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Atlanta's Regional Interfaith Agencies***

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Abstract:

This research examines a group of four regional interfaith agencies in the Atlanta metropolitan area: Faith And The City (FATC), the Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta (FAMA), the Regional Council of Churches of Atlanta (RCCA), and the Concerned Black Clergy of Metropolitan Atlanta (CBC). The purpose of the study is to describe the programs and services provided by these mid-level agencies; the relationships between these regional organizations and other faith-based groups including local congregations; and how these groups get along with one another. The faith integration scale is used to assess the degree to which faith is a part of the mission and goals of each organization. The relationships among the four organizations with one another and with other faith-based groups are assessed using the concept of network embeddedness. These agencies are caught in the middle of a competition for resources between larger-scale national groups and local faith-based organizations.

INTRODUCTION

This research examines a group of four regional interfaith agencies in the Atlanta metropolitan area. The organizations selected for study are Faith And The City (FATC), the Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta (FAMA), the Regional Council of Churches of Atlanta (RCCA), and the Concerned Black Clergy of Metropolitan Atlanta (CBC). The groups operate at the same metropolitan scale and represent more than a single denomination or faith. These intermediate-level organizations have received far less scholarly attention than smaller, local-scale congregations and larger national faith-based groups.

The purpose of the study is to describe the programs and services provided by each of these mid-level agencies; the relationships between these regional organizations and other faith-based groups including local congregations; and how these groups get along with one another. Two strategies are used to examine these issues in relationship to the four regional interfaith agencies. The first is to assess the degree to which faith is a part of the mission and goals of each organization. Part of this process involves the use of the faith integration scale developed by the Roundtable on Religion and Social Policy to assess the degree to which the four nonprofits are faith-based. The relationships among the four organizations with one another and with other faith-based groups are assessed using the concept of network embeddedness. Researchers conducted surveys and extensive interviews with representatives of the four organizations as well as participation in meetings held by the groups. The research is part of a larger, comparative study of these types of mid-level faith-based organizations (FBOs) in Atlanta and Philadelphia.

BACKGROUND

Faith-based organizations have been defined in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this research, FBOs are connected to an organized faith community and may include congregations; 501 © (3), tax-exempt organizations sponsored by congregations; and organizations of varying size that have religious affiliations. The connections of an FBO to an organized faith community may occur when the group is based on a particular religious ideology and draws staff, volunteers, or leadership from a particular religious group. Scott describes other characteristics that qualify an organization as “faith-based” including religiously oriented mission statements, the receipt of substantial support from a religious organization, or the initiation by a religious institution (2003).

FBOs can also be further classified in relationship to their organizational size and their geographic area of service. Cnaan (1999) uses these criteria to define six categories of religious service organizations: 1. local congregations; 2. interfaith agencies and ecumenical coalitions; 3. citywide or region-wide sectarian agencies; 4. national projects and organizations under religious auspices; 5. paradenominational advocacy and relief organizations; and 6. religiously affiliated international organizations (Scott 2003). In this scheme, a local congregation would have the smallest service area that might include several blocks along a street such as Peachtree Road. A citywide or region-wide sectarian agency would be affiliated with a single faith group or denomination such as the Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta or Lutheran Services of Georgia. National organizations would include groups such as the National Council of Churches. The Salvation Army would be an example of a paradenominational relief organization. Other groups such as the Baptist World Alliance operate at the global scale. The four

organizations selected for this study fall under the category of interfaith agencies and ecumenical coalitions designed to serve the Atlanta area. All of the organizations selected for this study regard the scope of their work to include the federally designated Metropolitan Statistical Area. These are the type of mid-level organizations that have received little attention from scholars. The regional interfaith agencies such as those included in this study are often caught in the middle of a scramble for resources and programming.

THE MISSION AND GOALS OF THE FOUR AGENCIES

Obviously one of the distinguishing characteristics of an FBO is **faith**; however, the role that faith plays within an FBO is frequently taken for granted. In this paper the role of faith in the four Atlanta FBOs will be assessed in a two-step process. The first step is to describe and compare the missions and goals of the four interfaith agencies and ecumenical coalitions selected for study. The second step will be to determine the extent to which faith is integrated in the service activities of the organizations. This will be measured using the Faith Integration Scale (FIS) developed by the Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy.

