

# Congregation-Based Community Organizing

## Building Vibrant Congregations

## Building Just Communities



The Rev. David Thornton, center, pastor of Grace Memorial United Presbyterian Church, sing hymns while leading members of the congregation and members of Pittsburgh (PA) government on a tour up Iowa Street in the Upper Hill District, where stop signs and repairs are needed. Grace Memorial Church is an active member of the Holy Ground Project, a project of the Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network.

“And what does God require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.” Micah 6:8

“As we abandon our individualism and accept our membership in community, a marvelous thing happens. We become less afraid, more at home on earth, because we no longer stand alone. Resurrection into community saves us from the secret fear that we have to carry the whole load.” *The Active Life* - Parker Palmer (Harper & Row, 1990)

“The arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice” - Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

## Overview

Presbyterian congregations across the country are seeking to experience spiritual renewal, to revitalize their congregational life and to transform themselves and their communities. They want to create a deeper sense of community, to fulfill the biblical mandate to pursue justice and create a better world.

Congregational-based community organizing (CBCO) is a means for congregations to engage their members to connect with their neighbors and communities, and to address social inequalities while simultaneously transforming communities and congregational life. Through this model, congregational members share their stories, deepen relationships with one another, discover issues of common concerns, develop leaders and act to improve the lives of members of their communities.

Since the 1950's the Presbyterian Church has been supporting congregational engagement in CBCO, nationally and globally. Today, we work with CBCOs across the United States to create a public and powerful voice for justice. CBCO is one of the many ways that Presbyterian congregations work for justice and create social change.

This booklet offers an introduction to the CBCO model, as well as a glimpse into the experience of several congregations involved in this growing movement. If you are interested in further studies regarding the biblical and theological foundation for CBCO work, Dennis Jacobsen's book, *Doing Justice* is an excellent resource. We hope that this booklet will initiate a conversation in your congregation about the potential for this model to transform both the internal life of your congregation and the ways in which your congregation participates in the larger community.

*Congregation-Based Community Organizing: Building Vibrant Congregations, Building Just Communities* explains the objectives, accomplishments, and process of CBCO and the benefits that congregations can potentially reap by becoming involved in it. The guide then describes how CBCO builds community, makes concrete changes to promote the public good, and develops community leaders. It describes the benefits reaped by participating congregations, including the development of leaders; and the new dynamism that transforms congregational life.

This guide was prepared by the General Assembly Mission Council (GAMC)'s Small Church and Community Ministry Office in partnership with the GAMC's Presbyterian Hunger Program (PHP), relying heavily on the work of the Office for Congregational Advocacy and Witness of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) and the Jewish Funds for Justice (JFsJ), with its kind permission. We are very much indebted to the UUA and JFsJ and grateful for their help.

CONGREGATION-BASED COMMUNITY ORGANIZING HAS SERVED AS THE PRIMARY VEHICLE FOR ESTABLISHING POTENTIALLY POWERFUL RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN MYSELF AND OTHER POWERFUL LEADERS IN MANY PROFESSIONS AND VOCATIONS. CBCO HAS ALLOWED ME TO BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT SHARING MY PASSIONS IN REFERENCE TO WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO ME AND WHAT I AM SEEKING IN TERMS OF SHORT AND LONG RANGE GOALS FROM A LOCAL, REGIONAL, STATEWIDE, NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE. CBCO RESULTS IN ME BEING ABLE TO CLARIFY AND ARTICULATE WHAT I HOPE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE BETTERMENT OF THIS WORLD. I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO CONNECT WITH OTHERS THROUGH ONE-ON-ONES AND DISCOVER OUR SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES IN TERMS OF A VARIETY OF SOCIAL ISSUES THAT FACE US TODAY. CBCO HAS ENABLED ME TO PRESENT A SET OF USEFUL TOOLS TO TWO DIFFERENT URBAN CONGREGATIONS OVER THE LAST EIGHT YEARS THAT ARE GUARANTEED TO ENABLE LAYPERSONS TO BUILD UPON THEIR LEADERSHIP ABILITY AS WELL AS PROVIDE THEM OPPORTUNITIES TO VOICE THEIR CONCERNS IN THE PUBLIC ARENA AMONGST A DIVERSITY OF PEOPLE. CBCO HAS ALSO SERVED AS A CATALYST TO BUILD ORGANIZED PEOPLE AND ORGANIZED MONEY TO PRODUCE ORGANIZED POWER FOR POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE IN BOTH URBAN AND SUBURBAN SETTINGS.

