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The role of community psychology in Christian community development

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Abstract

This project examines the connections between community psychology and faith-based community development. We investigate whether and how 4 major principles of community psychology—neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen participation—are found in the theory and philosophy of practice of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA), a national faith-based community development network. We employ content analysis of four official CCDA publications to identify whether and how these four principles are embedded in the organization's espoused principles of practice. Our findings are as follows: (a) All four principles are found within CCDA theory and philosophy of practice, with the greatest emphasis on neighboring and sense of community and a less robust application of empowerment and citizen participation; (b) CCDA primarily focuses on the individual-level impact of these principles; and (c) CCDA Bases their application of these principles in Christian scripture and tradition. Our results indicate that the field could be strengthened by examining religious approaches to these principles and considering how organizations engage these concepts in both the theory and the practice. Additionally, faith-based organizations may foster a more effective application of these concepts in their social change efforts by partnering with community researchers and practitioners.

1 │ INTRODUCTION

Community development and religion often overlap substantially in theory and practice, as congregations, faith-based community development and service organizations, and national denomination and organizing networks are major settings for participant and community empowerment and development (Speer & Hughey, 1995; Vidal, 2001). Yet community psychologists have long focused on community development (Florin & Wandersman, 1990; Gordon, 1985) and religious and spiritual matters (Johnson & Mullins, 1990a, b; Maton, 2001; Pargament, Silverman, Johnson, Echemendia, & Snyder, 1983) separately. Relatively few scholars have examined how they interface—how community psychology theory may inform religiously motivated and organized community development (cf. Dokecki, Newbrough, & O'Gorman, 2001; Speer, Hughey, Gensheimer, & Adams-Leavitt, 1995; Todd, 2011, 2012; Trout, Dokecki, Newbrough, & O'Gorman, 2003).

Given that multiple studies demonstrate that religion is a meaningful component of community life (Kloos & Moore, 2000; Pargament, 2008) and that religious organizations increasingly play a prominent role in the provision of social services and community development (Adkins, Occhipinti, & Hefferan, 2010), faith-based community development is an important site for studies of well-being, justice, and neighborhood change.

We seek to contribute to this literature by exploring how community psychology principles, particularly the cognitive and behavioral elements of social capital (Perkins & Long, 2002; Perkins, Hughey, & Speer, 2002), are embedded in the development approach of the Christian Community Development Association (CCDA), a large national religious nonprofit organization. The CCDA is an influential leader in the world of American Evangelical Christian development efforts and advocates for a unique approach to poverty alleviation grounded in proximity and relationships: CCDA encourages all of their practitioners to take residence in the neighborhoods they serve and to remain there for at least 15 years (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 51). In this study, we demonstrate the varied ways that community psychology principles are found in the CCDA approach and how CCDA engages these principles through Christian theology and tradition.

Although this study is limited to the particular case study, we contend that our analysis links two uncommonly associated concepts (faith-based community development and community psychology) in a way that advances both fields and points to the need for further research. We aim to offer community scholars and practitioners a nuanced critique of how community psychology principles are implicitly or explicitly embedded within one large Christian development organization, enabling us to further consider how community psychologists may engage with faith-based development to foster social change and community well-being.

In seeking a unifying framework to guide our study hypotheses and analysis, based on both prior knowledge of CCDA and past experience with many of its members, we reasoned that social capital development is fundamental to its mission and recognize that social capital theory has long been a part of faith-based development work in the United States (Adkins et al., 2010). Further, although social capital is a sociological construct, its psychological elements include sense of community and empowerment, and its behavioral elements consist of both informal neighboring and formally organized citizen participation (Perkins & Long, 2002). Thus, we set out to explore whether and how these four concepts might be reflected in CCDA's philosophy of practice and whether and how the use of these principles might also be linked to religious resources. We also sought to understand how, if at all, CCDA's engagement with these principles compared to community psychology's approach, and what we might learn from CCDA in this regard.

1.1 | Community psychology's relevance to faith-based community development key principles in community psychology

As community psychology expanded beyond its initial focus on mental health issues to address the full range of localized social, environmental, political, and even economic problems and resources, it naturally and increasingly overlaps with the field of community development (Levine, Perkins, & Perkins, 2005). Both the means and the targeted outcome for community development efforts include many concepts central to community psychology, including mobilization of community participation (Florin & Wandersman, 1990), empowerment (Christens, 2012), neighboring, and other forms of social support and cohesion (Nation, Fortney, & Wandersman, 2010; Prezza, Amici, Roberti, & Tedeschi, 2001). Increasingly, both community psychology and community development are focusing on action research and intervention in *faith-based* settings and networks (Dokecki et al., 2001; Speer & Hughey, 1995; Trout et al., 2003).

A central theory in the field of community development is social capital (Perkins et al., 2002; Saegert, Thompson, & Warren, 2001), which is broadly understood as "abilities to develop and sustain strong relationships; solve problems and make group decisions; and collaborate effectively to identify goals and get work done" (Mattessich, 2015, p. 59). Social capital scholars focus on the ways in which bridging (relationships across differences, usually formal) and bonding (relationships across similarities, usually informal) connections among individuals and institutions provide stability and capacity for society. Perkins and Long (2002) expanded theories of social capital by examining how it engages both psychological and behavioral elements: They proposed a four-dimensional psychobehavioral framework that incorporates four concepts prominent in community psychology (neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen

participation) as distinct but related dimensions of social capital that function at both formal and informal levels. These different forms of social capital interact with each other at both individual and communal levels. Thus, we use this framework to guide our analysis and build from the field's understanding of each construct as described below.

1.1.1 | Neighboring

Neighboring broadly refers to help and support from community members and includes informal assistance and sharing of resources and information (Perkins & Long, 2002). Unger and Wandersman (1985) suggested that neighboring includes social interaction, symbolic interaction, and attachment to proximate people and place, providing social networks and access to resources through relational links. Because of the spatial connection between neighbors and variation in the amount and type of neighboring both geographically and racially (Nation et al., 2010), the relationships and activities among them provide unique functions and support and may lead to greater potential for community organizing (Unger & Wandersman, 1985). Indeed, neighboring has been found to be one of the strongest, most consistent predictors of citizen participation in neighborhood organizations (Perkins, Brown, & Taylor, 1996).