The Regional Council of Churches of Atlanta is both the youngest and oldest of the four organizations. Its current configuration as the Regional Council of Churches dates to 2004, when the representatives of many Atlanta area churches met for worship and to reconstitute the organization. It represented a continuation of efforts to gather Christians together that began in 1879 with the Atlanta Preachers' Meeting and evolved into the Metropolitan Atlanta Council of Churches. Following the closing of the old Council of Churches in 1998, the Regional Council of Churches is a continuation of the

earlier Council, but this time as an organization determined to be a “congregation of congregations.” Its mission statement says, “To develop relationships, foster dialogue, and advocate collaboration among all Christians throughout the twenty county Atlanta regions.” Its three goals are:

1. Amplifying and strengthening the voice of Christian churches on key regional issues, events and policy decisions to cultivate leadership and social responsibility.
2. Fulfilling our Christian call for social and economic justice through advocacy, education, facilitation, and action taken in partnership with ministries and agencies.
3. Building unity and accord through fellowship and ecumenical activities.
(<http://rccatl.org>)

One distinguishing feature of the RCCA is its ecumenical Christian orientation. This limits membership to Christian churches rather than attempting to recruit organizations of other faiths. While many of their programs are open to participation by people of all faiths, the RCCA’s Executive Director knows that some churches in the Atlanta area are unwilling to provide financial support and participation to an interfaith organization.

The next organization, the Concerned Black Clergy of Metropolitan Atlanta, is also primarily composed of Christians; however, the joke is frequently repeated at CBC meetings that to be a member one does not have to be black, a member of the clergy, or even all that concerned—just as long as you pay your dues. Organized in 1983, the CBC brought together a small group of clergy whose churches were providing services to the city’s homeless. The mission statement of the CBC says it is a “primary, proactive, and principle-centered organization comprised mostly of African American ministers and laity.” The statement goes on to add that the mission of the CBC is “to provide leadership, advocacy and service to address the causes and conditions that impact the

homeless, helpless, and hopeless in our community.” All of the officers of the CBC are African American and Christian ministers, but the membership of the Board does include several lay persons, a white minister, and a representative of the Nation of Islam.

(<http://www.concernedblackclergy.org>). While the CBC has retained its interest in issues affecting the homeless, it is no longer simply providing meals, lodging, and other direct services. The CBC expanded its focus to include other aspects of poverty as a cause of homelessness, including policy leadership, advocacy and political action. The organization's role in politics has been the source of controversy in recent years as the leadership of the CBC changed producing a new focus on advocacy and service rather than confrontation.

The third organization selected for study, Faith And The City, describes its mission in these words: “To nurture a spirit of mutual community, shared responsibility and common destiny among the citizens of the Atlanta metropolitan area.” The organization was founded in 1999 by well-known Atlanta civic leaders (and ministers), Ambassadors James T. Laney and Andrew Young. The goals of the FATC are stated as:

1. To foster the development of public religious leadership, in clergy and clergy-in-formation, by involving the theological education institutions in current issues confronting the community.
2. To inspire religious leadership to take an informed role in the public discourse regarding community issues.
3. To amplify the voice of the faith community and elevate the importance of the moral dimension in the public dialogue on critical community issues.
4. To engender in the minds of the people of our region that “Atlanta” is the entire regional community and that regional cooperation is imperative.
(<http://faithandthecity.org>)

FATC is an interfaith organization so that its programming involves a variety of faith groups; however, all of its Board members except one are ordained Christian ministers. Since its inception, much of the work of FATC has been concentrated on the training of students from Atlanta area seminaries to become public leaders. This focus has affected the selection of Board members as well as the program activities of FATC. The emphasis on theological education is a long-term strategy, but the other activities of FATC will be the major emphasis of this study.

The final organization, the Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta, was formed in 2001 by representatives of several faith groups. It continues to be the most diverse of the four organizations studied. Unlike the other groups, FAMA does not have a paid Executive Director, but relies on volunteers for most of its activities. The President of FAMA is Plemon El-Amin, who is Imam of the Atlanta Masjid of Al-Islam, which is among the city's oldest and largest mosques. The mission statement of FAMA describes its work in these words: "To promote understanding, respect, prayer, interaction and unity among the diverse faiths in the greater Atlanta region, and to advance the influence and voices of the faith communities for the common good." Among its goals are:

1. To foster interfaith and multi-faith occasions for prayer, meditation and celebration among the region's religious communities.
2. To encourage and provide opportunities for learning about the rituals of prayer, worship, and meditation, and about the values and beliefs of the region's various religious traditions.
3. To organize and promote thoughtful multi-faith and interfaith dialogue concerning important issues of the day.
4. To stimulate and foster cooperation between people and groups actively engaged in religious and inter-religious work.

5. To be a unified and/or coordinated, ethical force for justice and the common good. (FAMA, Mission and Goals Statement, undated)

One of the founders of FAMA was Doug Gatlin, the Executive Director of FATC, who continues to serve as a member of the Board of the Faith Alliance. Other board members represent a variety of faith traditions.

