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Edward J. Gumz

Loyola University Chicago, egumz@luc.edu

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A Delicate Dance: Identity Issues in a Religious Nonprofit Umbrella Organization

Edward J. Gumz

ABSTRACT

Religious nonprofit social service and health organizations provide care to a large number of people in American communities. To enhance the services that these organizations provide, religious denominations have formed national nonprofit umbrella organizations. Little has been written about these umbrella organizations, their identity, and their functions. Using archival sources and interviews, this article explores the history and development of Lutheran Services in America (LSA), a large, Protestant, national nonprofit umbrella organization. Elements of this organization's identity are examined—its ongoing efforts to affirm its religious values and goals, its efforts to meet economic needs, and its serving as a forum in which differing views of social services in the church can be discussed. The multiple identities of LSA are explored, and the implications for religious nonprofit umbrella organizations are discussed.

A key to understanding any organization is its identity or how people within the organization perceive it. Whetten and Godfrey (1998) provided the following operational definition of organizational identity: “We propose defining an organization's identity as an idiosyncratic configuration of people sharing some attributes, pursuing a collective purpose through a given activity (core business/work), and using a limited number of operating principles” (p. 4). Albert and Whetten (1985), in a seminal paper, defined organizational identity as that which is central, distinctive, and enduring about an organization. An adequate statement of organizational identity encompasses the following factors: (1) There are features of an organization that are central to its character (e.g., its mission to help abused children). (2) There are features of an organization that distinguish it from other organizations (e.g., its religious affiliation). (3) There is a temporal dimension to identity within an organization. The question of identity is especially important at various times in its life cycle: the formation of the organization, the

loss of an identity-sustaining element (e.g., a charismatic leader), the accomplishment of the organization's purpose (e.g., the change of focus for the March of Dimes when a polio vaccine was developed), extremely rapid growth, a change in collective status (e.g., the threat of a hostile takeover), and retrenchment.

The presence of multiple identities in organizations can occur when organizations are charged with roles they don't want. For example, a small, rural department of human services may be charged to perform various functions from food stamp administration to counseling, or an organization may be changing its identity from that of a social service organization to that of a national advocacy organization. Young (2001) asserted that the management of multiple identities in an organization is a special challenge because of the need to work with different constituencies and different expectations. However, nonprofit organizations have latitude in negotiating multiple identities because nonprofits are “strictly bound neither

by market competition nor by political mandates that leaves some latitude for self-definition” (p. 290).

Stone and DeWaard (1998) studied how multiple identities in a Lutheran social service organization in Minnesota, the Lutheran Welfare Society (LWS), strengthened the agency from 1905 to 1962:

By the 1930s, it was granted membership in the Child Welfare League of America, a major, national credentialing agency. These affiliations were driven by LWS’s social service identity. Its evangelical and social movement identities, however, also helped LWS attain legitimacy within Lutheran associations (such as the National Lutheran Council) and Lutheran welfare circles (such as National Inner Mission Society and National Lutheran Welfare) as it became not only a member of key Lutheran associations but also became a pioneer of Lutheran welfare services. (p. 35)

Viewing these developments, Selznick (1957) indicated that LWS became “infused with value” not just from the professional social work environment but from its religious roots as well. Multiple identity organizations may express more internal conflict but may also be better able to adapt to complex and turbulent environments. Young (2001) asserted that “the literature is ambiguous about whether multiple identities must be fully resolved, and if so, how best to go about doing so” (p. 302).

In his study of nonprofit umbrella associations, Young (2001) noted that among the associations that he studied, an association may take on the following identities: (1) A goal-seeking system with the goal of fostering a unified social service system to, for example, improve the lives of children; (2) the association and its constituent members banding together to have their economic needs met more efficiently, through, for example, specialized technologies and public relations; (3) member organizations with diverse philosophies or approaches using the umbrella organization, through debate and discussion, to resolve polity issues. For example, conservative and liberal member groups may use the umbrella association to discuss differing views on social welfare and how this shapes the ability of these groups to work together to effect change.

The Study

In the current study of LSA, the organization was examined in relation to key organizational elements such as goals, economy or networking, and polity. Lutheran Services in America’s goals are also strongly influenced by its linkages to the Lutheran church.

