night with people infected with this virus. I've watched them die. I've been with their families from the beginning to the end. It's made my faith stronger. I truly believe that. There are families that have said, "I don't know how we would have made it through this without support of the Care Team." It just made my faith even stronger. I truly believe that God has a purpose for all of us. We all don't have to be here to do the same thing. He made it so everybody would have their little niche. And mine is being there for other people, being that shoulder. That's what he's shown me—that's the reason I'm here.

Fourteen of the volunteers, involved across the spectrum of CM subcategories, spoke of learning to rely on God. As a volunteer budgeting counselor in a homeless shelter said, "I never feel so close to God as when I'm doing those counseling sessions."

Eight of the volunteers described ways in which they have "seen God act." For example, a single Baptist professor in her 50s describes being asked to join a prayer group. Although she felt like her prayers were "bouncing off the ceiling," she learned to pray with the members of the group and had a "powerful, dramatic experience" that led to her feeling power in her service for the first time. She recruited others who believed in God's ability to act in the world, and they prayed for the children of the community. She related this story:

> The ministry no longer drained me. Something would go wrong, like it always does, and I would pray, and God would fix it, whatever it was. Even with tiny little stupid snafus, God was doing a lot of really miraculous things. The people leading the kids' groups would invite the kids to pray.

"Today we're going to pray about what you're afraid of. What should we pray about?" With middle-class kids, they're going to say "the dark," but these kids said the rats. "What do you mean, you're afraid of the rats?" "Well, they climb up in the night and bite us." So then of course the leader that was telling me this story gulped and said "well, let's pray about the rats." She said to me, "I prayed, 'I rebuke those rats in the name of Jesus,' but I didn't know what the hell I was doing." The next week the kids came back. She said, "Does anybody have anything to tell? How is everything?" "Fine, fine, everything's fine," they said. "Well, what about the rats?" They said, "Oh, they are gone." At which point, of course, the leader said, "Praise God." The kids said, "Well, you said to pray."

Finally, three of the volunteers involved in program development and administration—and none in the other forms of service—described what they were doing as "partnering with God." As an Episcopal married chef in his 50s, who organizes the food preparation for the annual Habitat "blitz build," said, "It's given me a mechanism to feel like I am working in God's world on a more consistent basis."

Personal Skills

Volunteers described learning interpersonal skills through their service, such as assertiveness and learning to listen. A graduate student leading ESL and GED classes for Mexican immigrants described learning the skills and developing the courage to lead the classes, something that was a real challenge for him as a shy person. He and five other volunteers described skills of advocacy they used in behalf of those they served:

> I was called into a situation where an illegal immigrant couple was working in a restaurant. The owners of the restaurant found out that their social security numbers had been fabricated, and so he wasn't going to give them their final paycheck. The company's position was that the restaurant had been defrauded by these people. Of course, these people had already worked. When they were let go, it was the end of the pay period. It was theft in my view. I made a telephone call and talked to the manager of the restaurant. Occasionally all that is necessary to right a wrong is a telephone call. Just to be able to say, "You know, somebody out here knows what you're doing to these people and it's wrong. It's illegal. Yes, what they did was also flawed. But you are compounding the wrong and in fact your wrong is a far greater wrong. You're stealing." Well, I waited to hear if anything would happen before I would take any further action. That telephone call was enough.

Eleven volunteers mentioned developing skills specific to the service they provided. A business professor who works in a teen activity program in the inner city described how she has had to learn to be very organized and structured. A woman working in a cold weather shelter for homeless people learned how to assess people. Twelve of the volunteers reported that building relationships is a significant skill for their work. A grandfather working in a tutoring program in an elementary school explained:

> As I was growing up, I was extremely bashful, only able to talk to close friends. But as I became more and more involved, I've had to get out of a shell and be able to communicate. Perhaps the best communication is being quiet and with a hug or—so that people know that you care and that you love them.

Four of the volunteers, all involved in group education, talked about the importance of being able to build trust, to honor and work through the recipients' fears of taking help. For example, the extension agent in her 80s, who is teaching budgeting skills in a homeless shelter, said:

> I am learning as I go along that they build confidence in you if you are really honest and you mean what you say. So you can't give up.

Ten volunteers who mentioned listening as a skill were involved in the provision of basic necessities, group education, and tutoring and mentoring—not in social and economic justice or program development and administration. It makes sense that these interpersonal skills were connected to direct service provision. For example, the Baptist widow who served on a care team providing home services for persons with HIV/AIDS described her work with one of the service recipients:

> Each day his sister has so much to do, so I would leave work and I would go straight from downtown out to their home and sit with him. He would tell me about his experience because he

was gay, and we would just talk. He said, "You know what? Some of the things I tell you, I have never told anybody else in my life." And I said, "Why do you think?" And he said, "You don't judge." I said, "No, I don't. No, I really don't." I would cook for him and we sat there and watched TV until his sister came home, and just chatting, and I could tell I made a difference.

