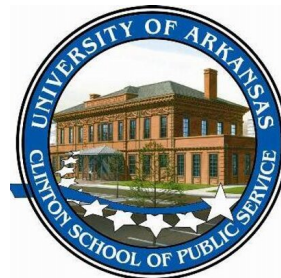

2021 Little Rock Congregations Study Facilitated Dialogue Series

Prepared for public distribution to the
Little Rock Community by
Students of The Clinton School of Public Service
and
Faculty of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock





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About the Little Rock Congregations Study


The Little Rock Congregations Study (LRCS) is a community-based research project that engages students in learning about the impact of faith-based community engagement. The long-term project, housed at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, has three main goals:



Learn more about the impacts of local faith-based community engagement



Get students out of the classroom and into the community



Provide relevant and meaningful findings to the community

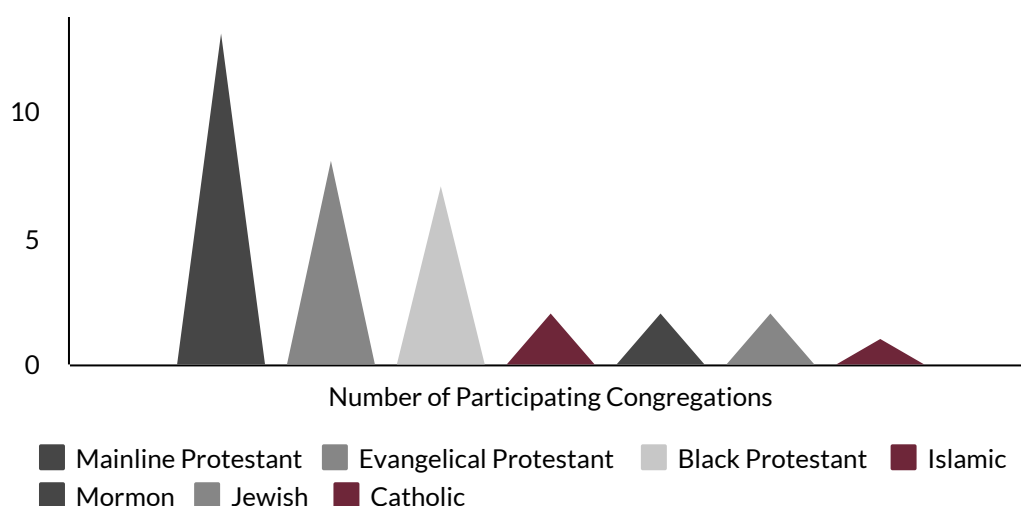


The Little Rock Congregations Study is led by Dr. Rebecca Glazier in the School of Public Affairs, together with an interdisciplinary research team at UA Little Rock, including Dr. Gerald Driskill in Applied Communication and Dr. Kirk Leach, an expert on nonprofits. The research team includes both graduate and undergraduate students--since the study began in 2012, over 180 students have been involved.

When we surveyed congregation members in 2012 and 2016, we distributed paper surveys by hand at the worship services of participating congregations. In October 2020, however, we worked with congregation leaders to distributed electronic survey links to members. This made it possible to reach many more participants and to keep everyone safe during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a longitudinal research project, we plan to repeat our survey of congregation members again in four years.

