

The Intersection of Faith and Community Engagement at Urban Institutions

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Faith and Community Engagement at Anchor Institutions: Exploring the Intersection and Turning toward an Engagement of Hope

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Editor: Valerie L. Holton, Ph.D.

Introduction

In a year that has featured a global health pandemic, a racial justice political-social movement, and a divisive political election that stretches democratic principles, the topic of faith and community engagement may seem more prescient than ever. The exploration of the intersection of faith and community engagement at anchor institutions, though, began prior to all of these events. Yet, the topics that emerge in this special issue of *Metropolitan Universities* journal are even more relevant in our current context, as scholars, practitioners, and community partner co-authors explore the relationship between faith traditions and engagement in the community.

As we framed this special issue as an editorial team, faith initiatives were initially broadly interpreted and all faith traditions were encouraged and considered (including, but not limited to, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu). Faith was loosely defined as a religious historical tradition and set of beliefs centered on a higher power. Faith-based organizations were generally communicated as religiously-affiliated colleges and universities, while faith-based initiatives included programs that were religiously affiliated. This special issue focuses on the intersection of faith and community engagement, specifically how they inform each other and the relationship between them at anchor institutions.

In an effort to elevate the voices of our various community partners, as well as recognize our own privileged voices, we as an editorial team seek to frame this introductory thought piece from the perspective of (1) honoring the variety of faith traditions, (2) our scholar-practitioner approach to this exploratory study, (3) our own faith journey related to our professional role, and (4) our goal to be collaborative co-educators with community members. As co-authors we share a common faith tradition, and therefore, we do not want to speak on behalf of other faith traditions. Instead, we invite the voices of the various traditions to represent themselves as our communities are composed of a variety of voices; and, any framing we do, risks misrepresenting them and/or their perspectives. To honor the variety of other faith traditions, we elevate their voices with permission in this framing piece and we worked to highlight their voices throughout this special issue. Through this lens, we lift the voice of one of our community partners, Pardeep Kaleka Singh, Executive Director of the Zeidler Group, and the co-author of *The Gift of Our Wounds: A Sikh and a Former White Supremacist Find Forgiveness after Hate*, to begin with a prayer:

This year has been a difficult year for our human family. We have been forced to humble ourselves and truly reflect on the frailness of our existence while also reflecting on the preciousness of life. Coincidentally, the inability to physically commune created a hunger in our souls to genuinely connect.

My simple prayer is that we trust the vision and the dangers that our creator has attempted to show us and we come together and invest in reconnecting with ourselves, our families, our communities at large, our interfaith communities, our earth and the spiritual purpose that God is attempting to manifest.

Our faith leaders and communities have a huge responsibility to embrace the current times and call on us to attach purpose to our pain, gifts to our wounds, and healing to our hurt. Pain without purpose is pointless but purpose derived from pain is the most powerful! This unique time calls for our faith families and institutions to bring about a courageous revival and educate on the importance of purposefully nurturing deep communal connections. This connection includes that connection to all things living and not. For if we don't learn in this moment in time then we as a species will not only have severed our connection to one another but we will have severed our relationship with this one and only earth we call home.

In this prayer by Singh, there is a clear call to action to foster communal connections and for faith to drive this "courageous revival," a revival that invites individuals, families, communities, and institutions alike to adhere to a deeper purpose, rather than risk losing hope.

This role of faith was originally our point of entry into this exploratory study. As the call for proposals indicates, the questions of origin included:

- Where are there intersections between faith and community engagement?
- How does faith inform community engagement or initiatives that enact an institution's public mission?
- Does faith animate place-based approaches at urban institutions?
- How does faith impact anchor institution initiatives?
- Are there barriers or constraints to public engagement because of faith traditions?
- How do interfaith initiatives influence community engagement?
- What factors influence and/or deepen practice in faith and community engagement programs?

The core element from our initial inquiry was focused on the role of faith and how faith shifts community engagement. To delve into this line of inquiry and prepare for the submission review process, we worked to identify our own positionality as scholar-practitioners, to explore our own intersections of faith and professionals, and to articulate a scholarly approach for this exploratory study leading to the emergent design of this special issue.

Methodological Approach

Our editorial team engaged in a methodological process of collaborative, narrative inquiry rooted in scholarly personal narrative and emergent design. We interrogated our own practice and facilitated an investigation into our own faith development related to our professional roles in higher education working at faith-based organizations. Each of our professional roles are hybrid roles in which we have a foot in the academy and a foot in the community, balancing the tension between learning, faith, and engagement. As third-space professionals, we identify as scholar-practitioners in which our practice informs theory and theory shapes praxis (Green, Eddins, Berkey, & Meixner, 2018; Whitchurch, 2013). Within our positionality as scholar-practitioners, we approach this exploratory study through the lens of inquiry, interrogating our practice (Lytle, 2008; Ravitch, 2014). Since this exploratory study sought to describe the relationship between faith and community engagement, a blend of qualitative approaches was appropriate, specifically collaborative narrative inquiry, scholarly personal narrative, and emergent design (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Donohoo, 2013; Nash, 2004, Creswell, 2012).

Prior to the submission process, we met as an editorial team and began our narrative reflection process. The critical prompts focused on articulating our expectations and our initial point of view on the topic, and they are listed below:

- What are you expecting from this topic of “The Intersection of Faith and Community Engagement at Urban Institutions” as we enter the submission review process?
- What expectations do you have in reference to this topic?

Each of the members of our editorial team works at faith-based universities which are Catholic, and each of us identify as Catholic, so we were aware of our potential biases and limited perspectives. From our professional experiences, we understand how working at faith-based institutions informs community engagement through programming, institutional initiatives, strategic planning, or directives from superiors. For example, faith-based universities may align programming and foster relationships with faith-based non-profit organizations, or build relationships with similar faith-based schools and churches. This influences the who, what, where, when, and why of community engagement directly, and we work in professional roles that consistently balance institutional priorities that are informed by the faith-based mission with community priorities. For the purposes of this inquiry, we sought to center our positionality explicitly so that we may honor the traditions of others and elevate their voices throughout the process, but also to articulate openly our expectations about this topic.

Data Analysis of Reflections

We analyzed the reflections through a collaborative process of categorizing and coding, establishing a thematic analysis. The narrative reflections demonstrated themes of faith informing how institutions engage, coupled with personal experiences in the community, and foundations of our own Catholic faith tradition connected to our professional roles. These themes intersected, but more importantly were integrated and inseparable within each of us, as demonstrated from the narrative excerpts below:

While working on my master’s degree in Theology and Ethics, at a United Methodist seminary, as a Catholic, African-American, female seminarian student, who never lived in public housing, I wrestled with the question “What is the role of the church in the midst of generations of families being displaced with only 30 days of notice?” Cabrini-Green public housing projects on the Northside of Chicago in the heart of one of the Gold Coast, one of the wealthiest neighborhoods of Chicago, became my focus. In the midst was the dichotomy of poverty and wealth, but also there were diverse denominational places of worship, where many were working individually and collaboratively to provide social services for the public housing residents before, during, and after displacement. From a theological perspective, the Good Samaritan scripture (Luke 10:25-37) became the foundation of my argument that the church can no longer standby on the other side of the street and ignore the plight of God’s peoples being displaced and not having a voice.

[CS]

I am drawn toward faith-based institutions engaged in participatory and transformative social justice work. In particular I am interested in how students, faculty, staff, alumni, and community partners/members see their personal and professional narratives/body of work connect in a truly participatory way and how community engaged approaches in partnership with faith-based campuses/institutions contributes toward mutuality. [CN]

Since assuming my role in community engagement, I have always understood faith, and the Jesuit [Catholic] charism, as the purest justification for the advancement of this core part of our strategic plan. In fact, I have often marveled at how my colleagues across campus embrace the importance of community engagement with such ease, naming it as one of our university's greatest expressions of its mission in our city. Our faculty, staff, and students are invited to understand their role in relationship with their communities as not just a responsibility, but as a vocation. [DB]

The blurred lines between what we studied, our professional roles, and our approach to community engagement were often driven by faith.

The expectations of our editorial team, upon preparing for this issue, were broadly general and indicated a wide landscape perspective of the intersection of faith and community engagement:

I am expecting to encounter themes of faith and community engagement in relationship with each other and as a function of each other. For example, community engagement is often a function of a faith tradition in the form of service. Likewise, faith often serves as the motivation behind community service. With this relationship between faith and community engagement serving as a function of and/or motivation to, the connection to faith and community engagement often appears natural. I am also expecting to encounter themes associated with institutional mission, values-centered approaches to engagement, and faith-based institutional or programmatic examples that feature community engagement. [PG]

This edition of *Metropolitan Universities*, and the emphasis on the role of faith in community engagement, provides the opportunity for us to coalesce this vision for faith-based institutions into a coherent message—that whether institutions express their faith in educational formation through Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Confucianism, Islam, or Taoism, it is precisely their faith framework for community engagement that sets them apart in the communities, and in the landscape of higher education. [DB]

Through this process, the editorial team recognized our own positionality, biases, limitations, and articulated perspectives on this topic.

We continued the narrative inquiry process in multiple reflections and meetings, exploring the intersection of faith and community engagement within our own professional experiences. Critical prompts situated our inquiry to connect our professional role in community engagement with our life and faith experiences. Such prompts included:

- What brought you to the professional work of faith and community engagement?
- Drawing from our own experiences, what brings us to this community engagement work at faith-based institutions?

Through the repeated collaborative process of categorizing and coding, the editorial team met and analyzed the data. The reflections demonstrated the interplay between our personal experiences, community histories, faith backgrounds, and professional roles.

