

**A TOOLKIT OF INFORMATION AND RESOURCES FOR FAITH-BASED
ORGANIZATIONS ADDRESSING SOCIAL NEEDS**

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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Introduction

Faith-based organizations are well-suited to address unmet social needs within their local communities because these organizations have an inherent concern for the wellbeing of humankind, and performing acts of charity and service are often an integral part of their mission. Many of the outreach programs in operation today have originated from faith institutions taking a proactive role in meeting unmet needs within their community. This report summarizes a multi-year project that examines the role of the major faith traditions in serving unmet social needs within the community. The study included a literature review of six major faith traditions and the historical context for which they have a commitment to addressing social needs. The study also involved online research of seventy-five faith-based programs addressing social needs in communities to provide a resource to faith institutions interested in developing similar programs. A key aspect of the research was interviewing the leaders of successful faith-based outreach programs to learn about what makes these projects successful and challenges that they have encountered. A practical application of the research study was the development of a series of slide decks to offer faith-based organizations a toolkit of resources to help plan and operate social outreach programs. The website provides an accessible platform to house all of the artifacts developed as part of the study. The final component of the project was creating an interactive public discussion board for the ongoing sharing of information among faith-based and nonprofit organizations addressing community needs.

Hypothesis of the Study

Many faith-based organizations have had to learn through trial and error the processes and structures for starting and sustaining social outreach programs to address community needs.

While many projects are successful, others did not accomplish their intended goals. Creating an easily accessible online resource of tools, information, and successful project models will benefit faith organizations, and offer guidance and direction to assist them in developing and operating successful programs to address social needs.

Research Methods

This project is structured as a capstone portfolio, delivered on a website, that creates an online toolkit of resources and information to assist faith-based organizations addressing social needs within their communities. The toolkit includes such artifacts, in addition to the website, such as: the results of a major quantitative national study of faith-based organizations with review and summary of existing resources, and a qualitative study from a series of interviews of leaders to gather perspectives on challenges and successes in operating these programs; articles were also reviewed on aspects of this research. In addition to quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, critical inquiry was used to study and explore how six different faith traditions engage in social outreach and the historical foundations compelling this work. The study unfolded through these projects:

- A thorough literature review to gather information on the major faith traditions' commitment to addressing social needs.
- Online research of 75 faith-based programs serving social needs across the U.S. and the data compiled into a directory.
- Primary research for the project that includes both quantifiable and qualitative information that was collected over a year through online interviews. The questionnaire used for the interviews includes both open-ended (qualitative data) questions and those using a Likert scale to measure quantitative elements of the study (See Appendix B). The results of the

research are reviewed and summarized in this narrative report that is included in the online toolkit.

- Conduct a review of existing community organization tools and online resources that are summarized in slide decks and included in the toolkit.

Project Goals

The anticipated learning to be gained and the goals to be achieved from this project include:

- Develop a clear understanding regarding the major faith tradition' commitment to social outreach work as expressed through their major teachings and service mission.
- Highlight the key attributes that are part of successful social outreach programs operated by faith-based organizations.
- Review the best practices of faith organizations serving social needs to share with other institutions interested in this type of work.
- Identify the major challenges and obstacles that faith-based organizations have faced when developing social outreach programs.
- Research and summarize the key tools that will assist faith-based organizations in planning, developing, and operating social outreach programs.
- Provide examples of successful organizational structures of multi-faith partnerships that have developed social outreach programs.
- Organize the information, tools, and resources into an easily accessible and usable website for faith-based and other organizations to utilize.

**REVIEW OF SIX MAJOR FAITH TRADITIONS
COMMITMENT TO ADDRESSING SOCIAL NEEDS**

Six Major Faith Traditions Serving Social Needs

The impetus behind faith institutions starting programs to address social issues is the result of their historical development and inherit mission to help those in need. This section examines the commitment of six major faith traditions to serving social needs.

Islam

As the Islamic faith began to develop, the call for social justice was imbedded in its teachings as referenced in the Quran. The Quran taught against economic and social injustices and stressed the need to overcome and eliminate these injustices. The Quran ordered people to reform their society, taught them to adopt new ways of thinking, and gave them incentives to undergo social changes (Timani, 2012, p. 139). Within the Quran there are many direct passages that compel believers to practice social justice in their daily lives. “Righteous are those who give food to the poor, the orphan and the captive” (Quran 76:8).

The Quran also addresses issues of trying to distribute wealth and resources more fairly among the wealthy and poor that were lacking as part of Arabic society prior to Islam’s formation. “Believers must share with others because what they share in not their own property but God’s property” (Quran 57:7). In Islam the term *zakat* is used to refer to this concept of creating economic fairness. In essence, *zakat* is a form of almsgiving with the intent to better allocate the wealth between the members of society, especially those who are poor. It is seen as part of a religious duty within the faith tradition connected to social justice that helps to provide assistance. This duty also ensures that the basic needs of fellow members among the Islamic community are met.

The believers are brethren: no man's iman (belief) is complete until he wishes for his neighbor that which he wishes for himself. The believers love one another by virtue of God's light and grace. The duties of zakat and charity are intimately related to this fraternal feeling (Haykal, 1976, p. 536).

In addition to zakat, the Quran also teaches about the importance of giving of one's time to help others. The term *sadaqah* refers to a form of charity that involves reaching out to assist others and working with others in a spirit of caring, compassion and kindness. This concept of *sadaqah* helps to build community and creates an environment of doing good deeds for your neighbors, whether rich or poor.

Islam strongly emphasizes the importance of caring for others and refers to those living in surrounding areas as neighbors: A 'neighbor' is not necessarily just a person living next door, but a street is a neighbor to the next street, a district is a neighbor to the next district. This creates a sense of togetherness and shared responsibility in a town or city (Asim, 2017, p. 60).

Based on the text of the Quran and the key teachings of the Islamic faith tradition, the major themes of social concern for others focus around:

- Gender justice and protecting women and their rights
- Economic and distributive justice in how resources get allocated
- Care of those who are vulnerable and oppressed
- Environmental justice
- Treatment of others including non-Muslims and persons of diverse ethnicities and religious beliefs
- Legal justice

These major themes are rooted in how Islam sees social justice being established in society by following the practices of zakat, *sadaqah* and altruism (a quality of selflessness and concern for the wellbeing of others). The Prophet Muhammed taught the significance of the quality of

selflessness when he said: “None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself” (Asim, 2017, p. 60). Sayyid Qutb, a 20th century Muslim leader, taught about the importance of social justice in modern Islam and how people must reconnect to these teachings from the Prophet Muhammad and the Quran. Qutb places great emphasis on mutual responsibility as the core of social justice and argues that the foundations of justice in Islam include: 1. Freedom of conscience; 2. Complete equality of all human beings and; 3. Social solidarity (Mussallam, 2018, p. 17).

Gender Justice

The Quran clearly states in various passages that both men and women will receive equal reward if they remain faithful and live a righteous life. It was Islam that had an integral role in helping to raise the status of women in society. The Quran includes references to the fact that it is a gift from God when a family is blessed with a son or daughter and it strongly condemns the act of families killing the female infants. Prominent scholar Amina Wadud concludes about Islam “that there is no inherently greater value placed on either women or men, and that the relationship between men and women is portrayed as one that is equitable and based on mutual dependence, not one of men’s control over women (Stiles, 2012, p. 160).

Economic and Distributive Justice

As part of Islam’s focus on social justice, it mandates that there must be fairness in how goods and services are allocated and distributed to the various members of society. There is special concern within the Islamic tradition to take care of those who lack resources and are living in poverty. As previously discussed, the term zakat is the religious obligation within Islam that compels Muslims who have sufficient resources to donate some of their wealth to those who

are poor and needy. Zakat not only enshrines the right of help for the community's vulnerable but, in so doing, it builds a relationship of consideration and appreciation between society's members (Asim, 2017, p. 59).

Besides the mandatory giving of zakat, Islam also implores Muslims to perform additional acts of charity and to donate beyond the minimum to help those in need. This act of charity, as mentioned previously, is referred to as sadaqah. According to the Prophet Muhammad he quotes God as stating "O son of Adam, spend in charity and I shall spend on you" (Khan, 2020, online).

Care of Those Who are Vulnerable and Oppressed

An integral tenet of the Islamic faith tradition is to always work on behalf of those who are oppressed and to serve as an advocate for these individuals. According to the Prophet Muhammad's teachings, "Beware of the supplication of the oppressed, for there is no barrier between it and God" (Khan, 2020, online). In addition to the oppressed, Islam also teaches about the importance of the care of those who are vulnerable in society. Two groups mentioned in the Quran and the teachings of Muhammad include orphans and slaves. "You stand firmly for justice towards orphans" (Quran 4:127). "Have you not seen the one who rejects faith? That is the one who repels orphans" (Quran 107:1-2). The care and support of orphans is of extreme importance in Islam and if one does not accept this responsibility, then it is seen as serious as one rejecting the faith. Islamic teaching also tried to protect those who were kept as slaves. Islam promoted the freeing of slaves, but also addressed their treatment in order to try and stop the abuses being rendered against this group. The Prophet Muhammad states, "He who frees a slave, God will set free every limb of his body from Hell in reward for every limb of the slave's body" (Khan, 2020,

online). The teachings regarding the protection of slaves were expanded within Islam to address other forms of ill treatment, exploitation and wrong doing levied against others.

Another vulnerable group that Islam tries to protect are those persons dealing with disabilities. Through various examples and teaching amongst its leaders, Islam stressed the importance of ensuring equal treatment of those with disabilities and to protect them from discrimination and harm. Besides those with disabilities, Islam also taught the importance of treating those with mental illness and learning challenges with dignity and compassion.

Environmental Justice

Muslims of the modern era have begun to pay increased attention toward how Islam's concern for social justice includes also focusing on protecting the environment. Islamic philosopher Seyyid Hossein Nasr argued for a reconsideration of the relationship between humanity and the natural world from the perspectives of several religious traditions, including Islam (Stiles, 2012, p. 166). Within the Quran there are several references to the importance of humanity demonstrating stewardship of the earth's resources. Some Muslim countries have begun to establish policies to protect the environment, and these laws have been developed using an Islamic framework.

Treatment of Others

Another demonstration of social justice within the Islamic faith tradition concerns teachings on the treatment of persons of other ethnicities, religious traditions and beliefs. A key aspect of Islam's concern for social justice deals with racial equality. The Quran states, "O Humankind, verily we created you from male and female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Indeed, the most honorable of you in the sight of God is the

most pious” (Quran, 49:13). According to Islamic teaching, by belonging to different ethnic groups it helps society advance human interaction and harmony between each other. In a sermon given by the Prophet Muhammad towards the end of his life he declared,

“O People your Lord is one and your father (Adam) is one. Verily, there is no superiority of an Arab or a non-Arab nor a non-Arab over an Arab. There is no superiority of a white over a black nor a black over a white. Only piety causes one to excel” (Khan, 2020, online).

Islam also teaches about the importance to show kindness and compassion towards everyone, even if they are of a different faith tradition or belief system. Two passages from the Quran reflect this teaching of being open and accepting to people of other faiths. “There is no compulsion in faith; truth is clear from error” (Quran 2:256), and “Had your Lord willed all people on earth could have believed; so how then could you try to force people to arrive at faith” (Quran 10:99)? Islam stresses that a person’s religious identity or beliefs should not be a factor when making decisions to help someone in need.

The Prophet Muhammad’s affirmation of the pledge known as *Hilf al-Fudul* (an agreement to protect anyone who was oppressed, regardless of their identity or background) demonstrated the duty Muslims have to protect anyone who is oppressed, and that Muslims should have no qualms entering into alliances with other religious communities in order to fulfill this duty (Khan, 2020, online).

Legal Justice

Due to the fact that laws were so unjust or even non-existent in early Arabic society, Islam attempted to create a fair system in how laws were developed and enforced. In the Quran it mentions that both husbands and wives have equal rights. When trying to exercise these rights the focus should be on service to one another and trying to maintain justice and balance. “In accordance with justice, the rights of the wives (with regard to their husbands) are equal to the husbands’ rights” (Quran 2:228). With regards to these rights, the woman should be recognized

as a full and equal partner with the man. The Quran also addresses the rights of orphans and identifies that they have certain rights, such as with regards to property. “Until orphans reach maturity, give full measure and weight according to justice” (Quran 6:152).

Islam also addresses issues regarding how public property is to be handled justly. “Do not consume your property wrongfully nor use it to bribe judges intending sinfully and knowingly to consume parts of other people’s property” (Quran 2: 188). As part of the Islamic directives on handling of public property, it also stressed the need for people to have a will and to avoid injustices when dealing with matters of a person’s inheritance. If injustice is committed due to an unfair distribution of wealth, the deceased person who owned the wealth will be held accountable in front of God for not distributing the wealth fairly among the inheritors (Timani, 2008, p. 64).

Islam also provides guidance on how business should be conducted. Islamic leader Sayyid Qutb stressed Islamic principles when operating a business and the importance of being honest and not cheating people.

Islam forbids dishonesty in business because it defiles the conscience, injures others, and represents a gain without effort (which is therefore un-Islamic). Islam does not recognize monopolies because they inflict hardship and distress on people and lessen the flow of supplies to the public. It is also opposed to usury, considering it even more shameful than adultery (Musallam, 2018, p. 20).

In addition to addressing business matters, Islam also addresses how to handle conflicts that arrive between individuals or groups and how to bring about fair justice. The Quran stresses the importance of arriving at a just and fair reconciliation between two parties who have a conflict.

Throughout the historical development of the Islamic faith tradition and the teachings of its religious leaders we find an ongoing commitment to social justice. Encouraging acts of zakat

and sadaqah from its members, the religion has always stressed the importance of serving social needs within society.

Hinduism

The Hindu religious tradition evolved in a society where the caste system formed the structure of the community. With clear social class and economic divides within the society, there were notable social injustices that existed between people in the higher-class structure versus those in the lower. Efforts to bring social justice within Hindu society requires an understanding of key terms making references to justice within the Sanskrit language. *Sarvodaya* is a Sanskrit term that would be similar to the word of social justice in western culture. This term refers to efforts at spurring change in the social, political and economic structures to help bring about equity and social responsibility. In addition to Sarvodaya, there are other key terms in Hindu that make reference to establishing social justice. The five justice-related terms from Hindu religious scripture set the stage for understanding the Hindu framework for talking about social justice: *Dharma, Niti, Nyaya, Karma and Punarjanma* (Dwivedi, 2012, p. 114). Dharma refers to one's expectation or obligation, goodwill towards each other as being part of humanity, and moral restraint. Niki makes reference to acceptable behavior and actions of respect. Nyaya concerns justice in action and how one must consider the impact of their behaviors both prior to and after making the decision to act. Karma conveys that a consciously intended act levied against another will result in consequences that Hindus believe will always remain with the person. Punarjanma concerns one's rebirth. Karma and Punarjanma are closely linked and provide for Hindus a reasoning and explanation regarding why suffering is allowed to occur with humans including matters such as the inequality among the castes, disease, painful and tragic death, and poverty.

The concepts of Karma and Punarjanma became ideological mechanisms justifying social disparity (Upadhyay, 1978, p. 173).

With the passage of time and continued advancement of India's society, there were numerous efforts made to change or eliminate the Hindu caste system. Lord Krishna attempted to try and change the negative elements that developed with the caste system, especially when it came to the harsh treatment of those in the lowest caste, with those in the untouchable group suffering the most and being completely disrespected. He explains in the Gita "despite being born in any Varna, a person devoted to his prescribed Karma can achieve salvation (Gita, 18:45). He tried to address the harshness of the caste system that had developed over time. His teaching stressed that even the lowest caste group were worthy of respect and salvation, trying to show their value in relation to those in the upper castes.

As the religious traditions of Buddhism and Jainism began to spread through the geographic area, their beliefs specifically rejected and taught against the validity or purpose of the caste system. These religious traditions also focused on trying to improve the status of women, opposing the oppressive rituals and excessive rites associated with Hinduism, and limiting the practice of worshipping multiple gods or deities.

When Britain gained dominance over this area of Asia and began to institute its rule over the people, a group of educated Hindus saw the opportunity to make reforms within Hinduism. The major movements of the 19th century tried to bring about a complete overhaul of the social-religious structure that had developed in Hindu society.

Arya Samaj was founded in 1875 by Swami Dayananda. He espoused a "protestant" Hinduism that emphasized monotheism and the Vedas and opposed the caste system and Brahmanical orthodoxy (Talbo, 2000, p. 35).

Arya Samaj regarded women as being equal to men and was against categorizing people as untouchables, viewing that as a wrong and sinful act. This movement also supported removing restrictions on widows so that they should be allowed to remarry and also believed that everyone should have access to a good education, across all caste levels. This movement brought about a renewed pride in the Hindu religion and it began to grow in the north and northwest India.

The other major social movement during this period in India history that attempted to change Hinduism was Brahma Samaj.

The Brahma Samaj was created in 1828 through the efforts of celebrated social reformer Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The Brahma Samaj opposed sati (the immolation of Hindu widows on their husbands' funeral pyres), the practice of polygamy among some wealthy Hindus, idol worship, and the degradation of widows (Dwivedi, 2012, p. 118).

This movement was successful in changing laws to make sati (killing of widowed women) a crime, instrumental in helping give widows the right to remarry, and curbing polygamy. Even with the focused efforts by Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj to change ancient practices within Hinduism, the caste system and labeling people as untouchables continued to remain. Following these social movements, two modern day Hindu leaders who came to the forefront to try and reform Indian society with its restrictive practices were Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. B.R.

Ambedkar.

Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar

These two gentlemen were modern day Hindu leaders who were influential in making changes within Indian society during the 20th century. They were both strong advocates for social justice and key reforms and devoted their lives to trying to address the inequality and abuses being rendered against those in the lower castes and untouchables. Although their approaches to

social justice may have differed, they were both devoted to equality amongst all within Indian society based on democratic values and creating a humanistic society.