1.1.2 | Sense of community

Sense of community, widely explored within community psychology, broadly refers to identity and belonging within a group, as well as interaction. McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggested four components: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Sense of community is consistently predictive of many qualities of community life, such as general health and well-being, community and life satisfaction, residential social climate, local friendships, informal social control, neighboring, citizen participation, empowerment, and less loneliness and fear of crime (Christens, Collura, & Tahir, 2013; Perkins & Long, 2002; Prezza et al., 2001). Scholars have also considered how sense of community manifests at multiple levels, suggesting that sense of community can be understood on an individual as well as a communal level (Perkins & Long, 2002) and understood as a multidimensional construct, which is positive, neutral, or negative, in which individuals are members of multiple, sometimes overlapping communities (Brodsky, Loomis, & Marx, 2002).

1.1.3 | Empowerment

Widely studied in community psychology (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995), empowerment has been defined as "A group-based, participatory, developmental process through which marginalized or oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environment, acquire values, resources, and basic rights, and achieve important life goals and reduced societal marginalization" (Maton, 2008, p. 5). Studies have also attended to the multiple levels of empowerment, noting that individuals and communities experience varying degrees of empowerment, that empowerment includes both process and outcome factors, and that settings can foster or hinder empowerment (Christens, 2012; Maton, 2008).

Maton (2008) suggested that empowering community settings, including many religious ones, fall into four domains based on two levels: at the individual level, empowering settings support adult resilience and youth development; and at the collective level, empowering settings foster locality development and social change. Empowerment is particularly significant in community psychology because it attends simultaneously to individuals, groups, and their context, acknowledging the structural forces at work while strengthening collective agency through participation in local "mediating structures" (e.g., congregations, neighborhood organizations), which in turn have more clout on decisions at the macro-system level (Maton, 2008; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995).

1.1.4 | Citizen participation

Citizen (or civic) participation is the behavior that empowerment both leads to and flows from and is broadly understood as engagement with local community voluntary associations (e.g., block and neighborhood associations, tenant and homeowner groups, parent–teacher associations, and, most common of all, local faith congregation social service activities) to collectively solve shared problems (Churchman, Wiesenfeld, & Sadan, 2017; Florin & Wandersman, 1990;

Perkins et al., 1996). Interest in participation in grassroots community organizations and other mediating structures has increased in recent decades for several reasons at the same time some observers have bemoaned the decline of social capital (Putnam, 2000).

Despite the important individual and community benefits of vital, meaningful and successful participation (including community satisfaction, neighboring, empowerment, and at least limited control over local decisions), relatively few people actively participate when given the opportunity and participation is unevenly distributed both geographically and demographically (Perkins et al., 1996). These studies suggest that citizen participation is important for community well-being, but neighborhoods and individuals with high mobility and less social capital are unable to take advantage of the many benefits of participation.

1.2 | Religion and community

Community psychology has also examined how faith and religion provide important resources and relationships and how they are a part of individual and community well-being. Scholars have demonstrated that religion is an important factor of individual well-being and development, contributing to coping strategies (Brodsky, 2000); prevention, healing, and empowerment resources (Maton & Wells, 1995); buffers for life stressors (Maton, 1989, 2008); identity development (Kress & Elias, 2000); belonging (Sarason, 2001); and organization of life and priorities (Pargament, 2008).

Similarly, religion has also been shown to play a substantive role at the community level by providing resources, support, and networks (Kloos & Moore, 2000; Maton, 1989, 2001, 2008; Todd, 2017) as well as motivation, institutional resources, and justification for engagement in social issues through organizing and development (Barnes, 2004; Cavendish, 2000; Smith, 1996). Community organizing scholars have noted that religion is an important and often overlooked part of social movements (Smith, 1996), particularly through congregational organizing models such as Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (Speer & Hughey, 1995) and inter-faith models of broad-based organizing (Bretherton, 2015).

1.2.1 | Faith-based organizations

Development and community scholars have shown that faith-based organizations, which tend to focus on service provision and community development in a local context, have long been a part of the American social fabric and often rely on theories of social capital (Adkins et al., 2010). Research has demonstrated that faith-based organizations are diverse and range in the form and types of social engagement as well the degree and dimension of their faith affiliation (Adkins et al., 2010). Christian approaches to development are often described on a continuum of charity–service–justice (Adkins et al., 2010) and our particular case, the CCDA, although understudied in the literature, is suggested by one scholar to be in the justice dimension (Adkins et al., 2010, pp. 16–17). The CCDA is part of a larger movement of Evangelical concern with social development that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s (as will be articulated more specifically in the next section).

The following publications from Christian development practitioners, for example, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* (Sider, 2005), *Walking with the Poor* (Myers, 2005), *When Helping Hurts* (Corbett & Fikkert, 2009), and *Toxic Charity* (Lupton, 2011), specifically consider why and how American Evangelical Christians should participate in development work and poverty alleviation, with particular attention to how Evangelical theology should guide these activities. Evangelical community development efforts are a valuable site for research and have been given limited attention in the field of community psychology. We suggest that CCDA is an excellent entry point into this discussion, and in the following sections, we explain the context from which CCDA emerged and outline the core components of their philosophy.

1.3 | Contextualizing the movement for American Evangelical community development

American Christianity's engagement with social reform issues, including poverty and community development, is a complex history of intersecting theological and political debates, and is beyond the scope of this paper (cf. Adkins et al.'s [2010] *Not By Faith Alone: Social Services, Social Justice, and Faith-Based Organizations in the United States;* Chaves' [2004]

Congregations in America and Chaves' [2013] *American Religion: Contemporary Trends*; Marsh's [2006] *Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice from the Civil Rights Movement to Today*; and Smith's [1996] *Disruptive Religion: The Forces of Faith in Social Movement Activism*). Moreover, Christianity in America is a fragmented and broad religious landscape (including, for example, Roman Catholics, Black and White Mainline Protestants, Black and White Evangelical Protestants, Fundamentalist Protestants, and Pentecostals). Each of these traditions has a unique history and approach to social justice, marked by both intragroup and intergroup diversity in theological and philosophical assumptions about poverty versus prosperity, individual versus institutional social responsibility, and related social justice and development strategies, tools, and methods.

American Evangelicalism itself is diverse and constantly undergoing change as it shapes, and is shaped by, the larger religious and political landscape. However, scholars generally agree that Evangelicalism is marked by three key tenets: (a) a belief in the inerrancy of scripture; (b) a belief in a personal conversion moment, often referred to as a "born again" moment; and (c) an emphasis on evangelism as a Christian responsibility (Balmer, 2016; Emerson & Smith, 2000). Evangelicalism has a long history in America and remains the dominant Christian tradition (25.4% of the U.S. population identifies as Evangelical, according to the 2014 Religious Landscape Study by the Pew Research Center [2014]), but has, like other Christian traditions, its own intragroup fractures.