DAVID THORNTON, PASTOR, GRACE MEMORIAL UNITED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,  
PITTSBURGH, PA. GRACE MEMORIAL IS A MEMBER OF THE PITTSBURGH INTERFAITH IMPACT NETWORK  
(PIIN) WHICH IS AN AFFILIATE OF THE GAMALIEL FOUNDATION.



## Why Congregation-Based Community Organizing?

Many Presbyterian congregations are working to reinvent themselves, discerning how God is calling them to serve their communities. Many struggle to build internal community, to attract new members, and to involve existing members more intensely. Some feel isolated from the community outside of the walls of the congregation but they have a desire to reach out with their neighbors. Many congregations are also deeply committed to creating a better society but are often frustrated by their inability to create lasting change through their soup kitchens, food pantries and shelters. Congregations seeking to confront these challenges are asking:

- How can we build more compassionate communities?
- How can we involve our members more deeply in congregational life?
- How can we reach out with our neighbors?
- How do we reach out to potential members, especially young people?
- How can we help our members make their Christian faith more meaningful and relevant to their lives?
- Are our social action programs really making a difference?
- How can we better live our values as a faith community?
- How can we build closer relationships with other faith communities?

CBCO helps congregations to address these challenges. It is a process that transforms faith communities into centers of civic power capable of acting on the values of compassion and justice. Through listening, relationship building, and leadership development, congregation members join together to act on issues of common concern.

The process begins with congregation members strengthening their relationships with one another, and then leads to relationship building with members of other institutions across lines of race, class and faith. Congregations that engage in CBCO join local ecumenical/interfaith organizing networks whose members identify and pursue policy and legislative solutions to social inequities, thereby creating systemic change that improves their own lives, as well as the lives of members of the broader community. The model of CBCO holds great potential for deepening congregational involvement in social justice. It provides an outstanding venue for congregational participation. It has the capacity to transform Presbyterian congregations in a way that enables us to truly understand and work for social change in community with others, as well as the capacity to meet the needs of congregations by developing and training leaders whose skills can enrich congregational life.



WHEN WESTMINSTER PC, LAKELAND, FL, BEGAN TO DEVELOP A NEW MISSION STATEMENT THAT BEST DESCRIBES WHO WE ARE, A NUMBER OF MEMBERS SAID, "WE MUST SAY THAT WE BELIEVE IN JUSTICE AND PEACE RIGHT UP FRONT." "JUSTICE MINISTRY IS WHAT WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO." "DON'T FORGET OUR ADVOCACY FOR THE POOR." SURE ENOUGH, WE WROTE OUR MISSION STATEMENT AROUND OUR JUSTICE WORK THAT IS EXPRESSED MOST CLEARLY THROUGH OUR PARTICIPATION IN CONGREGATION BASED COMMUNITY ORGANIZING.

OUR LOCAL DART ORGANIZATION, P.E.A.C.E. (POLK ECUMENICAL ACTION COUNCIL FOR EMPOWERMENT), OF WHICH WE WERE A FOUNDING MEMBER, ENABLES US TO EXPRESS OUR DEEPEST HELD BELIEFS. THROUGH P.E.A.C.E. WE ENGAGE IN MUTUAL MINISTRY WITH OTHER CHRISTIANS THAT COULD ONLY HAPPEN IN THIS CONTEXT. OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH CATHOLIC, URBAN, SUBURBAN, AFRICAN-AMERICAN, ANGLO, RICH, POOR, AND LARGE AND SMALL CHURCHES LETS US PRACTICE A RICH AND ENRICHING ECUMENISM.