Mahatma Gandhi (1869 – 1948)

Gandhi's outlook on social justice was based on the Indian concept of Dharma, which can generally be explained as that which sustains or supports and is based on the traditions imbedded in Sanskrit. The term can also refer to both one's religion and duty. Gandhi believed that what is required to achieve a fair and just world is for everyone to fulfill his/her duties. He supported the ancient Hindu support of the caste system, but based his viewpoint on a person's duty and his/her role in helping to support and advance all of society. He re-interpreted and redefined the existing paradigm of caste-based duties by reiterating the dignity and significance of all such duties for the "sustenance" of the society (Reisch, 2014, p. 40). The reality of India's experience with the caste system was creating an exploitative and unjust system that resulted in enslaving and demeaning certain groups of people. The result of this approach to creating stratified classes amongst the larger society was a small privileged group, with the majority of the wealth and ownership of resources, becoming controlling over those below them. In Gandhi's view, if everyone performed their duties justly and fairly, then everyone's rights and duties in society are ensured. Gandhi believed that if you were able to achieve this level of social justice among society, then the aim would be to create a type of religious utopia. He believed that the advancement or progress of the least developed (the lowest caste members) in the group would help to ensure the well-being and proper functioning of all of society.

In order to attain a just and fair society for Gandhi meant that people must hold to the truth and work for the well-being of everyone. He also believed in creating a just society that we most hold to the principle of non-violence.

Suffering is the mark of the human tribe. It is an eternal law. The mother suffers so that her child may live. Life, comes out of death. The condition of wheat growing is that the seed grain should perish. No country has ever risen without being purified through the fire of suffering.... It is impossible to do away with the law of suffering which is the one indispensable condition of our being. Progress is to be measure by the amount of suffering undergone.... The purer the suffering the greater is the progress.... Non-violence in its dynamic condition means conscious suffering (Rolland, 1924, p. 40).

In addition to teaching non-violence to build a socially just society, Gandhi also believed that we must be thoughtful in our use of resources. Do not take what you do not require or as he described it as non-covetousness or the term *aparigraha*.

Gandhi clearly described the key elements that he believed were needed in order to create a just Hindu society in the modern-day world:

Equal Distribution: In order to have a true equal distribution among the people, would require that the entire Hindu social order would need to be reconstructed. In Gandhi's view, the real implication of equal distribution is that each man shall have the wherewithal to supply his needs and no more (Gandhi, 1980, p. 18).

Trusteeship: In order to achieve a just society, then those with wealth must use it to benefit all of society. He believed that the skills to generate or accumulate wealth is a skill that is not possessed by everyone in society. Those who have this knowledge or skill should use it to generate wealth for the common good, once the individual reasonably fulfills his/her needs.

Self-Rule: Gandhi believed that there should be a minimalist state government with specific powers. True power to govern should be given at the local level (villages) and that everyone is allowed to participate in governance, including the laborers and peasants. He felt that social justice could be established firmly only when people of a locality (village) lived in harmony, decided their matters at the local level, and resolved their

disputes without having any recourse to the “evil of law courts,” which he believed tend to perpetuate strife and thrive on conflict (Palakkappillil, 2014, p. 43).

Swadeshi or Self-Sufficient Local Communities: Gandhi strongly advocated that in order to achieve true social justice required that each community become self-sufficient. In order for a community to become strong and thrive, it should be able to produce the material goods and services that it requires. This self-sufficiency will also help to ensure the sustained employment of those in the community.

Bread Labor: Gandhi was a strong proponent in upholding the dignity of labor as part of building a just society. Everyone should be contributing to the production of the goods and services needed by that community. He believed that both physical and intellectual skills are equally important for the success of society and for it to flourish.

Protection of Animals: Gandhi believed that the concept of love thy neighbor extended to every living being. We see this concept demonstrated in Hindu’s support and protection of the cow.

Because the cow, to him, is taken as the symbol of the entire ‘sub-human world.’ Cow protection means that man concludes a pact of alliance with his dumb brethren; it signifies fraternity between man and beast....By learning to respect, revere an animal, man is taken beyond his species and is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives Rolland, 1924, p. 29).

Work for the Oppressed: Gandhi was deeply opposed to the practice of untouchability that existed in India. He was constantly advocating for the uplift of society’s outcasts, including those in the lower castes and considered untouchables. This was one of the negative aspects of the caste system that he did not support. Gandhi used the term *harijan* to refer to those in the untouchable group. Gandhi called untouchables harijans (children

of God) and declared that there would be no independence in India so long as the curse of untouchability continued to strain Hinduism (Wolport, 2000, p. 310).

Gandhi was instrumental in advancing social justice within Hindu society. He advocated for justice amongst all members of India's society, and his key message was that true human happiness involved finding the right mix between spiritual and material realities.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar (1891 – 1956)

Dr. Ambedkar was another prominent Hindu who advocated for reforms within the religion and advancing social justice amongst all of the members of India society. He was part of the Mahar caste which were considered one of the untouchable groups and his family experienced many injustices and socio-economic barriers. Overcoming the odds stacked against him, Dr. Ambedkar was able to go to college to get his degree and launch a political career with his goal of fighting for the depressed classes and working to address the inequality present in Hindu society.

He was an uncompromising rebel against social injustice and inequality. He worked relentlessly for the regeneration of humanity, for the well-being of mankind and for the transformation of man and society (Raghavendra, 2016, p. 26).

The vision of Dr. Ambedkar was to create a new social order in India that was based on the key principles of equality, concern for each other, and justice. He spent his entire life working for the improvement in the conditions and quality of life of the poor and exploited members that were part of the untouchable class in India society.

Dr. Ambedkar's principles of social justice were based on a system of establishing the right relations between humans including all spheres of their lives. He stood against any hypocrisy, exploitation, and injustice of humans against each other and justifying it in the name

of religion. He advocated for a religion that is based on key principles of morality that is applicable to all societies and races. He believed that the caste system should be considered one of the greatest wrong doings that was part of the Hindu culture. A person's status in society should be the result of his/her merits and good works and where no one is classified as noble or untouchable just because of the group that he/she is born into. The Constitution of India, which was drafted under his chairmanship, contains a number of provisions that enjoins the state to secure to all citizens, justice, social, economic and political, along with liberty, equality and fraternity (Raghavendra, 2016, p. 27).

It was through the legislative system that Dr. Ambedkar was able to advance social justice and protect those who were being oppressed in Hindu society. He worked to include in the Indian Constitution preferential treatment for those persons who had been oppressed in society. He worked to declare within the Constitution that untouchability would be abolished. He also worked for an affirmative action type system for those in the lower castes and tried to ensure they had the tools (e.g. access to education, government services, resource) needed to allow them to advance educationally, economically and socially.

Modern Day Social Justice Themes in Hinduism

There are five key areas that Hinduism continues to remain focused on today to try and advance social justice among its members. These areas include caste injustices/eliminating untouchability, gender justice and advancing the rights of women, economic justice, non-violence towards others, and environmental stewardship.

Caste Injustices and Eliminating Untouchability

Despite numerous efforts over time by Hindu leaders and developing a legal framework to eliminate caste discrimination and the oppressions rendered against Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes classes, most of the major institutions in India continue to practice these in both a subtle and more secretive manner. Leaders within Hinduism and organization such as the Hindu American Foundation are calling on Hindus to acknowledge that caste arose in their society but it does not have to be tied to their spirituality moving forward. Through advancing reform movements, developing an activist agenda, and widespread education across society, the caste system, with the discrimination and inequality that has come from it, can be dealt with in Hindu society. The Constitution of India has made efforts in redefining Hindu law and practices in view of its relevance in a modernizing and forward-looking Hindu society (Singh, 2012, p. 129). Established laws are in place to prohibit discrimination on the basis of religion, gender, caste, race, and place of birth.

Gender Justice and Advancing Women's Rights

Hindu social and gender justice activists have helped to advance the rights of women in modern Indian society. India continues to pass laws to protect women on issues such as raising the age of marriage, ensuring that women have a right to their share of the matrimonial property, attempting to do away with the idea of dowry where a woman is seen as someone else's treasure, and continuing to strongly enforce laws making sati (burning the wife with her husband's corpse) illegal. The Constitution imposes a duty on every citizen in India to renounce practices that undermine the dignity of women (Singh, 2012, p. 134).

Economic Justice

There are several sections of the Indian Constitution that try to expand economic justice and equality of opportunity for everyone in society, including those in the lower castes. Efforts have been made to ensure that even those in the lower castes have access to education, including implementing affirmative action-based models of establishing quotas for certain under-represented groups. The concept of self-sufficiency, supported by Gandhi, requires that resources be used by the community in an equitable and fair, and wise manner to ensure the flourishing of all members of the community.

Non-Violence

Hindu teachings on the divine dwelling in all beings support that murdering and harming another living being are wrong in principle. Gandhi implored Hindus, and demonstrated by how he lived his life, how one should practice non-violence and it was a central theme in his teaching. Efforts continue in Hindu society to apply the concept of non-violence as it relates to positions on war, the death penalty, suicide and sati, abortion, euthanasia, and killing and harming animals. Protecting cows has also become symbolic of commitment to the whole Hindu way of life and identity, and so harming a cow has meaning beyond the fate of one animal (Robinson and Cush, 2020, p. 38).

Environmental Stewardship

There are many facets of the Hindu religious tradition that supports environmental stewardship and concern for nature. The support of living a simple life, that the divine dwells in all things, reverence for the cow, respect for all living things, viewing the earth as a goddess, and principles of non-harming are a few examples within Hinduism that

align with protecting the environment. The resources are there in the Hindu tradition for creating a contemporary Hindu environmentalism which views concern for the planet and all beings who dwell upon her as an important part of the spiritual quest rather than a distraction from it (Robinson and Cush, 2020, p. 39).

Hinduism has come a long way in its evolution on how it views members of society and respect for all living beings. Its concern for social issues within society and advancing justice continue to develop and change from its previous history of oppression that was tolerated with certain members of the community.

Buddhism

When Buddha was a young man, he saw the suffering and injustices going on in the society around him. He witnessed some of the major injustices within the Hindu faith tradition that were being imposed on the people related to the strong influence that the caste system had in this tradition and the hardships those in the lower caste groups faced.

Buddha began the practice of meditation and arrived at the understanding regarding what are the true reasons for the causes of human suffering and how one could be released from it. Buddha began to go out and teach others regarding what caused suffering. Religious scholars believe that many of the Buddhist concepts that are a key part of this tradition were consciously developed to counter Vedic thought that was common in Hinduism, especially establishing a hierarchical social order that resulted in tremendous suffering and inequality for those in the lower castes. Although Buddha did not oppose the concept of the caste system supported in Vedic teachings, he did reject the idea that there was a moral component to the system and felt

that there were good and bad people within all the classes. Also, central to the understanding of suffering in Buddhism is the notion of karma which means “act”.

Over time and under the influence of non-Vedic religious expressions, the term took on the connotation of “moral deed.” In Buddhism, our moral deeds produce consequences according to their nature, and these consequences must be experienced. If not in this lifetime, then a subsequent one. We live in a moral universe and karma is one of its laws (Fenn, 2012, p. 19).

Buddha believed that it is to the individual’s advantage to perform good acts in our current lives that will yield positive results, both in this life and the next. While Buddhism teaches that we can’t change our past, we are able to change our future by making a conscious and consistent effort to act in a positive manner.

Buddha taught about the Four Noble Truths as a key part of his message. When we have an understanding of these Four Noble Truths, then we have a sharper focus on the reality that the further our perception from reality will result in more suffering. These Four Noble Truths include (Namchak.org, 2022, online):

1. *Truth of Suffering*: we are living in an ongoing state of dissatisfaction.
2. *The Truth of the Origin of Suffering*: Suffering/dissatisfaction arises from causes and conditions.
3. *The Truth of Cessation*: There is a possibility of reaching a state where that dissatisfaction/suffering has ceased.
4. *Truth of the Path*: There is a path for us to follow that will bring us to such a state.

Buddha described an Eight-Fold Path that will assist one in developing routine practices in his/her life that will lead to the cessation of suffering by having the correct understanding regarding what is the nature of things. This path includes having the right thoughts, right view, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.

Briefly stated, the aim of the path is to bring our moral conduct into conformity with wisdom, that is, with a correct understanding of the nature of things (Emmanuel, 2012, p. 31).

This Eight-Fold Path ties in with key concepts of social justice. If we choose to follow the path, then one needs to begin with building a holistic and healthy state of mind, having a clearer awareness of our regular behaviors and their consequences, and practicing these actions will help improve our mental and physical well-being.

Buddha also provided a series of guidelines to help guide moral behavior among Buddhists. These Five Precepts help to form the foundation for Buddhist moral teaching and align with efforts to bring about social justice in society. These Precepts include refraining from murder, theft, sexual impropriety, lying, and intoxicants.

Buddha's spiritual journey throughout his life to obtain enlightenment was motivated not just by his personal experiences in life of suffering, but also by his sincere concern for the suffering experienced by those around him and within the world. He believed that there was an interdependence with each other and with everything in our universe. What we call the self is not ontologically distinct, not a substance self, but rather part of any ever-changing, interdependent network of processes in the world (Gowans, 2003, p. 84). From a social justice lens, Buddha taught that we need to come to the awareness that our personal suffering is interdependent with the suffering of others. To have true compassion according to Buddha, and Buddhist teaching, is when we come to the understanding that when we work to change the conditions that bring about suffering, both in ourselves and the larger society, then our individual actions help contribute to the freeing or release of suffering of all beings. After Buddha's death, there were a variety of monastic schools that developed among his followers. Today there are three major schools or branches of Buddhism: Mahayana, Theravada and Vajrayana.

The Three Major Buddhist Schools/Branches

To have a better understanding regarding the focus of Buddhism on social justice, it is important to understand the unique attributes of each of the current major schools of Buddhism.

Mahayana Buddhism

The Mahayana path or branch of Buddhism is common in regions of Asia that include Nepal, Tibet, China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia and Vietnam. This school teaches that lay people can also be good Buddhists and living a holy and dutiful life is not just reserved for the Buddhist's monks and nuns. The social dimension that is part of Buddhism is stressed in the Mahayana tradition. This branch of Buddhism also places as a central part of its teachings the interdependence amongst all beings. Especially important are the bodhisattvas who are persons who have reached the point of enlightenment, but come back and take a vow to use their enlightenment, wisdom, compassion and power to assist others in releasing them from suffering. This idea of one who is enlightened reaching out to help others in order to assist in relieving suffering in the world supports social justice practice. The Mahayana form of Buddhism also places key focus on the Six Perfections.

They constitute the practices a bodhisattva seeks to fulfill in carrying out his initial spiritual resolution (*bodhicitta*) and vows (*prañidhāna*) to achieve buddhahood for the welfare of all beings. The six perfections are (1) generosity (*dāna*), (2) morality (*śīla*), (3) patience (*kṣānti*), (4) vigor/diligence (*vīrya*), (5) concentration (*dhyāna*), and (6) wisdom (*prajñā*) (Apple, 2016, Online).

Theravada Buddhism

This path of Buddhism is common in regions of Asia including Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. This school focuses on the key figure of the Buddha and places significant importance on the role of the Buddhist monks and their practice of meditation. This

branch of Buddhism is focused on the Eight-Fold Noble Path taught by Buddha and the Theravadas' motivation is to free oneself from suffering.

Theravada monks hold that the Buddha taught a doctrine of anatta (no-soul) when he spoke of the importance of the human body/form, perception, sensations/feelings, consciousness and volition. They believe, however, that human beings continue to be "reformed" and reborn, and to collect karma (the effects of moral action on the person who is the agent of the action) until they reach Nirvana (Vail, 1982, online).

Vajrayana Buddhism

This path of Buddhism was a subset of Mahayana, so some scholars do not consider it as a unique form of the religious tradition. Tibetan Buddhism follows the path of Vajrayana. This path is focused on the Six Perfections, and similar to Mahayana, the main motivation is to free all beings from suffering.

Vajrayana Buddhism is sometimes called Tantric or Esoteric Buddhism. It involves the use of tantras, or specific spiritual techniques, which help individuals gain enlightenment as quickly as possible (Sokolov, 2017, Online).

With the proper training and skills and continued repetitive practice, this branch of Buddhism believes these tantric acts can bring one to full enlightenment within one's current lifetime without having to go through countless reincarnations.

These three main pathways of the Buddhist faith tradition all hold dear the teachings of the Buddha. As these major branches have evolved over time, there exists some differences in their teachings and central areas of focus. These three paths have all had some influence on a popular movement in Buddhism that has global awareness and a lot of support in the West, known as Engaged Buddhism.

Engaged Buddhism

Engaged Buddhism (also referred to as Socially Engaged Buddhism) is a modern movement within the Buddhist tradition. This movement tries to link together the various forms of social action that have been organized by Buddhists as a response to the various social, economic and political causes of suffering occurring in modern society. Although some within the Buddhist faith tradition have questioned its activist approach and if it adheres to traditional Buddhist doctrine, this modern movement does not represent a significant difference or departure from conventional Buddhist teaching, practice or the religious tradition.

Engaged Buddhism is defined and unified by the intention to apply the values and teachings of Buddhism to the problems of society in a nonviolent way, motivated by concern for the welfare of others, and as an expression of one's own practice of the Buddhist (King, 2005, p. 5).

Some have described Engaged Buddhism as an intention and that it is lived within the current forms of Buddhism. With the evolution of this form of Buddhist thought, there are many individuals who feel that the diversity and commonality that is part of Engaged Buddhism help to focus on shared issues and align the common set of traditional values that is present among the major Buddhist schools.

Engaged Buddhism is most closely identified with the life and teachings of Thich Nhat Hahn who lived in Vietnam and was a Zen Master. He was a teacher, poet, writer and social activist who during the Vietnam War was able to inspire thousands of Buddhists to get actively engaged in efforts promoting reconciliation and peace. Hahn was the one who coined the term "Engaged Buddhism" whose popularity grew in the West.