Despite the many nonviolent marches he conducted on the west and South Side of Chicago, after being hit in the head by a rock by a white protester in Marquette Park (an all-white neighborhood in the 1960s), Martin Luther King Jr. stated, “I have been in many demonstrations all across the South, but I have never seen – even in Mississippi and Alabama – mobs as hostile and hate-filled as I have seen here in Chicago.” So why did I start with this narrative? Because 55 years later, in Chicago, there are still many disenfranchised African American communities that are filled with low employment rates, lack of quality grocery stores, poor educational environments, shortage of affordable housing, and violence. But the foundation in many of these communities is the Black Church which provides an unwavering spiritual faith that is passed down from generation to generation of African Americans, who since their enslavement, held on to their faith in God in the midst of societal ills...I am an African American woman that grew up on the South Side of Chicago in the Englewood community and I learned at an early age the importance of the interaction between church and community...I was raised in the Catholic tradition and not the Black Church tradition, until I joined the Faith Community of St. Sabina in my early 20s. It was there under the leadership of Father Michael Pflieger that I witnessed the mantle of Martin Luther King Jr.’s fight for social justice regenerative modeling for my generation. I answered the call of ministry and vocation of service to others and I was able to graduate from two different faith tradition seminaries (Evangelical Covenant and United Methodist) and I was employed at different faith-based higher education institutions (Evangelical Covenant, Christian Reformed, Jesuit, United Methodist, and Evangelical Protestant). I also graduated from Harvard Divinity School with a certificate in Faith Based Community Development. All these institutions prepared me to work in academia, because they all live out the definition of practical theology as their mission is for students to experience the world outside the classroom setting to interact and reflect on their experience within an urban community.

Therefore, I am fortunate to have a foot in faith-based institutions and the community to continue the fight for social justice for those who seemingly feel invisible. [CS]

I sit across the table from one of the original NAACP Youth Commandos who led the 1968 Marches on Milwaukee in a bank-building-turned-diner called Coffee Makes You Black. 70 years of life has not dulled his activist tendencies, nor has it stilted his stature. He is a tall, African-American man, with a deep, graveled, voice. We are meeting to discuss his possible participation in an event we are hosting recognizing the 50th Anniversary of the Fair Housing Marches, a key moment in our city's, and nation's history. My intent is to partner with the local coordinating group, faculty members, and students to invite deeper campus discussions and explorations around the history of the movement, and the current moment in our city. The pause comes, and he leans forward. The questions are delivered in quick succession, with an intensity, and honesty that feels deeply personal.

“What is your motivation? Why are you doing this?”

As a white male, born and raised in a suburb of Milwaukee, the Catholic tradition informed much of my upbringing. I attended K-8 and high school at Catholic schools, and, while my post-secondary education occurred at two public universities, I had always longed to return to an educational setting that invited the exploration of faith as a component of the whole person. As I completed my master's in Cultural Studies, and was searching for my first position, I was excited when an opportunity opened up at Marquette University, a Catholic, Jesuit institution located in the urban heart of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. My return to Catholic education, and its strong mission-driven orientation, aligned with my values and religious upbringing, but I was unaware at the time how fully the expression of my faith would be ignited through the Jesuit charism and community engagement. The questions posed above by my community partner resonate at a professional and personal level because they are precisely the place from which I think we should begin our approaches in community engagement, and personal prayer around decision-making. In the Jesuit tradition, when a decision is being considered, the utilization of discernment allows us to more fully enter into and understand our motivations, paying attention to the gentle movements of the Spirit within us. My race, gender, historical background, faith, and institutional affiliation form a context for my motivations in every moment of engagement with this partner. To approach community engagement authentically, I need to continually discern the motivations, and perhaps more importantly, my professional and personal interest in pursuing and forming engaged relationships. [DB]

When I was meandering through life after high school, I did not think I had many experiences in my youth that I would have considered significant transformational

moments. I most certainly was not equipped to believe that my perceived lack of experiences would eventually lead to a vocation in academia. In fact, when I was growing up in North Hollywood I accepted being invisible and felt most comfortable not being seen, partly because a core Filipino value is the concept of others before self and as a first-generation immigrant my goal was to blend in and not be seen. (Plaxton-Moore & Donahue, 2018). Faith, vocation, and service would intersect when after serving a five year enlistment in the United States Navy, I enrolled in a Catholic university in 1995 as a transfer student. By the time I arrived on campus, three decades after the convening of Vatican II, the provost—a Sister of the Sacred Heart and co-founding charism of the university—would prophetically commit to ensuring our community engaged approach would move from “charity to change.” I feel fortunate to have been a student, and later an administrator, at a faith-based institution, just a few years after the enactment of the National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 during a time of expansion of civic and community engagement in higher education, and during a time when the national discourse would define service-learning within a larger community engagement and equity-focused framework. I have deep gratitude for serving as a community-engaged administrator, scholar, and practitioner at a faith-based institution. While polarities exist between our intent and actual impact, the mission and charism of our institutions hold us accountable to finding congruence between our espoused values and practice. [CN]

Having attended Catholic schools most of my life, my experiences with public or non-faith-based schools included only kindergarten and my doctoral studies, the bookends of my structured, institutional educational experiences. . . . I draw from my early professional work after graduate school, in which I taught high school working with at-risk youth in urban Milwaukee. I was the minority in that classroom, and I recognized the context of inequity as I worked with many Black and Latinx students trying to survive the educational system that had failed them. Following this community experience exploring racial injustice and inequity, I worked in the non-profit sector for over two years, serving individuals in a homeless situation in both Milwaukee and Chicago. The two different organizations provided educational services (pre-GED, GED, literacy, life skills courses) for the primarily Black community members that were trying to survive. The context I experienced across these non-profit organizations located in two different urban, metropolitan centers, generated a lot of reflection on my lived experience of privilege. As I signed the hours log sheets for student volunteers from a nearby public university in Chicago, I sought to be at the intersection of the social capital of community and higher education. To practice my faith, I had to insert myself into the blurred spaces of community and college—betwixt and between the tensions that emerged from learning and development alongside inequity and injustice—and that is when I determined my professional path would involve community organizations and higher education institutions. . . . As the Lebanese-American poet and philosopher, Kahlil Gibran, wrote “Work is love made visible,” my work and my faith are intertwined and interconnected.

In many ways, they are inseparable, as my professional work in higher education and the community is a profession of my faith. [PG]

The narrative reflections indicated the strong theme that personal experience and faith traditions influence and inform professional choices in the context of faith-based institutions.

The editorial team discovered upon our data analysis another theme of tensions that exist within this context of community engagement at faith-based institutions. Because of the interplay between our own faith and personal experiences with our professional roles, the tension and polarities between working in the community in our institutional role may conflict with our personal role in the community. Similarly, our faith experiences may influence how we engage in the community. For example, we may approach the engagement with community from a perspective of charity and volunteerism captured by “in service to,” or from social change and social justice envisioned through the “in solidarity with” perspective. As the reflections indicate below, understanding our approach is critical, but so too is thoughtfully listening to one another in the shared spaces of tension and hope that often arise through engagement.

I have been invited by a colleague from another local university to attend a neighborhood meeting with a community on Milwaukee’s Northside, a community claimed and proudly named by its predominantly Black and African American residents. She has indicated that it would be great for me to connect with this group of residents and share more about our institutional efforts in community engagement. 20 minutes before I arrive, she emails and says she will be unable to join me. Recognizing that I do not want to forego my commitment, I choose to attend anyway. When I arrive, I am one of three White people in a room of 45 Black and African American people. The other two White people represent the neighborhood settlement house, and another university who has been partnering with the residents for over five years, respectively. I introduce myself and the community welcomes me warmly as we open the meeting with a prayer, holding hands in a large circle. The meeting commences, and we proceed through a series of agenda items before getting to one in which a robust discussion opens-up about a new low-income housing development. The conversation shifts and a resident begins referencing the ways in which universities have displaced people to build housing. Another person states that she heard a rumor that my university is buying the local homeless shelter and will displace the homeless. As a representative of our institution, I address the rumor about the shelter, which is not true, and provide further context regarding our institutional efforts in community engagement. However, the seeds of generational distrust are laid bare in the open room, and I realize in that moment, like many who are leading or participating in initiatives in community engagement on behalf of their universities, I represent an institution whose history is complex, and for some, even painful. As current movements in racial justice and equity have demonstrated across the country, and recent statements by the Catholic Church have highlighted, striving to reconcile our institutional

histories through thoughtful and sincere relationship-building is a part of the continued process of authentic engagement and healing with our respective communities. [DB]

In 1996 I was hired as University of San Diego (USD)'s first program director for the Community Outreach Partnership Center (COPC) funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. USD's COPC was designed to deepen the university's outreach and create a cohesive cradle to career path for residents and families. COPC existed as a university office leased from a neighborhood community center in the neighborhood of Linda Vista, where USD resides. Through COPC, I collaborated with all of the university's undergraduate and graduate colleges and academic centers to address community-identified issues. The issues included early-childhood education, landlord tenant disputes and mediation, public health, educational access, economic development, supplier diversity, affordable housing, and workforce development. The actual community space in the neighborhood served more than just a place to work, but allowed members of the community to have direct access to faculty, staff and students. Some of those conversations created lifelong friendships and did not just change the path of a young person, but also created civically engaged paths for university students with many going on to integrate public service into their health, law, education, or business careers. Having a career that has spanned over two decades, I have been inspired by many government funded engagement centers located in the community that do not have a faith-based framework. However, I would argue that faith institutions as community anchors create reciprocal and equity-focused covenants that can endure even in the most tumultuous of times. [CN]

The tensions led the editorial team to recognize questions that emerged from the narrative reflections. For example, the role of community organizations, churches, and faith-based communities was interrogated:

I taught Interfaith Religion in the City, Youth Ministry, Urban Ministry, and Church and Community courses for undergraduate and graduate level students. At each of the faith-based higher education institutions for which I taught, I implemented out of class community visits, where I arranged with community leaders of nonprofits, churches, residents, and other community leaders to speak to the students about their role in the community. There were three main Chicago neighborhoods for which I had relationships with such leaders: Auburn-Gresham (Southside), Lawndale (Westside) and Cabrini-Green/Gold Coast (Northside)... Auburn-Gresham is the infamous Faith Community of St. Sabina Catholic Church under the leadership of Michael L. Pflieger. I was a member and part of the Executive Leadership team for 25 years. It was here at St. Sabina, where I learned the church is not within the four walls of the building. [CS]