WE HAVE LEARNED SKILLS THAT ARE GROWING OUR CONGREGATION SPIRITUALLY AND IN NUMBERS. USING ONE-ON-ONE DIALOGUE WE ARE REACHING NEW NEIGHBORS AND DEEPENING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH LONG-TERM MEMBERS. PRACTICING THE ART OF CONFRONTING INJUSTICE AND WORKING FOR REAL SOLUTIONS THAT ENHANCE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR THE POOREST AND WEAKEST OF THE COMMUNITY LED US TO DEVELOP A PARTNERSHIP BASED FAMILY-CENTERED ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM FOR NEW IMMIGRANTS. WE ARE SEARCHING FOR WAYS TO EMPOWER THE LOW-INCOME SENIORS THAT HAVE LITTLE VOICE IN OUR COMMUNITY.

BEING A CBCO CONGREGATION HAS REVITALIZED OUR REDEVELOPMENT-TRANSFORMATIONAL CONGREGATION IN WAYS THAT WE WOULD NEVER HAVE IMAGINED WHEN WE HELPED TO FOUND P.E.A.C.E. ALL WE WANTED TO DO WAS WHAT GOD HAS ASKED, "TO DO JUSTICE, TO LOVE KINDNESS, AND TO WALK HUMBLY WITH GOD." GOD HAS BLESSED US IN UNEXPECTED WAYS THAT CONTINUE TO LEAD US TO BE FAITHFUL DISCIPLES.

JAN COOLEY, CO-PASTOR WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH LAKELAND, FL.  
P.E.A.C.E. IS AN AFFILIATE OF THE DIRECT ACTION AND  
RESEARCH TRAINING CENTER (DART).

## What Is Congregation-Based Community Organizing?

CBCO (sometimes referred to as faith-based community organizing) is a method of working with faith communities to address the problems and concerns of their communities, and in turn, vitalize and strengthen the life of congregations. CBCO unites people across race and class, primarily through congregations from diverse traditions. Congregation-based community organizations sometimes also include community groups, unions, and public schools as members, along with religious congregations.

In the United States there are approximately 160 local CBCO groups, with more than 4,000 member institutions. The congregations and institutions that make up the CBCO movement have a combined membership of more than 1 percent of the U.S. population, a figure rarely reached by social movements in U.S. history. The significance of such numbers is indicated by the fact that “only 58 associations in American history have ever exceeded the 1% threshold [more than 1 percent of Americans in their memberships]” (Warren and Wood, 2001).

Although CBCO has traditionally been organized in cities, more rural and suburban areas are getting involved, and some networks are developing a regional approach. Most of our congregations are affiliated with one of five national networks and one regional network: Direct Action and Research Training Center (DART), the Gamaliel Foundation, the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), People Improving Communities Through Organizing (the PICO National Network), National Information Training Center (NTIC) and the InterValley Project (IVP), a regional network in New England. These networks provide training and organizers and are increasingly organizing at statewide and national levels.