In addition to organizing and training volunteer youth for social service, he founded Tiep Hien (the Order of Interbeing), a new branch of Vietnamese Zen Buddhism based on the principles of engaged practice. After the war his order continued to grow, gradually evolving into an international community of lay and ordained practitioners dedicated to

promoting mindful living and compassionate action in society (Emmanuel, 2012, p. 30-31).

There are several key important concepts around which Engaged Buddhism is focused on. First, is the teaching that all beings should be valued and are worthy of our attention. We should not approach matters as “us” vs. “them” or the “haves” and “have nots” but that we are all interconnected to each other. True compassion is utterly neutral and is moved by suffering of every sort, not tied to right and wrong, attachment and aversion (Rinpoche, 1985, p. 40). The second key concept is that social transformation and self-transformation are both required. As individuals we are part of the world, so if you are going to attempt to change the world then you must change yourself too. The third key concept of Engaged Buddhism is that it is dedicated to bringing together social justice and democracy by using disciplined meditative practices.

Modern scholars of Engaged Buddhism commonly fall into two camps in terms of how this movement relates to the broader Buddhist tradition and are identified as modernist or traditionist approaches. Those who support the modernist way of thinking believe that Engaged Buddhism is essentially a modern-day faith tradition that has a tenuous link to historical Buddhist practice, doctrine and thought. Some adhering to this way of thinking feel that certain elements of the modern-day movement may even be at odds with historical Buddhist teaching. Those falling into the traditionist camp tend to view Engaged Buddhism as a modern-day embodiment of the tradition and of the commitments that have been part of Buddhism since its earliest days. Engaged Buddhism itself emerges from a dialogue between Buddhist and modern Western ideas, and is firmly continuous with the Buddhist tradition (Garfield, 2022, p. 182).

There are several key areas that make Engaged Buddhism unique in approaching social justice issues and effective in addressing some of the challenges faced in this work. First, Engaged Buddhism provides a process and theory for addressing conflict or resistance when it

comes to advocacy, community organizing and working to address social justice issues. Second, those who are part of the Engaged Buddhism movement note that the practice of meditation and mindfulness helps them to deal with anger and frustration with others and their own personal feelings. Third, the focus on meditation helps to deal with a lack of motivation and fear that may hinder people from attempting or dealing with difficult or challenging tasks. Fourth, the approach of Engaged Buddhism will assist one in gaining understanding of their own biases (both conscious and unconscious) and narrow mindedness, which can result in the ways we are oppressive to ourselves and those we interact with, the cause of violence and abuse that's exhibited towards others, and individual greed and selfishness. Engaged Buddhism is a faith-based movement focused on changing one's awareness as a required element for facilitating positive social change. From an injustice standpoint, this movement sees it as more than just a wrong act committed against someone, but that the situation must be seen in a broader light involving inter-related forces to which one must address in its totality.

Those who are part of the Engaged Buddhism movement have noted that it involves an intricate discourse between individual conscious-raising and helping the world change. The primary Buddhist position on social action is one of total activism, and unswerving commitment to complete self-transformation and complete world transformation (Thurman, 1985, p. 46).

Judaism

Through all major aspects of the Jewish faith tradition, the theme of social justice is strongly embedded. Judaism places a great emphasis on the strong bond between the individual and the community; that is, on the crucial role of the community in the life of the individual (Hellinger, 2012, p. 170). The unique characteristic of Judaism is that it is both an identified religion and a collective of people who share a common ethnicity and national identity.

This collective component of Judaism being both a major religious tradition and national or public identity poses significant implications for issues of social justice. Throughout the history of Judaism, not only were individuals personally mandated to help the vulnerable, as taught in the sacred texts, there were also very public directives to do so. The community had the legal requirement to offer health, education, and welfare programs that were supported in part through taxes mandated by the government. From the religious side, Judaism had clear directives on the important bond/linkage between the faith tradition and morality. The Hebrew Bible and texts from the prophets assign a high priority to social justice.

Jewish religious tradition views morality – divinely ordained morality – as a guide for the individual and society alike; and in this context justice functions as both a religious virtue and as a personal and collective religious duty (Cohen, 1972, p. 65).

In the first chapter of the first book of the Hebrew Bible, we see the biblical directive for stressing the egalitarian notion of justice.

“And God said, let us make mankind in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the sky, and over the cattle, and over the whole earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on earth. So God created mankind in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female. He created them (Genesis 1:26-27).”

This passage bestows on humans their important responsibility to ensure justice in mankind for all of God’s creatures.

Within Judaism, the beginning point is addressing all moral, political and social issues which tie back to the theological understanding concerning the relationship that exists between God and his creation, especially the relationship that is in place between God and man. This postulate is also central to the concept of justice, particularly to social justice (Goodman, 1988, online).

Within the Jewish faith there is a strong focus on human dignity and the belief that this level of respect is the result of the creativity and majesty of God. This dignity also signifies that there is present a basic equality that is present amongst individuals. As humans, we must have

humility before God, and this also involves a certain level of developing respectful humanity in how humans approach the universe and also in our one-to-one relationships with each other. In Judaism it is taught that in trying to emulate God, there are three key practices that must be followed. *Tsedik* refers to practices of being just, *tsedakah* refers to practices of being charitable in our interactions with others, and the third is righteousness or doing the right thing.

“For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing *tsedakah* and *mishpat* [by practicing charity and justice]” (Genesis 18:19).

These practices of *tsedakah*, *tsedik*, and righteousness are imbedded in the faith tradition’s commitment to and demonstration of justice and addressing social needs.

Major Jewish Faith Orientations and Social Justice

A major element of the Jewish religious tradition is that there are two conflicting orientations that are at the faith tradition’s central functioning. These two orientations are universalistic individualism and Jewish-particular collectivism. The tensions that have developed over time between these two major orientations have had a strong influence on Judaism’s approach to social justice. The Jewish universalistic viewpoint emphasizes the common ground of all humanity as the essential first stratum on which any collective identity of the Jewish people must be built (Hellinger, 2012, p. 173). This orientation of Judaism supports its teachings based on the passages from the Bible that note “the creation of human beings was in God’s image” (Genesis 1:26). This orientation interprets passages from scripture, such as those from Leviticus that says to “love thy neighbor as thyself,” to be a universal call to brotherhood/sisterhood and not just referring to “neighbor” as being only Jewish. This group of the faith tradition also notes that God made covenants with both Jews and non-Jews, such a Noah. The covenant with Noah applied to all humans and not just Jews and stipulated seven basic laws for everyone to follow

(i.e. prohibits idolatry, murder, theft, sexual promiscuity, blasphemy, eating the flesh of live animals, and the need to promulgate just laws).

Maimonides (1138 – 1204) was the most influential Jew of those supporting the universalistic position. He attributed the “chosenness” of Israel to the acceptance of the Torah at Mount Sinai rather than to some immanent holiness limited exclusively to the Jews (Blidstein, 1997, p. 17).

The Jewish-pluralistic collectivism orientation of the faith tradition places Jews at the center of God’s creation. For strong particularists, Jews possess immanent spiritual uniqueness, indeed intrinsic superiority over all others (Hellinger, 2012, p. 173). Much of present day Jewish traditional Orthodoxy, and especially ultra-Orthodoxy, tend to support the pluralistic orientation of Judaism. Hasidism, that is one of the powerful charismatic movements of Judaism, definitely supports more of the pluralistic collectivism sphere. The faith orientation of Hasidism was focused mainly on the teachings of the Jewish texts of the Kabbalah and tended to stress the ritualistic and symbolic component of Jewish observance rather than placing the focus on social ethics.

From a social justice standpoint, the individual-universalistic orientation believes that acts of justice should not be restricted only to the Jews. Even in the daily Jewish prayer it relays the importance of *tikkum olam*, which refers to the need to perfect the world and make it a better place for everyone. Several contemporary Jewish denominations, in particular the non-Orthodox and modern Orthodox, embrace this approach, insisting that it is incumbent on every Jew to make his or her own contribution toward *tikkum olam*, and doing so first and foremost by fighting for the cause of universal social justice (Diamant, 1997, online). While the particularistic orientation may interpret the Torah as seeking compassion and favor for the Jewish people at the forefront, the individual universalistic position focuses on the teachings in the Torah that stresses the requirement to practice love, including the love of strangers outside the Jewish faith.

With regards to the Jewish notion of social justice, especially as promulgated by the individual-universalistic orientation, there are three key areas of note:

1. The support for social justice is based on the understanding that all men and women are created in the image of God.
2. It is based on the notion that justice comes from one's duty or obligation toward God rather than from the primary focus on human or social rights. Commitment to God lies at the heart of Judaism, and it is from this commitment that the duty to one's fellow men derives (Cover, 1987, online).
3. Judaism has a strong concern with how their fellow men and women deserve affection. As stated in the sacred verses of the Mishnah, "Beloved is the man, who was created in the Divine image." (Mishnah, Avot 3:18)

The collective –particularistic orientation of the faith tradition would argue that social justice needs to be viewed through a Jewish communal lens, due to the special covenant that Jewish people have with God that can be traced back to God's relationship with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In looking at the importance of social justice within the Jewish faith tradition, one key area is how issues of economic justice were handled. The ownership of property within Judaic teaching was viewed as acceptable, but one was also obligated to help the weak and those in poverty through individual acts of giving to charity. Both the Hebrew Bible and Talmud do not condemn accumulating property and possessions, but it must be done honestly and in moderation. Judaism does not have an issue with people gaining material benefits or wealth, but it should be seen as a gift from God that will help in carrying out acts of charity and for the purpose of fulfilling the mitzvot (the Jewish commandments from the Torah). In the Talmud

there are the warnings from sages that regard those who pursue wealth and possessions just for their own benefit, “the more possessions, the more concern” (Mishnah, Avot 2:7). It is important to note that Judaism has never presented poverty as an ideal state in life. Search in all the Jewish synagogues and you will not find one Rabbi teaching the community to loathe wealth or praising poverty (Urbach, 1951, p. 18). Jewish teachings also address how if one is able to work and contribute to society, then work should be seen as noble and valued. Charity, as viewed within Judaism, should be directed to those truly in need and unable to support themselves or contribute to the greater society. The faith tradition frowns upon those who are able to contribute to society and support themselves but choose not to and rely on the charity of others.

A central point regarding Jewish social justice in performing acts of charity is that it requires three levels of action at the individual and family level, civil society, and the state. The biblical passages pertaining to the expectation to perform acts of charity start with feelings of personal compassion as the individual. The personal feelings of compassion towards the poor comes primarily from familial connections toward each other and being part of a community. The strong personal dimension in the obligation of charity conveys the quasi-familial feeling of solidarity underlying the religious obligation (Hellinger, 2012, p. 182). The second level of action is the obligation placed on the Jewish community. The response to this level of action can be seen in that various Jewish grassroots organizations that are focused on specific charitable purposes to help those in need. The third level of action is focused more on the legal obligation to engage in *tsedakah*. The concept appears in the Bible for the first time in a legal context and is adopted by Abraham in the book of Genesis (Hellinger, 2012, p. 184). There is a responsibility in enforcing *tsedakah* by the citizens of the city (such as the local government imposing taxes to be used for charitable purposes) and through the Jewish court which will help to enforce community

public law and oversight. The key goal of performing acts of charity at these three levels is to help the poor and those in need become independent.

The continued development and focus on social justice within Judaism in the twentieth-century can be attributed to key faith leaders such as Rabbis Abraham Isaac Kook and Abraham Joshua Heschel. These men were strongly influenced by the impact of the European Enlightenment period that came about with the advent of modernism. Prior to this period, Judaic leaders of the faith had been putting more attention on the sacred text of the Talmud and placing that at the center of the Jewish religious culture. Rabbis Kook and Heschel stressed the importance of refocusing the faith tradition back on the Hebrew Bible, although some ranks within the Jewish faith tradition were resistant to this approach.

For Rabbi Heschel, he believed that justice by itself was not an adequate mechanism for imprinting God's will on society, but that we also needed righteousness which he felt is the type of personality that helps to cultivate a concern for others. Heschel insisted that "righteousness goes beyond justice" (Heschel, 1962, 1:217). He felt compelled to act on matters of social justice based on his strong sense of compassion and his religious commitment to justice. He was a strong activist on political and social issues such as racial segregation and discrimination, opposition to the Vietnam War, and causes focused on the rights the Jews of those living in the Soviet Union, the treatment of the elderly, and the security of the state of Israel.

Rabbi Kook took a different approach to addressing issues of social justice. Kook favored focusing on scholarship over prophecy to help bring about social justice and pointed to the example of the halakhic scholars of rabbis who had helped to shape and guide Jewish life for many centuries.

Kook subscribes to the attitude of traditional rabbinic culture when he equates authentic repentance with the intense scholarly study of civil and criminal laws. It is this endeavor that will remove all the obstructions to the heart in life and establish divine justice on a dependable foundation (Segal, 2012, p.199).

Kook's vision of a model and fair society is one that has undergone a significant change in which the legal system is changed based on inspired revelation from the prophets and aggadah that will help individuals in reaching a level of moral standards.

Reform Judaism

Reform Judaism began to establish its roots among American Jews around the late 19th century. It was during this period of the European Enlightenment and modernism that many intellectual and social challenges were confronting traditional religious thinking, including Christianity. Within Christianity there was the development of the Social Gospel movement that was a call to improve society and its institutions. The American Reform Judaism movement paralleled the Protestant Social Gospel movement and helped to articulate the central role that social justice played in religious life. The two leaders of Reform Judaism in America in the nineteenth century, Kaufmann Kohler (1843-1926) and Emil G. Hirsch (1851-1923) were like their liberal Protestant counterparts in that they accepted the findings of German Enlightenment scholarship (Kleinberg, 2009, p. 153). It was through this intellectual exposure to Enlightenment that helped to open Reform Judaism to new ways of thinking about the role of religion in society and theology. As both Reform Judaism and Protestantism began to think about how to respond to modern thought, it helped to build a bridge among these two faith traditions and bring them closer together.

It was Rabbi Hirsch who some labeled as the "father of the Jewish social gospel." He began to publicly address issues of social justice with members of his congregation including

inadequate wages, the length of the workweek, sweatshop conditions in factories, and economic inequality. He focused his rabbinate on social and economic issues and developed an ecumenical mindset to join with other faith groups to further the cause for social justice. Through Hirsch's example, similar friendships began to be built around a shared commitment to social justice between Jewish and Christian clergy around the country. In 1885 a meeting of leaders of American Reform Judaism came together (called the Pittsburgh Platform) and articulated principles that would be the foundation of their religious identity for decades following. Here in the Pittsburgh Platform, the Reform Movement established its unflinching commitment to social justice (Kleinberg, 2012, p. 160).

Reform Judaism and Present-Day Social Justice Priorities

Current major social justice initiatives that are priorities to Reform Judaism in the United States include the following issues (www.rac.org/advocacy-activism):

- Antisemitism and Hate Crimes
- Civil Liberties
- Criminal Justice Reform
- Disability Rights
- Economic Justice
- Environment and Climate Change
- Gun Violence Prevention
- Health Care
- Immigration
- International Issues

- LGBTQ+ Equality
- Racial Justice
- Reproductive Health and Rights
- Voting and Civil Rights
- Women's Rights

As the list shows, the Jewish faith tradition is involved in many important social issues impacting communities. Judaism responds to these issues through developing programs, providing resources, raising awareness within communities, and advocating on behalf of those who are oppressed.

Christianity

Historical Perspective of Christianity and Social Justice

Regardless of which Christian denomination that one identifies with, the impetus for advancing social justice causes within the faith tradition is tied to the sacred Scriptures. God throughout the Bible identifies injustices among humankind and intervenes to address it through others or directly. In both the Old and New Testament, we see examples of God directing acts of social justice among mankind.

“If in any of the towns in the land that the Lord your God is giving you there is a fellow-Israelite in need, then do not be selfish and refuse to help him. Instead, be generous and lend him as much as he needs.” (Deuteronomy 15:7-8).

“What he requires of us is this; to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.” (Micah 6:8).

“Suppose there are brothers and sisters who need clothes and don't have enough to eat. What good is there in your saying to them, “God bless you! Keep warm and eat well! If you don't give them the necessities of life.” (James 2:15-16).

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has chosen me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind; to set free the oppressed and announce that the time has come when the Lord will save his people.” (Luke 4:18-19).

For most Christians, the key figure that embodies the central concepts of social justice within their faith tradition is Jesus of Nazareth. For Christians he focused God’s law on two commandments, to love God and love of your neighbor. For Jesus, love of neighbor meant helping people in need until they can be self-sufficient and able to help themselves. In the Biblical accounts of his life, we see numerous examples of Jesus helping those in need (i.e. healing the sick, feeding the hungry, showing concern for the widows and poor) and preaching on the importance of helping others who are less fortunate.

While the sacred texts of the Bible form a large portion of social justice teaching within Christianity, one can also look to the narrative history to find further guidance on the need for practicing social justice. It is not only the biblical texts that inspire Christians towards social justice, it is also the narrative history contained in the Bible that informs contemporary Christians regarding how they should live lives of justice and mercy (De Young, 2012, p. 63). If we look at the history of Christianity, we see that Christians have been a people suffering in slavery and persecution that were liberated through the intervention and compassion of God. This history of liberation set expectations that Christians should act in certain ways regarding social justice issues. Many Christian scholars view Jesus, God made man, as a key agent of social change during his time on earth. He was a living example on how social justice should be lived and practiced by humankind. This human demonstration of social justice continued throughout Christianity’s history and continues to be lived today. The memory of the Christian Church is critical in tackling social justice issues as it reminds us time and time again not to reengage in a cycle of injustice, hatred or violence (Mealey, 2017, p. 23). In looking at the three

major Christian denominations (Catholicism, Protestantism and Christian Orthodox), we can see how social justice thought and practice developed over time within the faith tradition.