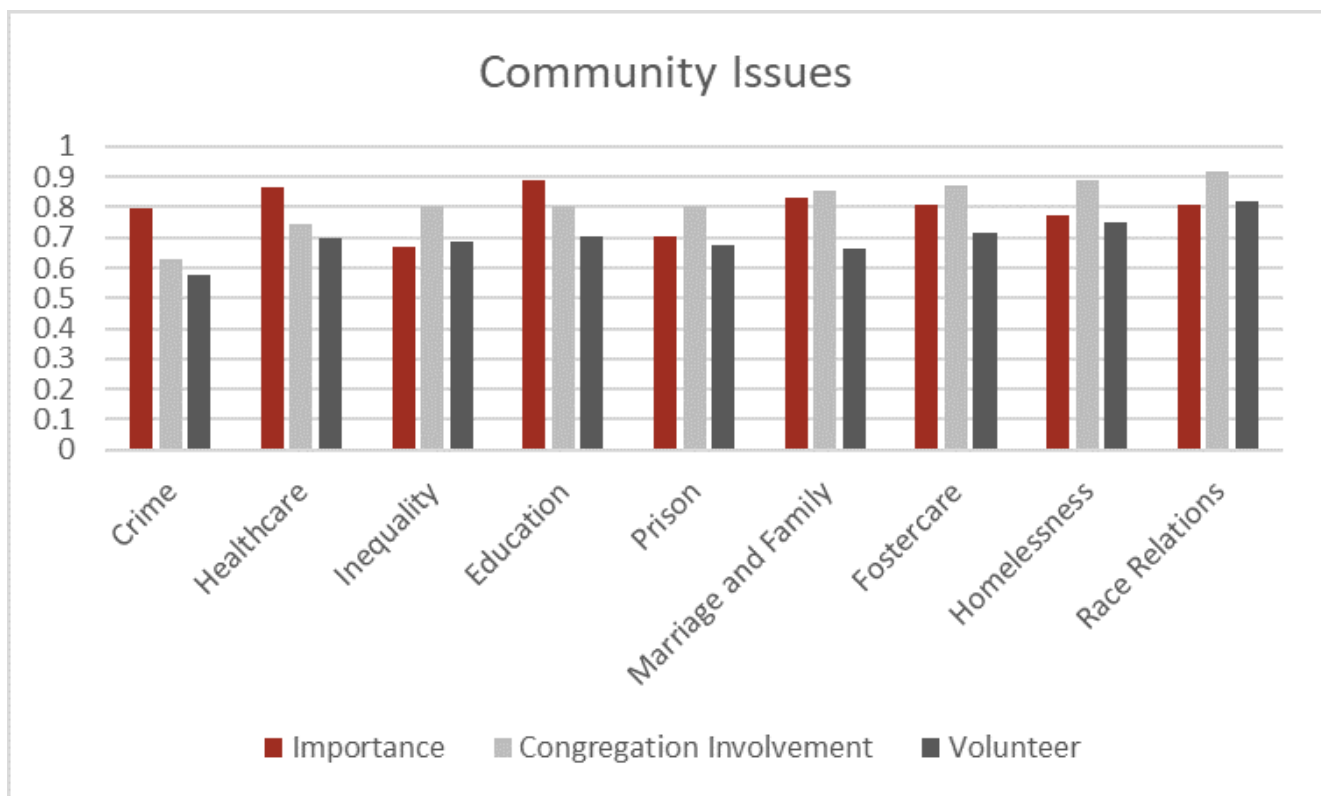
As a part of the 2020 LRCS, we interviewed 37 congregation leaders and 35 ultimately participated in the congregation survey portion of the project. A total of 2,293 people across these 35 congregations responded to the survey.

Number of Participating Congregations by Religious Tradition



Community Issues

We asked the members at these 35 congregations about nine issues and for each one, they rated its importance, whether they wanted their congregation to be involved in helping to solve the issue, and, if so, whether they personally would be willing to volunteer for the effort.



The most important issues to the people in our sample are Healthcare and Education. Additionally, the issue of Marriage and Family is unique in that it scores highly on both importance and congregation involvement.

The 2021 Facilitated Dialogue Series

In partnership with students from the Clinton School of Public Service, the Little Rock Congregations Study held a series of facilitated dialogues in February 2021. In these dialogues, non-profit representatives as well as clergy and congregants were invited to participate in conversations about the most important issues from the October 2020 survey.