MY INITIATION INTO CONGREGATIONAL-BASED COMMUNITY ORGANIZING OCCURRED IN 2005, WHEN MONTVIEW BLVD. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BECAME A MEMBER OF METRO ORGANIZATIONS FOR PEOPLE (MOP), A FAITH-BASED FEDERATION OF OVER 30 ORGANIZATIONS IN METRO DENVER WHICH IS PART OF THE PICO NATIONAL NETWORK. THE EXPERIENCE HAS BEEN PERSONALLY TRANSFORMATIONAL, AS IT HAS ENABLED ME TO PUBLICLY PUT MY FAITH INTO ACTION BY JOINING WITH "NEIGHBORS" OF DIFFERENT RACES, RELIGIONS, CULTURES, AND ECONOMIC STATUS THROUGHOUT THE METRO AREA AND ACROSS THE COUNTRY IN NONPARTISAN CAMPAIGNS FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE AT THE LOCAL, STATE, AND NATIONAL LEVELS. THE EXPERIENCE HAS ALSO BEEN A POSITIVE ONE FOR THE MONTVIEW COMMUNITY, PROVIDING A VEHICLE FOR HAVING PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH A MUCH BROADER RANGE OF "NEIGHBORS" AND FOR MOBILIZING OUR COLLECTIVE POWER TO BRING ABOUT MORE "JUST" SOCIAL POLICIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE CORE VALUES OF OUR FAITH. AS A RESULT OF OUR COMMUNITY ORGANIZING WORK WITH MOP AND PICO, WE HAVE DEVELOPED STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH OUR ELECTED OFFICIALS AND HELPED PASS LEGISLATION THAT WILL POSITIVELY AFFECT THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE, INCLUDING EXTENDING HEALTH INSURANCE TO 55,000 CHILDREN IN COLORADO AND 4.1 MILLION CHILDREN NATIONWIDE WHO OTHERWISE WOULD BE UNINSURED.

KAREN TIMMONS, MEMBER, MONTVIEW COMMUNITY ORGANIZING MINISTRY (MCOM), MONTVIEW BLVD. PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH.

## CBCO "Principles and Practices" in Congregations

The foundation for effective congregation-based community organizing is the development and deepening of relationships, both among congregants and among member institutions. How do these relationships develop? The following techniques are the building blocks of CBCO.

### *1. One-to-One Conversations*

"One-to-one conversations," also known as "individual meetings" or simply "one-to-ones," are face-to-face meetings between two people, in which they share their personal stories, and reflect on their values, hopes and concerns. The two participants in these conversations may be people who know each other from church, but have never shared with each other issues that matter to them, or may be two people who have never before met.

### *2. House Meetings*

"House meetings" are small group conversations in which a number of congregants gather in one member's home to share personal stories and to talk about issues of concern. During the exploratory stage of CBCO, the house meeting can also provide a forum for introducing the concept of this type of organizing and for discussing the possibility of joining an ecumenical/interfaith network.

### *3. Listening Campaign*

When a congregation begins to explore CBCO, and as it engages in the organizing process, it will often conduct a "listening campaign," a series of one-to-one and house meetings held over a period of a few months.

#### *4. Identifying issues to address*

Through one-to-one meetings and house meetings, concrete issues emerge. Issues most often identified by congregants—for example, access to health care, affordable housing, or care for the elderly—become the focus of action. For an issue to move forward, it must have strong support as a priority from CBCO member congregations.

#### *5. Researching the issues and developing solutions*

Once an issue has been chosen, a congregation works independently as a group or with other members of the CBCO. It researches the identified problems and possible solutions by holding seminars with experts, meeting with public or private officials, and talking with people who are knowledgeable about the issue.

#### *6. Meeting with public officials, corporate officials, or both*

The next step is to present solutions to public officials, corporate officials, or both and ask for their support and assistance. Typically, the leadership holds a series of smaller meetings with officials that culminates in a large public meeting, often involving thousands of people, where the officials are asked to publicly announce their support for the campaign.

#### *7. Winning the issue, holding the institutions accountable and moving on to the next one*

Once the issue is resolved, the CBCO group continues to monitor and hold accountable the institutions impacted by the issue. The CBCO then moves on to a different issue. CBCO groups are designated to address multiple issues over time in order to bring in and maintain interest from the largest number of people possible. CBCO groups are not single-issue-campaign organizations.

Through each of these steps, the pastor and a core leadership team from the congregation take leadership roles by speaking at, organizing, running, and hosting meetings large and small. In addition, they attend local, regional, and/or national training to develop their leadership skills.



## What CBCO Achieves

### Community Change

Congregation-based community organizing addresses a wide range of issues. These issues are well researched, and innovative strategies are often applied. The following is a random list of examples of what CBCO has been able to achieve. In each of the following examples, at least one Presbyterian congregation is involved with other faiths and institutions in making life better and in working for economic, social, and racial justice.

