



Smithsonian  
*Anacostia Community Museum*

## **Smithsonian Institution/Anacostia Community Museum**

### **Surveys of Houses of Worship in Ward 8 of Washington, DC: How Religious Institutions Engage With and Impact Their Communities**

#### **Report by**

**Harold Dean Trulear, PhD, and Wheeler Winstead, PhD Candidate, with Joi Orr, MDiv**

#### **Introduction: A National Context**

The Houses of Worship (HOW) survey undertaken by the Anacostia Community Museum finds significant grounding in a national context. To wit, with the growth of interest in the contributions of civil society to community strengthening in general, and faith-based institutions working in communities in particular, the desire for accurate documentation of these efforts has claimed a new place on the research map. The interest in civil society and its institutions grew during the decade of the 1990s— from President George H. W. Bush’s emphasis on volunteerism and “one thousand points of light,” through the administration of President Bill Clinton’s creation of the first federal “faith-based office” at the department of Housing and Urban Development, to the establishment of the Office of Faith- Based and Community Initiatives by President George W. Bush. Parallel to said development came a desire for more complete information on the capacity of faith-based organizations to provide social services, both within houses of worship themselves and through the sponsorship of faith-based and faith-related institutions serving the community.

With respect to houses of worship, two notable studies emerged. The first was a detailed census of congregation-based social services in the city of Philadelphia, conducted by Professor Ram Cnaan and the University of Pennsylvania. This massive undertaking involved collecting data from close to 3,000 houses of worship in the city, and, while calculating the estimated value of services, plotting a map of houses of worship providing a variety of social services from counseling and education to tutoring and acts of charity toward the poor.<sup>i</sup> A second study, funded by the DeVos Foundation, performed a similar census of the houses of worship in Kent County, Michigan. Conducted by Calvin College and scholar Edwin Hernandez, this study took the issue a step further by calling together the religious leadership of the region upon the study’s completion, to convene them for a strategy session on community service that both networked existing congregations and services, but also provided identifications of gaps in service with an eye toward strengthening the capacity of houses of worship and faith-based institutions to serve the area.<sup>ii</sup>

In the intersection between the research developed for the study and its utility for strengthening communities lies the work of public history; the purposes of this survey engaged by the Anacostia Museum apply here as well. From the beginning, museum staff has been clear that the resultant research should provide both an accurate picture of what is and also a context for thinking forward as to what “could be”—how the faith community can build upon its current role as a stabilizing force in a community challenged by demographic shifts, limited resources, and an uncertain future.



Smithsonian  
Anacostia Community Museum

To that end, we (Harold Dean Trulear and Wheeler Winstead) have worked with the survey data to both paint a portrait of the houses of worship and Ward 8 (Far Southeast, commonly known as Anacostia) and to place that portrait in the context of national development for interpretation and of local leadership for strengthening the community. What follows below is a rehearsal of issues identified, capacities assessed, and interpretation of the work of houses of worship in one of the District of Columbia's historic neighborhoods.

We began with basic research into both local history and national trends. Research assistant Joi Orr, a recent Howard University graduate, identified historical background consistent with and providing context for the current life of Anacostia houses of worship through sources such as Smithsonian publications *Black Washingtonians* (2005) and *The Anacostia Story: 1608-1930* (1977). This gave us helpful information on the development of Anacostia from town to neighborhood, and the shifting demographics of the area. Critical to the project was the documentation of the African American presence and its growth. As expected, and as fits national patterns, the migration periods after both the Civil and First World Wars coincided with the growth in the birth of African American congregations and their decisions from the beginning to provide ministries of personal and social care.

Additionally, we reviewed the primary publications generated by the research projects listed above: for Philadelphia, *The Other Philadelphia Story* (2004), and for Kent County, Michigan, *Gatherings of Hope* (2008). Both documents showed the value of houses of worship in their communities, providing stabilizing services for community well-being and stability and emergency relief for those in need. We expected to find parallel services offered by the congregations in Anacostia. As demonstrated by the Philadelphia research, each congregation carries on average a number of social services that would cost up to \$40,000 annually to replace. Specialized services such as prison ministry and afterschool programs exist alongside the common activities of counseling and education to provide a web of supports both ongoing and occasional which contribute to neighborhood well-being.