Catholicism

Early Church Fathers teach about the importance of helping the poor, sick and oppressed. St. Augustine of Hippo taught on the evils of slavery and inequality and felt they occurred as the result of punishment for the sins of humans. St. Patrick (389-461), British missionary to Ireland, condemns the practice of slavery, at least taking other Christians as slaves (Burgess, 2012, p. 48). As the Catholic Church began to grow and expand its evangelization, male and female religious communities began to develop that incorporated a focus on issues of social justice such as ministering to the sick and elderly, feeding the hungry, caring for orphans, and serving the poor. St. Francis of Assisi (born in the twelfth century), founded the Franciscan order and was devoted to respecting all of God's creation, serving the poor, and serving as an advocate for nonviolence and peace. St. Thomas Aquinas (born in the thirteenth century) became one of the most important theologians in the Roman Catholic Church history.

In his famous work, *Summa theologica*, he incorporates the philosophy of Aristotle into Christian thought. This serves as a basis for Catholic moral theology, including Catholic social thought (Burgess, 2012, p. 51).

Aquinas focuses his attention on issues of justice and describes society as a hierarchy of ranks and classes. He makes reference to the concept of distributive justice that concerns the socially fair or just allocation of resources. Principles of distributive justice should be used to help provide moral clarity that impacts the structures and political methods that affect the distribution of burdens and benefits within a community. Another early Church leader advancing social justice was Bartolome de Las Casas (born in the fifteenth century). Las Casas was a strong defender of Native American peoples, especially Spain's treatment of this population as they

conquered the New World. He teaches about the inherent dignity of all peoples and speaks out against the forced slavery of the Native American population. St. Vincent de Paul (born in the sixteenth century) was a Church father who was dedicated to helping the poor. He started a religious order and organized parishes with the focus on serving the needy, feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, ministering to the sick, and freeing those who are victims of slavery.

In addition to male figures, there were many Catholic females in the early Church advancing issues of social justice. Margery Kempe (born in the fourteenth century) taught on matters of social justice and helped to promote and affirm the role and importance of women in the early Church. St. Catherine of Siena (living during the same time as Kempe) had a strong devotion to serving the poor. She was a messenger on behalf of the Pope traveling and leading important ministries of peace making and preaching. As one reviews the Church's history in terms of practicing and advancing issues of social justice, we see many of the female religious communities taking on key roles in ministries of serving the vulnerable, helping the elderly, caring for orphans, educating the poor, helping the sick, and other acts of assisting those in need. Some key female religious leaders in expanding social justice within the Church include St. Mother Xavier Cabrini and St. Elizabeth Seton in the U.S., Blessed Emily Gamelin in Canada, St. Genevieve and St. Therese of Lisieux in France, and St. Mary Mackillop of Scotland who expanded her ministry to serve those in Australia and New Zealand. There were also important lay women advancing social justice in the Catholic Church. Dorothy Day was an American journalist and social activist who was a strong advocate for advancing social justice within the Church.

In the 1930's, Day worked closely with fellow activist Peter Maurin to establish the Catholic Worker Movement, a pacifist movement that combines direct aid for the poor

and homeless with nonviolent action on their behalf (Social Justice Resource Center, 2022, online).

The advancement of formal teaching on social justice within the Church began during the pontificate of Pope Leo XIII. Although there were many Catholic philosophers and religious leaders who dealt with issues of social justice prior to Pope Leo XIII, the Church had not developed a formal body of social teaching and social reform until his pontificate.

Pope Leo XIII in 1891 issues the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of the Working Classes). Leo rejects both socialism and capitalism, defending labor unions and private property. He insists that the role of the state is to promote social justice through the protection of rights. At the same time the Church must speak out on social issues in order to teach correct social principles and to ensure class harmony (Burgess, 2012, p. 55).

Other modern Popes, following Leo XIII, who addressed issues of social justice and expanded Catholic teaching on the subject include Popes Pius XI, John XXIII, Paul VI, John Paul II and Francis. Pope Pius I, following Pope Leo's pontificate, uses the term social justice in a papal encyclical he authored, but it was just a passing reference and received no real attention or development at that time.

It was Pope Pius XI, following the pontificate of Pius I, who further developed the concept of Catholic social teaching and formally included the term social justice into official papal social doctrine. In his encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931), Pope Pius XI developed the term social justice in consultation with the teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas (Pattee, 2016, p. 102). The term social justice in this papal document was chosen to designate what Aquinas referred to as legal justice. For Pius XI, when using the term social justice, he views it as a virtue which is focused on serving the benefit of everyone in society through the proper care and provision of each person who makes up and contributes to that society. Pope Pius XII, who followed the pontificate of Pius XI, did not issue any encyclicals addressing social justice issues

but did teach that man has an inherit disposition that is intrinsically social. The precepts of Catholic social teaching were central to his understanding of the functioning and core mission of the Church. As he explained:

“The social program of the Catholic Church is based on three powerful moral pillars: truth, justice and Christian charity. To deviate even slightly from the dictates of these principles would be impossible for the Church” (Pius XII, 1949, online).

Pope John XXIII helped to lead the Church in making a recommitment to social justice and ideals.

In particular, the encyclical *Mater et Magistra* redefined the Church’s commitment to the service of the poor. “Church’s first care must be for souls, how she can sanctify them and make them share in the gifts of heaven, [but] she also concerns herself with the exigencies of man’s daily life with his livelihood and education, and his general temporal welfare and prosperity.” (John XXIII, 1961, para. 3)

Pope John XXIII was challenging the economic inequalities that existed during his time. He believed that there were significant divisions that had developed between the rich and the poor and felt the government should play a key role in helping to level the playing field and advancing common dignity for its citizens.

Pope Paul VI followed the pontificate of John XXIII and continued the Church’s social justice concerns around economic injustice. Pope Paul VI wrote the encyclical *Populorum Progressio* in 1967 to address the world economy and its effect on peoples around the world (California Catholic Conference, 2022, online). In the document he addresses issues of the rights of workers to a fair wage, adequate working conditions, the rights to unionize, and job security. The document addresses three responsibilities that must be completed in order to achieve fair global development. Rich nations should give assistance and establish strong connections with poorer nations. There must be fair trade between strong economic nations and developing

countries. Lastly, there needs to be a worldwide focus on developing universal charity through building a more just and human community extending beyond nations.

Pope John Paul II teachings on social justice were also influenced by the work of St. Thomas Aquinas (similar to previous papal teachings) and one can see this in his social encyclicals. John Paul II is focused on the common good that includes protecting human dignity and life by both the Church and society. Pope John Paul II gave the common good a new name in what may have been his way of guiding the Church toward a renewed commitment of the virtue of justice, especially social justice. The new name given to the “common good” by the Holy Father was the “culture of life” so eloquently laid out in his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* [The Gospel of Life, 1995] (Pattee, 2016, p. 110).

Pope Benedict XVI followed the pontificate of John Paul II and focused on the roles of the government, civil society and the Church in advancing social justice. In 2006 Pope Benedict XVI issues an encyclical, *Deus Caritas Est* (“God is Love”), which focused on justice as the key concern of the state and the primary concern of politics and not of the church, which has charity as its central social concern. In addition, this encyclical states clearly that all members of the church (with focus on the laity) have the specific responsibility of pursuing social justice in civil society. The Church’s role is to inform the debate, using reason and natural law, as well as providing moral and spiritual formation for those involved in politics (Burgess, 2012, p. 56).

Pope Francis expanded the definition of the common good as focused on by John XXIII and John Paul II to include the physical environment. While John Paul II placed a lot of emphasis on the moral environment required for human life to grow and prosper, Pope Francis is concerned with the physical environment required for human life to be able to develop and thrive.

Laudato Si is an encyclical of Pope Francis published in May 2015. It focuses on care for the natural environment and all people, as well as broader questions of the relationship between God, humans and the Earth (Rice, 2022, online).

Protestantism

Early Protestant Church leaders preached about the importance of social justice within their denominations. Although Martin Luther is more focused on the correct interpretation of the Scriptures and on spiritual regeneration, he does address social issues in some of his writings. Luther criticizes some of the social reformers during his time because he felt they stirred up confusion and unrest among the peasants that led to incidences of violence. John Calvin, who overlaps with the time of Luther in the sixteenth century, is a strong advocate for social justice and preaches about social and economic matters. Recent scholarship indicates that Calvin's concern for the poor is to improve the actual situation of the poor, although he strongly opposes any direct relation between theology and politics (Burgess, 2012, p. 52).

Other Protestant Reformers' teaching on social justice include Menno Simons who was preaching in the mid sixteenth century. Simons taught that Christians should be free from envy, partisanship, and hatred while also having upright and pure minds and demonstrate a lovely spirit of peace. John Wesley, another early Protestant leader, understood the need for social justice and served as a model of Christian activism. Wesley felt that all classes of society have a sense of responsibility for eliminating social wrong doings that harm others.

Motivated by a conviction that all persons are made in the divine image, and, therefore, are of equal worth, Wesley teaches social sensitivity to his Methodist followers and to others who will listen. For him, love of God results in love of neighbors (Burgess, 2012, p. 52).

Wesley's strong commitment for social justice resulted in the founding of places for the sick, homes for orphans and widows, schools for poor children, and the establishment of loan funds to

assist small businesses. Another Protestant leader, William Booth, was a follower of John Wesley and was a great proponent of social justice in the late nineteenth century. Together with his wife, Booth starts the Salvation Army which has grown over time to become one of the largest Protestant charities. Started as a small Christian mission program opening soup kitchens around England, the organization has grown over its period of operations to provide a wide range of social outreach programs to help those in need across the globe.

Francis Willard was one of the female Protestant reformers that worked on social justice issues for women. Early Protestant churches did not allow women to hold clergy or leadership roles. As a social activist in the later part of the nineteenth century, she advanced the causes of a number of social reforms including a woman's right to vote, home-centered family life and labor reform. She became the president of the National Women's Christian Temperance Union.

Willard saw the WCTU as a platform from which women could address a variety of social ills and injustices, and under her leadership the organization expanded its conscience far beyond the issue of temperance. She declared a "Do Everything Policy" and set up departments to address such causes as a living wage, an eight-hour day, courts of conciliation and arbitration, an improved policy toward Native Americans, abolition of prostitution, reform of civil service and prisons, and the thorny issue of women's suffrage (Hammond, 2015, online).

In her later life, Willard promoted Christian socialism and some have viewed her as the forerunner of the social gospel movement.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the development of the social gospel movement within the Protestant denomination. Key Protestant leaders helping to advance this movement included Washington Gladden, Walter Rauschenbusch, and Shailer Mathews. The movement in the U.S. started as a grass-roots, faith-based effort comprised of laity and clergy to address social problems in this country in the aftermath of the Civil War. The social gospel movement was aimed at applying the teachings of Jesus and the complete message of the

Christian salvation story to issues facing economic life, society, individuals, families, social institutions, and the state. In focusing on the social gospel, the movement's main intent was to advance Christian salvation that would redeem and transform both the personal order and personal lives.

The theological emphases of the social gospel movement revolved around commonplace understandings of the biblical teachings of Jesus. These include the advent of the kingdom of God, the first and second Great Commandments (one must love God above all else and one's neighbor as oneself) and the Golden Rule (one should be treated the way one would want to be treated). These and similar biblical teachings became recognized as hallmarks of the social gospel movement and provided the foundation for increasingly widespread, formalized teaching of Christian social ethics (Deichmann, 2015, p. 203-204).

As the social gospel movement began to expand within the U.S., similar developments began to occur in other countries such as Canada, Germany, England, and other parts of Western Europe.

Moving into the post-World War period and the development of new liberal and other theological ideas, the social gospel movement began to lose significance. As the U.S. began to move into the turbulent 1960s, there was a re-engagement and focus on Christian social action. The Civil Rights Movement, under the leadership of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and other Black clergy, was a classic restatement of the Protestant social gospel in its insistence that the religious ideal of justice must be embodied in the institutions of society (Pluralism Project, 2020, online). During this same period, liberation theologies began to be advanced within the Catholic Church in Latin America trying to focus the gospels from the perspective of individuals experiencing economic, racial and political oppression. Many Christian females during this time began to promote feminist theologies with a focus on expanding the voices of women who had been marginalized and overlooked by church and society. As liberal ideas began to proliferate and take hold within Protestant denominations, moving into the late twentieth century saw a

pushback from the religious right who tried to refocus and limit Protestant involvement in social justice issues from a more conservative view.

Orthodox Church

A key historical figure of social justice teaching within the Orthodox Church is St. John Chrysostom who was born in the fourth century. He showed a strong sense of compassion for the poor, sickly and oppressed and believed that to be a good Christian one must show concern for his/her neighbor and care for them and their needs. He was a great preacher and helped advance social justice thought within the Church. Another key figure in the Orthodox Church was St. Basil the Great who was also alive during the fourth century. He is best known for establishing Basilian rule that focuses on liturgical prayer, living in community, and manual labor. He started his priestly vocation living a monastic life but later left the monastery to go serve in a parish to minister to the people.

In his writing “To the Rich,” Basil elaborates on Christ’s words to the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-22. He reasons that if one cannot divest oneself of wealth, one will not fulfill the law of love for one’s neighbor. The more one abounds in personal riches, the more one lacks in love. Basil concludes that the one who shows no mercy cannot expect that mercy will be shown to him. Those who do not give bread will not be given eternal life (Burgess, 2012, 48).

Although St. Basil disapproved of retreating from the world, over time within the Orthodox faith tradition there was an increased focus on monasticism and mysticism that offered the reasoning for disengaging from the world.

A contemporary Orthodox leader, Mar Osthathios, spoke out on social justice within developing countries. In his book, *The Sin of Being Rich in a Poor World (1983)*, he describes the sin of selfishness in the accumulation of wealth, in the patenting of beneficial scientific discoveries, in the luxurious lifestyle of a few in a world of poverty, and the unwillingness to

share God-given resources with others (Burgess, 2012, p. 58). In recent times, Orthodoxy's social doctrine has been limited to emphasizing nationalism as a way to survive during times of oppression and members of their faith being persecuted. The Orthodox Church focused its attention on the preserving the faith tradition over evangelization, looking inward as opposed to reaching out in a ministry of service and social justice. In 2000, the Church of Moscow published "The Basis of the Social Concept," an admirable though rudimentary effort to outline the social principles of the Orthodox Church in Russia after an extended period of state suppression (Chryssavgis, 2020, online).

In recent years, an important gathering of Orthodox patriarchs and hierarchs was organized to examine the role of the Church in contemporary society. The outcome of this meeting included a formal decree and encyclical letter.

The Holy Pan-Orthodox Council of Crete (2016) focused on current problems like the crisis of resources, the questions raised by the evolution of science and technology, crisis of migrants, terrorism and religious fundamentalism, and to address calls for love and peace in the entire world. Also, the fact that topics like family crises and fasting are approached not only from their theological point of view, but also from their value for the social life of the Church and of the world (Morariu, 2019, p. 6).

Although some people criticized the document for not delving deeper into the social issues of the present day, others have noted the significance of the Council and the encyclical in helping to direct the Orthodox Church in developing an external focus on key social justice issues.

Christian Approaches for Advancing Social Justice

Christian churches use various contemporary expressions to help advance social justice within their congregations and in the larger society. These approaches include teachings from the Scriptures, church declarations addressing social justice, specific actions for social justice led by the church, and taking a public stance on social issues.

Words of Scripture

Christians throughout history have turned to the Scriptures for guidance on addressing matters of social justice. Both the Old and New Testament provide wisdom through many passages referencing issues of social justice that stress God's concern for helping the oppressed and those in need.

“You shall not abuse a needy and destitute laborer, whether a fellow countryman or a stranger in one of the communities of your land.... You shall not subvert the rights of a stranger or the fatherless; you shall not take a widow's garment in pawn. Remember that you were a slave in Egypt and that the Lord your God redeemed you from there.” (Deuteronomy 24:14, 17-18).

“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor..... Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:18-19, 21).

Not only do the biblical texts motivate Christians towards acts of social justice, the faith tradition's narrative history that is contained in the Bible helps to educate Christians on the importance of living lives of mercy and justice.

Church Declarations and Formal Teachings

Words of social justice from the various Christian denominations are proclaimed in various ways such as specific theologies, educational settings and public declarations.

Theological examples of teachings on social justice include liberation theology that emerged from Latin America. The key theme of this theology is that God has a preferential option for the poor and addressed matters of injustice and oppression from the perspective of socioeconomics, race, and gender. At the same time that liberation theology was developing, African American theologians were developing a Black theology of liberation.

Black theology echoes many of the same biblical themes and social realities as Latin American liberation theology, but places a primary focus on blackness and white racism. It affirms the humanity, dignity, and worth of black people with a call for the liberation of blacks socially, economically, and spiritually (DeYoung, 2012, p. 66).

One key way in which theology around social justice gets disseminated in the various denominations is through educational settings. These educational settings can take different forms including para-church organizations, training institutes, faith-based organizations, colleges and universities, and seminaries. Many Christian colleges, universities and seminaries have courses, certificate programs and entire degrees focused on social justice.

Public declarations are another way that churches educate on social justice issues. These may include sermons and speeches, letters from church representatives (in the Catholic Church Bishops issue pastoral letters), and formal declarations that emerge from gatherings or conferences in which social issues or tactics are addressed.

A meeting was convened in 1973 by Evangelicals for Social Action and other Evangelical leaders in the United States to discuss the relative importance of social justice issues, including racism, sexism, and economic injustice. After the meeting they issued the “Chicago Declaration of Evangelical Social Concern,” stating that social justice was biblical and relevant for Evangelicals (DeYoung, 2012, 68).