For instance, in the late 1800s and early 1900s, American Evangelicalism was influenced by the Social Gospel movement, championed by Walter Rauschenbusch, which emphasized that the church must participate in responding to social injustice and the macro-economic structures that drive it, in order to heal and reform an unjust society (Rauschenbusch, 1907, 1917; see also Sanders, 2011 for a concise explanation and critique of Rauschenbusch). This theological position was compelling to many, and prompted a variety of social responses, such as building new churches (both urban and suburban), facilitating urban missions, training for community ministry, and establishing community development corporations (Adkins et al., 2010; Kemper & Adkins, 2005). However, the Social Gospel's emphasis on social change, rather than personal conversion and piety, was concerning to Evangelicals, many of whom shifted away from social change efforts by the mid-1900s.

Emphasizing spiritual reform rather than social reform, Evangelicals in the mid- to late-1900s tended to focus on evangelism and conversion, rather than development efforts, and were largely silent on issues of social justice (Balmer, 2016; Dochuk, 2011; Emerson & Smith, 2000). However, a segment of Evangelicals was engaged in social justice efforts—especially issues around segregation and poverty alleviation—and articulated a theological mandate for these activities (Dochuk, 2011, p. 310; Emerson & Smith, 2000, p. 52–66; Gasaway, 2011; Marsh, 2006; Slade, Marsh, & Heltzel, 2013). For instance, in 1973, a group of social justice-minded Evangelicals wrote the *Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern*, which eventually became the still-operating organization Evangelicals for Social Action.

It is in this context that the CCDA emerged: John M. Perkins, a Black Evangelical pastor in Jackson, Michigan, who had been arrested and tortured in the 1960s for organizing the poor community of color in Jackson and in 1976, wrote his first best-selling book, *Let Justice Roll Down*. Concerned with the state of declining urban neighborhoods in the wake of White flight and suburban mega churches, Perkins and White Evangelical pastor Wayne Gordon co-founded the CCDA officially in 1989 and began organizing annual conferences and networking events. Calling on Christians to radically reinvest in locations of poverty by moving to the inner city to disrupt the isolation caused by economic mobility and White flight, Perkins and the CCDA emphasized that the Christian faith included the political work of meeting the material needs of poor households (Gordon & Perkins, 2013; Perkins, 1995; Slade, Marsh, & Hetzel, 2013).

1.4 | Background for the case study: the Christian Community Development Association

Based in Chicago, Illinois, CCDA is now a national network of churches, organizations, and individuals dedicated to alleviating poverty and racial injustice through grassroots and church-based efforts (Perkins, 1995). The organization originally formed around three key ideas, commonly referred to as The Three Rs: *relocation* (taking residence in the community and becoming a vested member), *redistribution* (reallocating material and nonmaterials resources to neighborhood), and *reconciliation* (building connections among people and with God; Perkins, 1995). The Three Rs form the core of CCDA philosophy, demonstrating how location, relationship, and resources are viewed as interwoven and

interdependent components of neighborhood well-being. Through these components, CCDA articulated an approach to development that sought to resist what they described as paternalistic outsiders (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, pp. 102–104) by focusing on geographic solidarity. In doing so, the CCDA drew upon an Evangelical theology that emphasized social justice (Slade et al., 2013) to describe a method for putting that theology into practice (The Three Rs).

Over time, the CCDA philosophy has expanded from The Three Rs to include five more tenets: *leadership development* (investing in the moral, spiritual, and economic leadership of local residents); *listening to the community* (identifying the felt-needs of the community); *church-based* (focusing development through the church); *holistic* (attending to the spiritual, social, economic, political, cultural, emotional, physical, moral, judicial, educational, and familial issues of each person); and *empowerment* (helping the community help themselves; CCDA philosophy).

CCDA primarily focuses on providing networking and training opportunities to its 15,000 members (Gordon & Perkins, 2013) through national conferences, regional events, literature, and leadership cohorts (CCDA events and get involved). Leaders and members of the organization have been writing to public audiences for decades, developing the theory, theology, and praxis of their Christian development model (Gordon, 2010; Gordon & Perkins, 1995, 2013; Lupton, 1989, 1993, 2005; Perkins, 1993, 1995). In the few academic publications on the topic, scholars have suggested that CCDA provides a distinct approach to poverty alleviation, uniquely connecting Biblical perspectives with social development (Essenburg, 2000; Fernando, 2006; Slade et al., 2013). Geographers Hankins and Walter (2012) suggested that the CCDA approach is grounded in placemaking, thus providing a unique spatial intervention that explicitly attends to the relationships between people and place.

CCDA's founding role in the movement of Evangelical Christian community development makes it an important and relevant case, especially given that is has been generally understudied in community psychology so far. As a major national organization, the CCDA both functions as a leading voice for social-justice minded Evangelicals in numerous churches and development organizations (Slade et al., 2013), and provides an important entry point to examine the connections between community psychology, community development, and religion. In this study, we seek to understand whether and how social capital theory is embedded in CCDA's philosophy and whether and how the concepts of neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen participation may be identified in their development methods.

2 | RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODS

2.1 | Study questions

We approach this topic with two primary research questions: (a) How, if at all, does CCDA's philosophy of development engage certain core community psychology principles (neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen participation) and how, if at all, is this connected to Christian scripture, theology, and/or tradition? (b) Which of these concepts/espoused practices are less used by CCDA, and how does their application compare to the way the concept is understood in community psychology scholarship? We review CCDA publications and the website to identify and analyze the presence of these community psychology principles.

2.2 | Case study approach

The present analysis is part of a more extensive, ongoing case study (Yin, 2017) by the first author that has included in-depth interviews of CCDA practitioners in three cities around the United States. While that broader project has informed our understanding of the organization and its members, this study is focused on content analysis of official CCDA publications as an important stage in this broader research agenda. We contend that a careful examination of these products is long overdue: CCDA is a major national organization (over 15,000 members according to Gordon &

Perkins, 2013) that plays an influential role in the U.S. Evangelical community and articulates a unique and important approach to Evangelical community development (Heltzel, 2009; Rah & Vanderpol, 2016; Slade et al., 2013).

Moreover, no known studies of CCDA have included a thorough analysis of their publications. These publications represent the organization's official articulation of their philosophy, serving as the public face for practitioners and the broader public. By examining these products, we address an important gap in the literature about this unique community development approach and offer a scaffold for future scholars to draw upon and apply.

