

Opening Statement
Chairman Michael G. Oxley
Committee on Financial Services
Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity

**Strengthening America's Communities: Examining the Impact of Faith-Based
Housing Partnerships**
March 25, 2003

Today we are here to examine the Administration's proposed regulation to encourage the participation of faith-based organizations in certain Department of Housing and Urban Development programs. As part of President Bush's initiative to encourage government partnerships with faith-based and community groups, HUD issued a new rule on January 6 of this year. This rule is designed to assist faith-based organizations' ability to be responsive to the needs of their communities.

Religious organizations have long participated in federally funded social service programs, including HUD's housing community development initiatives. But the extent of their involvement and their ability to fulfill their faith-related mission could be affected by the terms of the regulations. The current regulations include requirements that groups provide assistance free from religious influence as well as limits on religion-based employment practices. Often times, faith-based organizations are forced to establish separate wholly secular entities to act as an intermediary with HUD.

We should do everything we can to make sure that our faith-based organizations have equal opportunities and access to the federal programs that will allow them to assist those that truly need our help.

When it comes to lessening the effects of poverty and addressing the needs of those that are suffering, some of the most creative and passionate volunteers are affiliated with faith-based organizations. It should come as no surprise that faith-based groups have the experience and knowledge to meet the social needs of their communities in a more compassionate manner than the federal government here in Washington. They know their communities, they know which families need assistance and they know what homes and services are available in their neighborhoods.

Our witnesses today are part of the compassionate army that is working hard to assist the poor, the sick and the homeless. We are anxious to hear how best to assist you in addressing those needs in your communities.

I want to extend a special welcome to Dr. Fairbanks, President of Mount Vernon Nazarene University in Mount Vernon, Ohio. We are pleased that you could join us today and look forward to your testimony.

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