Organized Church Actions for Social Justice

Oftentimes words addressing social justice issues will lead to action that can take different forms including rituals within the church, specific actions taken within the church and actions taken in society led by church members. Rituals within the church can be used as an important form of public display showing a commitment to social justice. For example, prayer can be an important Christian ritual in demonstrating a strong commitment to social justice. During the 1980s there was a call for Christians living in Eastern Europe to pray for an end to the harsh and repressive Communist regime. Individuals organized weekly prayer meetings to help bring about the end of Communism.

Actions can also be taken within the church itself to address social justice issues, especially when the faith institution itself is criticized for being unjust. For example, many churches have programs to outreach to persons with disabilities, but yet their facilities are not accessible to persons dealing with a physical limitation. Another example of injustice within certain churches has been sexism and the role of women in leadership. As a response to this injustice, some Protestant churches in the mid twentieth century began to change their outlook on women serving as clergy.

Methodists ordained women in the 1950s. World Lutheranism began ordaining women in the 1950s in Europe and in the 1970s in North America, Asia and Latin America (DeYoung, 2012, p. 71).

Churches also play an important role in pursuing social justice in the broader society through various actions. One example is when Christian leaders partner with larger political movements to try and spur changes within a society. Sometimes church members join in public protests and demonstrations as a sign of solidarity and support for a particular issue. Other forms of social justice action include directly meeting needs through the establishment of programs and organizations such as those focused on humanitarian causes, community development, homelessness, access to health care, refugee assistance, feeding the hungry, and other social service issues.

Mother Teresa began caring for poor and dying homeless people on the streets of Calcutta, India, in the 1940s. Her work soon grew into the Sisters of Charity religious order, established in 1950, with over 5,000 Catholic nuns giving their lives to serve the poorest of the poor around the world in over 130 countries (DeYoung, 2012, p. 73).

Public Stance on Social Issues

The willingness to take a public stance around issues of social justice has been demonstrated numerous times among Christians. The courage to stand up for injustice is modeled by the life of Jesus and the early disciples. In many cases, taking a public stand to

defend social justice will result in the person being publicly criticized, ridiculed or perhaps even suffering physical harm. When Christians are willing to suffer by being an activist for social justice, it provides a level of credibility to the cause. One example of the willingness of someone to suffer on behalf of justice was Nelson Mandela. He suffered for many years by being imprisoned in South Africa in his public fight against racist apartheid in his country and trying to advance freedom and equality for all people. His journey resulted in Mandela being universally recognized as a key proponent for social justice.

Social Justice Priorities of Christians Today

In looking at the major religious denominations within Christianity, we can get a good understanding of the major social justice priorities that they are focused on today. The Catholic Church has a rich body of work called Catholic social teaching that is focused on building a just society and how to live a life of holiness while dealing with the challenges of modern society. Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents and there are seven themes that form the basis of the Catholic social tradition (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2017, online):

- Life and the dignity of the human person: The Church proclaims that human life is sacred and the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society.
- Call to family, community and participation: The person is not only sacred but social. How we organize our society—in economics and politics, in law and policy—directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community.
- Rights and Responsibilities: The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met.
- Option for the poor and vulnerable: A basic moral test is how our most vulnerable members are faring.
- The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers: The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way to make a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation.

- Solidarity: We are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences.
- Care for God's Creation: We show our respect for the Creator by of stewardship of creation.

Two areas of social concern expressed by Pope Francis have been the protection of the environment and a concern for the poor. As discussed previously, Pope Francis issued an encyclical (*Laudato Si*) focused on the care and preservation of the environment. Pope Francis also issued an apostolic exhortation that emphasizes social and political measures to ameliorate poverty and to help the poorest of the poor, the pope endorses public action to promote “a better distribution of income” (Mahoney, 2019, p. 221).

In 2020, the Orthodox Church issued a document entitled *For the Life of the World*. This document helped to establish key principles to help guide the Church in terms of its key role and the responsibility of Orthodox Christians living in the modern world.

The document begins with the fundamental contours of an Orthodox Christian worldview and concludes on a prayerful note, with an expression of hope for personal and social transformation. Its approach to critical and controversial issues- including racism, poverty, human rights, bioethics, technology, and climate change- is both rigorous and pastoral (Chryssavgis, 2020, online).

The document stresses that if the Church is truly following the teachings of Christ and working to make him present in the modern world, then it must place an absolute concern for the disadvantaged and poor at the focal point of its spiritual, moral and religious life.

Within mainstream Protestantism, current social justice efforts have been based in common principles such as advancing key values, maintaining open-mindedness, religious tolerance, appreciation of diversity, and respecting the dignity of all people. A large majority of Protestant churches are involved in raising funds and establishing programs to help those in need within their communities. There are many programs established to feed the hungry, serve the

poor, provide social services, and assist the homeless. Some churches have become more involved in community organizing and civic engagement projects as demonstrated by Protestant clergy involved in racial justice and equality and pro-life movements.

As demonstrated by the history and development of the Christian Church, its core teachings, and present-day initiatives focused on social justice, one can see the commitment across the various denominations in addressing unmet needs within their communities and helping others in society.

The Native American Faith Tradition

The diversity of the Native American faith tradition is vast and varies by tribal affiliation. Unlike other mainstream religions, there is not one set of Holy Scriptures or a set of particular religious laws or theology that all tribes follow. There are hundreds of different tribes across the country who have unique cultures and spiritual practices and beliefs. For example, there are currently 574 recognized tribes according to both federal and state governments in the U.S. (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2022, online). Within Native American spiritual beliefs most are polytheistic, meaning they believe in and worship more than one deity, but some faith practices in this tradition lean more towards monotheism with one primary god or goddess. Instead of considering Native American beliefs and practices a set religion, most refer to it as a system of spirituality that permeates every aspect of their lives (Pow Wow, 2019, online). Native American spirituality includes common threads of similar ideas and tries to integrate them into everyday life and pass them from generation to generation. It is important to understand the key common themes of Native American spirituality and how these themes impact the faith tradition's view of social justice that is held by many tribes.

Common Dogma or Canon on Human and Non-Human Connection in Creation

Native American spirituality reflects the unique cultures, history, and beliefs of each tribe and sometimes there are different spiritual beliefs amongst the clans that make up the tribe. For example, the religion of the Ojibwe Tribe does not have a common canon and different versions of the human creation stories exist in their religion. At least 48 transcriptions of the origin narrative exist, and they vary widely (Smith, 1995, p. 159). One common theme in Native American spirituality that is present across tribes is the belief that all of creation, both human and non-human, is sacred, connected to each other, of equal worth, and should be respected. From a social justice lens, one can see the importance that Native American spirituality places on protecting the earth, being in harmony with it, and having a concern for all creation (e.g. humans, animals, plants, inanimate things, etc.). For example, the Ojibwe Tribe views inanimate objects such as, rocks, dirt, etc. as having equal worth with living beings.

The Ojibwe extension of “person” to all things translates into an Ojibwe recognition that there are social relationships among persons as well as among most persons-other-than-humans. Fundamentally, Ojibwe people are expected to respect all things. Failure to do so had repercussions. By the same measure, respect for persons and persons-other-than-humans is meritorious (Gagnon, 2012, p. 428).

This belief in a strong connection between the human and non-human parts of creation is a common belief within Native American spirituality held across tribes. In some of the Native American creation stories, gods and deities take on animal forms instead of human. For Native Americans, the concept of creation is a living process and so their beliefs include a strong kinship that exists amongst all things. Within the Native American faith tradition, common spiritual teachings identify Mother Earth as a living being.

European writers long ago referred to indigenous Americans’ way as “animism,” a term that means “life ism.” And it is true that most or perhaps all Native Americans see the

entire universe as being alive – that is having movement and the ability to act (Forbes, 2001, p. 284).

For Native Americans, advancing social justice actions focused on protecting the land and its non-human inhabitants is just as important as advancing causes to protect humans on this earth.

Concept of the Great Spirit

Although some Native American tribes believe in different deities controlling things and managing creation (e.g. natural events, the underworld, weather, etc.), much of Native American spirituality refers to a great-spirit or being. The Native American term that refers to this concept of a creator god or spirit is *Wakan-Tanka*.

Wakan-Tanka loosely means “great or sacred mystery” and encompasses a belief in spirits that integrate with the world in various ways. It is often considered a great force that exists in every person, animal, plant, and every object in existence (Pow Wow, 2021, online).

This belief in a great or sacred being helps to advance social justice efforts because all things of the earth have value and are deserving of respect and protection.

Native American Concept of Gratitude

In Native American spirituality the world is seen as a beautiful, wonderful, and fantastic creation that helps to engender very strong feelings of gratitude and indebtedness. This sense of gratitude that one feels helps to create a feeling of overwhelming love and extreme thankfulness for the gifts provided by the great creator or spirit and the earth upon which we live.

As a Cahuilla elder, Ruby Modesto, stated: “Thank you Mother Earth, for holding me on your breast. You always love me no matter how old I get.” (Forbes, 2001, p. 285)

This strong sense of gratitude is demonstrated in the social justice causes that Native Americans organize to help protect the environment, preserve creation, and respect our earth. We must be grateful for even the simple things of life and not take anything for granted.

Humility and Simplicity

Within Native American spirituality, there is a common understanding across tribes that one should be humble and live a simple life. In attempts to avoid exploitation of Mother Earth and all of creation, respect and humility should be the foundation of everyday ways of life for Native Americans. The value of simple living helps to reinforce the ideal of not exploiting other living creatures. This concept of living simply also means that one must avoid greed.

“You don’t eat five quail; you eat one. You don’t damage the plants just to make a barbeque-----you don’t use and squeeze people until they have shriveled to nothing, especially the people you love.” (Forbes, 2001, p. 289).

This concept of simplicity also translates into the simple laws of justice established by tribes that are based on the foundation of non-exploitation of others. Native Americans believe that issues of justice pertaining to members of the tribe should be handled within the tribal community based on a set of common values.

Use of Ceremonies

Native Americans place a great importance on their beliefs and practices (e.g. ceremonies) and see them as an integral and seamless part of their being. Ceremonies and rituals were conducted because they had the power to conquer the difficulties of life or to commemorate key events and milestones. The values and purpose of ceremonies also change through history, as Europeans settling in the new world tried to discourage or abolish them, and as the needs of the tribes changed. Europeans coming to North America made efforts to put an end to Indian ceremonies and rituals, because they viewed them as “heathenish,” but the tradition was able to survive and is still practiced today among many Native Americans.

The recent efforts of Indian activists to reclaim tribal ceremonies have highlighted the dilemma of today’s religious Indian. A traditional Indian finds himself still experiencing

the generalized presence of spiritual forces; at the same time, he finds himself bound by the modern technology of communications and transportation, which speed his world far beyond its original boundaries (Deloria, 1974, 250).

Even among Native Americans who converted to Christianity, in many cases they've been able to combine traditional customs with some Christian elements. Some of these ceremonies and rituals are connected with social justice themes. Some of the key ceremonies and rituals common amongst Native American tribes include the following.

Death Ceremonies: Native Americans perform ceremonies that celebrate death because the end of life on earth was the start of life in the spiritual world. Most tribes believed that the journey might be long, so afterlife rituals were performed to ensure that the spirits would not continue to roam the earth (Weiser, 2020, online).

Agricultural Festivals: Events such as the Green Corn Festival included celebrations and religious ceremonies to bring about or show gratitude for a good harvest. In some cases, these festivals also involve a religious renewal of the tribe.

Healing Rituals: The use of healing rituals is a symbolic act to bring participants into a state of harmony with the tribe, themselves, and their environment. These types of rituals could also be used to assist an entire group of people to return to harmony.

Peyote Worship: This ceremonial event involves eating or drinking of peyote (the fruit of a small cactus) that is held for healing ceremonies, baptisms, funerals and other special occasions.

Pow Wows: This special communal event can include Native Americans and non-Native American people and includes dancing, singing, and socializing to honor American Indian culture.

Dances: Various dances are used by tribes as a public display of protest (e.g. Ghost Dance) or as an action to honor a god or revered being (e.g. Sun Dance to honor the sun that has great power). An example of the importance of dance in Native American culture was the Ghost Dance. The general belief was that the dance would return ancestor's spirits from the dead, bring back the massive tribes of buffalo, and stop the white settlers from destroying the people or taking up the rest of the land (Pow Wow, 2019, online).

Smudging: This practice involves burning certain incense or herbs and the smoke produced from this burning is used to help cleanse a person, object or place.

Pipe Ceremony: Smoke in various forms plays an important role in Native American ceremonies. The rising of the smoke into the air represents a connection between the earth below and the sky above.

Sweat Lodges: The concept of the sweat lodge can be traced back through generations of Native American history. The sweat lodge offered a form of physical and spiritual cleansing and was a way to renew yourself and form a bond with the spiritual world.

Vision Quest

The right of the vision quest is practiced by many Native American tribes to signify a significant life event, such as older children reaching puberty. In most cases, the vision quest was a “supernatural” experience in which the individual seeks to interact with a guardian spirit, usually an animal, to obtain advice or protection (Weiser, 2020, online). Usually, prior to the vision quest a lot of preparation was required that would help to determine the commitment and level of sincerity of the person who was to be involved in the quest.

Dreams and Visions

Visions and dreams are key elements of Native American spiritual life. From a traditional perspective, dreams serve as an essential conduit for being able to communicate with the spiritual world and also helps to validate one's spiritual condition.

As one Native American leader states, "Dreams, remember your dreams, they tell you what you need to do. Ask elders what your dreams mean. You will learn more about choices, meaning in your life, and the contributions you should make" (Simpson, 2000, online).

Within Native American culture, they believe that dreams can communication important messages about life and should be interpreted for these key meanings and insights.

Storytelling

From both a historical and modern-day perspective, storytelling continues to be an effective and important means of learning and teaching within Native American tribes. Within these Indigenous communities, people have used folktales, fables and legends for key reasons including recounting the history of the people, to relay where the tribe came from and its roots, to relate exploits of a particular heroic person, and to educate children regarding cultural morals and values.

Storytelling can be an important mechanism to instill social justice ideals from one generation to the next. Traditional stories provide us with a lens to see the past and with a context to interpret that experience. It is therefore vital to be aware of the cultural "rules" regulating the oral tradition (Simpson, 2000, online).

Storytelling is not only important to understand key historical events from the tribe, but can be used in present day to highlight important or significant events and information to be instilled in future generations.

Important Native American Social Justice Movements

The Native American faith tradition has been very active in leading social justice movements and advancing the cause of justice to try and correct some of the wrongs that have been committed against this population. Since Europeans first began to settle in North America, we see numerous examples throughout history of the abuses and injustices rendered against Native Americans. These major abuses include taking Native American lands, relocating persons to reservations and forcing many to live in substandard conditions, the forced conversion of many to Christianity and the pressure to deny their native spirituality, forced institutionalization of Native American children to teach them the ways and beliefs of the white man, efforts to criminalize the actions and practices of this group, and attempts to destroy the rich culture and heritage of the Native American peoples. Based on the extreme adverse treatment rendered by the resettled Europeans towards Native Americans, one can understand how social justice activism became so prominent amongst American Indians. Following are some of the key social justice movements led by Native Americans from the mid twentieth century until present day. These efforts involve Native Americans fighting for their sovereignty, justice and dignity for their communities.

Occupation of Alcatraz Island: In 1969, a group of Native Americans occupied Alcatraz Island for approximately 19 months. The occupiers' list of demands included the return of Alcatraz to the American Indians and sufficient funding to build, maintain, and operate an Indian cultural complex and a university (Cooper, 2016, online).

Native American Activists Occupy Mount Rushmore: In 1970, a group representing the United Native Americans occupied Mount Rushmore. The purpose of this occupation was to reclaim the land that had been promised to The Great Sioux Nation in the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie in

perpetuity (Cooper, 2016, online). When gold was discovered in the area, the federal government had forced the Sioux Nation to relinquish a portion of their reservation.

First National Day of Mourning in 1970: This important day was first started at Plymouth Rock by American Indian Movement activists. The National Day of Mourning serves as a memorial and time of remembrance and spiritual connection and also a way to protest the racism and oppression that Native Americans continue to experience in the present day.

Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan in Washington, D.C.: This protest occurred in 1972 in which a group of Native Americans occupied the Bureau of Indian Affairs offices for approximately six days (Cooper, 2016, online). The group wanted to highlight and put a stop to the wrongs committed against Native Americans in the U.S.

American Indian Movement “Survival Schools:” In 1972, AIM began to develop their own community schools to offer an alternative to the public and Bureau of Indian Affairs schools that were providing an inferior education. Known as “survival schools” for their focus on basic learning and living skills, the schools strongly promoted Indian culture (Cooper, 2016, online).

Native American Activists Occupy Wounded Knee: In 1973, a group of Sioux Indians, with help from leaders of the American Indian Movement, gathered in South Dakota to occupy the spot where the Wounded Knee massacre occurred. The occupation of this area was intended to direct global attention to the generations of mistreatment from government agencies and the unsafe living conditions in which Native American lived.

The Longest Walk: Started in 1978, this peaceful transcontinental walk intended to highlight the need for Native American justice. The walk called attention to the continuing problems facing Indian communities including unemployment, inadequate health care and housing, and on the

key pieces of legislation that Congress was reviewing to cancel treaty obligations of the U.S. government.

Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation Orme Dam Victory: In 1981, after a decade of protesting and organizing, the Fort McDowell Tribe celebrated the decision by the U.S. Department of the Interior to not move forward with building the Orme Dam. This project would have destroyed more than half of the Fort McDowell Tribe's reservation land.

National Coalition of Racism in Sports and Media: This coalition was formed in 1992 by Native leaders to prevent the use of Indian images and names for school and professional sports symbols or mascots, in names and logos, and in marketing and media. These images often misrepresent the Native American people and lack cultural sensitivity.

