



## Lutheran Services in America Perspectives on Faith-Based and Government Partnerships

Lutheran Services in America is pleased that the Obama Administration is planning to expand and re-focus a national strategy for partnerships between the federal government and faith-based and neighborhood organizations. This memo, in response to a request from the members of the transition team exploring faith-based relationships, outlines LSA's perspectives on the rich possibilities, suggests ways in which LSA is prepared to partner, and outlines LSA's current advocacy agenda. We look forward to further conversation.

### **Lutheran Services in America**

Lutheran Services in America (LSA) creates opportunities with people in thousands of communities in all 50 states and the Caribbean as an alliance of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod, and their nearly 300 health and human service organizations. **Working neighbor to neighbor** through health care, aging and disability supports, community development, housing, and child and family strengthening, these organizations touch the lives of more than six million people every year – or one in 50 Americans – and have operating budgets in excess of \$10 billion. Through these efforts LSA is on the front lines of building self-sufficiency and creating hope in millions of lives. More information about LSA and its members is available at [www.lutheranservices.org](http://www.lutheranservices.org).

### **Partnerships Between Faith-Based, Neighborhood Organizations & Government**

The Obama Administration has emphasized change as its watchword and has called Americans to come together across divides to shape that change. Increasingly, the problems that face individuals, families and communities are complex and multi-layered. Solving those problems will require collaborative efforts between government, business, nonprofit and community organizations, and the faith community. As Alan Webber, founding editor of *Fast Company*, says, “the problems we call intractable live in the cracks between the solutions we’ve created.” **Greater imagination and mobilization of resources, including the insight and energy of the people most in need of solutions, is imperative.**

Government has long recognized that religious organizations as well as grassroots community groups can be agents of change, not as substitutes for government, but as partners with government. We encourage government – at federal, state and local levels – to convene and stimulate a wide range of players to lean in and work together. As we engage a greater range of grassroots and religious groups, it will be important to create accountability for both process and results, particularly when government funding is involved.

LSA and its members were involved in the Bush Administration Faith-Based and Community Initiative since its inception. Mary Nelson, former president of Bethel New Life in Chicago, IL, was with President Bush when he signed the first executive order. LSA staff and members met with Jim Towey and Jay Hein, the former directors of the office, to discuss priorities and to work



together. We attended their national conferences, public policy roundtables, and met with several of the faith-based offices. Lessons learned from the Bush Administration's efforts point to the need for

- greater clarification of the legalities of what can and can't be done with government funding;
- measuring outcomes not just activities;
- disseminating good practices and initiatives that work; and
- avoiding expensive redundancy of infrastructure.

Of course, we also expect there would be genuine will to address poverty, incarceration, housing, supports and opportunities for people with disabilities or the frailties of age, access to healthcare and so forth, apart from narrowly politicized agendas.

Rather than recount our observations about the successes and failures of the Bush Administration Faith-Based and Community Initiative, we would refer to the two volumes produced by the Working Group on Human Needs and Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (2002 and 2003) and [Rogers' and Dionne's December 2008 report](#), as well as the work of the Roundtable on Religion and Social Welfare Policy. These thoughtful resources point to more nuanced distinctions between shades of faith-based organizations, between programs and organizations, and between religious ends, means and motivations.

With some attention to ensuring appropriate boundaries and accountabilities, the Obama Administration has the opportunity to enliven faith-based and neighborhood partnerships. **Churches and faith communities are significant neighborhood assets.** They have physical plants, parishioners with talents and skills, and they are woven into the fabric of nearly every community in the country. **In partnership with government faith-based and neighborhood organizations can:**

- Engage more people to provide formal and informal supports to people with disabilities, people experiencing the frailties of age, children and their families, and people returning to the community from military service, incarceration or other transitions
- Identify and nurture indigenous leaders in neighborhoods
- Map and mobilize the full range of assets, people and resources in communities to create opportunities and solve problems
- Shape effective and responsive public policy at federal, state and local levels through active engagement of citizens
- Reinforce messages of hope that strengthen individuals and communities
- Disseminate information and education into diverse communities (ranging from healthy behaviors to Medicare Part D and Earned Income Tax Credits)

**Through existing systems of faith-based health and human service organizations like LSA, those local partnerships as well as national initiatives can become stronger with:**

- Multi-site demonstration projects and innovative approaches
- Applied research at the intersections of practice and policy
- New synergies between service, advocacy and community organizing, especially through the use of social media technologies
- Train-the trainer approaches, like those suggested by the Obama Administration, that build the capacity of local organizations and reduce the redundancy of back office infrastructure
- Concerted efforts to equip and engage people and communities through broad scale education, outreach and messaging
- Volunteer and national service initiatives that produce results greater than the sum of the individual efforts



- Aggregation of consumer perspectives, practical experiences and access to information about operational results of government policies and practices.