While all four of Atlanta's regional interfaith agencies represent slightly different constituencies, they share some common goals. These include two that overlap all of the organizations: 1. to work toward social justice in a variety of ways, and, 2. building a sense of unity among the members of the organization so that the voice of the group may be stronger in advocacy activities. Their different agendas are a reflection of the unique focus of each organization such as the CBC's emphasis on the issue of homelessness and poverty, the FATC's promotion of regionalism, and the desire for greater interfaith understanding by FAMA. What remains to be seen is the extent to which the issue of **faith** is embedded within the activities of the various regional interfaith agencies.

THE ROLE OF FAITH

The Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy has developed an instrument that is useful in measuring the extent to which faith is integrated with a faith-based organization. The intent of the Faith Integration Scale (FIS) is to measure several separate dimensions of faith along a continuum ranging from practices that are indistinguishable from a secular organization to those that indicate a high level of religious integration. The FIS also measures the extent to which faith is evident in several areas of the life of an organization. This assumes that an organization may have highly religious goals, but be willing to accept funds from a variety of sources, or, perhaps the board members are chosen from among the religious traditions of the

organization, but the programs are indistinguishable from a secular agency. The FIS has five factors that attempt to measure faith within an FBO along a continuum in an organization's structure, its administration, environment, funding, and programs. The organizational elements include questions about the extent to which board members share the religious values of the organization. Other questions in this group include relationships to any sponsoring or affiliated group and inquiries about specific faith issues practiced by the organization such as prayer, teaching of religious values, studying religious texts, and worship services. The set of questions on Administrative Elements assume that FBOs may be differentiated by administrative arrangements that play a large role in shaping the religious content of an organization. Some of these questions probe the religious character of the board, the extent to which staff members share the same religious values, and the extent to which religious values influence decision making and staff training. The set of questions dealing with Environmental Elements is designed to determine the extent to which the physical characteristics of the facilities used by an FBO serve as an indicator of the religious content of the organization. The questions related to this topic ask whether religious objects, paintings, or artifacts are present in the location where the FBO operates and whether services are provided within facilities designed for religious worship. A fourth set of questions in the FIS asks whether a majority of an FBO's funding comes from religious institutions. Finally, the scale contains questions to assess the level of religious integration in the content of an FBO's programs. These questions examine a number of religious practices such as prayer at meetings, the presence of worship as a program activity, and the inclusion of religious teachings in the programs of an organization. Under this heading is a consideration of whether these

religious activities are voluntary or mandatory as well as an active part of the organization’s program design or implicit within program elements.

All of the questions in the FIS are scaled so that a response of 1 indicates strong agreement and a higher level of faith integration, and a response of 4 suggests strong disagreement and a lower level of faith in the organization. Thus, a score of 1 on an item would mean a stronger presence of faith in the FBO, whereas a score closer to 4 would mean the programs of an organization are virtually indistinguishable from those of a secular organization. The FIS questions were administered to a representative of each of

TABLE ONE			
*Faith Integration Scale			
RCCA	FAMA	FATC	CBC
Organizational Elements			
1.8	1.8	2.0	2.4
Environmental Elements			
1.5	1.5	2.0	2.3
Funding Elements			
2.0	1.7	3.0	2.0
Programmatic Elements			
2.5	2.2	1.7	2.3
*Source: Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy			

the four Atlanta regional interfaith agencies. Responses for the questions in each of the five categories of questions for each agency were averaged and displayed in Table One.

This process masks some variation in the responses within each category as the

agencies tend to be reflective of faith values in some areas and more secular in others. For example, the Faith Alliance of Metropolitan Atlanta is an interfaith group whose administrative structure does not adhere to the religious values of any single faith perspective. An important Administrative Element to consider is that the board members of all four regional ecumenical agencies in the study are voluntary in nature. The majority of the members of the boards of the FATC, the CBC, and the RCCA are ordained Christian ministers, while the FAMA board members are selected from a more diverse group of faith leaders. This explains the higher average score on the Administrative Elements and indicates a more secular style of operation.

Likewise, Faith And The City is more open to soliciting and receiving funding from a wide variety of sources including religious groups and secular foundations as well as the United Way. At the same time, much of FATC's programming is focused on the training of ministers-in-formation at the four theological institutions in the city to be public leaders. This is why the average of the responses to the Programmatic Elements questions on the FIS are lower, reflecting a stronger faith integration in the seminary activities of FATC.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

The issue of programmatic activities most strongly separates the four Atlanta regional interfaith agencies from one another and from other faith-based organizations. Only one of the four groups, the Concerned Black Clergy, has an affiliation with a national organization, the National Congress of Black Churches, Inc. This is a confederation of African-American churches that does not affect the program activities of the CBC in the Atlanta area. Each of the four regional interfaith agencies is free to

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pursue programming activities that are consistent with its mission and resources. For example, the RCCA maintains an active website and a weekly electronic Church Action Newsletter. RCCA's Newsletter is sent to all active church congregations in the Atlanta metropolitan area for which email addresses are available. Its purpose is to inform Christian congregations of events and activities that will help them develop relationships, foster dialogue, advocate collaboration, and amplify the voice of churches throughout the Atlanta region (<http://rccatl.org>).