Coalition Forms to Protect the Peaks: This Native American coalition was formed in Arizona in 2004 to protect land that had spiritual and cultural significance to 13 area tribes (Cooper, 2016, online). The coalition's focus was on addressing environmental and human rights concerns with the planned development of a ski resort in the area.

Keystone XL Pipeline Protest: Indigenous groups in 2011 launched a massive campaign focused on pressuring President Obama to not approve the expansion of the Keystone XL Pipeline. "In the fight against Keystone XL our efforts as Indigenous peoples, whether Lakota, Dakota, Assiniboine, Ponca, Cree, Dene or other has always been in the defense of Mother Earth and the sacredness of the water" (Cooper, 2016, online).

Havasupai Tribe's Legal Action to Stop the Operation of a Uranium Mine: In 2013, the Havasupai Tribe led efforts to stop the U.S. Forest Service from letting a private corporation operate a uranium mine near the Grand Canyon National Park. The Havasupai Tribe raised

concerns of tribal rights, potential environmental harm and safety issues. Their efforts resulted in the permanent banning of uranium mining in the area.

Sioux Tribe Organize to Oppose Dakota Access Pipeline: The Standing Rock Sioux Nation in 2016 began one of the greatest organizing efforts to safeguard human rights, the land and the future of the planet (Cooper, 2016, online). The Dakota Access Pipeline poses significant environmental and human health dangers to the area and also threatens human rights. Over 200 Native American Tribes and allies have taken a stand with the Sioux in protesting this project.

Current and Future Social Justice Priorities for Native Americans

The Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona and the Vitalyst Health Foundation joined together to conduct a study on what are the key elements that make a healthy tribal community. Interviews were conducted with members of 17 different tribes in July 2019, October 2019 and January 2020. Based on this input, a vision was developed on what a healthy tribal community comprises.

A healthy tribal community is one where families have the opportunity to live in balance from birth to and elderly age, within environments that are clean, safe and promote wellness. A Tribal perspective is that one's health is influenced by cultural and environmental knowledge that sustained Tribal communities prior to colonization and that continues to provide a basis for addressing factors that influence our quality of life. These factors stem from overarching values that have continued and influence wellness in Tribal communities (Russell and Allison, 2020, online).

From the feedback received from the tribal representatives, there are four key principles that sustain a healthy tribal community going forward.

Beliefs and Spirituality: The long-standing knowledge that is accepted and considered to be valid which serves as the foundation of ceremonial practices, knowledge of plants and animals, connection to sacred places, and the importance of faith-based religions. Key social justice

concerns under this principle include building social cohesion in the tribal community, addressing injustices endured by the group (e.g. historical traumas, racism, unfair incarceration, fair distribution of resources, etc.), and protecting the environment.

Resiliency/Way of Life: To be resilient is a cultural trait or value that aids one to cope with the challenges of life. Tribes must strive for balance when imbalance exists and to have fairness in negative situations in order to help sustain the group's way of life. Key social justice factors under this principle include ensuring access to adequate health care, food access and reducing food insecurity among tribal members, and the respect for the land, its use and preservation.

Self Determination: Tribes must be actively involved in decision making, especially around the creation of policies and the development of programs. In making these decisions, outside influences or policies need to be examined in how they will impact the tribe's functioning. Social justice factors under this principle include building a just, fair and sustainable economy, having access to good education from elementary through college, and creating socially connected communities that build cohesion and are free of crime and violence.

Sovereignty/Tribal Governance: The structure of governance should be the tribal form of government that is guided by longstanding norms and cultural values, historical factors and appropriate actions in which thought has been given to the policy implications. Key social justice factors to consider under this principle include good transportation systems (e.g. safe, accessible, reliable and affordable and meets the community's needs), community design and development that is culturally appropriate and promotes a healthy and connected community, and housing that is high quality, safe, affordable, efficient and ensures that vulnerable populations are able to access acceptable housing.

Elements of social justice and addressing long-standing needs in tribal communities are reflected in all four of these key principles. The Native American faith tradition, including traditional Indian spirituality and the Christian religions having Indigenous influence, play a crucial role in advocating for and advancing these key principles to help ensure that there are healthy and strong tribal communities moving forward.

**FAITH COMMUNITIES SERVING COMMUNITY NEEDS IN CURRENT
SOCIETY AND COMPRISING A KEY PART OF THE U.S. SOCIAL SAFETY NET**

Faith-Based Organizations and Their Impact on the Social Safety Net

Throughout history, and in today's society, faith-based institutions continue to play a key role globally in developing programs and services to address unmet social needs. Without these faith-based supported programs, there would be a huge gap in services in the United States that the government and private sector would be unable to fill. According to a study published by The Bridgespan Group, faith-based organizations (FBOs) studied across a sample of six major cities in the U.S. contributed (based on a weighted average) about 40 percent of the total dollars spent on safety net services (Queenan, Grunert, and Murphy, 2021, p. 9). This investment in social safety net programs represents about two out of every five dollars spent in these communities on helping those in need. The amount FBOs invest in safety net programs could represent even a larger percentage when one considers that some congregations' financial information was not available, and also the support that these groups offer through volunteering, mutual aid, and expenditures that don't get captured in IRS tax reports.

FBOs represent a significant portion of the non-profit sector in this country with some estimating that they comprise over one third of not-for-profit organizations. This number is significant when those organizations registered with the IRS as nonprofit are close to 1.5 million. A recent report documented that giving to religiously affiliated organizations (including donations to congregations) represent nearly one-third of all giving in the U.S. (Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2020, online). The impact of these organizations and their investment in addressing social needs is crucial in serving those needing assistance.

Many of the programs that FBOs develop to address unmet needs in their communities involve partnering with other faith traditions. Coming together to address important social needs within communities can serve as a unifying force to bring different faith traditions together to

work for the common good. The world's major religions all have a commitment to social justice within their teachings that is demonstrated in the works of charity that they are involved in.

- In Christianity Jesus teaches his followers to love God and neighbor, which inspires one to practice acts of selfless and sacrificial charity by helping those in need. This idea of loving one's neighbor supports a strong doctrine of social justice. Jesus taught that one must move from just focusing on the letter of the law, as promulgated by the Judaic tradition, to cultivating the proper condition of the human heart demonstrated in how we treat and serve others.
- In the Judaic tradition they place importance on the individual's obligations and responsibilities to each other as members of a family and community and the commitments he/she has entered into. In the Old Testament there are terms used to denote justice such as *sedek*, *mishpat* and *ken* (Thakur, 1996, p. 34). *Sedek* makes reference to that which is righteous or true. *Mishpat* makes reference to making things right and living in the right relationship with God and each other. *Ken* means that which is right, honest or just. Judaism also has a Hebrew word for charity, *tzedakah*. This term is held as a commandment within the faith tradition to promote justice and righteousness among its members.
- Within Hinduism, the concept of social justice ties to the notion of *rta*. This concept of *rta* denotes primarily the cosmic order, and by implication, the order of the moral law, on the one hand, and the 'causal' order of the performance of sacrifices of the other (Thakur, 1996, 29). In order to follow *rta*, it requires the individual to follow certain virtues such as avoiding crimes, truth in one's friendship with others, being faithful in marriage, and developing positive relationships with others. This faith tradition also believes in *dharma*

which attempts to ensure the cosmic order in society and advances justice, social order, and morality in our relationships with each other.

- In the Buddhist tradition, concepts of social justice are linked to maintaining the right social order that relate to the concepts from the Hindu tradition of dharma, karma and nirvana. “The ‘law’ of karma is unyielding, so that right action always leads to reward and wrong action to punishment. But even the life of all possible rewards cannot be an ultimate desirable goal: that goal is nirvana, or transcendence of the cycle of births and deaths (Thakur, 1996, p. 32).”
- With the Islamic faith tradition, the two fundamental sources regarding teachings on social justice and righteousness come from the Koran and Sunna. In the Koran it declares, “Establish justice (al-fist), being witnesses for God – even if the evidence goes against yourselves or against your parents or kinsmen; and irrespectively of whether the witness is rich or poor: under all circumstances God has priority for you (over your relatives).” Islam ethics place high value on the community and the importance of the social virtues of hospitality, almsgiving and charity. “In Islam there is a moral imperative to support those in need. *Zakat*, one of the five pillars of Islam, requires Muslims to give alms or charity to the poor (Scott, 2018, online).”
- Native American spirituality has a strong theme of social justice woven throughout its various beliefs and practices. Although this faith traditions represents a diversity of beliefs, a common theme is the connection that humans have to the earth and its non-human inhabitants. In Native American spirituality the world is seen as a beautiful, wonderful and fantastic creation that helps to build strong feelings of appreciation and obligation. This strong sense of gratitude is demonstrated in social justice work that

Native Americans undertake to help protect the environment, preserve creation, and respect our earth.

Faith-based organizations play an integral role in society when it comes to giving, community impact, and volunteering. These institutions are highly regarded and trusted within their communities and invest in a variety of causes. A recent survey of religious congregations estimates that 84% of these organizations provide at least one type of social service to the community (King et al., 2019, p. 29). Some key areas where FBOs are involved in serving the community include addressing food and clothing needs. Other key areas addressed by faith institutions include physical health care, disaster relief, home repair, mental health substance misuse issues, job placement, and providing shelter/housing. Congregations report that the portion of their total budgets spent on outreach programs to address unmet needs can be close to one-third.

Collaborating with other organizations, including faith-based, is a common model FBOs use to develop programs to assist people in the community. A recent study found that almost all (98%) social service providing congregations collaborate with other organizations to provide services to the broader community (King et al., 1991, p. 29). These partnerships allow the FBOs to pool their resources and expand their level of impact and service within the community. Another benefit of working together with other faith traditions on a social need is that it offers the opportunity to learn about the beliefs/theologies of other religions and develops awareness and understanding.

The scope and impact of FBOs' community programs are significant in the U.S., as demonstrated by their overall numbers. Of the seventy-four constituent groups that are part of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, a network of disaster relief nonprofits, of

which more than half are faith-based organizations (Smietana, 2020, online). Faith-based groups of volunteers organized to help in disasters have assisted across the U.S. helping victims, providing immediate aid, organizing disaster recovery efforts, and offering disaster preparedness programs. Another area where faith-based groups are making a big impact in this country is around food insecurity. According to Feeding America, which is a national network of food banks in the U.S., approximately 62% of their 60,000 partner food pantries and meal programs are faith-based (Smietana, 2020, online). If these programs were not available, it is doubtful that the government would be able to meet the demand and food insecurity would be even more of an issue in the U.S.

The significant impact of FBOs is also true when it comes to providing housing/shelter to those who were previously housed. Faith institutions continue to play a key role in addressing issues of homelessness within their local communities. Fifty-eight percent of the emergency shelter beds in 11 surveyed cities are maintained by religious providers, who also deliver many of the addiction, health care, education and job services needed to help those experiencing homelessness regain their independence (Queenan, Grunert, and Murphy, 2021, p. 6).

In addition to the significant financial investments that FBOs make in addressing unmet needs in communities across the U.S., they also offer other benefits to assist with social issues that are not quantified in dollars. FBOs serve as a great way to engage individuals to volunteer for social outreach programs. It is estimated that roughly half of Americans belong to a formal house of worship, and one Gallup poll showed that three in four Americans identify with a specific religious faith (Larson, 2022, online). Previous studies have shown that those volunteers connected with a faith tradition tend to be more committed and consistent in their giving of time and service to help others. Another positive impact that faith organizations offer when it comes

to addressing social needs is that they are connected to those individuals being served. Faith-based organizations, which are community-embedded and trusted resources, maybe particularly advantageous partners (Campbell et al., 2007, p. 215). FBOs in many cases are seen as a safe and trusted place in the community that are felt by their members and larger community as well. One example of this important role that FBOs play in communities is with regards to chronic diseases such as diabetes. With this disease prevalent among the Latino community, and many of this population are members of the Catholic Church, it makes sense that a lot of partnerships have been formed with the Church to try and address diabetes among this group. In addition to the connections that FBOs offer to the targeted populations being served, they also offer other benefits that may not be measured such as offering space to conduct programs and connecting community stakeholders together to address a particular issue/need. FBOs can also use their network of congregants/members to help raise awareness in the community around a particular need or issue.

While FBOs play a significant role in supporting the social safety net in this country, there have been some concerns raised with these faith institutions having such a big impact on serving social issues within the U.S. Some of the large philanthropic foundations in this country have excluded FBOs from their giving portfolios. Research has documented that faith-based organizations represent only 2% of all grant dollars provided by the top fifteen institutional philanthropies in the U.S. (Queenan et al., 2021, p. 10). Some point to the discomfort that may exist with FBOs based on negative personal experiences and complex historical relationships that have existed between faith traditions and various areas of social justice initiatives. There are also instances where some major faith institutions have served to be a source of trauma, harm, and hardship around key social issues. For example, issues around LGBTQ rights, women's rights

and reproductive health have brought up differing viewpoints among some faith groups and community advocates. These issues may serve as the key reasons why some funders are wary about supporting programs sponsored and led by FBOs.

Another issue that gets raised with FBOs operating social outreach programs is related to concerns that these projects might be used as a way for faith institutions to proselytize and recruit members. A study done in Memphis, TN with 30 Latino community members and 10 faith leaders reported that despite respondents being receptive and acknowledging the need for faith-based programs aimed at prevention and filling healthcare gaps, concerns regarding the influence of religious doctrine on health interventions were expressed by members of both groups (Harmon et al., 2020, p. 1198). Some of the participants in the study were suspicious of an FBO's motives to preach or try to convert them by being involved in the health outreach programs. It is important when faith organizations get involved in social outreach projects that they understand the line between their purpose as pastors/faith leaders and their commitment to serving community needs.

With the significant role that FBOs play in serving social needs, there is some concern being expressed recently regarding the declining numbers of individuals in this country that identify with organized religion. The number of Americans who do not identify with any organized religion rose from 17% in 2009 to 26% in just ten years (Pew Research Center, 2021, online). Many young adults in this country do not want to affiliate with a particular religious tradition but prefer to remain spirituality unaffiliated with a term being used called the 'nones' to refer to this group. As faith organizations rely on volunteers from within their congregations to help provide social outreach programs, what will happen to these services as their volunteer base ages and shrinks in size? One consideration for faith institutions is to look at these community outreach

programs as a way to reengage with those who feel disconnected from organized religion. Providing opportunities for people to live the charitable mission of their faith tradition may help to reconnect people to the religious organizations that they belong to.

Specific Multifaith Partnerships Addressing Social Needs

Developing programs using multifaith partnerships can be an effective way to address social needs in communities. There are four notable interfaith programs that have been highlighted in both academic and professional journals as models for serving social needs within their communities. The first program is the Christian Networking Organization that includes membership from different Christian congregations in a moderately sized Midwestern community. The next project is the Bronx Health REACH (Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health) Coalition, which is a group of seventeen churches focused on health promotion, disease self-management, and helping people navigate the health care system with a focus on reaching the Black and Latino populations. The Health-Smart Behavior Program is a culturally sensitive health promotion project designed to increase engagement in healthy behaviors with the goal of reducing obesity. The last project to be reviewed is the Associated Ministries of Tacoma-Pierce County and their focused campaign against family homelessness in the community. Scholars, activists, and foundation officials now believe that the key to revitalizing distressed neighborhoods is to rebuild the community's social capital—its capacity and resources for cooperation and collaboration (Bachelder, 2000, p. 802). FBOs, such as these programs highlighted in the journals, play a key role in serving as the conduit for bringing secular and non-secular organizations together to collaborate on addressing key social needs.

The Christian Network

The Christian Network includes faith leaders from different Christian congregations located in the Midwest. The Network offered an opportunity to create a structured venue for Christian churches to work on projects focused on mercy and justice. The organization was founded in 2003 and their main activity was to bring together Christian churches to organize a community event where school supplies, food, and other resources were provided to local families (Todd, 2012, p. 233). While the term mercy in the organization's purpose statement was clearly understood by the group to denote practices of charity, such as doing collection drives to meet basic needs, the term justice was less clearly understood but appeared to focus on changing social systems to address social issues. The program was well organized and had defined roles for its leaders and clear leadership structures. Having formalized structures, such as a 501(c)(3) designation with the government, and formalized staff roles with strong leadership seemed to be key components ensuring successful operations of FBO programs.

Setting up a structure of engaging with other Christian churches to perform the work of the Christian Network was key in helping the organization be successful. By using its network of partnering faith communities, the organization was able to mobilize volunteers and resources (i.e. financial support, labor, and supplies) to host resource events for those in need. The personal connections that congregational members had developed in the community helped to secure resources and support for these big events.

“Group members described this as ‘mercy’ events that provided for basic community needs. The group also used the presence of volunteers from different congregations as an opportunity to build Christian community (Todd, 2012, p. 236).”

The organization was intentional in how it organized the volunteers from the different faith congregations who participated in these large resource events to have them work together. This

involvement of volunteers working with people from other faith traditions helped to promote relationship building and develop partnerships across the participating Christian congregations. This linking of different religious congregations helped to better address community needs by being aware of what resources each congregation had to offer. Monthly meetings organized by the Christian Network provided an effective model to connect individuals and congregations. These meetings provided an opportunity to create an informal structure to link individuals from different congregations to identify common projects of interest. At one meeting a member interested in providing construction work for a homeless shelter was connected to a person in another network member's congregation that had the necessary supplies (Todd, 2012, p. 237). These meetings also provided a great opportunity to share information on community resources and to invite external presenters to educate congregational members regarding what services were available that might assist individuals they were working with.

Although some may be critical of the fact that the Christian Network only included other Christian denominations, this homogeneity of members created a sense of connection and mutual trust with volunteers. In fact, it appeared that a common identification as Christian created *Christian Capital* where trust was assumed due to identification as Christian (Todd, 2012, p. 239). This idea of *Christian Capital* began to develop as a way of bonding people together where trust was enhanced among program volunteers knowing they shared similar religious values and beliefs, which could be beneficial as the foundation of working towards common goals to better the community.