Immanuel Presbyterian Church is a member of One-LA, Los Angeles, CA, an affiliate of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF).

- One-LA worked to get a \$235 million bond approved by Pomona district voters for school modernization.
- Nearly 500 institutional leaders participated in the One LA-IAF “Economic Summit” to address economic and political pressures on families in the Metro LA region.
- One-LA is working with Boyle Heights residents and the police to take it to the streets as part of its “Walk for Success” project, determined to find, or create, the tools to sweep away the off-campus problems that Boyle Heights residents see as obstructing their children’s education.

Montview Blvd. Presbyterian Church is a member of Metro Organizations for People (MOP), Denver, CO, an affiliate of the PICO National Network.

- MOP leaders are working to create a comprehensive network of near Northeast Denver schools plan that provides a variety of diverse, quality educational options for the children living in this area of Denver
- As one of the lead partners of the All Kids Covered Initiative, MOP leaders successfully worked for passage of key healthcare reform legislation in the Colorado General Assembly.
- The Healthcare Affordability Act will cover at least 100,000 uninsured Coloradoans. Another bill will eliminate the 5-year waiting period for documented immigrant children and pregnant women to be eligible for Medicare
- MOP is currently part of a coalition of organizations working with the Ya Es Hora Citizenship Campaign to help over 100,000 eligible immigrants apply for their U.S. citizenship, register to vote, and become civically engaged.

Grace Memorial Presbyterian Church is a member of the Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN), Pittsburgh, PA, an affiliate of the Gamaliel Foundation.

- PIIN spearheaded the awareness statewide of federal laws that enable pre-apprentice screening and training for minorities, women and persons in poverty in federally subsidized construction.
- The PIIN Transportation Task Force is addressing the need for dedicated, sustainable funding for the Pittsburgh Port Authority Transit Systems.
- Nationally, PIIN leaders have been instrumental in pushing for comprehensive immigration reform in the US Congress. Statewide, PIIN received a commitment from Gov. Rendell to veto any legislation which would diminish the civil rights of immigrants.

Westminster Presbyterian Church is a member of Polk Ecumenical Action Council for Empowerment (PEACE), Lakeland, FL, an affiliate of the Direct Action and Research Training Center (DART).

- PEACE addressed the issue of substance abuse treatment by securing an agreement with three county commissioners to a 22 month plan to add additional 100 beds for inpatient treatment and an additional 1,000 slots for outpatient treatment.
- PEACE and other community allies promoted a 1/2% sales tax that was passed with 62% of the county vote, allowing more than 26 million dollars a year to care for the 120,000 uninsured or underinsured in its county.
- PEACE heard a great deal of concern from the Spanish speaking community about its treatment at the Health Department clinics. PEACE successfully urged the Health Department to create customer services cards in Spanish, signs in Spanish, and make translation services more readily available.

## **Congregational Benefits from Participation**

The results of a study by Interfaith Funders and the University of New Mexico showed that organizing can both help congregation members grow as leaders within their faith communities, as well as strengthen congregations as vital community. <sup>1</sup>

*Stronger relationships* – Participation in organizing increases the quality and quantity of the relationships both within – and between – congregations and communities. Building the relational culture within a congregation is a key ingredient to the congregational renewal process.

*Building interfaith and interracial relationships* - The relational building with members from other congregations and the community can bring together people from diverse socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, and religious groups into a shared project of social change if the organizing process is itself diverse.

*Personal growth* - Congregation members experience compelling personal growth as a result of being connected to “something bigger” than individualized faith. Many report a new confidence, a new “voice” in the world, a rekindled sense of themselves as promoters of social justice, and a new hopefulness in their lives.

*Deeper involvement in congregation* - Participants report a deepened engagement with their faith community as a result of their organizing experience.

*Stronger Faith* - Congregation members experience a deeper relationship to God, as well as a deeper commitment to the biblical teachings regarding social justice.