To come to a strong sense of how the Ward 8 houses of worship serve their community, we received interview and survey data from Anacostia Museum staff, collected in 2009. We added to this information material collected from walking tours, website information, and other more current sources as 2009 moved quickly to 2010 and 2011.

In processing the information from these sources, our goals were:

1. To produce impartial, objective and informative summaries as a ready source of information. Therefore, all promotional, opinionative, or judgmental language was eliminated like "good," "bad," "small," "large," "prosperous," etc. We used surveys, interviews, and basic Internet search.
2. To inform and strengthen local communities and houses of worship in their common quests for stabilization, growth, and well-being.



Smithsonian  
Anacostia Community Museum

## **Characteristics and disclaimers for project**

The summaries were generated from information supplied and from readily available sources. These sources include completed surveys, interviews, respondents' websites, and Internet articles. No attempt was made to secure additional information.

A major characteristic of the Ward 8 houses of worship survey project was that of self-identification. Generally speaking, the titles and labels supplied by the respondents were the ones used in the summary. The survey contained two questions of identifications: question #4: *Who is the pastor or congregational or worship leader?* and question #5: *What is the denomination or faith?* No attempt was made by the researchers to verify the authenticity of the leader's title or to corroborate it with other similar titles in the same or similar denominations. The same was true for the labeling of the domination or faith. The label given by the respondent was the label used. An attempt was made to keep the labeling consistent throughout the summary.

Self-reporting was an important feature of the survey and summaries. This mirrored the methodology employed by the Philadelphia and Michigan studies as well. The survey included questions about membership size, the age ranges of the congregants, where the congregants reside, and number of persons served in the programs in 2008 and 2009. Numbers, dates, and percentages were used as reported. If nothing was given, nothing was included. However, if percentages were off 5% percent or less, an adjustment was made at the discretion of the writer to bring totals to 100 percent. The writers made no attempt to verify this information.

We encountered some difference in the information between the various sources. The rule of thumb was to go with the information on the website as the most accurate. This was based on the assumption that it was most current. No attempt was made to integrate or corroborate the information.

The writers make no representation of fact for any of the information reported. All information was reported as received.

## **Refining the Data**

As mentioned above, an effort was made to supplement the information collected in the surveys through an updating and refinement process. This included:

1. Verification of the house of worship address on the Internet
2. Location of the actual building via Google maps, for purposes of understanding house of worship aesthetics and building utility
3. Search for a website of the house of worship
4. Review of the information on the website and use of the website information if there was a conflict. We assumed the website to be more current.
5. When writing the summary, the subheadings of "History" and "Present" were only used if information was provided on the history of the congregation.



Smithsonian  
Anacostia Community Museum

## Overview of Information

Overall, there were forty-seven (47) surveys received with sixteen (16) different denominations or faiths. Baptist represented the largest group with sixteen respondents and Nazarene the smallest with one. Below is a breakout from the surveys.



Smithsonian  
Anacostia Community Museum

### How Denominations

DENOMINATION	NUMBER	% OF HOW
Baptist	15	31.91%
Nondenominational	11	23.40%
Islamic	3	6.38%
African Methodist Episcopal (AME)	2	4.26%
Catholic	2	4.26%
Holiness	2	4.26%
Pentecostal	2	4.26%
Apostolic	2	4.26%
African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ)	1	2.13%
Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME)	1	2.13%
Full Gospel	1	2.13%
Episcopal	1	2.13%
United Methodist Church (UMC)	1	2.13%
Presbyterian	1	2.13%
Independent	1	2.13%
Nazarene	1	2.13%
	<b>47</b>	

The forty-seven houses of worship represent both mature and newly formed congregations with Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church as the oldest, being formed in 1850, and Islamic Center of SE the latest, being formed in 2009. The congregations covered a membership range of 2,200 to 12. Of the ten oldest congregations, four were Baptist, two were African Methodist Episcopal (AME), two were Catholic, one was Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), and one Episcopal.