During the three years since its reorganization, the RCCA has undertaken a variety of program activities designed to fulfill its mission of promoting social and economic justice. Two of its efforts to promote economic justice are the CASH for Georgians (Creating Assets, Savings, and Hope) and the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program. CASH for Georgians is collaboration among two secular nonprofit organizations, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) and Structured Employment Economic Development Corporation (Seedco), a law firm, and Georgia State University's Neighborhood Collaborative. The purpose of the project is to increase the use of the Earned Income Credit and other programs available to assist low-income households. CASH also provides economic education to help people avoid predatory lending in order to increase the rate of home ownership. The RCCA has used its congregational membership base, website, and electronic newsletter to recruit volunteers for the CASH for Georgians project. The Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program is a related initiative designed to help low-income households, including refugees from hurricane Katrina complete their federal and state income tax forms.

When the twin disasters of 2005 hurricanes Katrina and Rita devastated New Orleans and the Gulf coast, thousands of people were left without homes and basic services. As refugees poured into the Atlanta area, the RCCA stepped forward to assume the role of a convener of congregations, agencies, and ministries to provide housing and other forms of assistance to the refugees. More than seventy-five faith-based organizations of all types responded along with social service agencies and individuals. There were several outcomes from the RCCA's efforts to coordinate relief to the refugees. First, the Council provided leadership for the collaboration among the variety of participants. Working together these organizations provided assistance to more than 982 families, representing 2852 people. A tangible result of this effort was the opening of the Standing Together Resource Center, an 8,000 square foot center for the victims of the hurricanes and any future natural disaster or emergency. The resource center provided long-term care management, housing assistance, job readiness training, employment counseling, support groups, food and clothing, disaster child care training, computer training, and voter assistance. It will also continue operations to be ready for future disasters. This has led the RCCA to continue its work with faith-based groups as they try to provide emergency preparedness instead of relief. Finally, in October 2005, the RCCA hosted a worship service of healing and harmony for hurricane evacuees, their relatives, relief workers, volunteers, and a diverse cross-section of the Atlanta area's faith community. The Executive Director of the RCCA summarized the work of the Council in the aftermath of the disaster saying, "The Christian church as a majority has the ability and the responsibility to be an inclusive convener of the community." (RCCA newsletter, spring 2006, 1)

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The ideal of the RCCA as a convener of congregations is the vision guiding the programs of the organization. The RCCA has undertaken an ambitious project to develop an assets mapping program in order to collect information about the programs operated by Atlanta-area congregations as well as the buildings used by congregations. Part of this process involved creating an interfaith assets program to map and mobilize congregations so that a central database is available describing resources from the faith community to respond to referrals and to deal with emergency situations. The project builds on the experience of the RCCA in leading the response of faith-based organizations in the aftermath of the hurricanes of 2005. As refugees poured into the city, no one knew which churches had facilities such as gymnasiums and kitchens that could serve as shelters for displaced persons. This information could be useful in planning responses to future disaster. Another use of the asset mapping program is to provide referrals to people seeking social services such as food pantries, counseling, child care, and other programs offered by churches in various parts of the metropolitan area.

While the RCCA cooperates with national faith-based organizations such as the National Council of Churches, Lutheran Services in America, and Catholic Social Services, the RCCA does not have any formal affiliation with these organizations. The Council must rely on a voluntary network of local congregations rather than any national group.

In contrast to the exclusively local network of the RCCA, the Concerned Black Clergy has a loose affiliation with the National Congress of Black Churches, Inc. as well its local congregational network. Since its founding, the backbone of the organization has been its connection to more than a hundred African-American congregations. The

CBC has expanded its membership base by including individuals and corporate members. Many of the programs of the organization are conducted by committees such as the Missions Committee which continues the CBC's work with congregations providing services to the homeless. Other committees focus on issues such as public safety, health, economic development, education, labor, and voter registration, education, and mobilization. These committees attempt to monitor the activities of city, county, and state agencies involved in providing services to the community. Over the years, the CBC has become recognized for its role as a political force in Atlanta. With the decline of local businesses as dominant participants in Atlanta's governing regime, CBC emerged as a powerful source of influence in local decision making (Newman 1994). Few candidates run for local office without attending one of the weekly meetings of the CBC. These forums provide the opportunities for the members of CBC to share information and mobilize in response to issues of concern. With its primary focus on poverty and homelessness, the representatives of the CBC regularly attend important legislative and administrative meetings. Issues of concern from organizations like the Atlanta Board of Education or Grady Memorial Hospital can be communicated quickly to the CBC membership through committee reports at the weekly meetings of the organization. Other programs of the CBC promote health and wellness among the clergy and members of African-American congregations as well as responsible parenting.

The Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta is essentially a voluntary organization with no Executive Director and a Board made up of diverse representatives of the major faith groups in the metropolitan area. Much of FAMA's programming consists of a monthly meeting that rotates in location among various temples, synagogues, mosques, and

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churches. The meetings have a focus on education about one another's faith traditions, conversation to promote understanding and tolerance among faith groups, and prayer as practiced by different groups. A common bond among many of the FAMA board members and participants is the experience of a World Pilgrimage. This program operates within FAMA to promote personal relationships among people of faith in order to encourage friendship, trust, and understanding among representatives of the major world religions. The World Pilgrims travel together for a ten-day trip during which time the participants visit important cultural and religious sites and meet with local religious leaders who are engaged in interfaith activities. The World Pilgrims have a Program Coordinator who works with the Outreach Director and Chair of the FAMA, Imam Plemon El-Amin. The network of World Pilgrim alumni form the core of the FAMA organization who participate in the committees and meetings as a way of staying in touch with one another. Relationships are rather informal within FAMA reflecting the largely voluntary nature of the organization. Among the active participants in FAMA are the Executive Directors of the RCCA and FATC.

The major focus of the programs of Faith And The City since its founding has been on the education of seminary students for their role as public leaders. Staff and resources were initially distributed to the Candler School of Theology, Emory University; The Interdenominational Theological Center; and Columbia Theological Seminary. More recently, a fourth institution, McAfee School of Theology, Mercer University was added to the FATC program. In addition to its work with the seminaries, FATC has a website with contact information to link faith community leaders with public officials and offering a variety of content on policy issues of interest to faith leaders. The organization

also distributes a printed newsletter with a focus on policy issues affecting the Atlanta area such as homelessness, housing, education, and the environment. FATC produces a series of television programs featuring interfaith dialogues for Atlanta Interfaith Broadcasting on a variety of topics such as ministerial public leadership and the 1906 Atlanta race riot. The program also brought together two groups of interfaith leaders to participate in the Faith Leadership Institute. The Faith Leadership Institute was designed to cultivate public leadership among the representatives of the participating faith groups.

As FATC prepared to begin its third year of the Faith Leadership Institute in 2006, the organization decided to change the Institute and, yet, to remain consistent with FATC's mission of inspiring religious leaders and amplifying the voice of the faith community within the metropolitan area. The new focus brought together the initial two classes of Institute participants as well as the leadership of the RCCA, FAMA, and CBC. The purpose of the project was to involve the alumni and the four regional interfaith organizations in a common agenda. After a series of conversations to develop a consensus on a program on which all the groups could agree, the City of Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin's Faith-Based Roundtable was added as a fifth participating organization. The issue selected was public education from a moral perspective on the need for an increase in the state's minimum wage. Currently, Georgia is not one of the 17 states that have raised its minimum wage above the current federal standard of \$5.15 per hour that has been in effect since 1997. The minimum wage policy affects many of the poorest citizens of the state and is also related to problems of affordable housing for the homeless.

One of the main purposes of the collaboration among the five organizations was to determine in what ways could members of the faith community in metropolitan Atlanta influence the public discussion of this issue. Another reason for collaboration on the minimum wage public education program was to determine the feasibility of more extensive cooperation among these regional interfaith organizations. Three of the organizations, in particular FATC, the RCCA, and FAMA, are having discussions among their staff about the possibilities of merger.

The discussion of consolidation among three of the Atlanta regional interfaith organizations is a reflection of the financial needs of the agencies. While each is funded in a separate way, their common budget problems reflect their situation of being caught in the middle between local congregations and national organizations in the quest for resources. Like all nonprofits, the three Atlanta regional interfaith organizations face the challenge of the fiscal stress created by the need to find the money to accomplish their mission (Lane 2006). Each of the nonprofits in this case study addressed this challenge in slightly different ways.