Archival data were used to examine the founding and development of LSA in addition to interviews with current and past board members and key administrators within LSA. Coding of archival and interview data was

done; organizational goals, economic or networking factors, and polity or governance issues were indicated. These elements follow Young’s (2001) framework of examining multiple identities for nonprofit umbrella associations. As themes in these three categories emerge repeatedly, examples are reported. Historical data found in board and committee minutes, memoranda, and reports in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) archives were reviewed and reported as the context for shaping social welfare in the Lutheran church.

Religious Nonprofit Umbrella Organizations

With some notable exceptions, little has been written about nonprofit umbrella organizations and identity issues in these organizations. Hudson and Bielefeld (1997) wrote about the structures of multinational nonprofit organizations; Glaser (1994) analyzed the United Way scandal; and Brilliant’s (1990) case study of the United Way suggested two possible identities for nonprofit umbrella associations—as goal-seeking systems or as economies. These works dealt with secular organizations, not religious nonprofit organizations, about which even less is known. Outside of several histories (e.g., Catholic Charities and the Salvation Army), little exists in the social science literature about religious nonprofit organizations.

Young (2001) wrote the most extensively about nonprofit umbrella associations—nonprofit associations whose members themselves are nonprofit associations. In the United States, an estimated one fifth of all nonprofit organizations belong to a national umbrella association, and four fifths of these are incorporated separately from the national organization. While there is no accurate count of umbrella organizations per se, it is likely that many of the approximately 8,000 U.S.-based charitable organizations whose services are national in scope and the more than 15,000 such organizations whose services are multinational are constituted as umbrella associations.

Both national and international umbrella organizations use a variety of structures, ranging from loose associations and alliances to corporate hierarchies and partnerships. This suggests that umbrella organizations have flexibility in designing their organizational structure and thus are able to be responsive to a changing environment. Young (2001), in his study of national nonprofit umbrella associations, found that these organizations grapple with several aspects of identity such as goal-seeking systems, economies, and polities. In studying Girls Incorporated (GI), an organization designed to assist local affiliates improve programming and advocacy for girls, he found that two aspects of identity were prominent: fostering economic goals that supported the efforts of local girls clubs and the identity of GI as a goal-seeking system, striving in a unified fashion to help girls become

more successful in modern society. In studying CIVICUS, “an international alliance dedicated to strengthening citizen action and civil society throughout the world,” Young (2001) found that “CIVICUS is an association that serves as a forum for people in different parts of the world to exchange views and agree upon mutual interests on a continuing basis. This is best accommodated by CIVICUS understanding itself as a polity” (p. 302).

Historical Background of Lutheranism in America

Sociologist Arthur Stinchcombe, in his work *Social Structure and Organizations* (1967), stated, “Organizational structures persist over time—and may change to match the context of time and their funding—but the initial context imprints the organization and organizational form” (p. 437). In the case of LSA, it is difficult to understand this religious nonprofit umbrella organization without an examination of Lutheranism in America and its approaches to social welfare.

Lutheran church bodies trace their distinctive interpretation of the Christian faith to Martin Luther, the 16th-century German reformer. Lutheranism, with the Anglican and Calvinist communions, make up one of the three major branches of Protestantism. The doctrine that Luther elucidated for the church was that of justification. Lutherans believe that because of the saving activity of God in Jesus Christ, namely his death and resurrection, people are justified or “made right with God.” Humankind had lost the image of God and had become sinful, not loving God or neighbor as the Ten Commandments prescribed. Lutherans believe that as a result of God’s intervention in history through Jesus Christ, people are saved to love God and other human beings and thus able to lead a life of spiritual fulfillment. The doctrine of justification by grace through faith in Jesus Christ is the core Lutheran belief, even though there are differences in practice among various Lutheran groups (Bodensieck, 1990). There are about 66 million Lutherans in the world today, and of that number there are about 8 million in the United States (Lutheran Services in America Board, 2000).