Education

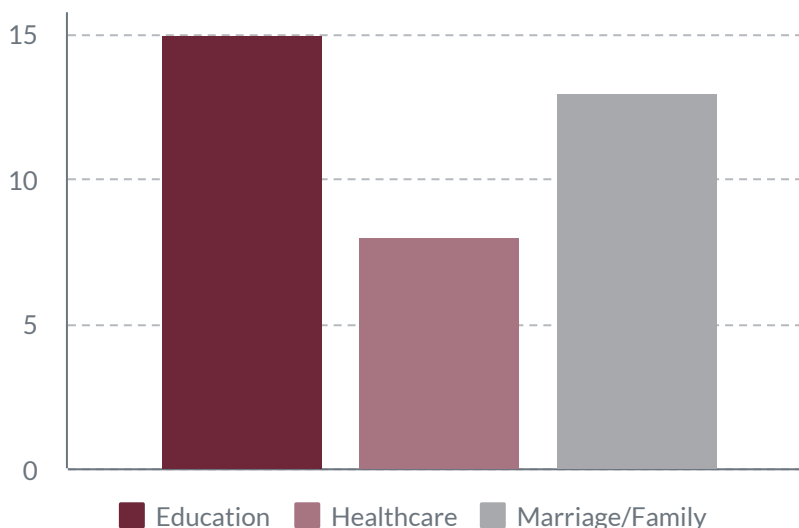
Healthcare

Marriage & Family

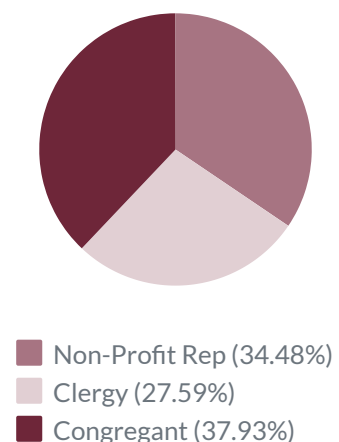
Within these dialogues, participants were asked to address the barriers which keep congregations, as well as congregations and non-profit organizations, from working with one another on these community issues. Based on the data analyzed from the Little Rock Congregation Study's clergy interviews in 2020, common themes to address in the dialogues were race relations, theological and political differences, time, and territoriality. Though these themes were mentioned within the dialogue's layout, each group of participants in the online breakout rooms were able to address these themes and overall issues however they chose. After addressing these barriers to collaboration, participants brainstormed solutions on how to best forge meaningful partnerships within the realms of education, healthcare, and marriage/family. In total, the dialogues hosted over 30 participants, with some participants attending multiple sessions and representing non-profit organizations and congregations across the Little Rock area.

Attendance

Attendance for Each Dialogue



Participants



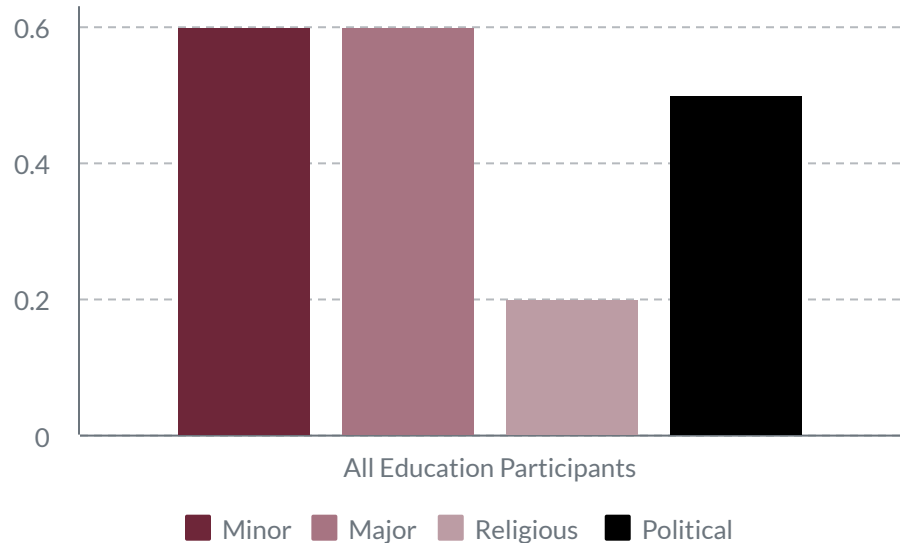
Out of participants who completed our pre-/post-surveys, there were 10 non-profit representatives, 8 clergy members, and 11 congregants.