Developing relationships and partnerships that are reciprocal and focused on equity are core principles in the field of community engagement and anchor institutions. However, tensions between town and gown are a result of years of community members feeling that the university agenda supersedes community-identified priorities and that academic partnerships are extractive and transactional with faculty and students parachuting in. I have learned from many of our community members that developing deep roots, while acknowledging often painful histories are necessary in creating enduring campus and community relationships. Resident New Orleans culture bearer and keeper of the flame at the Community Book Center, Jennifer Turner, would often ask college students, faculty, and staff “what do you get and what does the community get?” Turner’s question frames the polarity of campus and community [MOU1] relationships. I have used her question as a rhetorical imperative and foundational for deepening mutually beneficial relationships. Turner and other co-creators of knowledge have been the inspiration for me to join with a group of faculty, administrators, and community wisdom holders that formed the Epistemic Justice Project. Since 2017 the Project is focused on convening and facilitating spaces to explore relational power dynamics between higher education and the communities they serve. The Project mission is to use “the convening as contributing to ongoing scholarship and discourses that challenge dominant pedagogical and epistemological paradigms constraining higher education community engagement efforts and limiting the possibility of service-learning to transform students and communities for the better (Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell & Yep, 2017; Singh, 2012; Stoecker, 2016; Saltmarsh, 2011). We want the conversations to open opportunities for multiple diverse voices to co-construct a new paradigm for service-learning and community engagement that weaves epistemic justice together with existing critical theories and practices in the field. It will do so by starting with an interrogation of how epistemic injustice manifests in SLCE work.” Community wisdom holders bridge the space between town and gown in what Sharon Daloz Parks describes as “the commons.” The commons is where community-engaged pedagogy and practice fit best because the commons acknowledges that the process of inquiry, knowledge creation, and the understanding of where wisdom resides is co-created with the community. This necessarily means we must take up the challenge of creating transformative experiences for students and contributing to positive community change in collaboration with community co-educators. [CN]

This led our editorial team to further interrogate our approaches and the desire to honor community knowledge, wisdom, and experience. How are we including the community in this conversation and what role does the community play in fostering faith and community engagement? Our shared value and commitment to reciprocity and shared community spaces challenged us to pivot our attention and connect with community partners.

Community Voice Implications

In an effort to elevate community partner voices, our editorial team identified the tensions that exist when academics explore community engagement—yet what does the community say? How do community representatives frame faith and community engagement work? What role does community play and how? As the editorial team repeatedly identified within the narrative reflection process, we noticeably explored this inquiry without the partner voices, so we engaged with partners to explore their insights on this topic. Our partners provide insight that at this intersection of faith and community engagement are powerful influencers--churches made up of community residents:

Our congregations are wider than those bodies who show up on a Sunday morning (or used to show up!). Our “congregations” are the people of our neighborhoods, and the students in our local schools. They are the elderly living in the neighboring CHA buildings and they are the business owners who seek to make something happen in our commercial strip on Wells or Division. The church doesn’t exist for its own benefit, it exists for the sake of others. ALL OTHERS. So in the language of Isaiah, we are engaged with making sure the local CPS kids are ready for school with backpacks and healthy habits; we are engaged with our local police commander as we seek fair and just appropriation of justice; we run ministries to fill in the gaps left by poor government funding and we tie these activities back to a God who desires the world to be whole.
-Laura Sumner Truax, Senior Pastor, LaSalle Street Church, Chicago, IL

Ultimately our communities are our classroom. Therefore, the experts on the issues that face our communities are the ones most affected by them...If higher education isn't connecting our students to those in the work of community development, then we are perpetuating a credibility deficit that has existed too long between the ivory tower and the trenches. As my colleague, Soong Chan Rah writes in his book *Prophetic Lament*, for Christian institutions, "The tendency to view the holistic work of the church as the action of the privileged toward the marginalized often derails the work of true community healing." An antidote to this problematic posture is to remember that those in the margins are our teachers. As a faith based institution, we cannot just confess that the word was made flesh in Jesus and then remove the word from the flesh when we talk about injustice. Our engagement of injustice must be submitted to those most experiencing its effects. -Cheryl Lynn Cain, Pastor of Multicultural Ministries at Good Shepherd Church, Joliet, IL Jeffery L. Tribble, Sr., Columbia Theological Seminary and Clergy in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Decatur, GA

If justice is what love looks like in public (Cornel West) our quest is to fully understand what that means. When I work with faculty who want to serve the community we have to

understand each of our terms. This is our shared discipleship.” Another way to consider this is through the notion of “coherent wholes,” a shared understanding of mutuality as a covenant. (Del Rio, Loggins 2018) It is what Father Greg Boyle describes as a way to “widen the circle of compassion so no one stands outside that circle, and when you do that you have true kinship.” -Noel Musicha, Co-Pastor, Ebenezer Church|The People’s Cathedral and Star Plaxton-Moore, Leo T. MaCarthy Center for Public Service, University of San Francisco

I believe that politics and religion should not only be in the same restaurant, but they should be seated at the same table—each being true to self, each holding its individual integrity and each authentic to its very different purpose and calling...Yes, I believe religion must always be at the table even if that means pulling up a chair and sitting down when we are not invited. But it also means not apologizing for our presence, not sitting as a silent partner, or not compromising our religious principles, and like the Apostle Paul says, whether convenient or inconvenient. -Michael L Pflieger, Pastor, Faith Community of St. Sabina (McClory, p. 155-156)

The role of churches, faith-based community organizations, and communities of people play a powerful role of influence in the community. Faith is the engine for their community engagement, and collaborating with them is essential for this conversation.

Discussion on this Special Issue

The editorial team recognized a shift in our initial perspective as we began this special issue, dedicated to faith-based institutions in the context of community engagement and the anchor mission. Our perspectives were clearly stemming from our faith experiences and professional context. Given our roles at our respective universities, the community engagement work we do at faith-based institutions of higher education advances beyond the public mission of college and universities; our professional work is an expression of our faith principles, namely our lived expression of our faith. The article submissions for this special issue demonstrate that the intersection of faith-based organizations with community engagement and anchor institutions is ripe to explore more fully. The articles in this issue include representation from private and public institutions across various geographical urban locations, from multiple faith traditions, and from faculty, staff, graduate students, and community religious leaders and community partners as co-authors. Authors of different race and ethnicities employing varying methodologies, including action research, community-based participatory research, and mixed methods, offer various approaches across the issue. The approaches in the articles demonstrate this intersection of faith and community engagement reaches far beyond the walls and campuses of academic institutions. Faith and community engagement is multi-dimensional to say the least, considering communities, churches, and non-profit organizations that may connect and catalyze groups of people toward larger goals, such as the anchor community development mission. This

work clearly demands that practitioner-scholars explore this intersection through empirical research, as well as to honor the experience and knowledge of faith-based community organizations and churches in the community that contribute to the anchor mission of community development.

The issue begins with articles featuring community research collaborations. Glazier, Driskill, and Leach's article showcases a community research project, based at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. This study involves an interdisciplinary team focused on understanding and improving the community engagement of congregations in the city of Little Rock. Johnson, Ingram, Gordan, and Davis discuss the role of a Community Advisory Board and the impact of the research engagement training program working with a Full Gospel Midwest Regional Baptist Church. In Tirres and Schikore's article exploring the relationship between faith, pedagogy, and social justice, they discuss community partnerships and share their collaborative research leading to a framework for "faith in action."

The issue also features articles that build on program evaluation and assessment to leverage insight into the relationship between faith and community engagement. Filomeno's contribution presents a program evaluation study of faith community dialogues on immigration developed in partnership with a faith-based group of volunteers, Catholic congregations, and a public university. Sweetman, Wassal, Belt, and Sokol present a study drawing upon assessment data from undergraduate community engagement experiences exploring how they contribute to student learning in the areas of a well-educated solidarity, depth of thought, and depth of imagination.

The academy's focus on student learning in the context of faith and community engagement is further explored in Adams and Kesckes' case study focused on curricular approaches, influences, and impacts of Buddhist philosophy/spirituality on community engagement endeavors in the context of Maitripa College, an urban graduate higher education institution located in Portland, OR. Harrison, Weigel, and Smith's article also leverages a case study methodology, the unique positionality of Messiah University, a faith-based university located near the capital city of Harrisburg, PA, to explore the impact of a community engaged course with an urban nonprofit agency.

The issue also includes an essential thought piece by Owens, McKnight, Tiner, and Dunlap. This thought experiment begins by exploring the important role of the Black Church in the Black Community. Owens, et al., posit that institutions of higher education who seek partnerships with the Black Church, including small, independent, under-resourced churches as well as historically Black denominational churches, may benefit to consider collaborative educational opportunities around the issues of strategic financial sustainability, as well as short and long-term stewardship.

Given the context of Black Lives Matter and the racial justice movement, this thought piece is both timely and instructive as it embraces community histories.

Upon reviewing the articles in this special issue, our editorial team has re-framed our understanding of this topic, the intersection of faith and community engagement. Reading these articles has broadened the conversation to include faith-based community members, churches, and community organizations as social anchor institutions with influence and power. These concepts have extended the anchor institution conversation beyond “eds and meds,” the fundamental approach of educational institutions and hospitals serving the economic development of the community. Yet, these scholarly articles included churches, community organizations, and marginalized populations as key social anchors that contribute to community development. The way in which faith-based communities and organizations contributed, however, is what we focus on in this issue, which pushed our editorial team to re-frame and re-create our understanding of this intersection. Our exploration through collaborative, narrative inquiry and scholarly personal narrative, complemented by the article submissions in this issue, demonstrated that the explicit core to this faith-based work is perpetual hope amidst turmoil in tumultuous times.