Bronx Health REACH Coalition

The majority of persons served by the Bronx Health REACH Coalition are Black and Latino members of the community. The Coalition was formed in 1999 and created a strong faith-

based initiative with seventeen churches serving approximately 280,000 residents with more than 41% living below the poverty level (Kaplan et. al., 2009, p. 1113). The key goals of the program included using the resources and capacity of local FBOs to help change the attitudes, knowledge and behaviors of area residents regarding health promotion activities, disease management, and how to navigate the health care system. The other key goal of the program is to work with local clergy and congregational members to advocate for changes in law, policies and regulations to help advance equal access to health care. The member faith organizations serve as key social anchors in their communities and may offer organizational and communication structures that can be of value in implementing health promotion programs and transmitting important health messages.

The Coalition has been able to share some lessons learned since they implemented their program. First, one must have ongoing engagement with the persons being served in a way that is both fair and meaningful if you want to be successful. Second, having a good evaluation process is critical to share information with program partners, funders and those being served and to assess the program's effectiveness. Having good outcomes information will be important as you try to recruit with new partners. A third lesson is that one must invest the time needed to make the project successful. Community engagement takes time—to build relationships, develop trust, and encourage meaningful participation (Sutherland, Hale, and Harris, 1995, p. 212). The fourth lesson from this program is that you have to be sensitive to language and cultural issues when working with your target population. Next, you must have the buy-in and support from your faith organization's leadership to help ensure success. Without support from those in leadership roles, it will be hard for the FBO to sustain and develop the program. A final lesson shared from the Coalition is that program sustainability has to be considered. How do partners

continue to support the program going forward? Can the work be incorporated into existing budgets, are there other funders to approach to support the work, can volunteers be used to help continue the program, or are there other revenue streams to help support the project? These are some of the key questions that the program's leadership needs to be asking.

The Health-Smart Behavior Program

The Health-Smart Behavior Program is based on a multi-week model that is culturally sensitive with the focus of organizing health promotion events and interventions to improve engagement in healthy behaviors. The program recruited Black adult churchgoers from 21 participating predominately African American Christian churches in Florida (Tucker et. al., 2019, p. 83). In order for the churches to be part of the partnership, they needed to meet certain criteria. The churches needed to have a pastor/clergy member that was interested in health, there was currently some form of a health ministry project at the church, and the faith institutions were clustered in groups to help promote collaboration and communication among the participating churches.

The Health-Smart Behavior Program includes several key components that comprise the project. Each participant in the program is assigned a health coach to help them set individual goals and to monitor their progress in meeting identified targets. At each partnering church location group discussion sessions are held to provide multi-part educational sessions and offer the structure for discussion among the participants. Panel discussions are organized at each partner church site to provide information, answer questions from participants, and to motivate individuals towards achieving their goals. Another key part of the program includes physical activity. Participants are encouraged to engage in a certain amount of physical activity each week. The churches offer space to hold physical activity events such as dance classes and

walking groups. Funding is also provided to offer financial incentives to the participants to complete the intake data collection and after three months of involvement with the program. Participants continued engagement with these different parts of the program have been attributed to being culturally sensitive and being anchored in Health Self-Empowerment Theory (Tucker et. al., 2014, p. 96). This theory is based in the belief that to get a person to start performing healthy behaviors in their lives it is impacted by environmental, social, and economic conditions. Faith organizations can be a significant force in addressing issues in each of these key areas.

Associated Ministries of Tacoma-Pierce County

Associated Ministries of Tacoma-Pierce County (AM) was started as an ecumenical movement to try and address homelessness in the area. The movement began over a century ago and was incorporated as a non-profit in 1969 and today serves as a convener of over 250 local congregations (Costoya and Breen, 2021, p. 54). Over a period of time, AM began to become disconnected with some of its partnering congregations and in 2015 made a focused effort to develop its connection to local congregations and to increase their efforts around interfaith work. Both the board and leadership of the organization felt that if AM was once again able to be a leader in convening local faith communities, that the interfaith partnership had the opportunity to make a significant impact on addressing issues of the unhoused in the area.

In recent years, AM has begun to develop strategies that have been focused on how local congregations can be integrated into the work to end homelessness. One example is that AM hosts quarterly meetings of faith communities with the aim to educate faith communities on issues around homelessness, provide updates on what initiatives are currently in place, and to generate new ideas on possible projects. AM reports that at a recent meeting there were 80 local faith community members representing 54 communities, including members of non-Christian

faith traditions (Costoya and Breen, 2021, p. 55). The organization is now focusing its efforts on working with local congregations to respond in concrete ways to address homelessness in their neighborhoods. AM believes that they are in the position to serve as the intermediary that would be able to organize the local faith organizations around an interfaith and cross-sector movement that would be focused on ending family homelessness in the area. One of the key challenges that AM has faced with getting this project moving forward is securing the funding to be able to build the organizational structure and hire the staff needed. The organization has faced challenges in getting non-sectarian community partners to invest in the program. As mentioned previously in this paper, some foundations have been hesitant to invest in social outreach programs led by FBOs. With regards to AM's project, they do have the backing and support of their local city government and were even requested by some local city officials to get involved in helping to come up with solutions.

Online Research of Faith-Based Organizations Addressing Social Needs

This section provides a summary of online research looking at 75 specific programs led by faith-based organizations addressing major social needs in their communities. This research looked at how these programs were structured, what populations they served, were they developed on an multifaith model, and what major social needs were being addressed. The data collected from the online research has been compiled into a resource directory to help FBOs that are interested in developing similar programs.

Program Structure

As part of the online research, faith-based programs were reviewed based on those that were operated on a completely volunteer model and those with a paid staff. Whether the program

was led by paid staff or run by volunteers, most FBOs had organized their programs under a formal nonprofit organization per IRS requirements to be a 501(c)(3). Of the 75 organizations studied, 89.3% were managed by a paid staff and 10.7% were volunteer-led. FBO programs that were volunteer-led were no less effective in serving their target population compared to those with a paid staff.

Nashville Organized for Action and Hope (NOAH) based in Nashville, TN is a completely volunteer run program. NOAH was founded in 1993 and consists of a group of interdenominational faith communities, unions, and community organizations who have joined together to give a voice to traditionally marginalized people (<https://noah.tn.org>). The program works to engage people in economic and political decisions that impact their lives and to bring together partnering organizations to have a unified voice. Some of the committees that NOAH has formed to work on specific issues include:

- Affordable housing to expand the inventory of affordable places to live for those who are low-income and for the unhoused.
- The education initiative focuses on issues of social emotional learning, racial equity in education, and increasing funding for public education.
- The task force focused on criminal justice is focused on eliminating racism within the prison system.
- Efforts around economic equity are focused on improving area wages and developing more equitable policies leading to more equitable development in the city.
- Work being done by NOAH on voter engagement is focused on getting more people involved in community issues and increasing the number of people who vote in elections.

- The Young Adult Caucus is focused on working with young adults to help them become leaders who are concerned about social justice issues in the city.

Populations Targeted

Similar to data collected in other studies, the majority of programs operated by FBOs that address unmet community needs are targeted to those who are economically disadvantaged (i.e. low-income, uninsured, those without permanent housing, persons on government assistance programs, etc.). Of the 75 FBOs reviewed, 86.7% served persons who were economically disadvantaged. The next largest groups served by FBO-led programs included seniors (32.0%), youth (30.7%), general population (25.3%), persons with disabilities (14.7%), and refugees/immigrant populations (12.0%). Many of the programs researched online served more than one target population (64%).

One interesting program serving those who are economically disadvantaged is The Shade Tree located in North Las Vegas, Nevada. The program offers a safe shelter and other supportive resources to women experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, and those with children dealing with a crisis. The organization offers key services that help to promote self-reliance, stability, and dignity with its clients. Some key services offered by the program include medical care, individualized case management, nutritious meals, a children's activity center, mental health service coordination, and a shelter for pets of the victims served by the program (<https://theshadetree.org>).

Community Assisted Rides (formerly Interfaith Community Partners) is a FBO that is focused on helping seniors remain independent and living in their homes. The program is located in La Grange, IL and works with a group of 13 Christian churches to serve seniors in need of

assistance (<https://communityassistedrides.org>). Services are provided by a group of dedicated volunteers and include transportation assistance to medical appointments (for shopping, and other necessities), home visitations, delivery of books and other materials from the public libraries, and education on resources and services available in the community.

Interfaith Models Addressing Social Needs

Part of the online research looked at FBOs that worked with other faith institutions of different religious traditions to address social needs. Of the 75 FBOs analyzed, 90.7% are based on interfaith models of different Christian denominations working together to address unmet community needs. Approximately, 54.7% of the FBOs studied are working with faith institutions of other major religious traditions, in addition to Christian, such as Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Hindu, Sikh, and Sufi as some examples. For some of these interfaith models of service, the opportunity to bring together different religious traditions to work on a social need also provided an opportunity for dialogue to learn more about other religions and promoted interfaith collaboration.

The Mecklenburg Metropolitan Interfaith Network (MeekMIN) is an ecumenical model that is an interfaith network of religious organizations and individuals focused on building understanding, compassion, and justice. MeekMIN includes 64 faith communities representing Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Islam and Sikh houses of worship that was founded in 1987 to serve the communities of Charlotte and Mecklenburg in North Carolina (<https://www.meckmin.org>). Some of the major projects of MeekMIN include convening meetings with faith leaders to share information and resources, a pluralism project to help promote interreligious literacy, interfaith youth gatherings and camps for middle and high school students, open tables to build

relationships among diverse congregations by hosting meals, and the faith club to help members learn about different faith traditions and to build lasting friendships.

Another example of a multifaith social outreach program is Interfaith Action of Central Texas (IACT). The program emerged from the United Urban Council of Austin in 1976 as a civil rights and advocacy organization focused on creating collaborative relationships between different faith communities (<https://interfaithtexas.org>). Some of the key programs offered by IACT include:

- Hands on Housing: The program offers home repairs for low-income elderly and disabled.
- iACT for Refugees: This program provides cultural orientation classes and English as a Second Language (ESL) courses to newly arrived refugees.
- The Red Bench: This project offers ongoing dialogue to improve interfaith understanding and civil discourse.
- Passport Program: This is a twelve-month program that encourages individuals to travel and learn about different houses of worship and take part in different community celebrations of these different faith traditions.

Key Social Needs Being Addressed

Among the 75 FBO social outreach programs studied, the different areas of need being addressed included education/training (69.3%), food insecurity (65.3%), case management/referral services (57.3%), housing/shelter assistance (53.3%), basic needs (50.7%), policy change/advocacy (37.3%), mental health/counseling services (32.0%), financial assistance (30.7%), medical assistance (30.7%), transportation assistance (22.7%), senior services (20.0%),

programs for youth/children (18.7%), legal assistance (14.7%), criminal justice programs (13.3%), employment training/placement (10.7%), home repair programs (9.3%), environmental issues (8.0%), disaster preparedness and relief (6.7%), and dental care (1.3%). The top six social needs/issues that the FBOs addressed who were part of this research study included education/training, food insecurity, case management and referral to resources, housing/shelter, basic needs (beyond just food), and policy change/advocacy work. The needs that the FBOs who were researched were less likely to address included environmental issues, disaster preparedness and relief, and dental care. The majority of the FBOs (67%) that were part of the research study served five or more community needs/issues through their programs. There were some notable FBO community programs that used an multifaith model to address the top six social needs.

The Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches (GMCC) brings together different Christian churches from the community to offer a series of important classes and educational workshops for local residents. The GMCC traces its roots back to 1905, as a project of the Hennepin County Sunday School Association, and has grown over the years to become an entrepreneurial organization to help those most impacted by challenges (<https://gmcc.org>).

Educational programs offered by GMCC include:

- Youth Programs: Educational programs for youth include the Genius Labs and Tech Teens for middle and high school students to provide technological access, studio learning, and youth-centered design.
- Face the Facts: This project offers poverty simulation training that helps people from the community understand the complexities and main causes of poverty, privilege, and social justice issues in the community.

- Youth Innovation Labs: This program offers education around skills training to place youth in paid positions to help bring about systems change.
- Minnesota Venture Farms: This project provides education to help build a new, equitable food ecosystem.

An innovative interfaith program addressing food insecurity is Churches United of the Quad City Area. The program was started in 1961 to address food insecurity in Rock Island County, IL and has grown today to include 140 churches (representing 20 different denominations) serving 10 cities in Iowa and 13 cities in Illinois (www.cuqca.org). Through its large network of churches, the organization now operates 23 food pantries and serves close to 140,000 people annually. Of the many churches that collaborate on this program, 100 area congregations have agreed to prepare hot meals to help those in need and currently serve over 20,000 people each year.

One of the innovative interfaith models providing case management and referral services is Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon (EMO). The organization can trace its roots back to 1917 when the House Mission Council was formed to promote evangelism among churches in Oregon, and today includes 15 Christian denominations and 79 faith-based organizations (<https://emoregon.org>). EMO offers case management and referral services to several groups including persons with HIV/AIDS, unaccompanied high school students experiencing homelessness, persons experiencing domestic and sexual violence, and refugees coming to the U.S. Working with refugees, EMO tries to help this group with case management even before they arrive in the U.S. to help ensure they have a smooth transition as they resettle in the Portland area.

With regards to housing/shelter needs, one of the interesting FBO programs addressing this unmet need is Family Promise of the Coastal Empire (FPCE). FPCE is part of the national network of Family Promise programs addressing the homeless issue within communities by partnering with local faith organizations. FPCE was started in 1996 when a group of ministries from Savannah conducted a homeless needs assessment, and the program has grown today to include forty-six faith congregations (<https://www.familypromisece.org>). The model brings together churches to serve as host sites for unhoused families to offer immediate shelter. Once sheltered, the case manager works with these families to move them to transitional housing with the goal of securing permanent housing. During this process families are linked with other resources and supports such as job training, linkages to benefits, and financial assistance.

There are some successful replicable programs operated by FBOs to address basic needs for the underserved. Our Place Community Services is based in Spokane, WA and addresses the needs for food, clothing and hygiene items for persons living in the area. The program started in 1987 as an ecumenical ministry with 10 churches, and today has grown to include 600 community organizations, churches, foundations and individual supporters (<https://www.ourplacespokane.org>). In addition to operating a food bank, Our Place distributes personal care items, hygiene products, and diapers to anyone in need. They also operate a laundry center to offer free laundry services to those who are economically disadvantaged. Our Place also coordinates donations of clothing and household items and then distributes them to people in need. The organization is also able to distribute free bus passes for those needing assistance with transportation.

While many FBOs offer programs providing direct services, there are other groups focusing on changing policy and advocating with elected officials to impact social needs in their

communities. POWER is led by faith institutions to help build broad-based support for key policy changes. POWER was founded in 2010 bringing together people of different faith traditions, races, income levels and cultures and has grown to include 150 lay and clergy leaders from over 50 congregations in Philadelphia (<https://www.powerinterfaith.org>). The major initiatives around policy development and advocacy that POWER is working on include:

- Economic Dignity: POWER is working on building creative solutions that will create opportunities for people and help to lift them out of poverty.
- Education Justice: POWER is bringing its member congregations to work with students and parents to help improve funding for area schools and make sure resources get allocated fairly.
- Civic Engagement: POWER is working with persons of color to help protect their voting rights and to educate them on how to harness their political power.
- Climate Justice: POWER is working to protect the people and the planet and advance policies that protect the earth.
- Live Free: POWER is advocating for an end to the scourge of gun violence, mass incarceration, and the unjust criminalization of Black and Brown citizens.

The six programs highlighted here are just a few examples of the significant impact that FBOs are having in communities across the U.S. to address pressing social needs of the day. The seventy-five organizations that were studied online are key resources in their communities trying to advance positive changes by assisting and empowering those who are marginalized and facing barriers.

Focus of Additional Research

The online research of the 75 faith-based organizations discussed in this section provided a base of information that helped to guide additional research on how FBOs are impacting communities by serving social needs. The information gathered from this online study was used to select 16 FBOs for more in-depth study. The next section reviews the information that was obtained from interviews with the leaders of these programs. The purpose of these interviews included collecting information and highlighting best practices that will benefit other faith-based organizations developing similar programs to address social needs.

A SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH AND KEY INSIGHTS
WITH LEADERS OF FAITH-BASED PROGRAMS SERVING SOCIAL NEEDS

Faith-Based Organizations Benefit Their Communities

Faith-based organizations continue to serve as key resources in their communities to address important social needs. Interviews conducted with 16 leaders of FBOs provide some interesting insights regarding the important work that these organizations play in their communities and also the value of building multifaith partnerships to address unmet social needs.

Benefits of FBOs Serving Community Needs

A series of questions asked of the FBO leaders regarding the benefits that their organizations provide to the community included the following themes:

- Programs operated by FBOs Provide essential services to the community like food assistance, housing support, and serving basic needs.
- FBOs serve an important role as a safety net for vulnerable populations, including the homeless, seniors, and disabled.
- Faith-led organizations serve as advocates for systemic change in communities on issues like housing, health, and social justice.
- These organizations help to engage and empower the community through education, volunteer opportunities, and dialogue on key social issues.
- FBOs are able to collaborate with nonprofits, multifaith groups, and government agencies to maximize impact in serving the community.
- Faith-sponsored organizations are effective in connecting community members to resources and can serve as a catalyst in amplifying residents' voices.
- Programs operated by FBOs focus on both immediate needs and long-term solutions.

A Likert 10-point scale was used to assess the degree to which the current mission of the faith-based program still reflects its original purpose. Based on the information received from the leaders of these organizations, the average of the responses received was 8.13 and demonstrates that the current focus of these programs still aligns with their original mission. Further questions around the organization's mission offered the following insights:

- FBO programs had strong mission awareness with their employees and volunteers (9.1 out of 10) and with partners and collaborators in the community (7.8 out of 10).
- Clients served by FBO programs were less aware of the organization's mission (6.7 out of 10).
- The community served by the FBO had less knowledge of the mission/purpose of the organization (6.5 out of 10) that could impact the awareness and support of its programs.