### **Lutheran Services in America as a Partner with Government**

The LSA network of 300 organizations is extremely diverse. Some of the organizations are very large serving across several states; others are small, local and have only a handful of paid staff members partnering with a cadre of volunteers. Some organizations have roots that reach back more than 150 years. Others, especially community development organizations, have grown out of local congregations in just the past few years. This diversity offers insights into **a wide range of possibilities for partnership with government.**

Lutheran health and human service organizations have a long history of working effectively with government. For example, 100 years ago what is now Lutheran Child and Family Services of Illinois contracted with Cook County to care for children. Collectively, approximately 43% of LSA's member organizations budgets are funded by federal, state or local dollars. Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey (the fourth largest provider of affordable housing in NJ) has partnered with the city of Camden and other community organizations to rehab and manage 89 units of housing in a stressed neighborhood and to organize/train neighborhood leaders. Diakon Lutheran Social Ministries runs Pennsylvania's statewide adoption network. Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry in Cleveland engages a wide range of government and community partners on issues of prisoner re-entry and cooperative approaches to community supports for people with impairments. Southwest Healthcare Services in rural Bowman, ND operates a federally funded health clinic and has engaged the entire town to build a dozen units of affordable assisted living so that isolated elderly individuals can live in what has become the social center of the town. These are a few of thousands of examples.

**LSA is good at bringing diverse groups of people and organizations together to find common ground for action.** LSA itself is a collaboration of two Lutheran denominations that have substantial theological and political differences, yet they work together effectively in LSA. LSA's 300 organizations work in very diverse communities from rural to urban, and with people across generations, ethnicities, socioeconomic situations and faiths. LSA is not readily categorized as "conservative" or "progressive" or about aging, or children, or housing or disabilities, but instead is able to bring together a range of perspectives for collective action. While Lutheran organizations take their faith identities seriously, they employ and work with people of all faiths and of no particular faith. One nursing home in Philadelphia counts 26 different primary languages among its staff.

**Most Lutheran organizations are engaged in on-the-ground collaborations with a wide variety of nonprofits, community organizations, businesses and governmental units.**

They work with religious congregations – not only Lutheran but other faiths as well. Through LSA, Lutheran organizations have a vehicle for shared learning and collective action. LSA stands ready to offer that vehicle in partnership with government as well.

Just a few examples of the types of initiatives LSA is currently working on may be helpful. LSA's Porcupine Project draws on principles of Asset Based Community Development and uses asset mapping and mobilization as a tool to marry the strengths of health and human service organizations and local religious congregations and other neighborhood groups as they work in their communities. LSA's Aging in Community Initiative has brought together Lutheran health and human service organizations in an open source collaboration to cross-pollinate the best of their community-based aging programs to create hybrid models that can be disseminated broadly. Two promising models are simple, inexpensive partnerships between religious



congregations and health and human service organizations to offer respite for informal caregivers. LSA member organizations that provide supports to people with developmental disabilities have come together not only to benchmark effective and efficient practices, but also to engage one another, clients and their families in providing thoughtful input to Medicaid reform. Social networking technology is expanding these sorts of collaborative and capacity building efforts exponentially.

**The LSA system is fertile ground for partnerships with government** in many areas including:

- multi-site demonstration projects
- comparative evaluation of effective and efficient practices
- piloting new hybrid forms of social enterprise
- echoing and reinforcing messages about change
- mapping and mobilizing the “assets” in neighborhoods and communities
- disseminating information to citizens and consumers about government benefits, programs, etc.

LSA collaborates actively at the national level with many coalitions and associations, including the Roundtable of National Faith-Based Health and Human Service Organizations. This Roundtable offers a good place to connect with 13 associations of faith-based service organizations and LSA encourages the Obama Administration to reach out to the Roundtable.

As Lutheran Services in America reviewed Barack Obama’s speech of July 2008, we affirm the “train the trainer” approach to building the capacity and effectiveness of local faith-based organizations, and the need for partnerships at the federal, state and local levels. LSA and its members are well-positioned to assist with those efforts. LSA has a good track record of functioning as a mediating structure. **We are used to working without formal authority and operate peer consultation services that help to build capacity at the local level.**

One of LSA’s core strategies is “cultivate the intersections of research, practice and policy.” LSA sees this as an important part of ensuring that LSA member organizations and others have access to and can help to build the knowledge about what works, and can use that to inform both practice and public policy advocacy. We affirm the emphasis on “what works” in the Obama July 2008 speech.