*Leadership development* - Pastors and lay leaders reported gaining specific democratic skills, such as public speaking, leading meetings, and the development of intentional public relationships.

*More effective social justice work* - Congregation members experience creating significant change in the improvement of the lives of their community by impacting policy policies, e.g., increasing the number of affordable housing units or providing healthcare coverage for more children in their state.

*Heightened public profile* – Pastors and lay leaders widely perceived organizing as having heightened the public profile of their congregations.

*Bringing in new people in new ways* - New people become engaged with the life and mission of the congregation in meaningful ways and are excited to be a part of a congregation practicing its faith by doing effective social justice work.

## WHAT COMMUNITY ORGANIZING HAS MEANT TO ME AND MY CONGREGATION

"SOCIAL JUSTICE IS THE NEW TRENDY THING TO DO IN CHURCH. BUT IN A CULTURE WHERE WE ARE DRIVEN BY CELEBRITY PERSONALITIES AND BIG MARCHES, WHERE DO CONGREGATIONS LEARN HOW TO BECOME A POWERFUL FORCE FOR CHANGE?"

I REMEMBER A FEW YEARS AGO, WHEN POLICE FROM THE LAPD RAMPART DIVISION INTERRUPTED ONE OF OUR GOOD FRIDAY PROCESSIONS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND ARRESTED ONE OF OUR COMMUNITY MEMBERS. THE MOMENT WE REALIZED WHAT WAS TAKING PLACE, THE 80 OR SO IMMANUEL MEMBERS IN THE PROCESS CALMLY FORMED A LINE BETWEEN THE PATROL CARS AND THE FRONT OF THE HOUSE WHERE THE WOMAN WAS BEING TAKEN INTO CUSTODY. THIS WAS BACK WHEN RAMPART DIVISION WAS JUST STARTING TO RECOVER SLOWLY FROM THE SCANDALS OF THE 90s. WE NEGOTIATED CALMLY RIGHT THEN AND THERE – NOT ONLY TO ALLOW SOME OF US TO ACCOMPANY OUR MEMBER DOWN TO THE STATION BUT ALSO WE ASKED FOR A FORMAL PUBLIC APOLOGY TO THE WHOLE COMMUNITY IF IT TURNED OUT TO BE A MISTAKE.

WELL, IT DID. TWO MONTHS LATER, WE HAD AN ASSEMBLY WITH ABOUT 300 PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY AND THE LAPD CAPTAIN OF THE RAMPART DIVISION CAME, STOOD ON STAGE AND APOLOGIZED. WHAT IS MORE IMPORTANT IS THAT HE BROUGHT WITH HIM ALL THE SENIOR OFFICERS FROM THE DEPARTMENT AND SAT IN CIRCLES WITH OUR MEMBERS TO LISTEN TO STORIES ABOUT WHAT IT WAS LIKE TO LIVE, WORK AND WORSHIP IN OUR NEIGHBORHOOD. I AM PRETTY SURE THAT'S THE FIRST TIME ANYONE IN THE ROOM HAD EXPERIENCED BOTH OF THOSE THINGS. IT IS A WHOLE CONGREGATION, NOT JUST A FEW CLERGY OR LEADERS, BRINGING CHANGE IN ACTION. IT IS REAL CONVERSATIONS AND ACTIONS, NOT JUST SYMBOLIC PRAYERS AND RITUALS. IT IS POLITICAL POWER, ALONGSIDE SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZING TAUGHT ME, AND IMMANUEL, WHAT IT REALLY MEANS TO BE PUBLIC LEADERS - HOW TO BE A REAL POWERFUL FORCE FOR CHANGE IN THE COMMUNITY IN MOMENTS AND AROUND ISSUES THAT REALLY MATTER. IT IS NOT JUST CLERGY IN COLLARS MAKING MORAL STATEMENTS ON BEHALF OF THE WHOLE, IT IS MEMBERS ORGANIZING AND ACTING COLLECTIVELY."