FINANCING THE ORGANIZATIONS

Faith And The City was created out of a perceived need for the faith community to have a more active voice in public issues. This mission was embraced by two well-known leaders in the Atlanta area—the former Ambassador to the United Nations, Andrew Young, who was also a two-term mayor of Atlanta, a U.S. Congressman, and civil rights activist and former Ambassador to South Korea, James Laney, who was also the Dean of the Candler School of Theology and President of Emory University. As mayor, Andrew Young sought to restore and maintain the close working relationship

between city hall and local business leaders. As President of Emory, James Laney continued to cultivate the philanthropy of Atlanta's leading corporate citizen, the Coca-Cola Company, and secured for the university a grant of more than \$100 million from Robert W. Woodruff, the "boss" of the company for more than fifty years.

With these longstanding connections to Atlanta's business leadership, Young and Laney shared their vision for FATC with the director of the Woodruff Foundations, who served as a board member of FATC and provided a series of three three-year grants for the organization. This financial support created the classic dilemma of over-dependence on a major source of funds. While this reduces the stress of constant fundraising to support the mission of FATC, it fails to provide a broad base of financial support for the organization when the grants run out. In 2005, when the last three-year grant was awarded, it was made clear that no more support would be forthcoming from this major source. A feasibility study on other sources of funding was commissioned by the board, but the report found little support was likely to be available to sustain the operation of FATC beyond 2009.

Most of the funding of FATC has been used by three of the seminaries for training ministers-in-formation as public leaders. The Presidents and Deans of the theological institutions make up a majority of the FATC's Board of Directors. These leaders are committed to continuing some form of the FATC program on their campuses after the grant funds expire. The composition of the FATC Board is also responsible for the relatively weak community connections by the organization. For example, other than the head of the Woodruff Foundations, the FATC Board lacks representation from business leaders. This makes fundraising in a time of fiscal stress even more difficult.

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If new funding sources are not found, the central staff of Faith And The City who administer the grant as well as provide the communications efforts to maintain the organization's newsletter, website, and television forums on public issues, will be lost. In effect, most of the mission of FATC to enable the faith community of Atlanta to have a more active voice in public decisions will also be lost after the funding expires. This situation prompted the Executive Director of FATC to seek common ground with the other regional faith-based organizations in an effort to combine their programs. This program response to fiscal stress is consistent with an organizational strategy that seeks more collaboration with similar organizations during difficult times (Lane 2006). The fiscal stress felt by FATC is also evident in the willingness to solicit and accept funding from a wide variety of sources, which was seen in the responses to the interview questions on the finance portion of the faith integration scale.

The willingness of the Regional Council of Churches to consider collaboration or perhaps merger with FATC reflects fiscal stress within that organization as well. The Metropolitan Atlanta Council of Churches ceased operations in 1998 due to continuing difficulties raising money to support the agency. Its revival in 2004 as the RCCA was based on a new mission for the organization, but the challenge of fundraising, which confronts almost all nonprofits, has remained an issue for the Council. In contrast to FATC which has had major support from a single donor, the RCCA has had diverse support from congregations and organizations which join the Council as well as local foundations. The Board of the RCCA is a seven-member, diverse body comprised primarily of clergy, church leaders, and business persons. The twenty-four member Advisory Council is comprised of church and faith-based organization representatives

from various denominations and geographic locations. While FATC has had virtually the same Board members throughout its existence, the RCCA Board members rotate, providing a broader contact with the community. The staff of the Council has been kept small and office space is located in a warehouse in order to minimize operating expenses.

Unlike previous heads of the Metropolitan Council, the Executive Director of the RCCA is not an ordained minister, but comes from a background in the business sector. This has proven advantageous in maintaining an efficient operation of the organization. The Council makes extensive use of its website to communicate program activities to the public and to raise funds. It provides a weekly email newsletter to keep members informed. However, the Executive Director's ability to provide programming is limited by having little additional staff on which to rely while, at the same time, trying to generate financial support for the agency. Uneven cash flows cause periodic fiscal stress on the operation of the Council. The operation of the RCCA is highly dependent upon the Executive Director. The constant demands of both fundraising and program for the organization make the possibility of collaboration attractive to the leadership of the Council.

In contrast, the Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta has only the services of a volunteer who serves as Chair of the organization and no paid staff. The goals of FAMA and its programming are more modest in scale with little need to raise money beyond membership fees. The monthly meetings of FAMA rotate from one religious organization to another. These luncheon meetings devote time to the education of participants concerning other faith traditions, as well as opportunities to cooperate on common interests. The advocacy activities of FAMA are conducted by a committee and

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are limited to the communication of issues which the faith community members wish to support. One constant problem for FAMA is to maintain a balance among faith groups on the Board of the organization. There is an informal limit on the number of Christians who can serve on the Board along with appropriate representation from other faith traditions. Christian Board members must be balanced between blacks and whites, and a balance must also be maintained between Jewish and Islamic representatives, while also insuring that Hindus, Buddhists and others faith groups have representation on the FAMA Board.

