

Clergy Leadership in Faith-Rooted Organizing



PART 1

Organizing and Congregational Development

Faith-based organizing thrives when there is synergy and mutual benefit between the internal life of the congregation and the actions of the congregation in the public arena. Congregations also thrive when there is synergy between their internal life and their actions externally.

Organizing is grounded in a set of core concepts that support the development of people power, and, at the same time, support congregational development. These concepts and skills from the organizing tradition are transferable to the field of congregational development. These concepts include the following:

- **Relationships:** Faith-based organizing provides congregations with tools and processes to strengthen relationships within the congregation, as well as within the community. Organizers can train congregational members in how to use 1-1's and small groups to create much stronger ties among members, to surface new leaders, and to receive feedback on key items such as vision, direction, and program development. This building of social capital increases the capacity among members of a congregation to set and achieve goals together.
- **Leadership development:** Often, clergy are looking to find and develop new leaders within the congregation but lack a disciplined method to do so. When a congregation adopts an organizing approach and conducts outreach to a significant number of members, the congregation typically discovers people who would welcome the opportunity to play a leadership role. They just have not been asked to do so.
- **Synergy:** In the video that accompanies this article, Rev. Courter raises the question faced by many clergy of how to bring their members along with them as they engage in social action. Often, clergy will step out and speak on an issue, or participate in a press conference or other form of public action, only to be greeted with questions or even attacks, when they return to their congregation. Or they may find they are carrying the congregation's mission in the community by themselves, without backup or support from members. Organizing provides congregations with a process through which clergy leaders and members can develop synergy through joining together in a partnership to advance the congregation's mission within the community.

Engaging in social action and a long-term campaign on an issue can be time-consuming. Clergy often struggle with balancing their duties in the congregation with the need to be present in the community. When clergy and members work together in partnership, they are able to share this responsibility and ensure that the clergy leader does not become overwhelmed by the organizing effort.

When it comes to applying community organizing methods to congregational development, it's important to recognize that one size doesn't fit all. The approach needs to be adapted to the particular faith tradition and to the unique context of the congregation and the congregation's needs at a particular time. Organizers and clergy leaders need to work together as a team to design a process customized to a particular congregation.