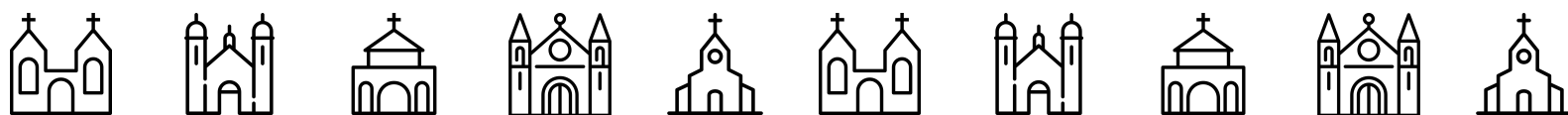


Little Rock Religious Leaders Summit

A Summary Report of the
Little Rock Religious Leaders Summit
held April 11th, 2019
at UA Little Rock Downtown



About the Little Rock Religious Leaders Summit

The Little Rock Religious Leaders Summit was hosted UA Little Rock Downtown on Thursday, April 11, 2019. The event was organized by the Little Rock Congregations Study research project at UA Little Rock and supported by the Arkansas Community Foundation.

Our goals were to bring religious leaders from different faith traditions together to discuss the major problems facing our city, share some of our research findings, and brainstorm ways that University researchers can inform and support religious leaders in their efforts to improve our city. Over 50 religious leaders from diverse faith traditions across our city attended the Summit.



Discussion

The Little Rock Congregations Study research team arranged the seating at the Summit so that religious leaders were seated in diverse groups of about six. After lunch, group discussions at 9 different tables were facilitated by Dr. April Chatham-Carpenter, Chair of the Department of Applied Communication at UA Little Rock. Each group was asked to think about two questions:

1. What are the biggest challenges facing our city and your congregants?
2. How can researchers help?



Dr. Chatham-Carpenter then assigned about half of the tables to come up with their top five answers to question 1 and other half of the tables to come up with their top five answers to question 2.

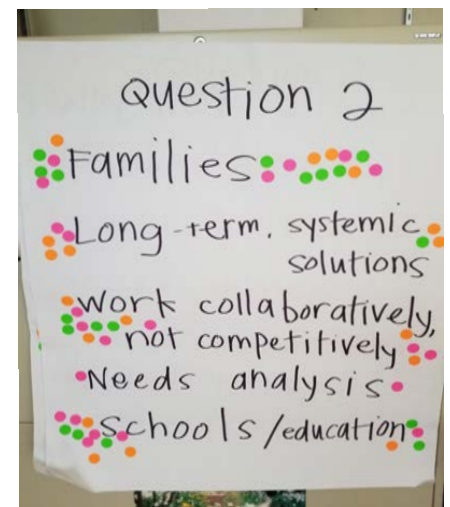
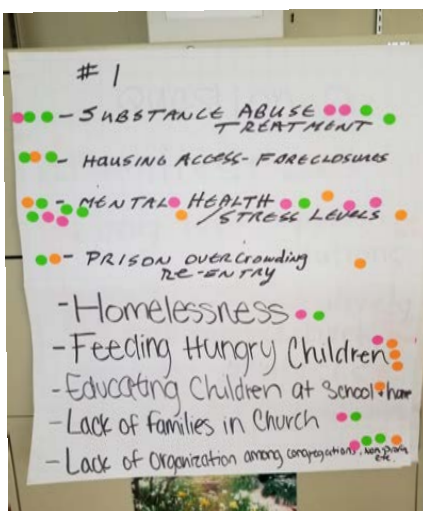
Discussion

Each table brought their final answers forward and they were written on giant pieces of paper. Each unique answer was written down and posted on the wall. The list of all answers given by the tables is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. All Answers Provided by Nine Discussion Tables

What Are Biggest Challenges?	How Can Researchers Help?
Cultural intolerance	Collaborative, not competitive
Don't know about help	Collect Neighborhood Info
Educational Divide	Families
Food Insecurity	Immigration
Homelessness	Long-term, systemic solutions
Housing	Mental Health
Individual change	Needs Analysis
Lack of Collaboration	Race Relations
Lack of Families at Church	Schools/education
Mental Health	Selfishness
Prison	Social Justice
School	Volunteerism
Substance Abuse	
Unemployment	
White Flight	

Each person was then given six stickers, three for each of the two questions, to use to vote for the responses that resonated the most with them.



Results

Figure 1. Most sticker votes for answers to the question:
What are the biggest challenges facing our city and your congregants?