The largest Lutheran immigration to the United States took place in the 19th century with immigrants coming primarily from Germany and Scandinavia. Given the harshness of life for immigrants in 19th-century America and the Lutheran belief in loving and helping one’s neighbor, social welfare activities arose. These activities in the conservative Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) from 1847 to 1997 were discussed by Svebakken and Bacon (1997), as well as Lueking’s (1968) *A Century of Caring*, which documented social ministry activities among Missouri Synod Lutherans from 1868 to 1968. Lueking indicated that in the LCMS, the synod, or the

national church, saw its work primarily as that of proclaiming the Gospel; its task was envisioned as a work for the souls of people. The ministry to the sick, homeless, and aged played a secondary role to that of preaching the Gospel. The advantage of this approach was the placing of initiative at the local or congregational level. As a result, Lutherans developed many orphanages, hospitals, and homes for the aged in communities. The disadvantage of this approach was in the overall lack of large-scale planning at the national level to study needs and create solutions. In the LCMS, the Department of Social Welfare at the synodical level to coordinate all social welfare activities was not established until 1950 (Svebakken & Bacon, 1997). In the Lutheran Church in America (LCA), one of the constituent church bodies of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), it was not until 1968, in a statement titled “The Church in Social Welfare: An Exploratory Study of the Role of the LCA in Social Welfare,” that social ministry was proclaimed as an integral part of the nature and witness of the church (Black, 1996).

Sydney E. Ahlstrom (1972), in his classic work on religion in America, states that Lutheran institutional history in the 19th and 20th centuries was extremely complex due to the linguistic differences, geographic differences, and varying degrees of Americanization among German and Scandinavian immigrants. Due to schisms developed by the mid-19th century between various groups within the LCMS and other Lutheran churches that were developing a broader American religious platform, at one time 66 independent Lutheran churches were operating in the United States, but by 1962 “ninety-five per cent of the once widely scattered Lutheran family had been brought within three rooms—connected by many doors and corridors, and well-covered by a common confessional roof” (Ahlstrom, 1972, p. 762). Currently there are three major Lutheran synods in America—the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA); the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS), and the ultraconservative Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). Because of doctrinal and practice differences, each congregation chooses with which synod it wishes to affiliate.

Several lessons from Lutheran social welfare efforts of the past may have relevance for future cooperative efforts. Lueking (1968) wrote about why cooperative Lutheran efforts in social welfare were difficult:

The first [reason] is the strong Missouri Synod (LCMS) emphasis upon full doctrinal agreement as the prerequisite for joint worship and work. While all Lutheran groups in America shared a common concern for theological integrity in matters of church union, the Missouri Synod (LCMS) developed a peculiarly rigid position on any inter-Lutheran contact largely as a result of the devastating theological controversy on the doctrine of predestination which began in the 1870’s and

carried over into the twentieth century. Missouri Synod (LCMS) pioneers in the welfare ministry had little or nothing to do with the shaping of that—the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LCMS) position—it is well to note. But the pioneers had limited time or energy to change the synodical mind on issues of isolation from other Lutherans that had become deeply ingrained in the life of the clergy and laity. (p. 59)

Current issues that divide the LCMS and the ELCA are the ELCA's fellowship with the Episcopal Church, and consideration of the ordination of women and gay and lesbian persons as clergy.

Differences regarding doctrine and practice between conservative and moderate Lutheran groups, as well as cultural and ethnic factors, also impeded the development of pan-Lutheran efforts in the field of social welfare. It was not until 1967 that the Associated Lutheran Charities and the National Lutheran Social Welfare Conference became the Lutheran Social Welfare Conference of America. In 1977, LS3 (Lutheran Social Service System) was formed; this consisted of social service agencies of the ALC (American Lutheran Church), LCA, and LCMS.

Martin Marty, the eminent Lutheran theologian and historian, has written about the topic of social services and religion. In his 1981 presentation, he gave an insightful view of Lutheran social ministry and social services that in many ways typifies a Lutheran approach to social welfare. "Soft social ministry includes works of mercy and care such as running hospitals and resettling refugees" (Marty, 1981, p. 12). In general, these endeavors "do not or intend to upset structures of the existing world." Marty indicated Lutherans are "less adept" at "hard ministry," which he described as challenging various institutions and structures that may cause or perpetuate injustice or suffering. He noted that Christians often disagree about social ministry approaches, but the challenge is for a variety of strategies; the Church dare not be "stuck in the 60s, whether the 1860s in terms of institutional forms or the 1960s in terms of tactics."

Historically, three factors appear to shape Lutheran social welfare. One, doctrinal issues separate conservative and moderate Lutherans, and from time to time interfere with cooperative efforts in social welfare. Two, until recently, efforts to further social welfare on a national level have often been slow in developing because of doctrinal differences that impeded cooperative efforts. The founding of LSA in 1997 marked the establishment of a large national organization composed of both conservative and moderate Lutheran church bodies. In contrast, Catholic Charities USA, another large religious nonprofit umbrella association (but with greater doctrinal agreement), was founded much earlier, in 1910, as the National Conference of Catholic Charities (www.catholiccharitiesusa.org).