Calling for an Engagement of Hope

This exploratory study led us to deeply and critically examine the concept of hope situated alongside community engagement in the context of the institutional tensions, historical legacies of inequity and racial injustice, and the communities’ multiple voices. Faith-based institutions strive to operate in relationship with communities through a virtuous hope that seeks to realize a more just and equitable world rooted in the greater glory of God, as opposed to a secular hope. To expound on this point, the twentieth-century German philosopher, Josef Pieper, distinguishes between a secular hope and a theological, or virtuous hope, in his treatise titled *On Hope*. In the case of secular hope, he describes how people can cultivate hope for anything, even evil outcomes. Virtuous hope, on the other hand, is a “steadfast turning toward the true fulfillment of man’s nature, that is toward good, only when it has its source in the reality of grace in man and is directed toward supernatural happiness in God” (Pieper, p. 100). This is a critical consideration in how faith-based institutions strive to operate in community engagement, not from a savior approach, but rather, one in which we acknowledge our own inherent gifts and challenges, as well as those of the communities with whom we engage, while directing our efforts towards the fulfillment of a better existence, and happiness in God, through virtuous hope. This commitment to hope—a virtuous hope rooted in the public good amidst troubling times and historical challenges—is central to the work of community engagement for faith-based institutions.

The editorial team predicted faith-based colleges and universities would be the center of this anchor intersection conversation on this topic of the intersection of faith and community

engagement, and indeed they are central. Yet, as the articles in this special issue demonstrate, the anchor mission work was accomplished by churches, faith-based non-profit organizations, and faith-based communities and for generations have modeled how the co-creation of knowledge can be foundationally, democratic, reciprocal, and equity-focused. This special edition acknowledges and highlights the collaborative imperative that faith organizations, including faith-based higher education institutions have to serve the public good. The conversation here is re-centered to focus on faith organizations broadly, including higher education institutions that are faith-based and public institutions that work with faith-based communities. The dialogue of anchor mission organizations needs to shift to include faith-based organizations broadly as significant contributors to this work, not only because of a moral mission they espouse, but because of the community network with which they collaborate and the coalitions they build.

The extent to which this issue contributes to, and calls for, a new dialogue in the anchor mission conversation is salient: faith-based institutions are significant influencers in the community both as institutional structures and the degree to which they develop coalitions in the community. The context in which many faith-based organizations have operated has historically included racial and ethnic discrimination, social-economic disparities, and unjust systems, but yet faith-based communities have thrived. As leaders within faith-based higher education institutions and communities, we understand it is a complex task to be agents of changes when wrestling with systemic injustice. However, we have a sense of hope in the words of Martin Luther King Jr.:

I must confess, my friends, the road ahead will not always be smooth. There will be still rocky places of frustration and meandering points of bewilderment. There will be inevitable setbacks here and there. There will be those moments when the buoyancy of hope will be transformed into the fatigue of despair. Our dreams will sometimes be shattered and our ethereal hopes blasted ... However, it will give us the courage to face the uncertainties of the future Let us realize the arc of the moral universe is long but it bends toward justice. (Washington, pp.251-252).

This is the call for those in faith-based institutions and communities to not grow weary in working toward the public good, because, if they persist, at the proper time they will reap a harvest. As Brenda Salter-McNeil, in her book, *Becoming Brave, Finding the Courage to Pursue Racial Justice Now*, concludes with a reminder of hope for faith communities stating, “There is much to be hopeful for, despite the inevitable setbacks. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, ‘We must accept finite disappointment but never lose infinite hope.’” Salter-McNeil follows by encouraging faith communities to:

... come out of their individualism and come together as a community to make and execute a plan based on a united vision for the future. In the context of community, they should find

the support, courage, and accountability to imagine and work toward a world different from the one we currently live in. (Salter-McNeil, p. 192-193)

Similar to the “courageous revival” referenced in the opening prayer-poem by Singh, this is a call to plant our efforts in community engagement in sincere discernment, born out of faith, and a commitment to perpetual hope.

Truly this is a call to recognize what faith-based organizations have been fostering in our communities for some time: an engagement of hope. The challenges facing society and the unprecedented confluence of a global pandemic, calls for deconstructing systemic inequity, and the erosion of trust in academic and governmental structures requires a transformational ecosystem that must thoughtfully include faith-based organizations, defined as churches, faith communities, and faith-based non-profit organizations. The articles in this issue demonstrate how faith-based institutions co-generate knowledge, influence community development, and influence change for positive outcomes. There are examples of community-based research, action research, participatory research, and hybrid versions of community-based methodologies. There are examples where community organizations and marginalized communities create knowledge production, as well as lessons learned from community organizations and church communities. In light of these examples, we find the “courageous revival” being led by faith-based organizations.

Let the dialogue be framed as “eds, meds, and FBO’s (faith-based organizations)” when we speak of anchor mission institutions so that the power, influence, experience, and knowledge of these faith-based organizations is recognized, and just as importantly, our communities can honor the critical need to nurture not just the mind and the body, but the spirit as well. Reverend Victoria Safford challenges us to position ourselves at “the gates of Hope,” which is a “different, sometimes lonely place” to serve:

The place of truth-telling,
About your own soul first of all and its condition.
The place of resistance and defiance,
The piece of ground from which you see the world
Both as it is and as it could be...

—*The Gates of Hope* by Victoria Safford

In essence, let the conversation move us toward an engagement of hope, characterized by the honest and persistent work of faith communities that elevate the voices of people, challenge unjust structures, and integrate community histories with the potential and possibility of a better future.

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Connecting with Community and Facilitating Learning through the Little Rock Congregations Study

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Abstract

Places of worship play important roles as anchor institutions that promote community engagement and motivate political activity. Universities, particularly in urban settings, can also serve as anchor institutions that connect communities. Yet, there is often a gulf between the two, to the detriment of the broader community. In this article, we present the Little Rock Congregations Study (LRCS) as an approach to community engagement with faith-based organizations in an urban setting. This research project, based at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, involves an interdisciplinary team focused on understanding and improving the community engagement of congregations in the city of Little Rock since 2012. We present qualitative and quantitative data to illustrate the benefits of our approach, including research results returned to community organizations, greater visibility of the university in the community, student involvement in research and with faith-based organizations, and substantive findings that inform the greater body of knowledge and our own community. Through more than eight years of community-based work on the LRCS we provide six key lessons learned for researchers and students building relationships with religious leaders that can help bridge the gulf between these two key community institutions.

Keywords: religion, higher education, community engagement, community-based research, collaboration

Communities are often centered around key, immobile institutions where people gather, engage, and develop relationships. Universities and medical institutions are common examples of “anchors institutions” (Adams, 2003). Places of worship, such as churches, temples, and mosques can also play this role. Although universities and places of worship are often both engaged institutions in metropolitan areas, they may not work closely together. Universities tend to come from a rational, humanist perspectives and, especially if they are publicly funded, may be cautious about crossing the church/state line. Faith-based organizations, on the other hand, may be skeptical of higher education and not feel fully appreciated or taken seriously by universities (Fraser, 2016). The gulf between the two represents a missed opportunity for connections that can benefit these institutions and the broader community. Through our research, we specifically ask: what can universities bring to partnerships with faith-based organizations in order to return mutually beneficial results and help bridge these gaps?

Here, we present one approach to university community engagement with faith-based organizations through a longitudinal community-based research project. Through more than eight years of engaging with religious leaders and congregants, involving students in work outside of the classroom, and returning meaningful results to the community, we have built relationships between our university and the faith-based community in Little Rock, AR that have yielded positive benefits.

In the following sections, we first describe the value of universities and congregations as anchor institutions and the potential for good that can come when they work together. We then describe our community-based research project at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock: the Little Rock Congregations Study (LRCS). We present both qualitative and quantitative data to demonstrate the benefits of the study to the students, the faculty, the university, and the community. We then highlight major lessons learned.

Anchor Institutions

Anchor institutions are an integral part of the community fabric and play an important role in civic life. Anchor institutions are thought of as “locally embedded institutions, typically non-governmental public sector, cultural or other civic organizations, that are of significant importance to the economy and wider community life of the cities in which they are based” (Goddard, Coombes, Kempton, & Vallance, 2014, p. 307). These institutions often have significant place-based investments in real estate, are deeply embedded in local networks, and are relatively immobile given their commitment to building civil infrastructure (Birch, Perry, & Taylor, 2013; Cantor, Englot, & Higgins, 2013). Given their permanence and commitment to the community, anchor institutions are primed to serve as a catalyst for economic growth and social success in urban areas (Harris & Holley, 2016).

Some of the most prominent anchor institutions are “Eds and Meds.” This encompassing term refers to geographically defined networks of universities, educational, and medical institutions. Places of worship, given their permanence, and as sites for building social capital, are also community anchor institutions. Both have key, complementary strengths, and their respective missions indicate their potential to collaborate. We have found this to be true both in the literature on anchor institutions in communities and through our own research.

Congregations in Communities as Social Anchors

Places of worship are “social anchors” in the community, facilitating bonding and bridging social capital, and serving as access points for connecting members across racial, economic, and gender lines (Clopton & Finch, 2011). Congregations are also places where important civic skills are learned (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995) and where social capital is built (Putnam, 2000; Putnam & Campbell, 2012). They bring people together for fellowship and provide a space to build upon critical social connections in the community (Cnaan, Boddie, & Yancey, 2003).

Of the estimated 400,000 congregations in the United States (Randall, 2017), almost half make significant contributions to the stock of social capital in America, either through providing volunteers, philanthropic giving, or civic participation (Saguaro Seminar, 2009). Unlike Eds and Meds, anchors that may have been physically present but historically disconnected from the local community (Adams, 2003), places of worship have traditionally been trusted institutions (Dash & Chapman, 2007). Consistent with the immobility characteristics of community anchors, religious institutions provide leadership and other resources in urban areas experiencing decline (Patterson, Silverman, Yin, & Wu, 2016), but they are also deeply embedded in the social and cultural life of a city (Maurasse, 2007).