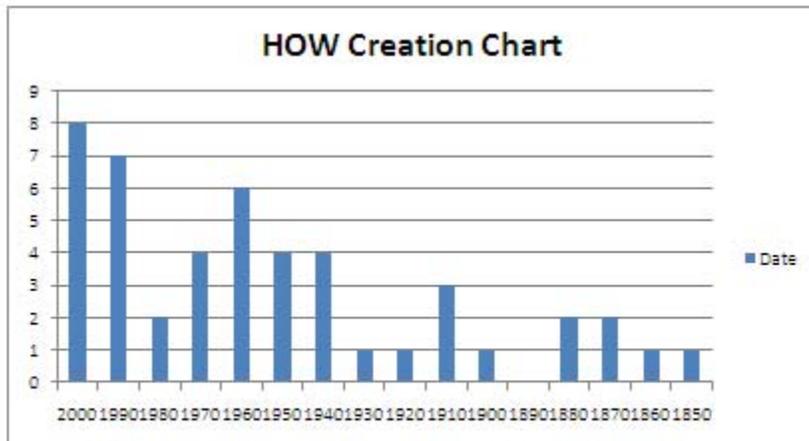


Smithsonian  
*Anacostia Community Museum*

The 1990s and 2000s seem to be the decades for creating religious congregations. The chart below shows a steady increase of congregations being formed with a major jump in the 1990s and 2000s. By decade eight were formed since 2000, seven in 1990, two in 1980, four in 1970, six in 1960, four in 1950, four in 1940, one in 1930, one in 1920, three in 1910, one in 1890, two in 1880, two in 1870, one in 1860, and one in 1850.



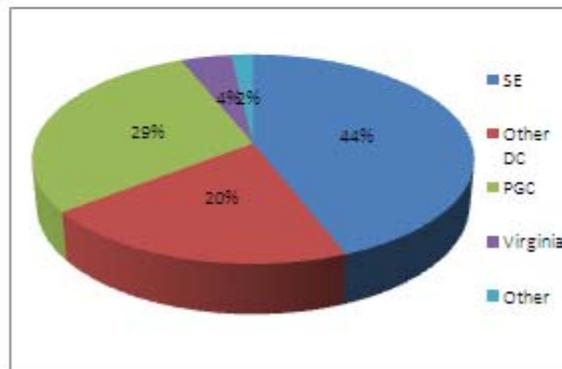
Smithsonian  
*Anacostia Community Museum*



The near majority of the congregants still live in the southeast section of Washington, D.C., i.e., 44%. However, Prince George's County is second in residence for HOW Ward 8 congregants with 29%, followed by other D.C. residents with 20%, Virginia with 4%, and other 2%. See chart below.



### Houses of Worship Residence



The majority of the houses of worship have congregants in the age range between 30 and 65.

A total of 62,257 persons received service through the ministries of the HOW as reported on the survey. The survey revealed that the HOW had approximately fourteen (14) different ministries. It is important to note that this number is based on the categories supplied to the respondents in the survey only. The top seven ministries in terms of the number of persons served were: feeding, 25,143; health, 7,735; youth, 7,508; Sunday School, 7,408; other, 5,931; senior, 2,623; and prison, 2,083. See charts and graph below.