Three, Lutheran social welfare efforts do not tend to challenge existing social and political institutions, but rather focus on alleviating the suffering that injustice in these institutions causes and also on changing unjust public policies.

Lutheran Services in America

History

Lutheran Services in America (LSA) was founded in 1997 and built on the work of the Lutheran Social Services System. Headquartered in Baltimore, MD, LSA is a national 501(c)(3) charitable umbrella organization, and has a board of directors of 18, a staff of 14, and a president/CEO. According to one of the Blue Ribbon Panel members of the Division of Church and Society of the ELCA that was charged with the creation of an organization to relate to affiliated agencies, the proposed umbrella agency was supposed to engage in collaboration with state public policy offices; social-ministry-related committees in synods, congregations, and regions; and networks of individuals committed to specific social causes (Division in Church and Society of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, 1995). The director of the Division of Church and Society of the ELCA at the time felt there was a need for a new structure that both the ELCA and LCMS could relate to, and the church would relate to this new agency through representatives on the governing board of LSA. The counterpart of the ELCA's Church and Society, the LCMS Board for Human Care Ministries also met to consider the creation of LSA. Eventually, the Churchwide Assembly of the ELCA approved the creation of LSA in 1997. In an interview with the chairperson of the Board for Human Care Ministries, Gene Svebakken recounted how in 1997 he presented the proposal for the creation of LSA to the Board of Directors of the LCMS. The first vice president of the LCMS at one point in the presentation indicated that social ministry is one of the unrecognized gems of the church and that the proposal should be approved. At this point, everyone in the room seemed to begin to talk about the importance of social ministry and in favor of the LSA proposal. This official of the LCMS, Robert Kuhn, had adopted children through an LCMS social service agency, and perhaps that was a factor in his recommending that the proposal be approved; the proposal was approved in 1997 by the LCMS. The chairperson of the Board for Human Care Ministries also remarked that the LSA proposal was approved at a time when generally the LCMS was reluctant to enter into cooperative endeavors with the ELCA, making the approval all the more noteworthy.

Goals

Lutheran Services of America is an alliance of the ELCA, the LCMS, and their related social ministry organizations whose goal is to provide quality services to their clients. "LSA's more than 300 health and human service organi-

zations provide care in thousands of communities in the United States and the Caribbean. In 2004, these organizations served more than 6 million unduplicated clients, meaning that they served one in 50 people in the service territory. The operating budgets of member organizations exceed \$8 billion” (*LSA Management Report*, 2004). In its 10-year history, the goals of LSA as reviewed in board minutes and publications have remained remarkably the same. For example, an *LSA Focus Plan Summary* that was approved by the board in November 2000 lists the following goals:

- (1) Promote the central importance of theological roots in Lutheran social ministry. Strategies: develop readily usable resources for a variety of audiences and market the portfolio of materials aggressively (e.g., develop one audio tape entitled “What It Means to Be Lutheran” for staff, etc., to use; produce the 2001 Annual Conference on the theme of Social Ministry Organization (SMO)/Congregation partnerships).
- (2) Connect SMOs to leverage their strength. Strategies: develop a system to gather, process, and distribute information and resources (e.g., develop a regular electronic newsletter that supports information exchange among members).
- (3) Influence public policy on behalf of social ministry organizations and those whom they serve. Strategies: actively work directly with congressional offices and administrative officials on LSA priority issues; research SMO public policy efforts on the state level.
- (4) Contribute to the development of social ministry leaders skilled in both mission effectiveness and business practices. Strategies: inventory resources currently in use by members and capture in a database; identify and assess opportunities to carve a niche for LSA in the leadership development arena. (*LSA Focus Plan Summary*, 2000)

Albert and Whetten (1985) used the metaphors of business and the church to understand the modern research university. In the case of LSA, it is impossible to understand its work without being aware of its connection to the Lutheran church. LSA sees itself as an element of the church, and its mission is rooted in believers’ conviction that as a result of their redemption, they are to love and help their fellow human beings. This core Lutheran belief becomes operationalized in a variety of ways in LSA. Devotions are held at each board meeting of LSA to give a religious perspective to the work of the organization. In addition, early in its history, LSA contracted with a Lutheran theologian to be present at board meetings to assist in leading discussions about the relationship between Lutheran theology and social ministry. For example, at a board meeting in 2002, a theologian raised the following question for discussion: “How does the board of LSA govern itself, remaining true to the proper

role of reason/wisdom in civil life on the one hand, and to the recognition of our identity as Christians focused on the wisdom of God (Christ crucified) on the other hand?” (Board of Directors, LSA, 2003 October). In addition, the first president of LSA, Nelson Meyer, stated, “Our single unique characteristic at LSA is our Lutheran identity” (*LSA Management Report*, 2001).