Although congregations serve a key connecting role in communities, historically, they have also contributed to negative social patterns. Segregated churches are correlated with segregated communities across all regions in the United States (Blanchard, 2007). Homogeneous churches represent a lost opportunity to enhance racial understanding and instead undermine common connections (Blanchard, 2007; Christerson, Edwards, & Emerson, 2005). The significance of this lost opportunity for racial understanding tragically surfaced during the 2020 nationwide protests that included Little Rock. Our longitudinal research reveals a higher percentage of faith leaders now viewing race relations as a “very important issue” with 86% of responding clergy strongly agreeing or agreeing that “Little Rock has a problem with racial division.” Our initial 2020 research with clergy, however, does provide cause for hope. Of early clergy responders, 60% agree or strongly agree that race relations are likely to improve in Little Rock in the future (Glazier, 2020). Thus, while challenges of division exist, consistent with existing scholarship

(e.g., Brady et al., 1995; Cnaan et al., 2003), the permanence and legitimacy of places of worship within urban areas are their strengths as facilitators of racial understanding. Yet, we also recognize more than ever the need to engage in collaborative work that supports congregational leaders in efforts to address barriers that have historically harmed their influence.

Colleges and Universities in Communities

As place-bound institutions, universities are also critical anchors with significant ties to the local community and economy. Universities are not only catalysts that facilitate creating and sharing knowledge, but are also key to a city's economic health (Adams, 2003; Harkavy & Zuckerman, 1999). Even universities in areas experiencing urban decline and institutions with low enrollment may still invest in neighborhood stabilization and commercial development projects (Austrian & Norton, 2005), and may even boost local housing values (Cortes, 2004).

Real estate investments by universities attract other complementary investments in the surrounding metro area (Adams, 2003). Universities bring visitors from outside the region, increase local spending, and generate local revenues (Bartik & Erickcek, 2007). Moreover, Steinacker (2005) found significant positive localizing effects of student expenditures in the immediate area. As such, universities as anchor institutions contribute to economic vitality.

Additionally, universities as anchor institutions also influence the civic life of a community. Cortes (2004) points out that some in the academic community view the university's role as more than passive producers of knowledge, but as "societal instruments uniquely capable of addressing community problems" (p. 343). Thus, universities have an opportunity to engage in public work through collaboration with local citizens as co-producers of knowledge (Boyte, 2014). In doing so, the university as an anchor institution moves from being isolated islands of privilege (Alexander, Clouse, & Austrian, 2016; Harris & Holley, 2016) to inclusive spaces where students, faculty, and community members engage in bi-directional, collaborative projects that benefit the local community.

However, universities have historically had challenging relationships with their local communities. The divisions between "town/gown; ivory tower/ real world; theory/ practice; thinking/ doing" articulated by del Rio and Loggins (2019, p. 37), epitomize these challenging relationships. For instance, in articulating the "town and gown" relationship, Barr (1963) notes "the town suspects the university feels arrogantly towards it, and the gown feels the town is suspicious of it" (p. 304). Thus, there exists an opportunity for the university to work alongside institutions of the town, such as places of worship, to bridge this divide. Consistent with the literature (Martin, Smith, & Phillips, 2005; McWilliam, Desai, & Greig, 1997), we argue that a community-based research practice that builds trust and returns tangible benefits to the community can build a bridge between these local anchor institutions.

Bridging the Gap

Although places of worship and universities both serve as anchor institutions, they often serve on parallel paths. For example, as noted earlier, universities may function to revitalize their communities through purchasing power or hiring from the local community (Bartik & Erickcek, 2007), whereas places of worship may provide social capital in the form of philanthropy and volunteers (Saguaro Seminar, 2009). Occasionally, we see examples of where these paths cross, such as through job training programs at faith-based organizations, but these instances are far more the exception than the rule. This gulf results in missed opportunities for collaboration and better service to the broader community.

Whereas universities might be seen as ivory towers, places of worship are typically with the people of the community in a critical and personal way, thus providing an access point for broader collaboration to address local social problems. Indeed, partnerships between places of worship and universities illustrate how trust can be built between these institutions (Cantor et al., 2013) and utilized to leverage community assets (Milofsky & Green, 2016) that can build bridges between the institutions and the community they serve.

For instance, Cantor et al. (2013) illustrate how discussions between university leaders and faith-based leaders build trust. In the Near Westside neighborhood in Syracuse, N.Y., such conversations were the impetus for a broader community-based coalition to address social and economic challenges. Identifying and acting on these opportunities to connect universities and congregations can yield benefits for both, and for the broader community, including opportunities to build bridges across denominational and racial divides.

How did we seek to bridge the gap between these two anchor institutions, the university and the faith community, in Little Rock, AR? We see our approach of conducting research in partnership with faith-based organizations as one way to bridge the gap. Consistent with Stoecker (2012) and Strand et al., (2003), our approach focuses on providing useful information, emphasizes collaboration, and utilizes diverse methods. Our approach to community-based research engages community members as partners in research, not as subjects, with goals that are jointly determined and mutually beneficial (Hotze, 2011; Riffin et al., 2016). Thus, it is not just a methodological approach to doing research, but a mutually-beneficial way of engaging with our community.

As academics, we use our expertise to conduct research, to engage our students, and apply diverse methods, specifically survey and interview data, to address local social issues. Our approach is driven by the assertion that, as a university embedded within the capital city, the institution has an obligation and responsibility to engage with the community to address local issues (Dubb & Howard, 2007; Hudson, 2013). This framework, as articulated by Boyer's (1990)

“scholarship of engagement,” argues that the university attends to a city’s most pressing problems by partnering with the local community and institutions.

As community members, we aim to return meaningful results to our partners in the faith community and beyond. We address the challenge presented by the congregation-university gap by engaging multiple places of worship that represent denominations that may have not worked together in the past. For instance, our Clergy Advisory Board includes Muslim, Baptist, and Presbyterian leaders, among others, working together to identify research topics that matter to our community. Particularly in the southern United States, in a context of division and segregation, the university may prove to be a source of collaboration, of improving ties not only between the university and the congregations, but even between houses of faith.

We carried out these elements through the infrastructure of the Little Rock Congregations Study (LRCS), an interdisciplinary, longitudinal research project housed at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock.

The Little Rock Congregations Study

The LRCS is a community-based research project at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. The project involves students and faculty as multimethod researchers through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and case studies. The LRCS began in 2012, and data collection efforts with congregations took place in 2012, 2016, and 2018. The research team also worked with local nonprofits to collect data in 2019. Additional data collection with congregations is ongoing in 2020.

The research project has three broad goals: 1) to better understand the impact of faith-based community engagement, 2) to get students out of the classroom and into the community, and 3) to return meaningful findings to the community. When the LRCS began in 2012, researchers focused on the first and more academic goal. Over time, researchers learned more about the congregations we were working with and their needs, and the project became more community-oriented to align with the interests and needs of the local faith communities. Our process therefore aligns with Stoecker (2012) who suggests that as part of the community-based research process, we engage in reflective practice with our partners to make the research more useful for our partners. These goals all seek to further our broad research question of how the university can contribute to the community and help bridge gaps.

For instance, in 2012, we asked questions about presidential vote choice and political activity. We found that clergy are important political actors (Glazier, 2018) and the messages congregation leaders deliver about political engagement have an effect on their members. Congregants who attend places of worship where they hear messages about voting and

participating politically are more likely to believe that their voice matters and to be politically active (Glazier, 2015). In 2016, on the other hand, we included more questions about community engagement. We found that congregations tend to develop cultures that encourage either community engagement or political activity, rather than both, with Black Protestant churches as an exception (Glazier, 2019a). As we prepare to collect data in 2020, we are prioritizing reports for congregations on the issues their members care about and the community organizations and congregations that are active on those issues, deliverables that community members tell us that they value.

This gradual change in the priorities of the researchers, away from our own intellectual understanding and towards helping the community in the most beneficial way, is reflected in additional substantive choices we made over the years. As our research focus became more refined, our 2018 clergy survey asked about collaborations with nonprofits. In 2019, we added a nonprofit survey to gain a fuller picture of collaboration in the Little Rock community and to understand what barriers might be standing in the way of further collaboration. The shift in focus was prompted, in part, by informal ongoing dialogue with members of the faith community. This dialogue was facilitated by the creation of a Clergy Advisory Board in 2018 and the LRCS Religious Leaders Summit, which we hosted in 2019, with the explicit goal of listening to faith and community leaders and getting feedback on the issues they wanted us to focus on in our research.

We see our approach of conducting community research with faith-based organizations as one way to bridge the gap between universities and congregations. Thus, it is not just a methodological approach to doing research, but a mutually-beneficial way of engaging with our community. We find that it yields benefits in five distinct, yet interrelated, ways for students, faculty, the university, the community, and reciprocity in collaboration. In the following sections, we use qualitative and quantitative data to demonstrate how the LRCS has provided benefits in each of these areas.

Benefits to Students

Experiential learning research indicates that students often learn best by doing (Beames, Higgins, & Nicol, 2012; Kuh, 1991). When they participate in the LRCS, student researchers get out of the classroom and into the community to see how people of faith act and serve. While sitting in Sunday services, students hear announcements about back-to-school backpack drives and meals for the homeless. They find out about the real and substantive ways that people in faith communities serve. The students also interview clergy members who organize prison reading ministries, or youth summer education programs. They see the real work that is done by faith leaders behind the scenes. The students attend service days and help with neighborhood clean ups. These experiences enhance students' classroom work, enable them to make meaningful

connections with the people in their city, who they might not come into contact with otherwise, and lead students become more civically engaged and socially competent (Anderson, 2002; Strand, 2000).

