

# Scholar says faith-based initiative failed to increase churches' role

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DURHAM, N.C. (ABP) — Eight years of President George W. Bush's faith-based agenda to increase religion's role in providing social services had little impact on day-to-day ministries of local congregations, according to scholar at Duke Divinity School.

Mark Chavez, a professor of sociology and religion who directs the National Congregations Study, [said](#) the Bush administration's push to increase the flow of government money to faith-based organizations was reported widely by the media because of the church-state debates it provoked, but did little to increase the role religious organizations have long played in America's social-welfare system.

Chavez said that the proportions of congregations that provide social services (82 percent of all houses of worship), that have a staff member who devotes at least a quarter of their time to providing social services (11 percent) and that receive government funding for such services (4 percent) did not change between data collected in 1998 and in 2006-2007. In both surveys, about 6 percent of social services performed by congregations were done in collaboration with the government, while 20 percent were done in collaboration with a secular non-profit agency.

Easier availability of government funding for faith-based groups, introduced as part of welfare reform during the Clinton administration but elevated to a centerpiece of Bush's domestic agenda, did increase congregational interest in social services, however. Nearly half (47

percent) of surveyed congregations said in 2006 they would like to apply for government funding, compared to 39 percent who said so in 1998.

Chavez said that despite heated debate over the faith-based initiative, religious congregations have long played a role in providing social services and have long received public funds to support social-service programs.

The idea behind the faith-based initiative was that removing hurdles like requiring religious organizations to segregate social-service from religious functions would make it easier for churches and other houses of worship to compete with secular providers.

Chavez said the data hint that the faith-based initiative may have led some congregations already involved in social services to devote slightly more staff and volunteer time to those activities, but that overall "the faith-based initiative increased congregations' interest in social service programs, but it did not change their behavior."

*-Bob Allen is senior writer for Associated Baptist Press.*