2.3 | Primary source material

We rely on four primary texts for this analysis: (a) the CCDA.org website; (b) the early CCDA handbook, *Restoring At-Risk Communities: Doing it Together and Doing It Right* (1995); (c) the recent CCDA handbook, *Making Neighborhoods Whole: A Handbook for Christian Community Developers* (2013); and (d) the CCDA supplementary handbook, *Empowerment: A Key Component of Christian Community Development* (2010). While CCDA leaders, practitioners, and board members have written many other books articulating CCDA practices, we limit our analysis to these books because they are official publications of the organization and most clearly represent its views.

2.4 | Approach to qualitative analysis

Employing a content analysis approach, we first used social capital literature to define the four constructs of neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen participation, which were used to deductively code the texts. The first author did the primary coding of the four publications, and then discussed findings and initial analysis with the second author during regular meetings. Questions, points of confusion, and/or contradiction regarding the coding results were discussed in detail and evidenced with relevant quotes until consensus was reached. Each of the most relevant sections of the CCDA website were coded ("philosophy," "biblical justice," and "events" sections) and additional pages were reviewed for applicable information and incorporated as needed; each book was read and coded in its entirety. As we took a deductive or "framework approach" (Pope, Ziebland, & Mays, 2000) to our analysis, coding was done without the use of qualitative software, which is more helpful for inductive analysis, and used hardcopy and electronic highlighting, commenting, and note taking instead.

All four data sources were coded through the following recurring coding cycle (Saldaña, 2009): (a) Each data source was deductively coded for neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen participation, enabling us to see the varying ways CCDA engaged each construct; (b) subcategories and codes within each primary category were developed, identifying, for example, how productive work is connected to notions of empowerment in CCDA's approach; and (c) limitations and constraints of CCDA's approach were analyzed and recoded to confirm the emerging analysis.

At each stage, representative quotes were gathered to provide concrete examples of the code and categories. We determined saturation and credibility when we had multiple examples from each text for the established categories and codes. This coding cycle was conducted on each unique text to allow for points of conflict and divergence to emerge, which were carefully noted and recoded. We accounted for flux, contradiction, and change with how the organization presented itself by noting differences among the texts and incorporating these results into the discussion; however, we did not code the texts for change over time. In the Conclusion section, we discuss the challenges of accounting for organizational change in our coding process and also note how the CCDA reviewers (discussed below) highlighted this challenge as well.

After our initial analysis, we approached the authors of the CCDA texts (Gordon, Perkins, and Nelson) as well as two other current CCDA staff and one CCDA member to solicit any feedback or commentary regarding our analysis. These discussions took place via email (we sent copies of our article for their review) and functioned as a form of member checking. Two individuals responded to our request and their feedback generally aligned with our analysis but did provide some important contextualization that suggests the need for further research. For example, one reviewer suggested that while our analysis of these publications is accurate, the organization has begun to de-emphasize these texts

as outdated and is in the midst of articulating nuances in their philosophy that are not evident in their handbooks. This suggests, for instance, that future in-depth ethnographic methods may be an important next step for understanding this phenomenon, as it would make legible these nuances and changes in the CCDA philosophy over time. The details of CCDA's response are incorporated in the Discussion section at the end of this article.

2.5 | Positionality

Although we strove to maintain as objective and nonjudgmental a stance as possible throughout the collection, coding, and interpretation of data, a brief description of our own religious and disciplinary positionality is in order. The first author was raised in the Evangelical tradition, joined the Northwest Yearly Meeting of Quakers from 2008–2015, and currently attends an Episcopal church in Nashville. She is a fourth-year doctoral student in community research and action. The second author was raised Presbyterian, but has spent decades exploring other faith traditions, including Unitarian-Universalism, Quakerism, Judaism, Episcopalianism, and Buddhism, and serves on an interfaith, anti-Islamophobia advisory council. He is an interdisciplinary community psychologist.

3 | RESULTS

Our analysis suggests that while CCDA does not explicitly reference social capital theory or community psychology, the organization engages the concepts of neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen participation in varying ways and with varying degrees of similarity to community psychology's use of the principles. Often using other terms, neighboring and sense of community undergird much of CCDA philosophy, are emphasized as core to neighborhood well-being, and are understood in the traditional neighboring behaviors that community psychology recognizes. Empowerment, although explicitly emphasized by CCDA in multiple ways, is engaged primarily as individual development and is generally approached with a less robust understanding than is found within community psychology. Citizen participation is the least used principle and primarily engaged through approaching the church as a mediating institution and is the least similar to community psychology's framework. We also find that the organization generally focuses on individual-level, and occasionally community-level, impact rather than larger interventions toward social transformation.

Additionally, we find that CCDA's use of concepts like neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen participation are based in Christian scripture and evangelical tradition—that is, for example, the CCDA describes and justifies the concept of empowerment by linking it to scripture rather than citing empirical research that supports the efficacy and importance of empowerment. This suggests that community psychology principles are quite relevant to the work of CCDA, and likely other Christian organizations, but are accessed through the door of faith, rather than the door of research. For example, drawing on Biblical imagery from the book of Isaiah, the CCDA handbook states, "In other words, the mission of the Messiah—and our mission—is not complete until we have empowered those living in the devastated places, the ruined cities, to restore and rebuild their own community" (Perkins, 1995, p. 31). In this quote, the explicit combination of both religious references (Messiah, mission, restoration) and community psychology principles (empowerment, sense of community) hints at the connections between these fields and potential for greater interaction. In the following sections, we describe and provide evidence for how CCDA implicitly understands and applies each of these principles.

3.1 | Neighboring and sense of community

The concepts of informal neighboring and sense of community undergird almost all of the CCDA philosophy, although they are not explicitly defined. The organization approaches neighboring and sense of community as two sides of the same coin, contending that one cannot happen without the other—sense of community fosters neighboring and vice versa. This is most clearly seen in the organization's commitment to The Three Rs (relocation, reconciliation, and

redistribution), which emphasize geographic proximity to foster vested interest and interdependence (relocation), shared resources (redistribution), and meaningful relationship (reconciliation). These tenets intersect to form the basis of CCDA's work and incorporate multiple principles within the trifold process.