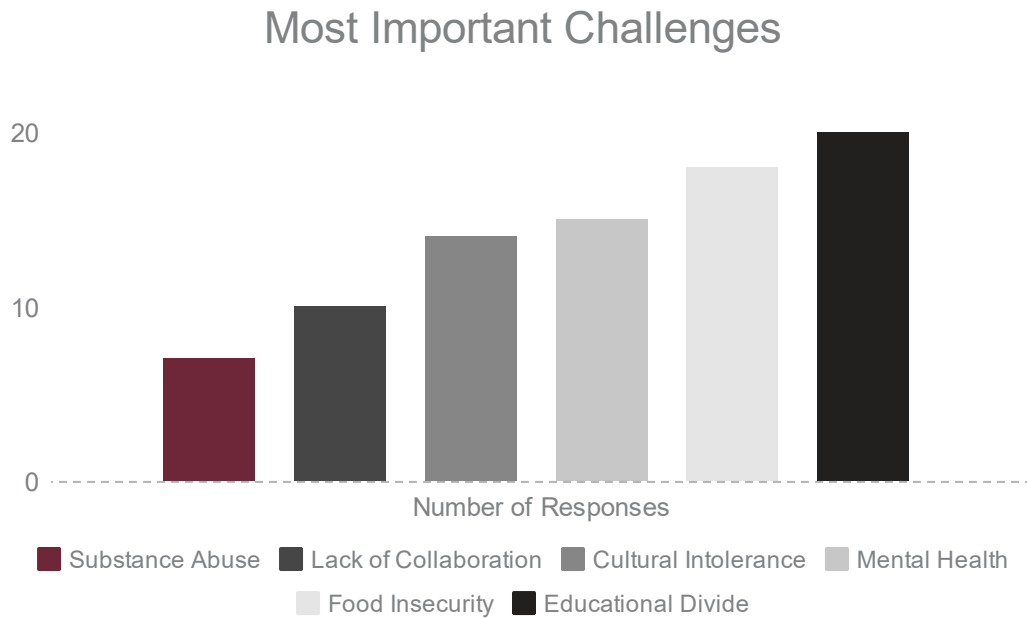
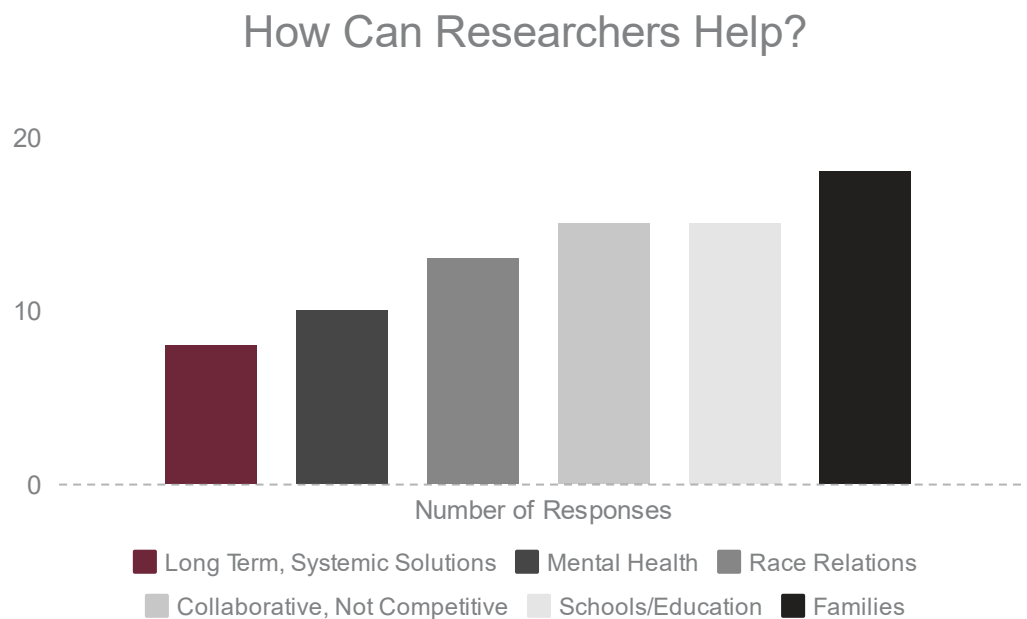


Figure 2. Most sticker votes for answers to the question:
How can researchers help?



Our Takeaways

Looking at the feedback we received from the Religious Leaders Summit, we see our role as researchers as contributing in two important ways.

First, researchers can help by studying topics that are particularly important to religious communities in Little Rock. Data from the Summit indicates religious leaders are particularly concerned about families, education, race relations/intolerance, poverty, and mental health.

Second, researchers can also contribute by looking at broader questions including:

- How to facilitate collaboration
- How to find long-term, systemic solutions

Looking Ahead

As we think about our plans to survey congregation members in 2020, we are carefully considering how to take the feedback we received at the Religious Leaders Summit into account to best help our city. Here are a few things we are considering:

- Asking participating congregations if they would be willing to opt in to sharing their contact information with other congregations who are interested in similar issues, in order to facilitate collaboration.
- Focusing our survey questions on a few of the high-priority issues religious leaders identified at the Summit, to avoid overwhelming respondents with too many questions.
- Trying to measure community connection/division, including by asking questions about closeness to one's own religious community, to one's neighborhood, to the Little Rock community, and so on.

Additional Feedback

- We received multiple comments about the diversity of the gathering—across religious, racial, gender, and geographic lines—and about the difficulty of bringing together such a group in Little Rock. We hope that similar gatherings will be possible in the future.
- Attendees appreciated the opportunity for in-person communication with diverse faith leaders and would like to see more opportunities for dialogue.
- We received mixed feedback about the political leaders who spoke at the Summit. As the Little Rock Congregations Study is not well known, political figures can lend legitimacy and signal the importance of collaboration despite differences. However, sometimes the messages delivered by political leaders can be received differently by diverse audiences. Given our goals, we will think carefully about whether the political components of collaboration might be better discussed in other forums.
- We are very grateful to the many religious leaders who reached out with messages of support and appreciation for the Summit.
- We are also grateful to the many people who contributed to making the Summit possible, especially the students!



Have something to add?
We are happy to hear more feedback!
Email Dr. Rebecca Glazier
raglazier@ualr.edu



Project Website: <https://research.ualr.edu/lrcs>
Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/LittleRockCongregationsStudy/>

