

Black churches prove cool to federal grants: Tiny fraction receive monies to aid poor

News in the [October 17, 2006](#) issue

Only a tiny fraction of black churches have received money to help the poor as a result of the Bush administration's federal faith-based initiative, and most of those tend to be liberal in their theology and located in the Northeast.

These are among the findings of a first-of-its-kind survey of black churches by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a Washington think tank, released September 19.

The survey—conducted among 750 churches between November 2005 and January of this year—was designed to explore how black congregations view the much-discussed effort to make it easier for religious organizations to receive public monies for providing social services, as well as how many and what kind of churches are participating.

The results would seem to tamp down claims for the program's great reach in the black community, while also allaying critics' fears that the program would lure influential black pastors into the Republican fold.

In one of the most startling findings, the report notes that the black clergy most critical of the Bush administration initiative were the most likely to seek and receive funding. "It throws cold water on some hot embers of concern," said Robert Franklin, a professor of social ethics at Emory University in Atlanta, who served on the report's advisory committee.

Those "hot embers," Franklin said, include fears not just that the initiative would become a political slush fund, but that it would lead to an unseemly rush for funding that would breach church-state boundaries, that it was a ruse for reducing existing government responsibilities to the poor, and that it would inhibit black ministers

from speaking truth to potential funders.

Critics of the Bush administration's handling of the program, including former deputy director of the initiative David Kuo, have charged that funding overall has not materialized at the levels promised. *-Religion News Service*