In addition, LSA published several booklets for use by its affiliates that emphasize Lutheran identity in social ministry. *Joined at the Heart: What It Means to Be Lutheran in Social Ministry*, a book written by a theologian (Childs, 2000) familiar with social ministry issues, contains both a narrative and parts where study questions about the material can be answered. Chapters include the following: “The Anatomy of Lutheran Identity”; “Being Lutheran in Social Ministry is to be Shaped by Distinctive Lutheran Theological and Ethical Themes and Convictions”; “Being Lutheran in Social Ministry is to be part of the Church’s Witness in the World.” The booklet *Focus on Mission: Reflections and Meditations on Mission in Lutheran Social Ministry* (Childs, 2003) is intended for use by the administration and staff of social ministry organizations and brings a Lutheran perspective to the work of social service agencies. Some topics include the following: “Solidarity: The Continuing Crisis of Human Need”; “Community: Loving Means Including”; “Vocation: It’s More Than a Job.”

Early in the history of LSA, in 1998, there was an organizational initiative to “nurture Lutheran identity”—with the goal being that all staff members and board members of LSA would have a clear grasp of the distinguishing features of Lutheran social ministry organizations. The board was given material that stated, “In reality, the majority of the 85,000+ employees of Lutheran SMOs are not members of Lutheran congregations. There is need for an intentional effort to help all staff of Lutheran SMOs understand their work as ministry” (*LSA Management Report*, 2001, p. 3). A training video was produced, *Why We Do What We Do: Understanding Service as Ministry* (1998), with specific guidelines for its use and implementation. The outcome measures included that a minimum of 25 social ministry organizations would use the material by July 1, 1998, with feedback/evaluation forms summarized; that there would be an increased understanding of the work of a social ministry organization within a Lutheran context; and that by July 1, 1999, one half of LSA organizations would accomplish goals through the use of the material.

Another goal of LSA is to develop leaders among its constituent agencies. LSA wants its agencies “to have senior staff leaders who are skilled at both business and clinical services and also the church/faith connections essential to fulfillment of missions” (Board of Directors, LSA, 2003). The board of LSA also wants its CEO to be of the Lutheran faith. The goal of attracting Lutherans who understand Lutheran identity in the social services to

serve as leaders in LSA and its affiliated agencies is important in the articulation of values of LSA. However, the goal of training Lutherans to become leaders in Lutheran-affiliated social services is also important, as Lutherans are faced with an overall decline in their national membership. Lutherans, as one part of mainline Protestant denominations, have experienced a decline in church membership; for example, in the last 5 years there has been a 1.2% membership decline in the ELCA and LCMS (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America News, 2005).

Economy and Networking

Members of the LSA umbrella association band together to have their economic needs met more efficiently than they would in the open marketplace. According to Young (2001), this is the view of an umbrella organization as a trade association; LSA certainly performs this function but has also become a powerful economic actor in the world of nonprofits. For example, according to *The Nonprofit Times* (<http://www.wfn.org/2001/11/msg00010.html>), in 2000 and 2001, LSA was the largest nonprofit national network of hospital, social service, and long-term care programs, providing close to \$7 billion in services for each of those years. After 2001, LSA no longer ranked number one since more than 90% of its funding was provided by government, and it no longer met *The Nonprofit Times* criteria that at least 10% of its funds come from private sources. This economic stature is made possible, at least in part, by the extensive networks that LSA maintains with its affiliates; the support and consultation that LSA makes available to those affiliates; and strong connections with government, making governmental funding possible. Examples of networking are affinity networks such as the Council for Human Resource Management (CHRM), which connects human resource managers within the LSA system; the Council of Program Executives (COPE), which serves executives responsible for multiple programs; and Lutheran Information Technology Network (LITN), which gathers IT leadership of agencies. There are service-line networks that serve LSA member agencies involved in a similar type of ministry such as LSA Disability Network (LSA-DN); and Lutheran Long Term Care Network (LSA/LTCN). There are also regional networks that are clusters of social ministry organizations that provide wide-ranging services within a specific geographic area, such as Coalition of Social Ministry Organizations of the South (COSMOS). Through the use of networking among LSA and its constituent agencies, there are opportunities for socialization among staff members, shared information to assist agencies with difficulties, and the development of preferred models of action. These networking formats are similar to those used by the United Way of America (UWA) (Brilliant, 1990).