3.1.1 | Relocation

Noting the impact of societal isolation and the historical exodus of upwardly mobile households from poor neighborhoods, CCDA draws on theological resources to call practitioners to relocate to places of poverty and disadvantage. The first step of neighboring and community, for CCDA, is about location—it is through location that sense of community, neighboring, and vested interest can develop and emerge. The CCDA describes this as a "theology of place" that is marked by "unconditional commitment to a particular neighborhood or community" (Gordon & Perkins 2013, p. 51), which leads to a deep and shared concern for the neighborhood's well-being. For example, in the 1995 CCDA handbook, Lupton, Lupton, and Yancy (1995) state, "We can most clearly understand the real problems facing the poor if we relocate into the community of need. Then their problems become *our* real problems" (p. 104). CCDA suggests that proximity enables shared experiences—and thus shared goals of transformation—to emerge among interdependent neighbors. Thus, becoming a vested member of the community (both geographically and relationally) is crucial to the neighborhood's development. The organization explains:

> The key principle is that the person lives— and becomes part of— the community he or she hopes to see transformed. Regardless of which form it takes, relocation entails desiring for our neighbors and our neighbors' families what we desire for ourselves and our own families. It entails living out the gospel in a way that improves the quality of other people's lives spiritually, physically, socially, and emotionally, even as one betters his or her own life. It means, in part, sharing in the suffering and pain of others. (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 49)

Relocation, thus, is seen as the first step toward community and neighboring, "transform[ing] 'you, them, and theirs' to 'we, us, and ours'" (CCDA relocation) to foster interdependence and connection among local neighbors.

3.1.2 | Reconciliation and redistribution

Through the tenets of reconciliation and redistribution, CCDA employs traditional understandings of neighboring that draw on support and sharing of resources as well as intimate and meaningful friendships. Seeking to break down barriers between people and develop deep relationships, CCDA emphasizes relationship building within the neighborhood as the critical next step. For example, the 2013 handbook explains,

> It's possible to relocate our houses but not our lives. If people are not involved in their new community— if they don't really know the people, if they never let their neighbors come into their houses and never enter their neighbor's houses, if they are not intimately aware of the issues and struggle with which people are dealing, if they don't share tears of sadness and joy as the community faces failures and success—then they have not truly relocated. (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 52)

Developing a sense of community through diverse and meaningful relationships of vested interest is a primary objective of CCDA. The organization emphasizes that it is only through relationships, interdependence, and shared resources that transformation of disadvantaged neighborhoods can occur. However, the organization is clear that community requires participation and care—neighboring—in order to thrive. Drawing on understandings of neighboring as support and sharing of resources, CCDA explains that "good neighbors keep watch on each other's house. Neighbors borrow from and lend to each other. Neighbors watch each other's kids. Interdependency is the operative word" (Perkins, 1995, p. 89). Thus, CCDA suggests that neighboring is a process of developing relationships of proximity that function to support and integrate local households because "without interconnected neighbors functioning as living ligatures to hold neighborhoods together, disintegration occurs" (Perkins, 1995, p. 88). Moreover, neighboring is seen as a method for redistribution to occur—through committed neighbors, resources (both material and nonmaterial) are re-invested in the community. For example, the 1995 CCDA handbook states:

Perhaps the greatest need of under-resourced communities is for achieving neighbor-leaders. Achieving neigh-
bors can do much to break the isolation of poor neighborhoods and reconnect them with the life-giving systems
that are the common grace of the city and larger society. Achieving neighbors bring living, personal model of hope
back into a disheartened environment. Achieving neighbors bring resources and skills into a depleted neighbor-
hood, along with fresh energy to deploy them. (Perkins, 1995, p. 83)

Thus, neighboring and sense of community are seen by CCDA as both goal and method. Within The Three Rs, CCDA has developed a model of community engagement that fosters relationships of geographic proximity, encourages the creation of committed support systems based on interdependence and vested interest, and seeks to extend access to needed resources.

3.1.3 | Limitations and constraints

Although CCDA emphasizes the importance of neighboring relationships and community interdependence, its use of neighboring occasionally draws on deficit frameworks to implicitly position CCDA practitioners in modeling and redemptive roles. For example, the 1995 CCDA handbook describes relocation as "putting ourselves in threatening situations, coming into areas that that others have long since abandoned, or merely planting our feet in neighborhoods that 'smart' people are leaving" (Perkins, 1995, p. 36). This statement tacitly suggests that CCDA practitioners are heroic and frames the neighborhood as dangerous and deficient. Similarly, language about the need for healthy or achieving neighbors suggests an implicit definition of what "achieving" looks like and suggests that CCDA practitioners best represent this idea. However, the organization explicitly resists this "savior complex." For example, the 2013 handbook states that "Relocators don't come in with all the answers" (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 52) and emphasizes that relocation "is not about wealthy people from the suburbs going into poverty-stricken areas to save the day with their supposed expertise" (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 47). Our analysis suggests that while the CCDA philosophy does have normative assumptions built into their approach, they are also calling for radical and disruptive action toward equality and justice.

3.2 | Empowerment

CCDA lists empowerment as a distinct philosophical tenet of their development work. Empowerment is understood by CCDA as the ability of a community to meet their own needs and is explicitly positioned as the opposite of dependency. In 2010, CCDA published a handbook entitled *Empowerment*, by Dr. Mary Nelson, who defines relocation in four ways: "respects the dignity of the people involved; strengthens the community in sustainable ways; promotes freedom from dependency; allows people to use their own resources and be self-determining" (p. 8). A key theme of CCDA's philosophy of empowerment is that practitioners disrupt dependency-based service provision and operate instead from a place of partnership that explicitly centers the community of interest. Distinguishing between "betterment" (a deficit-based approach to charity that seeks to meet immediate needs and change lifestyle patterns; i.e., service-oriented) and "development" (an asset-based approach to organizing and partnership that seeks to identify barriers and build capacity; empowerment-oriented; Nelson, 2010, p. 31–33), CCDA practices of empowerment emphasize religious justification, productive work, vested community engagement, ensuring access to resources, and leadership development.

3.2.1 | Religious justifications of empowerment

While CCDA broadly uses religious language, imagery, metaphor, and scripture throughout all their publications, they use specific religious references to explain and justify empowerment practices. For example, the CCDA website draws on Old Testament descriptions of gleaning practices (Deuteronomy 24 and Leviticus 19) and uses this as an example of an economic system intended to ensure food was available to everyone that came to harvest. In this biblical mandate, CCDA explains, farmers are instructed to harvest their fields only once a season; the remaining crop was then available for harvest by those without access to a field, such as widows and orphans. Referring to this as "God's welfare system" (CCDA empowerment), CCDA contends that this is an empowering process, which provides individuals with access to

meet their own basic needs rather than receiving charity and dependency-based assistance. The organization emphasizes that "caring for the poor, the weak and vulnerable, the disenfranchised, the outcast, or those who are grieving or struggling in some way is clearly a high-priority agenda item for followers of Christ," but that this is not a handout and "the Bible constantly requires those in need to participate in their recovery to the extent that they are able" (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 153).