Many Board members and participants in FAMA have a common experience as participants in a program called World Pilgrims that operates within the organization. The World Pilgrims program is designed to develop personal relationships among people of different religions so that communication and understanding can be facilitated. Participants representing primarily the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian communities of Atlanta are selected on the basis of their willingness to meet with one another for conversation and travel on a pilgrimage together. The travel experiences visit sites such as Turkey, Morocco and Spain, and Jerusalem, where the group visits religious and historical sites. The pilgrims also meet with local religious leaders who are engaged in interfaith activities. After returning to Atlanta, participants use the FAMA meetings as an opportunity to continue friendships forged among members of different faith groups during the pilgrimages. These former pilgrims form the core of the Board and membership of FAMA. The organization is limited by its lack of staff and program, but continues to function through the dedication to interfaith activities of the World Pilgrims.

The opportunity to collaborate with other FBOs provides FAMA with access to the additional resources of FATC and the RCCA.

The Concerned Black Clergy is the fourth organization invited to join the collaboration of faith-based groups in Atlanta. The majority of its Board members are Christian ministers who serve as pastors of African-American churches. The organization is involved in the minimum wage coalition because the issue is consistent with the CBC's mission of advocacy on behalf of the "homeless, helpless, and hopeless in our community." (<http://www.concernedblackclergy.org>) The CBC leadership seems interested in cooperation with the other three FBOs, but has expressed no interest in exploring the broader issue of a possible merger. This reflects the relative independence of the CBC with its large membership base of individuals, congregations, and corporations. Corporate support for the activities of the CBC is provided by an interesting combination of black-owned businesses as well as larger corporations wishing to support minority organizations. The CBC has a solid base of support from more than 120 congregations representing more than 100,000 members. The congregational membership base and its leaders are well aware of the long-standing political influence the organization is able to wield in municipal politics.

Atlanta has been described as a city where largely white corporate business leaders serve as a model of elite political decision making (Hunter 1953). More recently, Stone (1989) used the term "regime politics" to characterize decision making in a city where corporate interests were still dominant. Nevertheless, the CBC has at times been able to influence the outcome of policy decisions when an issue is perceived as a threat to the interests of the black church and its members (Newman 1994). Few candidates for

political office in the city begin their campaigns without a stop at the weekly Monday morning meeting of the CBC. In the weeks before an election, these CBC meetings also provide time for candidates to appear as part of forums in which those running for office are expected to make their appeals to the influential membership of the organization. While the organization stops short of endorsing particular candidates, voting lists are sometimes left on tables by individuals urging support for a particular slate of office seekers. In short, the CBC provides the leadership of Atlanta's African-American churches the opportunity to continue a long tradition of political influence that found its most prominent expression in the civil rights movement of the 1960s.

NETWORK EMBEDDEDNESS

Unlike the other three organizations that need to collaborate with one another to strengthen their resources and expand their influence, the CBC is a much stronger group with closer connections to local congregations as well as its rather loose affiliation with the National Congress of Black Churches. Organizational culture literature suggests the term "network embeddedness" to describe the degree to which an individual or an organization is connected to others. Management literature using the term network embeddedness stresses the importance of the external interorganizational relationships that are critical to the survival and success of organizations (Noorderhaven et al 2002). This concept could usefully be applied to describe the network of relationships in which a nonprofit organization is embedded. The concept of embeddedness for a nonprofit could assume either vertical or horizontal dimensions with relationships to other organizations above or below it as well as lateral contacts with other groups that surround it.

The concept of network embeddedness also sharpens the distinction between the four ecumenical agencies in the Atlanta study group and another type of faith-based organization known as regional sectarian agencies. These two types of faith-based organizations differ in their patterns of network embeddedness. For example, a regional sectarian agency such as the Lutheran Services of Georgia is connected to local Lutheran congregations that provide support for the organization in financial contributions and volunteers. At the same time, the Lutheran Services of Georgia is part of the national network known as Lutheran Services in America, which is “the largest not-for-profit social ministry enterprise in the country.” (<http://www.lsga.org>) This upward and downward network provides strength for a regional sectarian agency like Lutheran Services of Georgia that most closely resembles that provided the Concerned Black Clergy, but is missing in the other three Atlanta regional ecumenical organizations. Of the four Atlanta regional ecumenical agencies only the CBC has any relationship with a national organization as it participates to a limited degree in the National Congress of Black Churches. The CBC has close connections with the pastors of local African-American congregations who comprise the bulk of its individual and congregational membership. In contrast to the other three organizations, the CBC has a constituency of African-American businesses and corporations seeking to expand their influence within the minority community of Atlanta.