Fourteen volunteers described skills and experiences they brought with them into the service. As examples, a foods and nutrition teacher was planning meals in a homeless shelter; the member of the home care team with HIV/AIDS patients lost her husband to AIDS; an elementary school principal and a teacher were volunteer tutors; and an accountant was serving as a budget counselor in a homeless shelter. In other words, volunteers often sought to serve in ways that used their career or special skills and experiences, and not, as some have suggested in order to develop skills. Moreover, ministry leaders said that they try to match existing skills and "gifts" with service opportunities.

Personal Achievement and Sense of Wellness

Volunteers experienced achievements that personally benefit them as a consequence of serving. There was no obvious pattern to these experiences; they occurred across the spectrum of community ministries. Seven described feeling respect and recognition from others, including the larger congregation and sometimes beyond. For example, a volunteer who had established a computer lab in her church was excited that another congregation had asked her to help them set up a similar ministry. In contrast, the financial advisor who provided budget and debt reduction counseling to homeless families said that no one really knew what he did because he doesn't talk about it in order protect the confidentiality of those he served. He said, "But you do have the self-satisfaction. You know it, what you did."

Some volunteers described how their work generalized to other areas of their life. The man who prepared the snacks and helped out in other ways in a children's activity program said that he is more honest on his job as a teacher; he doesn't try to cover when he doesn't know something but has learned to say "I don't know, but I'll find the answer." He was striving to live his values more fully since he is trying to teach them to others. The credit manager who ran a computer lab for Mexican immigrants and raised money to support it believed she had skills now that will make her a much better employee. And a business professor had gained insight into cultural diversity that she was carrying back into her university classroom.

Six volunteers described ways the work has contributed to their own spiritual and emotional health. It provided an outlet for a stay-at-home mother and for others who "had the time." Others described how service helped them to grow spiritually as they saw others change their lives. The ministry provided stability for a mother during a time when her own family life was troubled.

> My family has been very blessed, but we have also experienced times of trouble. The consistency and the discipline of going to the Souper Bowl [homeless feeding program] provided my family a sense of stability at a time when there were not a lot of other stable factors in our day-to-day life. The interaction with the people who work there, the fact that those people are there because they believe that what they are doing is right. It is the right thing to do for them, it is the right thing to do for others, and it is the right thing to do in the eyes of the Lord. That has certainly been something for me to lean on.

Family Life

A leader described a couple who was having marital problems, and through the work they did together of helping others, they were able to change their attitudes and tackle their own problems. Families of volunteers benefited from strengthened relationships (e.g., talking together, teamwork, shared interests) and from the socialization of children that took place. The leaders almost never mentioned changes in family life, but volunteers did. This difference suggests that leaders may not be aware of the impact service can have on strengthening families and on parenting and socializing children.

For example, the graduate student sometimes involves his children in events of the ESL and GED programs where he taught. He valued their exposure to different cultures and seeing him relating—in Spanish—to students. He wanted his children to value their own Latino heritage, and he saw their involvement in his volunteering as a way to help that to happen. He did not want them to be isolated in their "middle class, assimilated world." He went on to describe how important it was to model involvement for children, so that they, too, can choose to be involved, "not that they have to be involved, but the opportunities are there." Similarly, the mother involved in the inner city activity program for teens said:

It's made me want to make sure that as I raise my child, I give her a sense of appreciation for people who are significantly different from her. I am trying to help her be nonjudgmental. I want her to develop a sense of value for everyone and a sense of a desire to use what she has been given in the right ways.

A father described how important it was to serve alongside his son in a food bank: he knew where his son was, and it gave them a chance to have "a father/son relationship." In a previous church, volunteering had actually separated them. A number of volunteers mentioned serving alongside family members—couples prepare food together to feed the homeless, serve together in Meals on Wheels, read to children, and visit the homes of children in a congregation's after-school program.

Findings: Impact on the Congregation

Both leaders and volunteers described changes to their congregations as a result of involvement in community ministry. These changes involved both internal changes as well as changes in the relationship of the congregation to its larger community.

Congregational internal changes

Both volunteers and leaders described internal changes to the congregation that involved stronger ties of members with one another, and a change in the congregation's sense of identity. Leaders said that service actually resulted in increased financial resources. Only leaders (not volunteers) identified negative results in the congregation such as increased demands on human resources, especially staff time, and conflict in the congregation over priorities.

Stronger ties.

Five volunteers—all in social and economic justice programs or program development and administration—described the socializing with other church members they enjoyed in their serving. A retired Episcopalian widow who led her congregation's ministry advocating for international fair trade and environmentally sustainable practices said:

Our steering committee was meeting about once a month to do this planning, but now we meet twice a month because the group wanted to become more of a community itself. We spend time now just getting to know each other and supporting one another, and it has been a wonderful experience. We're still the steering committee—but we're more than that.

Eleven volunteers from across the spectrum of community ministries described a stronger congregational community as a result of their involvement. A Christian Reform pastor in Michigan said:

This homeless ministry shapes this church community. It brings cohesiveness. It brings trust. And it brings growth. It makes the community love on each other. It takes away all of the badness within a community.

Energized.

Thirteen leaders stated that the CM had "energized" their congregation. Seven leaders described ways in which involvement in one ministry program led to involvement in others.