3.2.2 | Productive work and empowerment

Embedded in CCDA's understanding of empowerment is the importance of productive work. For example, the scriptural reference described above is followed by this statement: "First, there must be an opportunity for people to get their needs met…. Second, the person who has a need must be willing to work for it…. Third, when these two principles are working, a person's dignity is affirmed" (CCDA empowerment). In this way, productive work is positioned as a combination of access and effort—work must be available, but people must also be willing to work. The 2013 handbook states:

> The first principle makes it possible for people to take care of themselves and their vulnerable loved ones without having to beg or steal. The second principle allows people to achieve some measure of self-respect because to some extent they earned what they are receiving, which empowers them with dignity. (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 155)

Emphasizing that in true empowerment access and participation work in tandem, the CCDA contends that handouts and charity "strip people of their dignity by doing for them instead of empowering them to do for themselves" (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 156) and suggests that "fruitful labor" is "part of the blessing of God; meaningless toil or idleness is the result of the curse" (Perkins, 1995, p. 30). Thus, productive work is seen as both a right and a responsibility, and lack of work—either through lack of access or lack of willingness—is perceived as a problem to be resolved. As such, CCDA contends that one of their primary roles is "to develop people to the point that they are using their God-given skills and abilities in satisfying work that is also benefiting the community" (Perkins, 1995, p. 30).

3.2.3 | The Three Rs and empowerment

CCDA contends that practitioners are best able to engage and employ principles of empowerment when they position themselves as members and partners of the community. In so doing, practitioners invest in the community, center the needs of local residents, and become the catalyst for new resources into the community. For example, echoing empowerment's self-help and mutual support ethos, the website states:

> Christian Community Development ministries harness the commitment and energy of men, women, and young people living in the community, and others who care about their community, and find creative avenues to develop jobs, schools, health centers, home ownership opportunities, and other enterprises of long-term development. Seeking a just distribution of resources and working for justice in underserved communities contributes greatly to helping people help themselves, which is at the heart of Christian Community Development. (CCDA redistribution)

Critiquing other programs that exclude local residents or simply engage them in advisory boards, CCDA suggests, "outsiders should never impose their views or programs on a community," (Perkins, 1995, p. 82). Instead, CCDA calls on practitioners to become "part of the neighborhood" (Perkins, 1995, p. 82), noting that "there have been many attempts by 'outsiders' to alleviate the problems, but most have fallen short of lasting change" (CCDA *Philosophy*). Rather, CCDA calls for practitioners to focus on amplifying the voices and needs of the local community and advocating for access to work and opportunity.

3.2.4 | Leadership development and empowerment

Additionally, CCDA sees developing the leadership capacity of local residents as a key part of empowerment and long-term capacity building. For example, the CCDA website states:

> *Leadership development is of the highest priority in Christian Community Development. Each ministry must have a dynamic youth ministry that is reaching young people with the good news of Jesus Christ and then equipping them to become faithful followers of Christ, and effective community leaders. This will take at least fifteen years to accomplish, so a worker must plan to stay in the neighborhood for at least that long. (CCDA leadership development)*

Leadership development is one of the ways that CCDA seeks to ensure meaningful and sustainable change, by investing in the potential of young people that belong to the neighborhood. Empowerment in this context is seen as equipping current and future leaders—it is through the process of building local leadership that long-term change and development in a neighborhood can happen. By providing relationships, church connections, educational opportunities, and employment support, CCDA seeks to enable local adults and youth to become leading figures in their community. Additionally, when local community members face obstacles to their leadership development—such as an inability to attend college due to immigration status—CCDA calls practitioners to advocate for "social action to challenge and change" laws and policies (CCDA leadership development).

3.2.5 | Limitations and constraints

While CCDA is explicit about the inherent value of communities, the importance of empowerment, and the need to address the (in)accessibility of resources, the CCDA tends to emphasize the individual level and gives limited attention to the macro–level that shape an individual's and a community's opportunities. For example, the organization's emphasis on productive work (such as statements that the poor must also be willing to work and not simply receive charity) has a limited analysis of the structural forces that create and maintain poverty. This frame overlooks how the construction of the formal workplace has historically and systematically excluded and exploited the poor and people of color for the benefit of wealthy Whites. Additionally, our analysis suggests that the CCDA approach to empowerment tends to focus on empowering individual achievement and could be strengthened by greater attention to community organizing as an empowerment method (as will briefly be discussed in the following section).

3.3 | Citizen participation

Of the four psychobehavioral principles of social capital, we found that citizen participation is the least applied in CCDA philosophy. The organization primarily engages ideas of citizen participation through encouraging volunteerism in the local church and positioning the church as a change-making institution in the neighborhood, rather than emphasizing local politics and partnership with citizen actors. More recently, the organization has begun to engage the public square on a national level through "Biblical Justice" programs, a group of task forces that advocate and organize around issues of structural injustice.

3.3.1 | The role of the church as a mediating institution

CCDA emphasizes the local church as the primary institution of stabilization and change in the neighborhood and encourages CCDA practitioners to be based in or partnered with a local church (Kehrien, 1995, p. 163–180). The organization contends that the church provides the spiritual direction and moral authority needed for development work and that "it is virtually impossible to carry out effective wholistic ministry apart from the local church" because the "local church provides the moral authority and spiritual direction ministries need to stay grounded and on track" (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 121, 125). However, the organization explicitly linked the church's spiritual role with a community development role. They explain: "The church's responsibility is not limited to activities associated with Christian spirituality such as evangelism, discipleship and spiritual nurturing. From the command of Jesus, it is also the responsibility of churches to love and serve their neighbors and their neighborhoods" (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 123). Thus, the church is understood as a source of spiritual care and leadership, as well as a development agent.

Seeking to shape the local church into a catalyst and source of change, CCDA positions the church as uniquely prepared to connect, care for, and mobilize residents. For example, the CCDA website states: "One problem today has been

that the church is not involved in developing its communities…. Churches should be seen as lovers of their community and neighborhoods. It is out of the church body that ideas and programs should emerge" (CCDA church based).