FATC has limited downward connections to local congregations that are the result of the Faith Leadership Institute and the communication program that functions through FATC’s website, newsletters and television forum series. The organization has participated in a program called Mentor-a-Family that has been supported by funding

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from the United Way. However, the strength of its relationships has been with the four seminaries in the Atlanta area. FATC funding for a Director and programming at these institutions will likely yield long-term influence on local congregations as ministers-in-formation take their places as leaders in the community. What is missing is a network of financial support for FATC from either congregations or business organizations beyond the single foundation that has kept the organization operating since 1999.

FAMA is a small organization with a limited circle of supporters. These are concentrated among individuals who are leaders or members in congregations of various types. Expanding this network through the World Pilgrim Program is a slow process, unlikely to generate a significantly larger membership base. The organization must either seek more varied sources of funding or remain a small agency with a modest program and influence within the metropolitan area. Even this level of activity is dependent upon the continued support of committed volunteers such as the President who is the imam of a local mosque.

The RCCA has stronger connections to local congregations than the FATC, but less than the CBC. Its support comes from Christian congregations that are committed to ecumenical programs and regard the Regional Council as a way of engaging other congregations in social programs. Other financial assistance comes from local foundations interested in Christian social ministry. In many ways the programs of the RCCA are similar to the National Council of Churches, but the leadership of the Atlanta organization is reluctant to affiliate with the national group and risk losing support from some local congregations.

The concept of vertical and horizontal networking among regional ecumenical organizations is similar to Putnam's bridging behavior that builds connections between an individual and groups or associations in civil society (2000). While much of the research on bridging behaviors is focused on individual civic activity, Chaves uses the concept of bridging behaviors to describe the connections between congregations that are part of their civic engagement (2004). The concept of network embeddedness by nonprofit organizations describes the array of interorganizational relationships, while bridging behavior in Chaves' study is used to differentiate among congregations with varying theological perspectives. The examination of the relationships in which the four regional ecumenical organizations are embedded is a promising avenue for the study of faith-based groups. It exposes the dilemma faced by the four Atlanta area agencies as they move toward greater cooperation with one another and as they struggle individually with fund raising and program delivery.

CONCLUSIONS

The work of Cnaan (1999) and Scott (2003) to define and develop a classification scheme for faith-based organizations is helpful in undertaking a study of regional ecumenical coalitions. This category of faith-based agencies has not received much attention from scholars, especially in relation to local faith-based groups such as congregations and their related organizations or groups operating at the national level. The classification scheme sets the four Atlanta area agencies apart from other faith-based organizations and points to the dilemma of these groups as they are caught in a struggle for resources with which to accomplish their missions.

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The faith integration scale developed by the Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy is a promising tool for examining faith-based organizations. The faith integration scale was administered in an extended interview with a representative of each of the four Atlanta area agencies. The results showed a high level of faith in the four faith-based organizations. While there were individual variations among the four depending on their organizational structure, programming, and willingness to pursue funding from varied sources, overall there was a consistent pattern of a high level of faith within all of the four regional ecumenical organizations. Further use of the faith integration scale will also permit comparisons with other types of faith-based organizations in other localities.

The concept of network embeddedness from organizational culture literature is also useful in examining the relationships between an organization and the groups around it. Using this concept on the four organizations indicated that the Concerned Black Clergy has both the largest and strongest relationships with local congregations as well as a loose affiliation with a national organization. These networks set the CBC apart somewhat from the other three organizations in the study which lack any national affiliations and have much smaller and less supportive relationships with local congregations. As a result of these observations it is no surprise that the three organizations are reaching out to one another (and to the CBC) in an effort to work cooperatively on a common agenda as well as to explore the possibility of merger. Given its higher degree of network embeddedness, the CBC is unlikely to do more than collaborate with the other three organizations. For the Faith And The City, the Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta, and the Regional Council of Churches of Atlanta the

possibilities of collaboration, if not merger, are important for increasing their program effectiveness and ability to accomplish their organizational mission.

While research on faith-based organizations is extensive, little attention has been paid to mid-level regional groups such as the four Atlanta agencies. The investigation of similar agencies in other localities would be useful to see if they experience the same dilemma of being caught in the middle in a constant struggle to secure financial resources and accomplish their objectives. The Atlanta area study is part of a larger comparative research project that will provide some answers to these questions. It will also be possible to determine the extent to which faith is integrated in the organizations in another metropolitan area and what are the patterns of relationships between regional ecumenical coalitions with other organizations.

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WEBSITES

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<http://faithandthecity.org> Faith And The City.

<http://www.lsga.org> Lutheran Services of Georgia