SAMUEL CHU, FORMER STAFF MEMBER, IMMANUEL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, LOS ANGELES, CA. IMMANUEL CHURCH IS A MEMBER OF ONE-LA, AN AFFILIATE MEMBER OF THE INDUSTRIAL AREAS FOUNDATION.

## The Process of Joining

A congregation goes through several steps when it joins a congregation-based community organization:

- 1. Clarity of Mission.* The pastor and congregation need to be very clear as to their reasons for engaging with CBCO work. Doing CBCO work is not just another short-term mission project, nor is it simply learning how to connect with one's community. CBCO work is labor intensive, requires a long-term commitment and may come at a sociopolitical cost. With this in mind, it is important for each congregation to stay focused on the faithful witness required in working to build just communities.
- 2. Initial exploration of CBCO.* Usually the pastor or a staff member, members of the Session, the social justice or community outreach committee, or a combination of these people are the impetus for a congregation to investigate joining a CBCO group. The process begins with meetings between the congregation's key leaders and the CBCO organizer. If there is interest on the part of the congregation after these initial meetings, the pastor, members of the Session, and the social justice or community outreach committee may attend some public meetings or actions sponsored by the CBCO to learn more. To broaden its information base, the congregation may wish to talk with community leaders, other congregational members, Presbyterian pastors involved with the relevant network in other places, pastors from local member congregations, the Small Church and Community Ministry Office and the Presbyterian Hunger Program.
- 3. Forming a core group.* A core group of approximately five to twenty members is formed, usually including a pastor (depending on the size of the congregation). The core group continues to research the CBCO group and begins to educate the congregation about CBCO. If the congregation eventually decides to join the CBCO group, this core group will lead the campaign within the congregation and relate to core groups from other participating congregations.
- 4. Exploratory process.* Sometimes the CBCO group will conduct a series of workshops with the congregation as part of the process of exploring.
- 5. Training the core group to lead the initiative.* The core group attends training workshops led by the relevant network CBCO (for example, DART, IAF, PICO National Network, NTIC, InterValley or Gamaliel), which teach participants about building power and how to involve a broad number of congregation members. Members are trained to conduct one-to-one meetings and house meetings and to chair committee meetings, among other things.
- 6. Building support for CBCO within the congregation.* As is the case with any congregational project, congregational acceptance is critical before participation can move ahead. Pastor support for this type of work is essential. The key step in obtaining congregational support is to have the core group lead a process of conversations and relationship building through one-to-one meetings, house meetings or both. One-to-one meetings are meetings between two individuals; they last approximately one hour, are set up by appointment, and provide a means of building relationships (as opposed to "getting business done"). During these meetings, both people share their personal stories, discuss what motivated them most in



their life, and identify their values and highest concerns. House meetings are in someone's home, with a group of people present. These meetings convey the purpose of the congregation's potential membership in the CBCO group; identify issues, hopes, and dreams; build community; and identify additional leaders.

7. *Deciding to join.* Once support has been established, the Session votes to join the organization. Joining a CBCO group requires the payment of dues. Dues vary among CBCO groups. Some charge a flat fee, whereas others charge a percentage of budget (commonly 1 percent). Others simply recommend a "head tax" based on congregational membership. Whatever the method, dues are sometimes negotiated to accommodate congregational differences and support participation.

## **"What Might a Congregation With an 'Organizing Culture' Look Like?"**

In 2004, Pastor John Heinemeier, a Evangelical Lutheran Church in America clergy, who has been engaged since 1978 in faith-based organizing in New York City, Boston and Baltimore, made a presentation to a Lutheran-Presbyterian CBCO consultation on what an organizing culture might look like in the life and ministry of a local congregation that embraces CBCO . The following points outline some of the possibilities Rev. Heinemeier presented:

### *1. People will know each other.*

Relationality is the foundation on the congregation's life. John writes, "God is love." It would not be too much of a reach to say "God is relationality." It could be the very essence of the Trinity. For a congregation to be doing one-to-ones with each other on a massive scale could well present a new model of church. All evangelism flows from relational meetings. There will be several one-to-one campaigns each year. Members would schedule one-to-ones with each other and with visitors before they leave church each Sunday. There would be training in the art of doing a relational meeting. Organizing "house meetings" would take place in regular small groups in the congregation: people would listen to each other, connect their faith with their lives. They would be lay-led and sometimes focus on the group's going into action, carefully planned and executed around chosen issues.