Smithsonian  
*Anacostia Community Museum*



Smithsonian  
*Anacostia Community Museum*

**Ministries and Community Services**  
**Table of Numbers Served and Percentage of Total Served**

Ministries	# Served	% of total
Feeding	25,143	40.39%
Heath	7,735	12.42%
Youth	7,508	12.06%
Sunday School	7,408	11.90%
Other	5,931	9.53%
Senior	2,623	4.21%
Prison ministry	2,083	3.35%
Return offender	925	1.49%
Mentor	898	1.44%
Skills enrichment	725	1.16%
Daycare	535	0.86%
After-school program	440	0.71%
Job training	268	0.43%
SHARE	35	0.06%
<b>Total</b>	<b>62,257</b>	

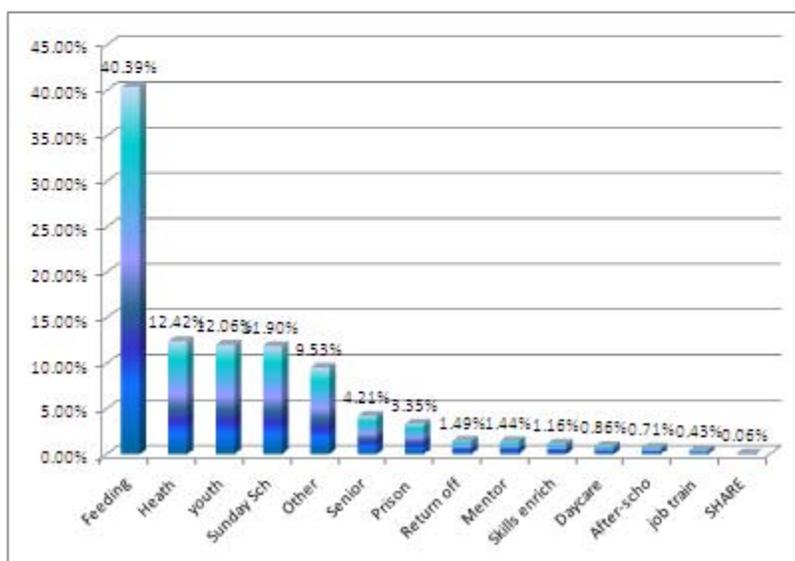


Smithsonian  
Anacostia Community Museum



Smithsonian  
Anacostia Community Museum

**Ministries and Community Services**  
**Bar Graph / Percentages Served by Ministry or Community Service**



The survey results revealed that the number of those served was also not always related to the size of the congregation. Houses of worship with smaller congregations often served more in the community than those with larger congregations. The chart below of the top ten community-serving HOW illustrates this. This group includes HOW which are in the first, second, and third quartile of member size.



Smithsonian  
Anacostia Community Museum



Smithsonian  
Anacostia Community Museum

### Top 10 Community Serving HoWs

Ranking according to member size	11	2	1	13	30	23	8	16	25	24
Ranking according to number of persons served	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

### What possible trends did we see?

1. Location of members: movement of some out but still connected to neighborhood by church

Like many congregations during the past forty years, Ward 8 houses of worship have seen their memberships shift with changing demographics that have witnessed larger numbers of members moving out of the neighborhood and into suburban locations. The fact that many commute back to Anacostia for worship indicates an ongoing connection to the community. However, if Anacostia's congregations mirror national trends, several things bear watching. First, while members from the neighborhood who relocate to the suburbs or other parts of Washington maintain a sense of connection to the neighborhood, their children may not share the same affinity. As such, these may not be as committed to community-based programs with the same sense of connection as their parents. Second, the geographic relocation of members often results in their commitment to the community becoming less relational and more programmatic. Simply put, as demonstrated by scholars such as Ida Mukenge in her text *The Black Church in Urban America: A Study in Political Economy* (1983), a congregation which once responded to challenges and crises through relationships in the neighborhood begins to do so through more structured, but less personal programs as the membership demographics shift. Congregations shift from their historic role as stewards of social capital, relationships, and friendships to a more depersonalized, client-based form of outreach that may meet tangible needs, but does not strengthen neighborhood infrastructure.<sup>iii</sup> An exception seems to be in the small congregations which often maintain a significant percentage of



Smithsonian  
*Anacostia Community Museum*

residential members. These houses of worship often resist the tendency to depersonalize services and maintain the relational character of their community witness.<sup>iv</sup>

Additionally, if national trends hold, residents of Anacostia commute outside of the neighborhood to attend other houses of worship as well.<sup>v</sup> As community residents find greater affinity with the worship services of congregations outside of the neighborhood, their own ability to participate in the historic intersection between family, congregation, and public schools as a repository of social capital lessens.<sup>vi</sup> In short, not only do neighborhood residents move away and commute back to the neighborhood for worship, but remaining residents also commute outside the neighborhood for worship themselves. Such movements reflect a decline in the social capital that stabilizes neighborhoods and challenges residents and houses of worship alike to become more intentional in building community infrastructure.