Noting that historically Black churches have long provided "substantial community efforts in housing and economic development" (CCDA church based), such as shopping centers and housing units, the organization calls on all churches—particularly White churches—to also participate in "taking action towards the development of its community" (CCDA about). Because CCDA sees the church as the core institution in a neighborhood and a place in which differences can be overcome and deep relationships can be developed, they challenge churches to "reclaim their responsibility to minister to their communities" (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 123). The church is positioned as a unique and important site of desegregation, contending that "a worshiping church breaks down the barriers that divide people in communities" (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 126).

3.3.2 | Biblical justice: Organizing and advocacy at a national level

The CCDA also suggests that the church can be a catalyst for community organizing, although this is a less developed concept in their literature. Dedicating one chapter of the *Empowerment* handbook to community organizing, CCDA suggests that practitioners, clergy, and laity employ methods of community organizing from Saul Alinsky's *Rules for Radicals*, including: power analysis, one-on-ones, and identifying winnable issues. These methods are described as part of the practice of empowerment and are "collaborative processes of working together on justice and fairness issues" that build "a strong sense of community" (Nelson, 2010, p. 73). Basing this work in theological understandings of God's liberatory goals for oppressed peoples, CCDA contends that "churches can be a major part of a community of relational power that brings about significant transformation of a neighborhood and the city" (Nelson, 2010, p. 72) and the organization encourages alliances with faith-based organizations toward these efforts (Gordon & Perkins, 2013, p. 123).

Additionally, CCDA attends to systemic issues through their work in "Biblical Justice," organizing and advocacy to influence federal policy regarding immigration, mass incarceration, and education reform. Maintaining that the local church and neighborhood are important participants in these issues, the organization explicitly addresses these issues beyond the local scale, stating in regards to immigration for example: "We also recognize that systemic change is needed for holistic justice to be completed. We believe that this is most effective when immigration organizing and advocacy is directed to federal level leaders" (CCDA Biblical justice: Immigration).

CCDA facilitates efforts for both advocacy and organizing on these issues, maintaining a theological foundation for the work and emphasizing close connection with people who are directly impacted by the issues. In 2017, for example, CCDA organized an awareness and advocacy day for mass incarceration. Seeking to "educate the community on the issue of mass incarceration, pray for the church to respond to this need and for systems to change, listen and share stories about the impacts of mass incarceration, and engage our public square to make change" (CCDA Biblical justice: Mass incarceration action), CCDA provided resources, training, discussion sites, and publicity for this event.

3.3.3 | Limitations and Constraints

Although CCDA articulates an agenda for organizing and advocacy and sees the church as a mediating institution, the organization describes limited engagement with citizen actors and offers minimal direction for how practitioners might participate in local politics. The lack of attention to citizen participation suggests a shortsightedness on the part of CCDA—substantial neighborhood change, in terms of housing access, poverty alleviation, or employment opportunities, is difficult to attain without coordination with other political actors and secular institutions. The organization's lack of guidance on how the church and practitioners might engage secular intuitions, such as other neighborhood associations, social service centers, and local government, may limit the organization's reach. In particular, CCDA's emphasis on church congregations may exclude those who are disinclined to participate in church, preventing possible alliances across local groups. We suggest in the closing section of this article that explicit training around issues of citizen participation as a pathway for local development and social transformation would likely help CCDA practitioners to be more effective in their work.

4 | DISCUSSION

This study explores how community psychology principles, particularly the cognitive and behavioral elements of social capital (Perkins & Long, 2002; Perkins et al., 2002), are embedded in the development approach of the CCDA, a large national religious nonprofit organization. In particular, we have considered how CCDA's implicit use of these community psychology principles is connected to their Christian tradition, contributing to the current literature on the connections between community, faith, and development (cf. Dokecki et al., 2001; Speer et al., 1995; Todd, 2011, 2012; Trout et al., 2003).

Additionally, we have wondered how CCDA's use of the principles compares to community psychology's understanding of the same principles, particularly neighboring (Nation et al., 2010; Perkins et al., 1996; Unger & Wandersman, 1985), sense of community (Brodsky et al., 2002; Christens et al., 2013; McMillan & Chavis, 1986; Prezza et al., 2001), empowerment (Maton, 2008; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Todd, 2017), and citizen participation (Perkins et al., 1996; Putnam, 2000).

Our findings suggest that the theory of social capital and all four principles are embedded in CCDA's philosophy, although they are applied in varying degrees of similarity to community psychology's frameworks. Notions of neighboring and sense of community form the basis of CCDA philosophy and, similar to community psychology, are understood as informal support networks based on proximity and interdependent relationships, and perceived as crucial to the process of empowerment. Our findings suggest that The Three Rs most clearly emphasize these concepts, uniquely connecting ideas of proximate location, vested interest, positive relationships, and access to resources as the pillars of community development. Empowerment was found to be a key focus of the organization and is understood as a scripturally-based concept of developing autonomy and efficacy to meet communal needs. Our findings suggest that CCDA engages empowerment primarily at the individual level, emphasizing productive work, vested community engagement, access to resources, and leadership development. Citizen participation is engaged primarily through the church, which CCDA sees as the primary institutional structure in the neighborhood. The organization describes little interaction with secular organizations but does incorporate advocacy for federal policy change.

In particular, our findings also demonstrate that while the principles are embedded in the CCDA philosophy, they are approached and understood from a scriptural position rather than an empirical research perspective. Notions of neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen participation are found throughout CCDA's literature and are explicitly based in Christian theology and supported by scriptural references to describe their purpose and application. This is not to say that CCDA avoids or is unfamiliar with research and theoretical frameworks, but rather they seem to be most compelled by ideas and approaches that are broadly identifiable within the Christian tradition. This suggests that CCDA, unlike secular organizations or research projects, is most interested in theories and practices that can be framed within and explained through Christian tradition.

Finally, our findings also suggest that CCDA primarily focuses on the individual and local, communal levels of intervention, with less attention to the macro-level of society. We argue that this is a limitation because neighborhoods and individuals are profoundly shaped by historic and systemic forces of oppression. Although the CCDA seeks to bring about transformation and does describe some ways it engages larger structures, it tends to focus on the individual and the neighborhood as a single entity, rather than being situated in a complex dynamic of racial, political, and economic power, and uses occasional damage-centric language.

In response to these findings, the CCDA reviewers offered two main comments: First, they agreed that we have accurately described the CCDA emphasis on place and relationship as well as their underemphasis on citizen engagement and their tendency to focus on individual-level change. However, they suggest that a number of citizen participation efforts do exist that are not visible in the CCDA literature. For example, one reviewer described two different events where CCDA members and leaders protested in Washington D.C. and were arrested; another reviewer suggested that many CCDA local organization engage in efforts for domestic policy reform, such as immigration reform.