In addition, LSA is a member of the Center for Faith-Based Leadership, an ecumenical consortium of religious nonprofit associations of health and human service providers. The mission of the center is to increase the capacity for effective, theologically grounded executive and governance leadership in Christian health and human service organizations. Through interactive workshops, leaders of social ministry organizations of these faith-based organizations are trained in a range of management strategies. Denominations represented are Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Mennonite, Brethren Caregivers, and United Church of Christ.

Through networking with other umbrella nonprofit associations (e.g., Alliance for Children and Families, Catholic Charities USA, Child Welfare League of America, and others), LSA has tried to influence federal legislation regarding social welfare issues. LSA, from its beginnings, has had a public policy staff advisory committee and has employed a full-time director of public policy.

Polity

Young (2001) used the term *polity* to refer to the form of governance of an organization; it refers to structures and practices for the distribution of power. Frequently, constituencies of the umbrella association as affiliated agencies and church bodies use the association as a forum to work out strategies and collaborations. Social ministry organizations are independent 501(c)(3) organizations, so LSA or any other umbrella association has little direct control.

LSA is an alliance between conservative (LCMS) and moderate (ELCA) church bodies. In the case of the LCMS, LSA is linked to LCMS by the Board for Human Care Ministries, and in the case of the ELCA, the linkage occurs through the Division for Church in Society; it is the board and the division that have ultimate authority in terms of approving decisions made by LSA.

LSA is governed by an 18-member board of directors that appoints a president/CEO of the organization, who in turn appoints a staff. Class A members of the board are CEOs from the 280 social service affiliates; there are nine Class A members. There are nine Class B members; six are appointed from the membership of the ELCA, and three are appointed from the numerically smaller LCMS. Voting rights are an important element in any organization, and this is also the case in the LSA, where the smaller LCMS used rules of voting to maintain its power. "In order to deal with the bylaws, policies, and budgets, a positive vote of 75% of Class B members is required. In this way, though the LCMS may have a smaller number of members, it cannot be simply out-voted" (Board of Directors, LCMS, 1996).

An area of contention between the two church bodies involved the relocation of the LSA headquarters.

Originally located in St. Paul, MN, when LSA was founded in 1997, a relocation committee of the board of directors of LSA recommended that the headquarters of LSA be moved to Baltimore because of its proximity to a major airport, the city positioning itself as a center for national nonprofit headquarters, and the media opportunity for LSA in nearby Washington, DC. “The relocation committee agreed that it would exclude Chicago [the national headquarters of the ELCA] and St. Louis [the national headquarters of the LCMS] from consideration to avoid any issues related to church body relationships” (Personal communication, LSA conference call, 2001).

Each of the 280 affiliates of LSA pays annual dues to finance the operations of LSA and hire staff. For example, a social service agency with an expense budget of \$7.5–10 million would pay about \$1,000 in dues to LSA, whereas a large agency or health facility with an expense budget of \$85–90 million would pay about \$10,000 in dues. In the early history of LSA, several agencies objected to the fees assessment, questioning the gains that the agency would obtain. The administration of LSA contacted the directors of these agencies, by phone but often in person, to thoroughly explain how these fees would be used—primarily to provide networking services and to support public policy advocacy at the national level. This is an example of how LSA worked collaboratively with its affiliates to achieve goals deemed vital for the umbrella association. Currently, there is no indication that affiliated agencies question the dues structure or gains from their membership.

However, a significant area of contention and debate involves the two church bodies and their ability to cooperate with each other to further the goals of LSA. The LCMS believes that it is the primary role of the church to preach the gospel; it is the role of individuals who believe the gospel to act to reduce such social problems as hunger, poverty, and racism. The church, in this view, speaks out against only certain social problems, such as apartheid, which the LCMS did in 1986. The LCMS also adopted in 1995 a resolution of support for Lutherans for Life, a pan-Lutheran organization with an educational ministry that promotes legal protection for the unborn; but generally the church makes few social statements about social issues. On the other hand, the ELCA, as a church body, has voiced strongly through the social statements of the church on a wide range of topics (e.g., poverty, minimum wage, and racism) that the church as an institution needs to play a more activist role in addressing social problems. These social statements of the ELCA are approved by the Churchwide Assembly, which is held biennially.