Congregational external changes

Finally, leaders and volunteers also identified resulting changes in the congregation's role in the community. Four volunteers, all serving either in program development and administration or in basic relief ministries, noted that the community became aware of the congregation and its leader and viewed the congregation with greater esteem, leading to more opportunities for service. Esteem in the community was a result that nine leaders described. Eighteen of the volunteers engaged across the community ministries subcategories and 13 leaders described ways the community ministry connected the congregation to its community. In turn, this reputation helps the congregation to accomplish its goals:

11

I think our community ministries, all the things we do, have been able to attract the attention of our community leaders, like supervisors who make decisions about zoning, money, and buildings. Because we have attracted their attention, we have not had a lot of problems getting a lot of the things we request from the city or the county government. We have been very successful for that reason (African-American Baptist pastor serving his California congregation 32 years).

Implications

The study provides congregational and community service leaders with a typology of the effects volunteer experiences can have on volunteers and their congregation. It suggests that volunteer opportunities have the potential for serving as channels for increased commitment to service, enriched faith development. , increased understanding and tolerance for difference, greater compassion for those who suffer in unjust social systems, and broader and deeper engagement in the community.

The study only interviewed those volunteers who have continued to serve in their communities over time, along with their congregational leaders. Moreover, the volunteers were chosen by congregational leaders; they were probably some of the best examples of congregational volunteers, from the perspective of their congregational leaders. These were not volunteers who dabble in serving a holiday meal in the homeless shelter once a year; their service is an integral part of their lives. Very different responses about outcomes of service would no doubt have been gleaned from volunteers who had become burned out or discouraged and dropped from service, or who were only marginally involved. This project was concerned with identifying the possible outcomes in the lives of volunteers and congregations, recognizing that those possibilities are not always realized.

The interviewees described what can happen when volunteers find a place to serve that is congruent with their religious beliefs and that call for expression of faith in action. At least according to this group of congregational leaders and members, it appears that if faith-motivated volunteers can be motivated and sustained in service, the rewards can be a deeper understanding of self and of others and of God, greater compassion and tolerance for those whose life circumstances are so different, a reorientation of priorities, a deepened faith, and a sense of personal achievement and health, and even deepened family and congregational cohesion and identity. More research is needed to tease out the factors that lead to and sustain these outcomes in the lives of volunteers and their congregations.

"Volunteers have a variety of motives for volunteering, most of which relate to client benefits, they get involved to make a difference for individual recipients, programs, and communities; this data shows that significant benefits also accrue to volunteers themselves, although this had little to do with their reasons for getting involved, there unintended positive benefits for (at least) long-term volunteers and may help to sustain their involvement.

Given the nature of volunteer motives, it may actually be counterproductive to inform volunteers about possible personal benefits of volunteering, because they mostly talk of fairly altruistic motives, telling them of these benefits may not help or even be counterproductive, nevertheless, it may be helpful to inform congregational and ministry leaders about these benefits so they can strive to foster them, leaders may be in a better position to do things while they are recruiting, training and supporting volunteers that will enhance and foster these benefits.

Despite the fairly altruistic motives volunteers identify, informing them of family, community and congregational benefits may still be consistent with their altruistic motives. It may help to sort out some of these benefits, and emphasize those consistent with volunteers' sense of identity, purpose, goals for volunteerism.

Drawing upon service-learning theory, we can anticipate that certain types of experiences are more likely to promote changes in volunteers, our data suggest that volunteers involved in certain types of ministries

(e.g., face to face) are more likely to report certain outcomes than others (e.g., administrative). It's useful to simply be aware of these activity/outcome linkages. It also suggests there may be ways to elaborate volunteer activities to promote certain outcomes, to expand the effect of volunteerism.

Our outcomes portray learning in the broadest sense, not merely cognitive gains (new information). Volunteers report diverse types of learning: changes in attitudes, values, skills, relationships, networks, etc. Whole-bodied, experiential learning contributes to learning in many dimensions of a volunteer's life, and may contribute to the strength, durability, and profoundness of the changes."

Figure 1. CM Program Continuum of Relationship Intensity between Volunteers and Service Recipients

Global/national focus, with no direct relationship with recipients	Social and Economic Justice programs National/global focus--------------------No direct relationship with recipients (social/political advocacy for fair wages, studying and developing congregational responses to global concerns)
↕	Program Development and Administration Local/national focus ----------------------Limited relationship with recipients (organizing volunteers for Meals on Wheels or a temporary homeless shelter in church buildings during cold weather)
Local focus, with some relationship with recipients	Emergency Relief & Distribution of Basic Necessities Local focus------------------------------Direct, usually short-term relationship (homeless feeding programs, food and clothing pantries, health care, delivering supplies on the streets to homeless persons)
↕	Group Educational Programs Local focus -------Direct, longer-term relationship with groups of recipients (teaching English as a Second Language or GED courses, computer skills, job readiness)
Local focus, with one-on-one, sustained relationship with one or more recipients	One-on-one Sustained Relationship Program Local focus--------Direct longer term relationship with individual recipients (tutoring, mentoring)

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