Second, one reviewer suggested that while the Three Rs form the basis of CCDA philosophy, many CCDA practitioners have been resistant to "relocation" language for the same critiques that we articulate. In response, CCDA philosophy has been shifting toward ideas of incarnation, rather than relocation, and increasingly drawing on a Lao-Tsu poem: "Go to the people/Live among them/Learn from them/Love them/Start with what they know/Build on what they have/But of the best leaders, When their task is done/The people will remark, 'We have done it ourselves'" (CCDA CCD philosophy). Additionally, this reviewer suggested that she no longer uses the book *Restoring at Risk Communities* (the 1995 CCDA handbook) because of its outdated and occasionally offensive approach and emphasized that the CCDA philosophy continues to evolve and respond to the current context.

These comments are important and helpful for our analysis in a number of ways: First, they substantiate our findings and highlight some key critiques that CCDA has begun to engage already. This suggests that there may be valuable opportunities for community psychologists to engage and partner with the organization in developing and articulating their philosophy. Second, the comments demonstrate the need for further scholarship and suggest an important agenda for the next stages of research, particularly for ethnographic projects that can explore and analyze the evolving philosophy of CCDA that is not yet captured in their publications. We detail this agenda below.

4.1 | Implications for community psychology

In light of our findings, which show that CCDA engages community psychology principles but accesses them through the Christian tradition, rather than through scientific literature, we encourage community psychologists to attend to and disseminate more research on faith-based community development settings. We further suggest that scholars who engage these sites without attention to and familiarity with religious resources may overlook important dynamics, assumptions, and motivations that are at play. As our study has demonstrated, principles of social capital can be linked to (at least some perspectives within) Christian tradition and these theories are likely recognizable to the organization. CCDA's emphasis on relationships of proximity and religious motivation is a unique approach to the practices of neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen participation, which, upon further study, might provide new ways of understanding and nuancing these constructs. Continued research examining the possible religious dynamics of these principles is an important next step of this research and prompts our field to consider how faith, for example, impacts the nature and degree of neighboring relationships and sense of community.

Similarly, our research suggests that the CCDA's application of empowerment and citizen participation could be expanded, and the CCDA reviewers agree but also suggest that these efforts are happening in ways that are not captured in the four CCDA publications used for this study. Thus, we encourage future studies to explicitly consider how empowerment and citizen participation are happening in the organization. Additionally, we suggest that scholars consider whether and how religions function to limit or expand approaches to these principles.

Our findings also demonstrate some of the complexity of researching and collaborating with community organizations that may use community psychology theories in similar and different ways, particularly in regard to differing epistemological positions about the origin and nature of poverty. For instance, community psychologists tend to emphasize the historic and structural condition that create and maintain racialized poverty, but community organizations may emphasize alternative or additional causes of poverty. The role of theology may be an important component of understanding these dynamics—for example, the CCDA's approach to empowerment and the importance of productive work may be grounded in a particular theological approach that may not resonate with another Christian organization. Additionally, our discussions with CCDA reviewers demonstrate that organizations are evolving entities—that may be engaging in efforts that are not captured in our particular methods of data collection—and are thus complex sites for research. This again emphasizes our suggestion that an ethnographic project with the CCDA is warranted.

Finally, the innovative, place-based approach of CCDA's model issues an important challenge for the field of community psychology. This model prompts our field to examine our location—both figurative and literal—in the communities we study. The CCDA approach emphasizes radically grounding oneself in proximate relationships and argues that these vested connections are crucial for the work of justice. Engaging this idea, as both a possible method of research and a praxis to be examined through research, is an important next step.

4.2 | Implications for Christian community development

Our study found that despite central attention to sense of community, neighboring, and individual empowerment, collective efficacy and citizen participation were less developed in the CCDA philosophy. Training, education, and engagement around issues of social structures and citizen participation could strengthen CCDA's work to alleviate poverty, providing avenues for organizing, advocacy, networking and policy change in addition to developing local support structures.

Additionally, we suggest that CCDA invest energy into evaluation and assessment of their practice, which would reveal the implications and success of their program, as well as identify specific targets for improvement. As noted in the methods section, this study is part of a larger project that examines the CCDA approach and we hope in future stages of our study to engage directly with the organization in discussing these ideas. More broadly, however, we suggest that these results are meaningful for other faith-based organization's efforts in poor urban communities and we have attempted to demonstrate the importance of addressing structural causes of poverty in tandem with individual and communal interventions.

4.3 | Limitations of case study

This article explicitly focused on the CCDA, a large national faith-based organization, and our findings are not generalizable to other faith-based nonprofits, which may draw on different community psychology principles, employ different scripture and theology, or draw upon alternative models and methods of development work. Additionally, this study is based on a review of CCDA published and web-based content rather than ethnographic exploration (such as surveys, observations, and interviews) of the CCDA philosophy in practice, which limits our analysis to the espoused philosophy of CCDA, rather than analyzing how the CCDA philosophy translates into practice.

Moreover, our coding process was deductive and explicitly looked for evidence of neighboring, sense of community, empowerment, and citizen participation, rather than an inductive process of allowing the data to "speak for itself." While the deductive nature of our analysis enabled us to clearly identify and operationalize our research questions, it was less able to capture the unexpected results that would be more apparent in an open-ended or grounded theory approach.

Finally, we chose to focus on one set of community psychology constructs because they have been previously related to social capital and community development; but different findings might have emerged if the principles guiding our analysis had instead been diversity, ecology, or social justice. Alternatively, we could have used a more specific application of just one of our chosen principles, such as empowering community settings theory, some of which may apply (e.g., group-based belief systems, relational environment, or opportunity role structure), while other characteristics that are more setting-focused or organizationally-focused than community-focused may not apply. We hope that future projects, our own and the work of others, will address these gaps.

4.4 | Conclusion

This study explores the connections between community psychology and religious community development, drawing on the national CCDA as a case study. Our findings suggest that community psychology principles (sense of community, neighboring, and individual empowerment) are embedded in the CCDA philosophy in multiple ways and are grounded in Christian tradition and scripture. Additionally, our findings suggest that the CCDA's approach could be strengthened by greater attention to collective efficacy, citizen participation, and opportunities for networking across secular entities. Community psychology would benefit from more attention to religious development organizations and, in particular, to helping practitioners incorporate a structural critique into their interventions, which may lead to a more robust engagement of collective empowerment and citizen participation.

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