### *2. Means will be as important as ends.*

Developing leaders will be as important as any institutional goal. The process of preparing for, executing and evaluating a session meeting, for example, will be as important as anything the council decides. You look around and you see leaders clearly gaining confidence about their leadership capabilities, both in the congregation and in the public arena.

### *3. The congregation will see itself as constantly being transformed.*

"All organizing is disorganizing and reorganizing." The congregation will be in a constant process of being transformed, resisting the inevitable evolution from mission to maintenance, from people-development to projects and programs.

*4. Public worship is an action.*

In the liturgy and preaching, faith is connected with life, including public life. The congregation will see themselves as rehearsing the liturgy for their community-building during the week. They will pray for public concerns and celebrate public victories. In their relationship building and public actions, they will give testimony and lift up “signs” of the reign of God proclaimed.

*5. Diversity is seen as good.*

Diversity of race and class and faith is seen not only as a foretaste of the God’s reign, but as a source of strength, influence and growth now (and it is so much more interesting!).

*6. The congregation will practice public story telling.*

Both the telling and hearing of one another’s stories within the congregation and in the public arena will be the basic culture of the congregation; connecting wherever possible everyday people’s stories with the Biblical story. In our increasingly privatized and individualistic world, this congregation and its life will be buoyantly communal.

## Conclusion

Today, an increasing number of Presbyterian congregations are engaging with CBCO to renew and revitalize their congregational life, to connect with their neighbors and to develop new ministries of compassion and justice for/with their members and neighbors. Although there are many paths to a more just world, we believe that CBCO can offer a faithful witness and life-changing experience. While we hope that this resource will serve as a helpful introduction to CBCO, we



believe that the best way to learn about this model of ministry is to speak to organizers, lay leaders and pastors who are currently engaged in CBCO. For a listing of current congregations and/or Presbyteries involved in CBCO or for any other resource information, please contact us.

Phil Tom, Small Church and Community Ministry Office, PC(USA)  
502-569-5845; phil.tom@pcusa.org.

Trey Hammond, Consultant, Presbyterian Hunger Program, PC(USA)  
505-255-8095; treyhammond@aol.com

# Resources for Congregation-Based Community Organizing

## *CBCO Networks*

Direct Action and Research Training Center, P.O. Box 370791, Miami, FL 33137-0791, (305) 576-8020. [www.thedartcenter.org](http://www.thedartcenter.org)

Gamaliel Foundation, 203 N. Wabash Ave., Ste. 808, Chicago, IL 60601, (312) 375-2639. [www.gamaliel.org](http://www.gamaliel.org)

Industrial Areas Foundation, 220 W. Kinzie St., 5th Floor, Chicago, IL 60610, (312) 245-9211. [www.industrialareasfoundation.org](http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org)

Interfaith Funders, 2719 Denver Ave., Longmont, CO 80503, (720) 494-9011. [www.interfaithfunders.org](http://www.interfaithfunders.org). (IF) is a network of faith-based and secular grant makers committed to social change and economic justice. Interfaith Funders works to advance the field of faith-based community organizing (FBCO) and to educate and activate IF members' constituencies.

InterValley Project, 2 York Dr., Durham, NH 03824, (603) 397-5015. [www.intervalleyproject.org](http://www.intervalleyproject.org)

National Training Information Center, 810 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago, IL 60642, (312) 243-3035. [www.ntic-us.org](http://www.ntic-us.org).

PICO National Network, 171 Santa Rosa Ave., Oakland, CA 94910, (510) 655-2801. [www.picocalifornia.org](http://www.picocalifornia.org)

## *Written Sources*

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