Additionally, students who participate in the research also learn marketable research skills (Gregerman, Lerner, von Hippel, Jonides, & Nagda, 1998; Russell, Hancock, & McCullough, 2007). Our graduate students work across semesters and see projects through multiple research stages, an experience which benefits students intellectually and in terms of their careers (Thiry, Weston, Laursen, & Hunter, 2012). Student researchers have the opportunity to develop and test their own hypotheses in the data, thus making connections between theory and practice (Breese, 2011; Furco, 2010; Gullion & Ellis, 2014).

These educational opportunities have been exceptional as students have gained experience through research design, data management, participant observation, interviewing, focus groups, survey administration and analysis, and hypothesis testing. These skills can be transferred to a world where data literacy is increasingly emphasized. Course evaluations reflect the value students see in these skills; both undergraduate and graduate students mention the importance of learning analysis techniques and gaining data collection experience. For instance, one student shared in their final course evaluation that the best part of the course was “real experience researching, conducting surveys, and working with data.” Another student remarked in their final course evaluation they had strengthened their research skills, noting, “I learned how to conduct surveys, do interviews, input data, leading focus groups, and much more” (Glazier & Bowman, 2019, pp. 13-14).

Since 2012, over 170 students have participated in research with the LRCS. Of these students, five have presented original research at academic conferences, two have co-authored academic papers currently under review at peer-reviewed journals, and four have been awarded research grants to further their individual research related to the project. Students have reported improved analytic skills, data analysis skills, and skills that transfer well to careers beyond academia. Additionally, the students are able to connect with their local community in a way they otherwise would not have without this experiential learning opportunity (Glazier and Bowman 2019). In all, many benefits flow to students as a result of engaging with places of worship through community-based research.

Benefits to Faculty

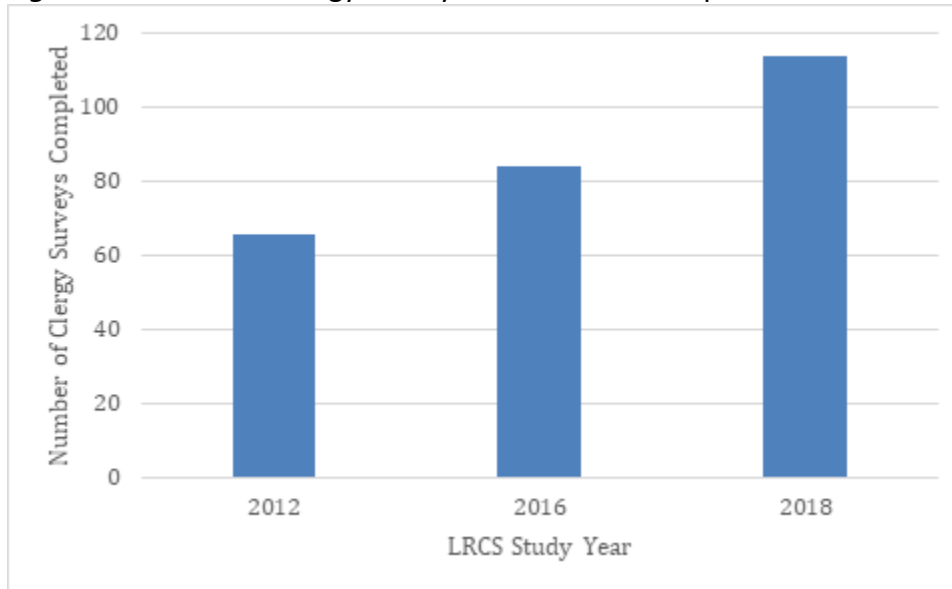
Faculty benefit from our approach to community-based research because of the wealth of data and the potential publications that come from it. The LRCS approach is one of community-based, longitudinal, interdisciplinary research. Multiple faculty members at the university work

together to develop research questions, work with community members to address topics that matter to them, and collect data.

Successful community research partnerships are both sustainable and long-term (Furco, 2010; Hyland & Maurette, 2010). As we have continued to work with the community and return useful results over the years, participation in the study has steadily increased. As Figure 1 shows, both the total number of participants and the response rate has increased over time, indicating increasing trust from our community partners.

As more congregations and clergy leaders have participated, we have been able to produce more academic research papers, which are of course essential to tenure and promotion. Researchers have used data from the Little Rock Congregations Study to publish six academic research papers, with four others currently under review. Thus, the benefits to faculty in terms of academic data and publications are substantial.

Figure 1. Number of Clergy Surveys Returned and Response Rate over Time



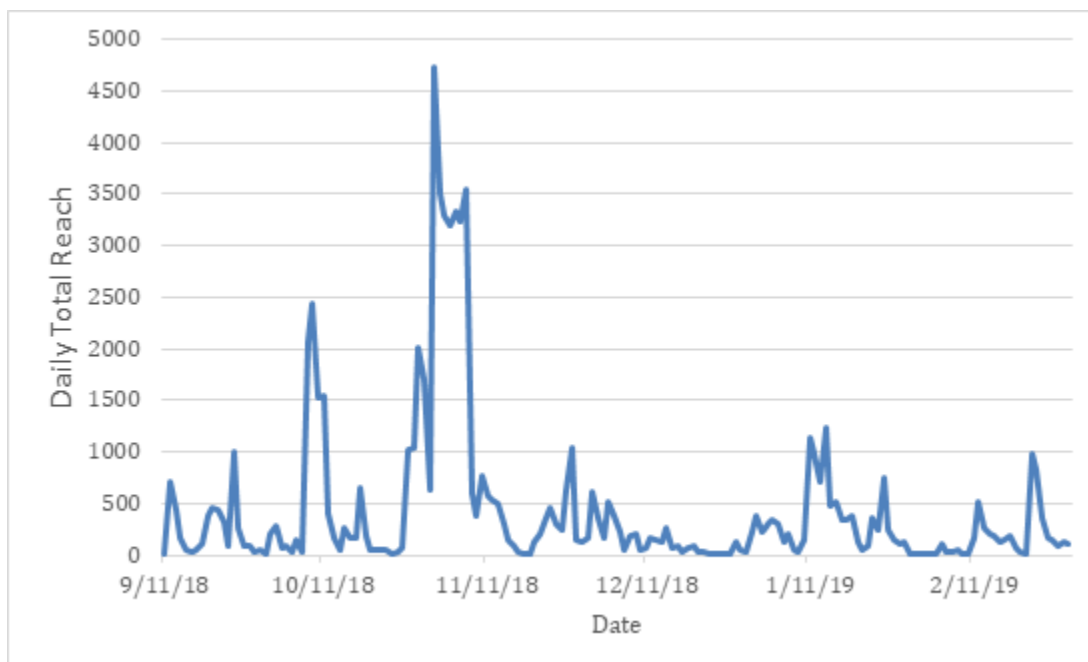
Benefits to the University

The university benefits from the approach exemplified by the LRCS mainly through the increased positive public presence of the university in the community. The research has garnered a fair amount of press coverage over the years. With each iteration, the Office of Communication puts out a press release on the study, which local newspapers often pick up, including religious news services. For instance, both the local Catholic news service, Arkansas Catholic, and the Arkansas Baptist News have run stories about the LRCS. For a full list of news stories on the LRCS, see the media coverage section of our website (Media Coverage, n.d.).

In 2018, we started the LRCS Facebook page, where we regularly share study results, promote community events, and highlight the good work that people of faith are doing in our community. As of August, 2020, the Facebook page has 376 followers, providing LRCS with a consistent form of contact with community members. Figure 2 shows just how many people we have been able to reach through the posts we make on our Facebook page.

Figure 2 shows a metric provided by Facebook called a “Daily Total Reach.” This metric is defined by Facebook as, “The number of people who had any content from your Page or about your Page enter their screen. This includes posts, check-ins, ads, social information from people who interact with your Page and more. (Unique Users).”

Figure 2. Daily Total Reach of the LRCS Facebook Page, September 10, 2018-March 1, 2019



Because our followers share our posts to their friends and because we sometimes pay to promote our posts to members of the Little Rock community, not everyone who sees our posts necessarily follows the LRCS Facebook page. In the fall of 2018, when the Facebook page first started, we shared some heartwarming stories about student researchers and community members that were liked and shared a number of times, representing the larger spikes in Figure 2.

The Facebook page helps us share results with community members, raise the profile of the research and the university, and maintain good relationships necessary for community-based research. The data in Table 1 show the responses to the different kinds of Facebook posts, with

Results posts the most common, followed by Spotlights posts, which highlight the work of specific congregations as they provide service to the community.

Spotlight posts garnered the highest mean lifetime post reach, meaning they reached the most people, likely as the congregations we tagged shared them on their own pages. Although for any of the post subjects, the range of the number of people reached is quite large. Some of our Spotlights posts reached thousands of people, whereas others reached only tens, and the standard deviation is over 1,000. In all, our outreach efforts through Facebook benefit the university by bringing thousands more people into contact with the research and the university. This definitely raises the positive profile of the University in the community. For further discussion of how social media can help facilitate community-based research, please see additional research by the authors (Glazier and Topping, 2020).

Table 1. Types of Posts and their Reach through the LRCS Facebook Page, September 10, 2018-March 1, 2019

Post Subject	Total Number of Posts Made	Mean Lifetime Total Post Reach	Standard Deviation	Range
Results	31	510.96	651.84	64-3063
Spotlights	27	738.48	1026.56	52-3860
Events	15	432.33	668.23	34-2161
Promotions/Well-wishes	18	473.44	856.83	33-3684
News Coverage	6	334.83	350.20	30-816
Total	97	544.27	797.69	30-3860

Additionally, the LRCS community-engaged approach of faith and scholarship benefits the university by engaging students. High-impact learning opportunities, like engaging in research projects, have a significant and positive impact on student learning, retention, and graduation rates (Alexander, 2000; Ishiyama, 2002; Thiry et al., 2012). The opportunity to engage in undergraduate research can be particularly impactful for first generation college students (Ishiyama, 2002), which make up 80% of the student population at UA Little Rock, and students

of color (Pender, Marcotte, Sto Domingo, & Maton, 2010), 45% percent of our student population (Quick Facts, 2019).