Education

The education dialogue hosted representatives from multiple non-profit organizations and congregations within the Little Rock region. This conversation on education encompassed the history of Little Rock's education system as well as its current state, and participants emphasized the impact that race relations and segregation have continued to have on the education system. Participants discussed numerous limitations to one's education such as racial inequity, poverty, and school funding; barriers to collaboration also included race relations, time, and lack of economic resources.

During the education dialogue, participants completed both a pre-/post-survey on collaboration for community issues. Following the education dialogue, participants reported a positive change in their willingness to collaborate with others. In categories such as minor, major, religious, and political differences, findings show that participants showed positive change at all levels.

Change in Willingness to Collaborate When Encountering Differences



Would you be willing to collaborate with someone with whom you shared any of the following differences?

Participants brainstormed a wide range of ideas for creating collaboration during this conversation, including:



engaging with different congregations in volunteering



volunteering in mentor programs for local students

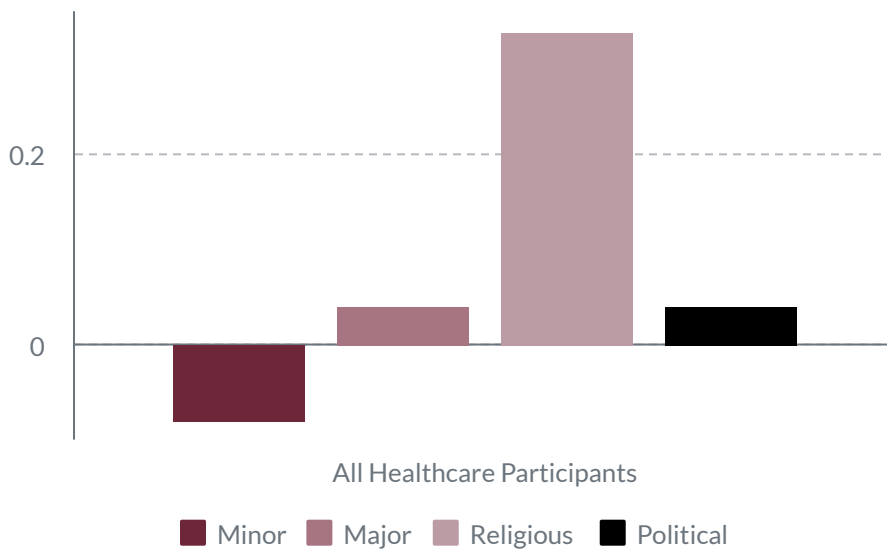


partnering as a congregation with a local school

Healthcare

The healthcare dialogue included participants from various local healthcare and non-profit organizations as well as local congregations. On a cold and snowy evening, participants discussed issues impacting healthcare in Little Rock, including equity and access to healthcare, rising costs, and differing priorities. One focus of the discussion included racial disparities in healthcare issues and access to healthcare. Participants were interested in finding ways to connect with organizations and congregations outside of their usual circles to learn about initiatives taking place across the city.

Change in Willingness to Collaborate When Encountering Differences



Would you be willing to collaborate with someone with whom you shared any of the following differences?

From our pre- to post- survey, most participants indicated that the dialogue helped them become more willing to collaborate when encountering major, religious, or political differences. Participants discussed some barriers to collaboration, particularly in logistics or prioritization of interest areas.

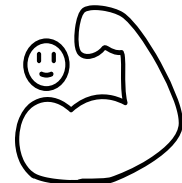
Participants brainstormed a wide range of ideas for creating collaboration during this conversation, including:



collaborating to arrange health screening and vaccine clinics



building conscious connections across community groups



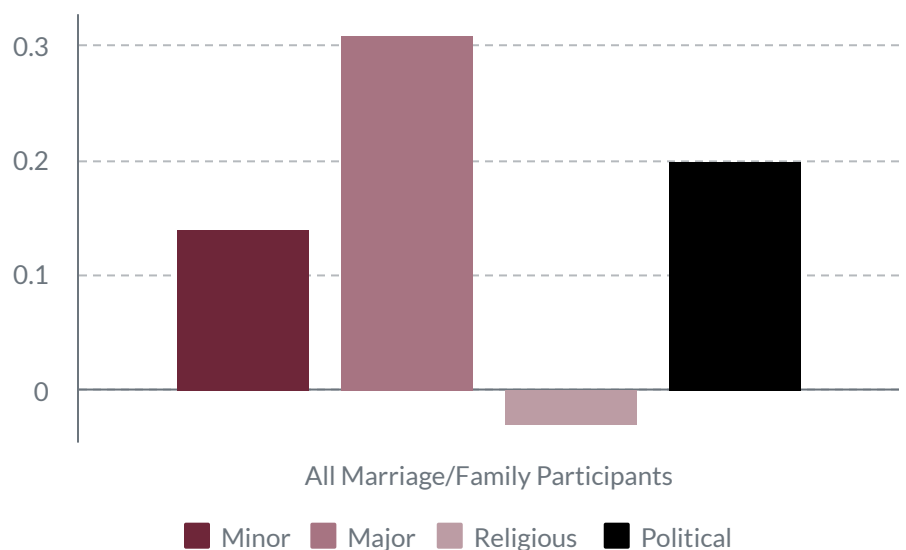
prioritizing empowerment and education around health issues and rights

Marriage & Family

Our Marriage and Family dialogue included enthusiastic participants from across the city! Clergy, congregants, and nonprofit leaders discussed some of the most pressing issues facing families in Little Rock. Participants from a wide variety of backgrounds found common ground in the stressors that marriages and families encounter and how to provide empathy and support to families in times of need. When families have a strong support system, they are able to persevere through challenges, which benefits family members and their community.

Participants from a variety of backgrounds found that the dialogues helped build a willingness to collaborate on issues facing marriage and families. Nonprofit representatives and congregants were more likely to be willing to collaborate across major and minor differences as well as political differences after having conversations with other dialogue participants.

Change in Willingness to Collaborate When Encountering Differences



Would you be willing to collaborate with someone with whom you shared any of the following differences?

Participants brainstormed a wide range of ideas for creating collaboration during this conversation, including:



mentor programs for families and couples



support for children in foster care and their families

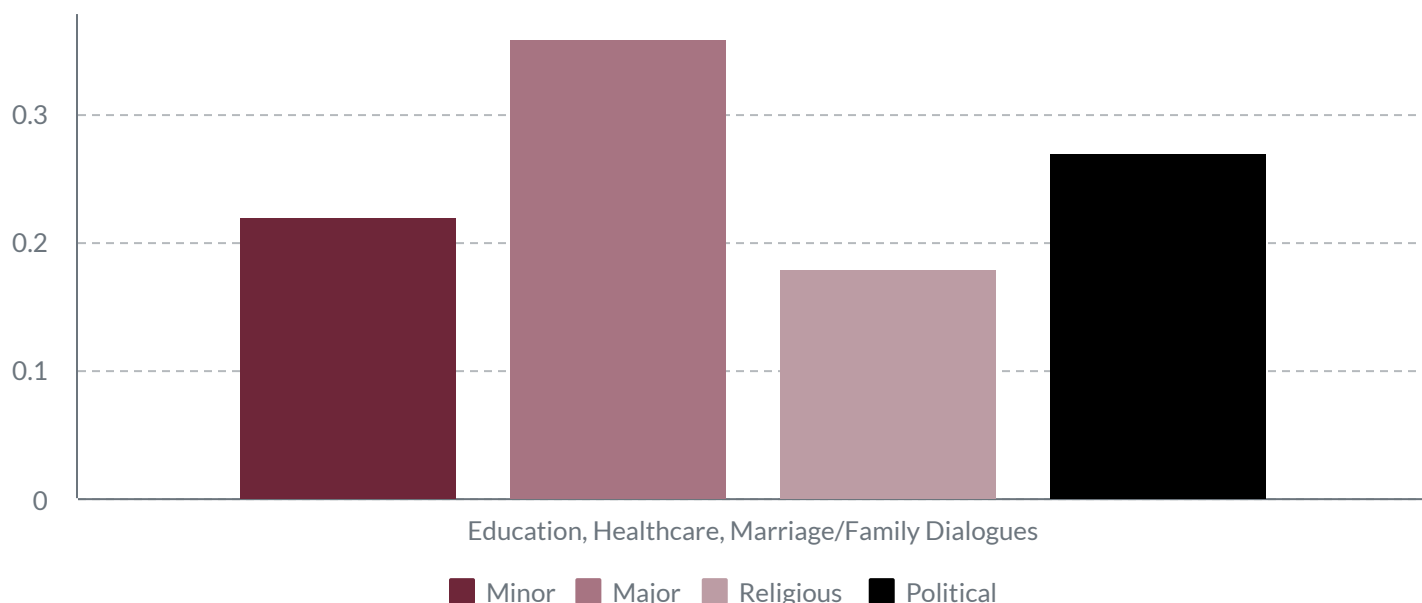


outreach to identify and address issues facing families

Results of the Facilitated Dialogues

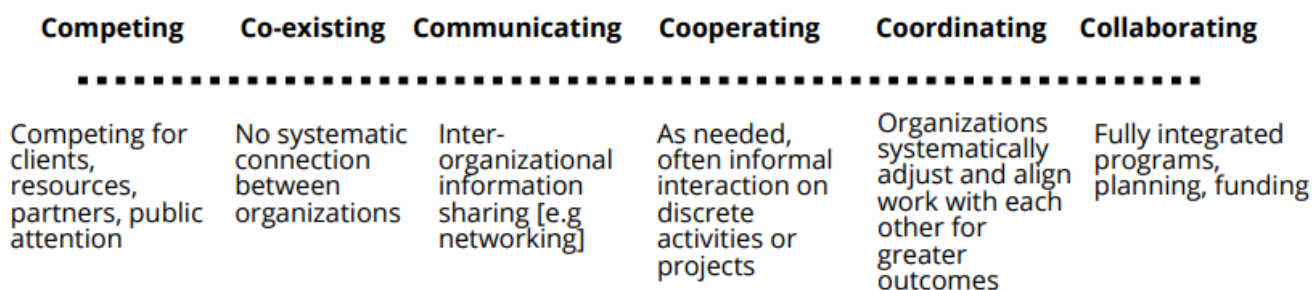
Following all three events, our research team conducted data analysis to study the effects of the facilitated dialogues as a whole. With 28 pre-survey responses and 24 post-survey responses, the results of participants across all three dialogues are shown below.

Change in Willingness to Collaborate



Overall, participants became more willing to collaborate as result of the dialogues. Across dialogues, data showed that most participants became more willing to collaborate across differences, including religious and political differences. Additionally, when asked to rank themselves on the collaboration spectrum below, the majority of participants moved to higher levels of collaboration as a result of the dialogues. Out of the 24 participants who took the post-survey, **all** 24 said they would participate in another event like the facilitated dialogues.

The Collaboration Spectrum



Next Steps

It is clear from the Little Rock Congregations Survey as well as our dialogue series that congregants across Little Rock are passionate about the issues of education, healthcare, and marriage and family! In our dialogues, we found that many congregations haven't begun collaborations because they are not sure where to start. Participants often mentioned that it is challenging to connect with new people or organizations outside of their usual social circles, and the pandemic has made connecting with others even more difficult. We have identified some organizations in Little Rock who are eager to collaborate over these issues, and we encourage you to reach out directly to connect!



CityChurch Network

www.citychurchar.org

Encompasses a variety of Little Rock initiatives from key interest areas, including the Antioch Institute, The CALL, Race Under Grace, Vital Families in Schools, and Central Arkansas Marriage Initiative



Arkansas FAITH Network

www.arfaithnetwork.org

Focused on improving the health of underserved communities

We encourage congregations to reach out to each other as well! Congregations across Little Rock are excited to work on these issues, and making connections is the first step. If you would like copies of our facilitation guides, conversation starters, and scripts, please reach out!

Research Team

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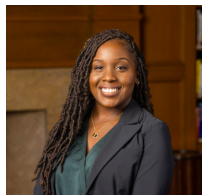
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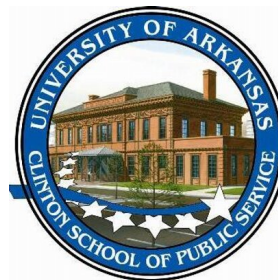
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