Within the Lutheran system (both health and human service organizations and congregations themselves), there are a plethora of pre-school, after school and summer programs for children. These can be placed in service of the “Close the Summer Learning Gap” initiative proposed by the Obama Administration.

Lutherans believe that all people are beloved children of God entrusted with gifts to share, and God asks that they use those gifts for the benefit of others. That translates to an interesting understanding of responsibility. People must assume personal responsibility for contributing to their own well-being. But, they also have responsibility to care for others – to contribute to the good of the whole by using their unique gifts and skills. **We each are responsible for ourselves and also for our neighbors.** As we look at public policy, we ask: What sorts of policies would equip people for these dual roles of caring for self and caring for others?



## **LSA Public Policy and Advocacy Priorities for 2009**

LSA, LSA members and the people that they serve are looking forward to engaging with the new Administration and Congress around our public policy priorities. We are facing a historic opportunity to make a significant improvement in the lives of people in need of affordable and accessible health care, safe and affordable housing and quality child day care and child welfare services. Federal budget and tax policy as well as new opportunities to engage volunteers and national service staff members will also be valuable in helping LSA members, congregations and others care for their neighbors.

**LSA's top public policy priority for the incoming Administration is the economic recovery package.** The package should assist those struggling to meet their basic human needs as well as help vital nonprofit organizations remain viable. We ask that you include:

- A plan for assuring that efficient and effective nonprofit organizations can meet the current increased demand for services in an environment of contracting resources
- An increase to \$2.8 billion for the Social Services Block Grant, funding which is crucial to meet a variety of health and human service needs on the local level.
- Adequate funding to implement the new National Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which would result in 1.5 million affordable housing units for very low income renter households.
- Assistance in the states, particularly an increase in the Federal Medical Assistance Percentage (FMAP).
- An increase in the food stamp program, now called SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and an improvement in benefit allotments and eligibility.

### **LSA public policy advocacy agenda for 2009**

The following overview of key policy issues is supported by specific legislative and regulatory priorities that may not be included here, but are available in other documents.

**Health Care.** LSA is pleased that the Obama Administration will focus on health care reform in the first year in office. LSA members provide health care services in a wide range of settings, from acute to home care, from nursing homes to home and community based services. LSA and its members are developing core principles which will serve as filters through which health policy can be analyzed by the full range of health and long term care service providers. We look forward to working with the Administration and Congress as plans are developed and discussed.

**Affordable Housing.** LSA supports public policy that increases the preservation and production of affordable housing for people with low-incomes, particularly older adults and people with disabilities. Public policy should ensure that people who are without homes are offered shelter and supportive services to help transition into permanent housing. Shelter and supportive services should be available to all populations including single adults and adults with children. We ask that resources be made available for people with low-incomes to have access to rental vouchers and other sources for subsidizing their rents as homeownership is not a viable option for all people.

LSA is focusing its legislative efforts on bills that would reform and expand housing for seniors and people with disabilities. We are focusing our regulatory efforts on implementation of the National Housing Trust Fund program signed into law earlier this year. We ask that the Obama Administration support increasing the amount of affordable housing units available for low-income renters.



**Child Welfare.** LSA supports public policy that facilitates the ability of community and government to keep children safe in the case of abuse or neglect and provides children in out-of-home placements the same access to health care, educational opportunities and recreational activities as other children. We also support assisting parents or caregivers with adequate and appropriate resources to be able to care for children and to prevent abuse and neglect.

We ask that the Obama Administration support the reauthorization of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA), allowing for funding of programs essential to slowing the number of children who enter the child welfare system as a result of abuse and neglect. The reauthorization of CAPTA should also include the reauthorization of the Adoption Opportunities Act, allowing financial support for the improvement of adoption services. LSA is pleased that Title IV-E training dollars will be available to private as well as public child welfare providers as a result of P.L. 110-351 and LSA will be focusing on the regulations in the new year.

**Federal Budget.** The budget is a moral document and reflects the priorities of our country. As federal funding is further restricted in FY09 and FY10, we ask that health and human service funding be given a priority and not be cut disproportionately to other areas of the budget. Tax policy must be examined critically by the Obama Administration as it will have a significant impact in such a tight economic environment. We support improving the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit to aid working families in making ends meet.

**Volunteerism and National Service.** The time is right to engage a broader range of people to share their time and talents with others in their communities. We are pleased that the Obama Administration supports volunteerism and national service and we hope that Corporation for National and Community Service programs such as AmeriCorps are expanded and funded. There appears to be significant support for legislation that expands national service and LSA encourages the passage of legislation into law in 2009.