Benefits to the Community

The LRCS also provides benefits for the community. When community members collaborate with researchers, the needs of the community are taken into account (Hotze, 2011). As a result, community members feel heard and the research results can inform community problems that they care about. Returning deliverables to community partners helps to create a positive feedback loop and builds trust (Goldberg-Freeman et al., 2010).

Getting the results of our research out into the community is one key way for the university and the researchers to show our partners and the broader community that the research is relevant and meaningful. Over the years we have done this through mailing executive reports, hosting community events, creating a project [website](#), and sharing findings through our project [Facebook page](#). The website houses all of the findings from the study, including executive summaries, infographics, and academic papers, as well as blog posts discussing findings and community spotlights.

One resource on the website that is directly aimed at helping the community is an interactive map of food pantries (available in the References). This map has the location, hours of operation, and requirements for every food pantry in Little Rock. In Pulaski County, where Little Rock is located, the food insecurity rate is 19.9% (Feeding America, 2019). The United States Department of Agriculture has identified Little Rock, and in particular areas south of Route 630 and east of Route 430 as a food desert (2017). Thus, by developing this interactive map, we move beyond an intellectual exercise in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping, to developing a platform where the university, students, faculty, and the larger community can access information that attends to the real-life challenges faced by the broader Little Rock community. Congregation leaders can now share information with their congregants and other community members in need on where they can access meals and learn about healthy eating habits.

For the 2020 LRCS, we plan to expand our efforts at sharing our findings by preparing a report for each participating congregation. These reports will let the congregational leaders know which community issues their congregants are most concerned about, would like to see their place of worship address, and the extent they are willing to volunteer. The reports will also include contact information for congregations and nonprofit organizations that are working on those issues, so they can connect with community partners. An example report is included in the Appendix.

This engaged process leads to another community benefit: facilitating connections. The reason we revised our research design to provide reports specific to each participating congregation was because of feedback from religious leaders. In 2019 we hosted a Religious Leaders Summit to bring city leaders together to talk about the major problems facing our city. We held this meeting at UA Little Rock Downtown, an urban space in the heart of Little Rock. At that meeting, one of the problems clergy identified was the difficulty of collaborating and making connections with one another. The contact information in our reports addresses this issue, along with our plan to hold future summits.

Reciprocal Benefits of Collaborative Community-based Research

The LRCS is one example of an academic research project, housed at a community anchor institution, that has used its resources to connect with and serve the community in a mutually beneficial way. We view this relationship between congregations and the university as ongoing, but looking at just the past two years can provide a snapshot of the process by which ties are strengthened, research is furthered, and the community benefits. In 2019 we brought together religious leaders from diverse faith traditions across the city to advise us on survey design and community outreach as members of our Clergy Advisory Board (Clergy Advisory Board, n.d.). Our advisory board represents the religious, gender, and ethnic diversity of our city, and helps grow and sustain the relationship between the university and the faith community. The board members provided feedback, planning, and goodwill in the community as we planned and hosted a Little Rock Religious Leaders Summit in 2019 to share our findings with leaders and get their feedback on future research. Working together provides an opportunity to be self-reflexive and engage in a dialogue with congregational leaders who have the local knowledge necessary to guide our research.

At the summit, we distributed reports to share two findings that we thought would be particularly meaningful for the religious leaders in attendance. Congregations that: (a) partner with nonprofits or other congregations are able to reach more community members in need; and (b) are engaged in the community have members that are more likely to volunteer at their own congregation. Service is not a zero-sum game. Serving in the community fosters a culture of service that also leads to more service to the congregation (Glazier, 2019b).

Leaders at the summit were able to immediately see the value in the work we were doing, connect with other faith leaders at the event, and let us know what was important to them for future research. These efforts, the findings, and the increased engagement from the community are indicative of the value added of our ongoing bridge-building work.

Lessons Learned on Bridging the Gap

The LRCS approach continues to be refined. In our collaborative journey with colleagues, students, and our community, we have identified five lessons learned that we hope will aid others in building bridges in urban areas. These practices can be replicated by other universities engaging in community-based research with faith-based partners.

First, invite community leaders to inform the research process. While we still add theory and research in appropriate publications, the LRCS approach reflects the values of community-based research by working with community partners. From our work with over 50 leaders in focus groups seeking to understand the most pressing issues facing our city to engaging our Clergy Advisory Board in shaping survey and interview questions, by taking the input of community partners seriously, we close the gap between the anchor institutions of university and congregations. In addition, this process ensures that even before data is collected, bridges are built. We have stronger relationships with leaders than ever before. They know we seek to listen to and provide data that will aid their efforts to improve our community

Second, find ways to improve civic discourse at public events. We have learned the hard way that we work in a polarized space. For instance, in our first foray into hosting a downtown event designed to share data with community leaders, we invited local political leaders to lend their voices to the importance of such venues. This platform, however, was taken as a rallying point for political leaders that marginalized other voices present. In listening to reactions from participants, some were taken back by the speeches given by one political leader. Others expected it. Bridging long-standing gaps between universities and institutions of faith does not happen automatically and missteps are to be expected. In this instance, we learned that while we cannot dictate the comments of politicians, we can either offer talking points, or frame the event so those attending know to expect diverse voices.

Third, create spaces for dialogue on the complexity of causes and solutions for addressing endemic social problems. Religious organizations seek to address endemic problems, but may not be aware of the role of discriminatory social networks or government policies that fail to address these issues holistically. For example, congregations frequently provide food pantries. Through our research, we are learning that limited collaboration happens in this space in terms of working with neighborhood-wide or political initiatives to address food insecurity. Our website map of Little Rock food pantries illustrates instances where collaboration is happening and provides a tacit invitation for further collaboration. We are now also aware of the need to create spaces for dialogue on addressing complex social issues.

Fourth, identify and promote collaborative counter-narratives. Counter-narratives refer to “narratives that counter missing, inaccurate, incomplete, and/or damaged social constructions”

(Papa, Singhal, & Papa, 2006). Our work in this space moves against the primary narratives in congregations and non-profits which focus on the successes and programs of individual organizations. In contrast, we provide community spotlights focused on collaboration.. As such, they provide “counter-narratives” to the cultural norm of working independently and/or in competition. Indeed, our work has been enhanced by a denominationally and racially diverse network of pastors addressing divisions (Driskill & Camp, 2006) This pastor network launching an organization featured in a LRCS community spotlight, The Children of Arkansas Loved for a Lifetime (C.A.L.L.). This collaborative effort, in response to a shortage of families for foster care, engages congregations by providing training and open homes. Other LRCS spotlights include the Madina Institute and Islamic Center. Both represent minority religious traditions in a Christian-dominated Bible belt state and the stories highlight their community-engaged work. Such spotlights, shared through our Facebook page and website, provide a way to fill in incomplete narratives about marginalized groups.

Fifth, identify and/or create diverse networks to address racial, socio-economic, and religious division. Division based on race/ethnicity as well as economics and religion is a story our city shares with others. The incongruity of these divisions with theological tenets of faith surfaces and resurfaces in our community. In fact, in a study in our city, over 50 leaders from diverse denominations and ethnicities gave a public confession on how their divisions had harmed the community (Driskill & Camp, 2006). In addition, the language of “the most segregated hour” has consistently emerged in our interviews with pastors along with their appeals to address division (Driskill, Arjannikova, & Meyer, 2014; Driskill & Jenkins, 2019). Thus, our work has involved connecting with already existing diverse pastor networks as well as creating bridges built through collaborative service.

Conclusion

Places of worship and universities exist as anchor institutions that make positive contributions to our communities. However, bridges between these institutions are often lacking and the good work that they do is thus limited in its reach and efficacy. Our research question sought to answer how universities could partner with faith communities and bridge the gulf between them in a mutually beneficial way. Community-based research is one answer to that question. The LRCS provides one example of how researchers might develop such a bridge. As we have worked to build relationships in our own community, our data evidences positive results for the community, as well as benefits to the university, the faculty, and the students.

Furthermore, we have evidence of positive impacts from practices that promise to further strengthen this bridge. As we reflect on the lessons we have learned through more than eight years of researching with community partners in Little Rock, AR, we recommend five practices as an encouragement to others of ways to replicate our work in our urban center: (a) invite

community leaders to inform the research process; (b) anticipate and find ways to improve civic discourse at public events; (c) create spaces for dialogue on the complexity of causes and solutions for addressing endemic social problems; (d) identify and promote collaborative counter-narratives; and (e) identify and/or create diverse networks to address engaged in creating collaboration.

As universities and places of worship are able to come together for their mutual benefit and the benefit of the community, we see the potential for great hope for collaboration and community improvement.

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Promoting Public Good and Wellness From the Perspective of a Midwestern Regional Baptist Church Community-led Research Engagement Partnership

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Abstract

Faith-based communities supporting diverse and underserved communities are increasingly being recognized by researchers as community “anchor institutions” and equitable partners in research engagement. Research suggests that faith-based organizations (FBOs) can promote health and well-being within congregations and throughout communities. This evidence has energized community-academic partnerships to collaboratively support FBOs in plans to improve community wellbeing and health equity, particularly within communities of color. This paper describes the evolution of a community-academic collaboration led by a Full Gospel Midwest Regional Baptist Church where the co-partners professed a commitment to advancing the public good through collaborative governance and shared goal setting in the delivery of an engagement training program. Core features highlighted are: (1) establishing a Community Advisory Board; (2) developing a research engagement training program; and (3) analyses, results, and legacy. Extension of the church-led mission to lead research engagement connects leaders and communities to resources and scientific expertise in support of the data needs and aspirations of faith-based communities. As research-ready partners, faith-based communities have the capacity to function as localized anchors to drive urban health policy and to serve as advocates by being the “voice” in community-driven research engagement for “public good.”