The impact of the different views of the church bodies is illustrated by a statement from a board member, “Perhaps LSA has gone as far as it can go since the definition of roles of social ministry in the two major Lutheran church bodies differ” (Board of Directors, LSA, 1999).

The President of the LCMS at an LSA board meeting indicated that “inter-Lutheran work with the ELCA will come under increasing tension within the LCMS and suggested the need to think through actions and alternatives in light of this.” (Board of Directors, LSA, 2002)

One of the CEOs of LSA succinctly summarized the problems confronting LSA. “The threats to LSA are the tension between the church bodies; possible member [LSA affiliate] apathy if organizations don’t experience value directly; and a lack of leadership which is both highly skilled professionally and committed to Lutheran connections.” (Board of Directors, LSA, 2000)

These indicators of tension between the ELCA and LCMS in LSA are typically not dealt with directly but are part of the “delicate dance,” as indicated by a CEO of LSA that representatives of both church bodies engage in; perhaps direct discussion of these concerns is too difficult, painful, and potentially disruptive to the organization. These differences are not mentioned in any LSA publication, but church body representatives, board members, and the CEO are well aware of them.

Discussion and Conclusion

Since its founding in 1997, LSA has become a powerful nonprofit umbrella association; according to *The Nonprofit Times*, a publication that ranks nonprofit associations, LSA was ranked number one for 3 years as the largest nonprofit national network of hospital, social service, and long-term care programs. However, achieving this kind of economic stature, while important, is not the chief goal of LSA. Promoting the central importance of the theological roots in Lutheran social ministry and having persons who help others in LSA affiliates articulate these goals in their work is seen as the primary goal of LSA.

LSA networking with affiliates to strengthen their ability to provide high-quality services is also important to the organization. LSA has shown a high degree of interest in networking with other nonprofit umbrella organizations to influence public policy, by promoting federal legislation favorable to specific social welfare concerns. In spite of differences between conservative and moderate Lutheran church bodies, their stands on public policy issues are unanimous.

In addition to goals and economy/networking as identity aspects of the organization, polity issues exist within the organization. These issues deal with power as they are manifested in collaborations, strategies, and disagreements. It is in this arena, in the current study, that the differences between the conservatives (LCMS), who have concerns about fellowship with the Episcopal Church, the ordination of women, and the possibility of ordination of gay and lesbian persons, and the moderates (ELCA) bubble beneath the surface of the work of social

ministry. Discussions between conservative and moderate Lutherans who are represented on the board of LSA are relatively infrequent, and are part of the delicate dance perhaps because of the fear that discussions about these differences will adversely affect the organization in a variety of ways. Also integral in balancing the multiple identities of LSA is the power of the CEO to shape the course of the organization. The first CEO of LSA placed heavy emphasis on the Lutheran identity of the organization, emphasizing the commonalities that conservatives and moderates possessed in terms of social ministry. The current CEO, while emphasizing the organization's Lutheran identity, is also placing greater emphasis on the organization's ability to fulfill a networking function. In this way, less controversial aspects of the organization's identity are fostered.

From this study, based on archival materials and interviews with administrators in LSA and board members of LSA, it is evident that these leaders understand the culture of Lutheranism well and have been able to avoid issues of controversy that may be detrimental to the work of LSA. So far, this strategy of working on issues that both church bodies can find agreement on has worked well in the first 10 years since LSA was formed. Whether this strategy will continue to be effective depends to a large extent on the direction that the broader church bodies of the LCMS and ELCA will take in the future. If either growing conservatism or voices calling for greater moderation prevails, LSA will experience more difficulty in maintaining the alliance with the LCMS and the ELCA, as these church bodies work to respond to the needs of people.

Additional study of other religious nonprofit umbrella organizations is needed to determine what role differing viewpoints such as conservatism and moderation play in the life of the organization and what strategies are used to deal with conflict and find areas for cooperation.

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Edward J. Gumz, PhD, is associate professor, Loyola University, Chicago. Correspondence regarding this article may be sent to egumz@luc.edu or Loyola University, School of Social Work, 820 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611.

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