Value of Multifaith Partnerships Operating Community Programs

Many of the FBO leaders who were interviewed operated programs in the community that were based on multiple faith institutions partnering together to address key social needs. The feedback from these leaders provided some valuable information regarding the benefits that these partnerships offer to both the community and their faith partners.

- Based on a 10-point Likert scale, FBO leaders felt that their faith-based partners were engaged in the programs (7.8 out of 10).
- Based on the same Likert scale, FBO leaders felt that there were opportunities for their faith partners to communicate more with their members/congregants about the community programs their institutions collaborate on (6.81 out of 10).

- Some of the key benefits that the FBO leaders identified by involving multiple faith groups in the development and oversight of programs included:
 - Interfaith collaboration allows for an inclusive space where diverse faith groups can come together around common values, especially related to social justice issues.
 - Collaborating with other faith traditions help to foster mutual understanding, respect, and learning across different beliefs, while helping to build relationships and a sense of belonging.
 - Working together, faith-based institutions are able to amplify their collective impact, including increasing outreach capacity, visibility, and focusing on common goals.
 - Collaborating with different faith partners and community organizations enhances the program's ability to access funding, engage broader community support, and build a pool of committed volunteers.
 - Multifaith models of program development help to enable a better coordinated response to community needs, encourages advocacy and public engagement, and offers diverse perspectives to address key community issues.
- FBO leaders were also asked about the value of their collaborative partnership model with different faith institutions and how the partners benefitted from their involvement.
 - The multifaith model of collaborating on social outreach programs helps to strengthen collective impact by better coordinating resources, avoiding duplication of efforts, and creating a central hub for making referrals, providing services, and coordinating communication.

-The multifaith partnership benefits the collaborating faith organizations by providing opportunities to live their mission through action through social justice work, community engagement, and volunteerism. The collaboration also helps to amplify the influence of the partners by giving them a unified voice in the community, and a mechanism to work together to shape policy and advocate for change.

-Faith groups involved in the collaborative program benefit from knowledge-sharing and promoting mutual support and constructive dialogue across diverse beliefs helping to build strong community connections.

- FBO leaders were also asked to comment on the benefits of a multifaith model of program development for the members/congregants of the partnering faith organizations.

-The outreach program helps to engage members of the different partnering faith organizations in social justice work by providing structured opportunities to get involved.

-Members of faith organizations benefit from their involvement in the social outreach program by being involved in shared projects that can lead to interfaith dialogue and initiatives such as multifaith dinners and summits.

-The multifaith partnership model of program development helps members of faith groups be connected to inclusive opportunities to work on community issues. Members are given hands-on opportunities to work with those in need, deepening their understanding of social justice inequalities, and learning about faith beliefs other than their own to build trust and authentic relationships.

-Working with a multifaith outreach model helps the members of faith organizations to be proactive in addressing community concerns and, by working together, strengthens

collective impact. The collaborative partnership can help unite diverse groups around shared social justice goals and needs within the community.

Challenges of Faith-Based Organizations Leading Community Outreach Programs

In discussing the challenges that faith-based organizations encounter in operating programs to address social needs in communities, the leaders discussed several key items. These challenges are grouped into two categories dealing with issues faced in operating the program and issues encountered in developing a multifaith collaborative model to develop the project.

Programmatic Challenges

The challenges that FBO leaders discussed in operating community outreach programs included:

- The main organizational challenge expressed by all of the FBO leaders interviewed concerned funding.
 - Issues raised included insufficient, inconsistent, and competitive funding streams to support programs. Some funders are also reluctant to support programs operated by faith-based organizations.
- While funding remains a key challenge, the FBO leaders also noted that the demand for their programs continues to increase with contributing factors such as growing mental health needs, lack of affordable housing, immigration issues, increased food insecurity, and the remaining long-term impacts of the Covid pandemic.
- Operational issues identified by the leaders participating in the study included limited resources, space, and staffing challenges.

- Organizational challenges discussed by FBO leaders included an aging volunteer base and the declining numbers of volunteers from religious groups as their membership of active congregants/members declines.
- Some of the external challenges discussed by FBO leaders included skepticism by some members in the community of a faith-based organization addressing needs of the general community.
 - There is resistance by some community residents of having programs operating in their neighborhoods.
 - Some FBO leaders mentioned the difficulties that can be encountered sometimes when addressing a sensitive or divisive issue in the community.

Challenges Identified in Operating a Multifaith Model of Community Outreach

The FBO leaders discussed some of the challenges encountered when operating a program based on a multifaith collaborative model. While some challenges were encountered, the leaders of these programs noted that the benefits of developing a multifaith model far outweighed any issues that arose.

- FBO leaders noted that sometimes it can be challenging coordinating across diverse faith-based institutions.
 - Some congregations are smaller and have limited time and resources to participate on a program/project.
 - Sometimes it takes focused efforts to keep faith-based partners engaged in a project.
- Multifaith partnerships require more general and inclusive language.

-Sometimes differences in theological language and terminology can result in misunderstandings between faith partners in the group.

- FBO leaders mentioned different ideological, political, and doctrinal issues that may result in differing opinions and ideas within the group of diverse faith traditions.

-Sometimes the pressure to take a political stance on a community issue can alienate some partners.

- FBO leaders mentioned how situations arise where a change in a faith institution's leadership can impact their involvement in a program.

- Some of the leaders interviewed mentioned the pressure placed on organizations to address a specific need that might raise concerns with some of the faith partners.

-The issues that organizations face is do they move forward with addressing the need or do they take a less controversial stance and focus on needs/issues that have general agreement with the FBO partners.

Advice to Other Faith-Based Organizations Starting Community Programs

The last part of the interview with FBO leaders focused on advice that they would like to share with faith organizations interested in starting programs to address social needs. Leaders offered advice for operating programs and building multifaith models of collaboration.

Programmatic Advice for FBOs Interested in Starting a Program

FBO leaders offered several key points to consider in helping to ensure the success of a new community outreach program.

- Be clear about the program's mission, goals, and reasons for getting involved.

- Research existing needs in the community and if any work is already being done on addressing the issues before starting a program.
- Stay focused on the needs you intend to address and tailor programs to reflect the unique characteristics of the community.
- Avoid duplicating existing efforts or “reinventing the wheel.” Reach out to other organizations who have experience in operating a program similar to what your organization is planning.
- Develop strong relationships with community members, leaders, and organizations.
- Be bold, proactive, and guided by the organization’s core values.
- Stay focused and committed on the long-term impact.
 - Be willing to get involved in advocacy work to help address the community need.
- Continue to build community trust as you develop your program.
- Continuously evaluate the program and make improvements as needed.
- Shift towards more strategic, forward-thinking leadership as the program grows.
- Focus on building self-sufficiency versus just implementing a short-term response.
- Continually adjust the program based on evolving needs.
- Build sustainability into your funding model for the program.
- Focus on evolving towards a more strategic, sustainable, and systemic approach that incorporates prevention, long-term impact over short-term aid, stronger infrastructure, and clear governance and communication.

Programmatic Advice for FBOs Starting Multifaith Models of Outreach

FBO leaders running multifaith organizational models shared some useful advice for developing successful programs with collaborative partners.

- Foster an environment of mutual understanding, learning, and respect among the faith-based partners.
- Create an inclusive space for diverse faith groups to be able to work together.
- Keep the different faith partners updated on the program and engage them in the work.
- Respect each faith organizations' views and do not force them to participate on issues that might be controversial or against their beliefs.
- Make sure the partnership of faith organizations reflects the diversity of the population you are serving and the broader community.
- Respect, appreciate, and acknowledge what each faith partner is able to bring to the table with regards to the program and the community needs being served.

Examples of Notable Multi-Faith Partnership Programs

In discussing the importance of FBO partnerships bringing together multifaith religious institutions/groups to address key needs in the community, highlighting some examples of these programs offer insight on the key impact these collaborative networks have on their communities. While some programs are offering direct services to clients, others are focusing on advocacy, education, and empowerment to bring about structural and legislative changes that will benefit their communities.

Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative (<https://www.beaconinterfaith.org>)

This multi-faith organization is located in St. Paul, MN and includes 101 faith communities in the collaborative. The programs are focused on its vision of imagining the community where all people have a home. The services include providing supportive housing that includes support services for the residents and advocates on-site at the housing complexes. They also work with their partnering faith organizations to provide temporary shelter to unhoused individuals needing immediate assistance. The organization is also working with its partners to do advocacy work and change policies at the local, regional, and state level around rent support legislation and affordable housing.

The benefits that the organization provides to the community is that it is the leading developer and operator of non-time-based low-income housing in the Twin Cities area, providing over 700 homes in the area. The advocacy work that the organization does has benefitted the community by expanding rent subsidies in the area and increasing the number of affordable housing units in the two-city area. The benefits that the organization provides to its partnering faith institutions is that it conducts education with members of the collaborative around housing issues and provides training in how to advocate and organize around issues with local, regional, and state political leaders. The organization also offers opportunities for the member faith-based groups to get involved in social justice work.

The challenges that Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative is facing include the issue that the need for affordable housing in the area is greater than the resources that the organization has to meet them. Another issue the organization is dealing with is how the opioid crisis has impacted some of their clients and the challenges in trying to get resources to assist these individuals. Another challenge facing the collaborative is the decline in numbers among the

religious partners' membership. This decline in people going to religious services and being connected to a particular faith group require more effort and creativity in reaching out to people who are not part of an organized religion.

Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston (<https://www.imgh.org>)

This multifaith organization includes membership representing Christian, non-denominational groups, Islam, Jewish, Buddhist and Hindu faith communities. These faith organizations partner together to address food insecurity by offering home delivered meals to seniors and the disabled, assist refugees in the community, provide opportunities for interfaith dialogue and community partnerships, and offer a way for Houstonians to engage in interactive volunteer opportunities and service-learning experiences.

The key benefits that the organization provides to the community include offering refugee and resettlement services to the many individuals from other countries that have come to the Houston area. Also, the multi-faith partnership is having a big impact on food insecurity in the area by providing over 5,000 home delivered meals to seniors and the disabled on a daily basis. The organization also serves as a mechanism to connect volunteers from the partnering faith organizations with key projects in the community. The partnership also helps to unite people in dialogue and service around key community issues. The FBO partners are also able to live out their mission in action by being involved in the work that Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston is leading.

The challenges that the organization is facing include the need for more funding to support programs and meet the growing needs for services. Some funders are unwilling to support organizations that identify as faith-based. Another challenge is the disasters that have

impacted the area. Houston has been impacted by some major hurricanes and this increases the demand for services and volunteers provided by the organization. The other challenge that the organization faces is related to working with refugees. Services targeted towards refugees and immigrants can raise some sensitive issues within communities and people may hold different views on what services to offer these individuals.

San Francisco Interfaith Council (<https://sfinterfaithcouncil.org>)

The organization includes over 800 congregations in the City of San Francisco, their respective judicatories, sectarian educational and healthcare institutions, and the faith-based social service agencies that serve the area's most vulnerable and marginalized residents. The organization engages its faith-based partners in activities vital to interfaith cooperation, philanthropic service, and social justice initiatives. Some of the major projects the Council is involved with include COVID-19 response, convening a roundtable to discuss how to serve the needs of older adults and persons with disabilities, disaster preparedness, operating a winter shelter for those without a home, hosting an interfaith service to promote dialogue among people of different beliefs, hosting a forum of faith-based social service agencies to address issues of common concern, and providing opportunities for broad civic engagement with its partner faith organizations.

The key benefits that the organization provides to the community are its ability to work with its partners to mobilize resources around a particular need or issue. Having a network of over 800 partners provides the organization with access to key resources, such as individuals to volunteer for projects or space to hold meetings/events. Another benefit that the Council offers to the community is the relationships it has developed with local, state and national government leaders. Linking its partners with these individuals can help to drive positive change in the

community when you get people in dialogue and working together. The other benefit that the organization offers to San Francisco residents is that it is focused on being inclusive and providing a voice to everyone on issues and matters of concern to the community.

The challenges that the organization is facing include the need for more funding to support its projects. The organization only has two full-time staff, so additional funding would help to bring in additional resources to work on projects. Because the organization has a large membership of different faith groups, it must discern what its public stance will be on issues of concern in the community. The organization needs to maintain a safe space where partners feel that they can have open and honest dialogue with each other. In order to accomplish this, the organization must maintain positive civil discourse amongst its members. Lastly, the Council is working continuously to cultivate and maintain trust with its partners.

The impact that faith-based organizations have on their communities is significant and many times they are the ones leading the charge to address a community need or issue. While these organizations do face challenges in carrying out their missions, their work should be highlighted and appreciated within the community because they represent an important resource in engaging residents, leveraging resources, and advocating to help develop healthy and vibrant communities where everyone is included and valued.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this research project was to gather information and resources that would assist faith-based organizations working to address social needs facing their communities. In researching the topic, the first step was to understand the impetus behind why the major religious traditions have an interest in serving social needs within society. Developing a basic understanding of these religious traditions' commitment to meeting social needs and working for social justice, based on the review of the literature, provided direction for the next part of the research.

A review of key studies and the body of data on the topic show that faith-based organizations contribute to a significant portion of the social safety net in the United States. Online research was completed to identify specific examples of how FBOs are serving social needs within their communities. Through an online review of 75 programs, the information from this research was compiled into a directory that was made available on the internet. The intent of compiling this directory is to assist faith-based organizations that are interested in starting programs to serve social needs within their local communities. The completion of this research guided the third component of the project.

From the 75 programs reviewed online, there were 16 programs selected for further research. Through a series of online interviews, the leaders of these programs were asked to respond to a series of questions to share their first-hand experience in developing and operating programs to address needs within the community. The information collected from these interviews highlighted the importance of organizations understanding what needs exist in the community, what work has already been done around the issue by other organizations, having the knowledge to assist in planning and starting a program, and the value of building partnerships to bring together the expertise and resources to address social needs. This information helped to

formulate the last element of the research project which included the creation of a series of short slide decks to assist organizations in their planning and launching of community programs.

The slide decks provide the practical tools to help faith-based organizations as they begin the journey of developing programs/projects to meet needs in their communities. These tools are meant to provide guidance in planning, financing, promoting, building partnerships, and launching programs that will be successful in serving social needs.

In reviewing all of the information collected during the research project, finding a platform to make it accessible to faith-based organizations was the final step. A website was created to house the information from the project that individuals and organizations can access online (<https://pathways4socialneeds.net>). There is a public networking platform on the website where organizations can continue to share best practices in program design or to post questions to assist projects that are getting started.

As the need for services and resources to address basic needs in the U.S. continue to increase, faith-based organizations will continue to take a leadership role in addressing those issues within their communities. These organizations are best suited for serving social needs within society because it is an inherent part of faith institutions' concern for others and their religious mission of assisting the underserved, marginalized, and overlooked. The purpose of this capstone project is to help these faith-based organizations as they begin that path of developing programs to serve needs within their communities by providing information, resources, and tools to move projects forward.

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<https://www.familypromise.org>

Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches

<https://gmcc.org>

Interfaith Action of Central Texas

<https://interfaithtexas.org>

Interfaith Community Partners

<https://interfaithcommunitypartners.org>

Mecklenburg Metropolitan Interfaith Network

<https://www.medkmin.org>

Our Place Community Services – Spokane

<https://www.ourplacespokane.org>

POWER

<https://www.powerinterfaith.org>

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

List of Faith-Based Organizations Participating in Research Interviews

Anderson Interfaith Ministries, Anderson, SC

Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative, Saint Paul, MN

Christian Center of Park City, Park City, UT

Council of Churches of the Ozarks, Springfield, MO

Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Portland, OR

Faith Action for Community Equity, Honolulu, HI

Interfaith Action of Evanston, Evanston, Illinois

Interfaith Community Services, Tucson, Arizona

Interfaith Emergency Services, Ocala, FL

Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston, Houston, TX

Interfaith Sanctuary, Boise, ID

Interfaith Works of Central New York, Syracuse, NY

POWER Interfaith, Harrisburg, PA

San Francisco Interfaith Council, San Francisco, CA

Vermont Interfaith Action, Burlington, VT

Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice, Madison, WI

APPENDIX B

Survey Questionnaire of Faith-Based Organizations Involved in Social Outreach Programs

1. How engaged do you feel your faith-based partners are in the program?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No Engagement					Actively Engaged				

2. To what level do you feel your faith-based partners communicate with their members/congregants about the program and its projects/activities?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
No communication					Active promotion				

3. To what extent do you feel that the program’s current mission still reflects the original purpose when the organization was started?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Mission is very different from the original founding purpose				Program is still focused on its original mission but has changed some				Program still reflects/supports its original mission	

4. How clear do you feel the program’s mission/purpose is to:

	Not Clear					Very Clear				
Prog. Clients	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Staff/Employees/ Volunteers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Partners/ Collaborators	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

5. What have been some of the key benefits of having partnerships with faith-based organizations of different religious traditions?

6. Is the program a 501.C.3 and, if yes, what was the reason for incorporating under this structure?

7. What do you feel are the key benefits that the program offers to the community?

8. What are some of the major challenges facing the program?

9. Have you encountered any challenges or obstacles in operating a collaborative partnership that is interfaith? If yes, please explain.
10. What benefits do you think that the interfaith collaboration offers the partnering faith-based organizations?
11. Is there anything you would change regarding the model/structure of the program? If yes, what changes would you consider making?
12. What is some helpful advice that you would give to faith organizations interested in starting a program to serve an unmet need in their communities?
13. Do you feel this program helps engage members/congregants of the partnering FBOs in social justice work? If yes, how so?
14. What benefits and drawbacks do you feel there are with faith-based organizations operating programs to address community/social needs?