## 2. Age of members: mature and stable

At the same time the findings on the age of congregants paints a hopeful picture. Often, social scientists who study congregations informally refer to the “doughnut” phenomenon whereby houses of worship demonstrate the demographic of large numbers of senior citizens and children, with few adults of middle age in the picture. While some of the Anacostia houses of worship reflected such a demographic, many showed an ability to attract and maintain adults, especially young adults, whose numbers often represent the “hole in the doughnut.”<sup>vii</sup> Such attraction can be an important building block for social capital in Anacostia.

The numbers of mature adult members can also be seen as a sign of stability, in the face of the changes noted in the discussion of mobility. Houses of worship nationally and locally must move beyond the simple emphasis on “numbers” and pay increased attention to what the numbers represent, especially the potential for stabilizing neighborhoods in an era of increased mobility upward and outward. What critics may call “stagnant” can actually be “stabilizing” and a community influence.

## 3. Health and possibly housing may be an issue as the population matures fairly soon.

As houses of worship seek to serve their constituencies, they do well in identifying the specific concerns raised by the community demographics. In Anacostia, the mature adult congregational profile points to senior housing and health care issues as priorities for the coming years. As residents age, their needs for assisted living and health care access increase. Some houses of worship have begun to address these issues in formal ways. Interviews with congregation leadership reveal that the support system around these issues is more often informal. However, with the passage of the health care reform bill, houses of worship will want to be more proactive in helping an aging membership fully access health care services. With underrepresentation in Medicare and Medicaid participation in the African American community, such advocacy looms large. Similarly, with the early move toward gentrification in Southeast Washington, housing for low income seniors takes on an importance that mirrors the challenges which have hit other communities both in the District of Columbia and beyond.



Smithsonian  
*Anacostia Community Museum*

#### 4. Ministries: Poverty is a real issue along with education and the penal system.

One need not juxtapose poverty statistics of Anacostia against our data to determine the impact of poverty. Rather, the clear finding of the proliferation of “feeding” ministries—food distribution, meal provision, etc.—points squarely to the fact that community residents struggle with basic subsistence issues. Houses of worship must consider how their historic witness of economic uplift fits into the twenty-first century, as many of the older congregations recall their role in assisting with basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter in the years of black migration to Washington. Similarly, houses of worship in nineteenth century Washington had a significant role in providing and advocating for quality education for residents. Such an emphasis can be seen in informal discussions with congregations and leadership, but not so much in the formalized programmatic life of houses of worship.

With respect to the penal system, there is a growing awareness of the impact of incarceration on Anacostia. The Court Services and Offender Supervision Agency of the District of Columbia estimated in 2007 that 50 % of the students at Anacostia High School had a parent under some type of court supervision, including incarceration.<sup>viii</sup> CSOSA’s partnerships with congregations in Ward 8 reflect an increased awareness of and commitment to addressing the impact of incarceration on the community. Our findings of the existence of prison ministries in several of the congregations, with their relative newness compared to other ministries, is a strength to build upon.

#### 5. Churches seem to be less tied to denominational structures. Six of the eight new HOW are not connected to traditional denominations.

National data show stability in the numbers of persons attending houses of worship, but a demographic shift away from traditional Christian denominations and toward other religious traditions, as well as new Christian religious organizations.<sup>ix</sup> We found this to be an important context for the discovery that of the eight houses of worship begun in Anacostia in the past ten years, six of them are not tied to traditional denominations. This circumstance pairs with our notation vi above concerning the impact of televangelism on worship trends and church affiliation. It also points to the rising tide of Islamic influence in the African American community.

#### 6. Changing patterns in socialization of youth

The relatively small numbers participating in the traditional congregational programs of Christian education can be interpreted in one of two ways. Some scholars, citing the difficulty in houses of worship in reaching youth, see the decline in terms of the actual numbers of young people. However, more likely is the emergence of national trends toward different ways of socializing youth into houses of worship. While “Sunday School” attendance may be in decline, future research into Anacostia houses of worship should determine whether those structures have been replaced or supplemented by such programs as children’s church, youth church, and children’s sermons, all within the framework of the scheduled time for regular Sabbath worship. With increased patterns of mobility, having all programs for and outreach to children and youth during the regular worship hour



Smithsonian  
Anacostia Community Museum

provides incentive for families traveling a distance to enroll their young people in specialized programs. Additionally, our society's increased commitment to leisure time, even amongst relatively disadvantaged families, often leads to less participation in houses of worship beyond the morning service. More investigation is needed with respect to the structure of Anacostia's houses of worship in their response to the situation of families, children, and youth, especially given the changes in social capital noted above.

## Conclusion

This brief narrative, along with the profiles contained in the remainder of our document [to be posted in a separate document], both celebrates the strengths of Anacostia's houses of worship and points toward issues for further investigation by researchers and religious leaders alike. Much of Anacostia's history is tied to its houses of worship. With the changes in demographics, it may be that such a relationship will require more intentionality in the years to come. A follow-up to this initial survey would assist greatly in further documenting the history and in plotting direction for the future.

---

<sup>i</sup> See his *The Other Philadelphia*

<sup>ii</sup> *Gathering of Hope*

<sup>iii</sup> Hara Leslie Wright-Smith, "The impact of inner city commuter and community congregations on civic engagement and social action" (January 1, 2004). *Dissertations available from ProQuest*. Paper AAI3125921. (<http://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI3125921>). See also Sinha, J. W., Hillier, A., Cnaan, R. A., & McGrew, C. (2007). "Proximity matters: Understanding resident and commuter congregations through an ecological framework." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 46, 245-260.

<sup>iv</sup> Harold Dean Trulear, *Faith Based Institutions and High Risk Youth*. Public/Private Ventures, (2000).

<sup>v</sup> Michael. L. Owens and Drew Smith, "Congregations in low-income neighborhoods and the implications for social welfare policy research." In M.L. Owens and Drew Smith, *Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly*, 2005 vs.sagepub.com

<sup>vi</sup> The choice of congregation based on worship service versus social service reflects not only Lewis and Smith's findings concerning the disconnect between community residents and local congregations nationally, but also the influence of televised religious services. Scholars such as Neil Postman (*Amusing Ourselves to Death*) and Jonathan Walton (*Watch This! The Ethics and*



Smithsonian  
Anacostia Community Museum

---

*Aesthetics of Black Televangelism*) document how these televised services create a certain expectation for corporate worship that can either influence traditional congregations to adapt the methods of the televangelist, or lead worshippers away from traditional congregations to those reflecting the ethos of the televangelist. Prince George's County, which abuts Far Southeast, is home to a number of mega-churches whose worship services reflect the televangelist ethos.

<sup>vii</sup> Harold Dean Trulear. "The Challenge Ministry for Young Adults in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" for the Second District of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Founder's Day, 2/18/11.

<sup>viii</sup> Strategy session with CSOSA staff concerning the implementation of the Healing Communities prisoner reentry model in the District of Columbia, 2007

<sup>ix</sup> D.E. Sherkat's "Tracking the restructuring of American religion: Religious affiliation and patterns of religious mobility, 1973-1998" in *Social Forces* (2001) is but one example of a trend that began in the sixties. See also Hartford Seminary's Institute for Religion Research at <http://hirr.hartsem.edu/ency/PublicOP.htm>. More recent data from studies by Mark Chaves (*Congregations in America*, 2004) reflect similar shifts.