Keywords: faith-based communities, shared decision-making, engagement, public good and wellness, full gospel, research ministry ambassadors, Pastors4PCOR

Introduction

“Expand to the right and to the left, and your descendants will inherit the nations, and make the desolate cities inhabited” (Isaiah 54:2-3)

Nationwide urban institutions of higher education educate about 20 million students annually and are significant economic anchors or place-based institutions within cities and the nation. In Chicago, public and private higher education institutes identify and have been identified as anchor institutions that actively embrace the “public good.” (CASE, 2020; Perry, 2018; Murasse, 2001). Universities have led partnership projects to further place-based social causes and human flourishing (Bamk et al., 2018) and improve the economic health of local neighborhoods (CASE, 2020). Institutions with hospital systems are also working together to improve patient experience via patient engagement. Chicago, for example, is home to both the Chicago Consortium for Community Engagement, established in 2008, and the Area Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Network, established in 2013. The Chicago Consortium for Community Engagement (C3) takes advantage of the significant federal investment of the National Institutes of Health in Chicago’s Clinical and Translational Science Institutes to ensure that local research is conducted collaboratively with communities in efforts to make research findings more relevant and available to the public more effectively and efficiently. C3’s mission is to maximize the impact of community-engaged research, improve population health and health equity throughout greater Chicago and actively engage researchers, community stakeholders, policy makers, and others who share a common vision for a healthier Chicago (C3 partners are listed in Appendix A).

Pastors4PCOR (P4P) is a faith-based research engagement initiative that serves as a community liaison ready to partner with research institutions and public health networks. More specifically, and directly impacting P4P’s current focus on building a Community Support HUB for connecting patients, stakeholders and researchers (PCORI, 2019), is C3’s work with the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH). The wider availability of big data which impacts health on a daily basis has sparked renewed focus on the health disparities and inequities which exist in the city from multiple perspectives. Understanding the particular mix of underlying health conditions and health factors in different communities has become a city hall priority (CDPH, 2020). C3’s 2017 appointment of a CDPH coordinator laid the groundwork for a reciprocal working relationship between P4P and CDPH. The coordinator is a respected and valued HUB Community Advisory Board (CAB) member, linking CAB and HUB Community of Resource Enrichment (CORE) members to C3, CDPH, and other community place-based anchors and Support, Partner, Opportunities, Knowledge, Expertise, and Services (SPOKES) (See Figure 1).

Unlike C3, the Chicago Area Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Network (CAPriCORN)'s mission is to advance patient-centered research across Chicago. Specially, to develop, test, and implement policies and programs designed to improve health care quality, health outcomes, and health equity for the diverse populations of Chicagoland and beyond. Since 2014, CAPriCORN has worked to put in place the infrastructure and processes necessary to create data sets comprised of high-quality, de-duplicated patient information. Eleven (11) different health systems (see Appendix A) contribute strategic leadership, data, and/or data stewardship. CAPriCORN is one of nine Clinical Research Networks (CRNs) supported by the National Patient Centered Clinical Research Network (PCORnet) that originated from the Patient-Centered Research Institute, (2013). More specifically, and directly impacting P4P's capacity to build and sustain a Community Support HUB for connecting patients, stakeholders and researchers, is the legacy of engaged partnership between P4P and CAPriCORN leaders and members since 2013. For example, a founding member of the original P4P CAB was also a founding member of CAPriCORN's Patient Community Advisory Committee (2013).

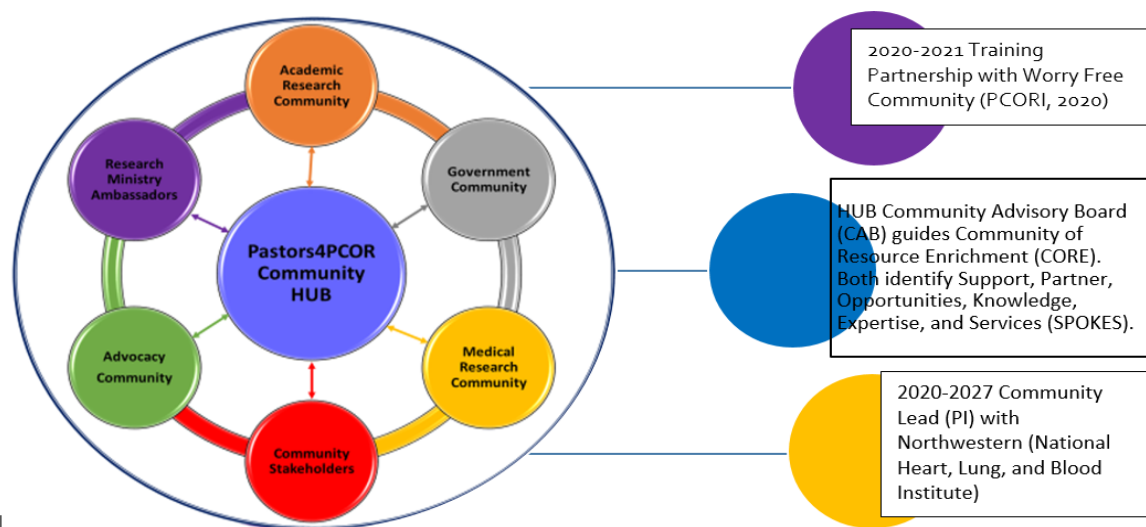
C3 and CAPriCORN illustrate the powerful added value of networks hosted by urban universities and the expertise hosted within affiliated research hospitals, other health systems, and city departments. Partnership between networks like these and community place-based anchors, such as P4P, have considerable potential. The literature for researcher-initiated community engagement, for example, showcases mutually beneficial partnerships between the urban university, civic foundations, and other community place-based anchors. Indeed, these partnerships can deliver sustainable place-based communities and reduce neighborhood health inequities (Harkavy, 2018; Fritz et al., 2019). However, despite the proliferation of "public good" partnerships, measuring the size and significance of that identification and the impact on communities has remained elusive. Universities tend to measure what they are required to measure (Friedman et al., 2014) and community partners are rarely afforded the experience of informing research questions asked, collecting and analyzing data, or the opportunity to disaggregate data for their own use (Friedman et al., 2014). Additionally, as noted by the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities, "resources, not mission often drive data collection efforts" (Friedman et al., 2014) with partnership priorities and investments changing over time in response to funding as much as societal need. Further as several authors have observed "the persistent health inequities impacting communities close to wealthy urban universities raise troubling moral issues, as well as, questions about higher education's contribution to the public good" which become particularly apparent during times of emergency (Harkavy, 2016; Scriven, 2011).

In this article, we focus on the evolution of Pastors4PCOR (P4P), a faith-based research engagement initiative. Triedstone Full Gospel Baptist Church (FGBC) is located on Chicago's southside. Triedstone's church leader is Bishop Simon Gordon. Under Bishop Gordon's direction, the Midwest Region of FGBC provides localized accessible health-related information, services and resources that are much needed by local community residents. These initiatives are

managed through the Triedstone church’s community outreach hub, Total Resource Community Development Organization (TRCDO). TRCDO was established as a 501(c)3 entity in 2000 to assist at-risk families in need of immediate wraparound support services. TRCDO’s mission is to help close service gaps by functioning as a one-stop resource that offers onsite programs and linkages for providing daily living resources and support. For over 20 years, TRCDO has successfully accomplished this goal through collaborative relationships within the faith-based community, varying local entities and governmental agencies, including the formation of Pastors4PCOR (P4P) in 2013. TRCDO annually reaches over 25,000 individuals directly through health awareness and prevention programs, food pantry, HUD housing counseling, CEDA assistance, and training and development programs.

Since its inception in 2013, P4P has partnered with multiple stakeholders across Chicagoland to pave the way for a community support HUB capable of connecting patients, stakeholders and researchers (PCOR, 2019). Valued stakeholders have included Southland Health Ministers Network; medical and academic researchers from Northwestern University (NU); Rush University Medical Center (RUMC); Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT); University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), University of Chicago (UC), Loyola University; Cook County Health Systems (CCHS); faith-based community-based patients and caregivers; and church leaders and members. Initially, P4P focused on building a community advisory board (CAB), and members were recruited from those valued stakeholders listed above. The CAB managed the development of a research engagement training program for church leaders and members designated as trainee Research Ministry Ambassadors (RMA). Now, as illustrated in Figure 1, P4P is building out a Community Support HUB to sustain support and navigation for collaborative partners interested in community engagement

Figure 1. Building a Community Support HUB (PCORI, 2019) and sample research engagement.



Context

Community-initiated research engagement with research institutions is well documented (Jewett-Tennant, et al., 2016; Adebayo, et al., 2018; Campbell, et al., 2007). Systematized review of the growing body of literature suggests faith-based communities are heavily invested in the processes of reciprocal relationship building, regularly connecting congregations to healthcare knowledge and information (DeHaven, et al., 2004; Kang, 2016; Khubchandani, et al., 2016, Olivier, 2017; Brooks, et al., 2002; Tucker, et al., 2017; Sanders, 2016). Published research on community engaged research with faith-based community anchors shows recurrent positive impact via a range of initiatives, particularly those with a preventive or behavioral and educational focus. Cardiovascular health, diabetes, cancer, depression, dementia, nutrition, and physical activity (Brewer et al., 2017; Hankerson et al., 2013; Hou, 2017; Misra, 2016; Plunkett, 2015; Campbell et al., 2007) are all topic areas where researchers and faith-based communities have effectively engaged. Factors which have impeded researcher-initiated engagement include researcher misunderstanding about faith-based community infrastructure, historic mistrust of research institutions, and faith-based community misunderstanding of communication by healthcare providers (Kiger, 2017).

P4P's community engaged work should be understood with reference to the patient engagement rubric and framework for practice defined by PCORI (PCORI, 2014). To clarify, whilst community engaged and community based participatory research is characteristically defined by its mission to increase knowledge and understanding of a given phenomenon and to integrate the knowledge gained with interventions for policy or social change benefiting the community members (Stoecker et al., 2003), the mission for PCORI engagement awardees is to build capacity of patients, caregivers, stakeholders, and consumers of the broader healthcare community to engage in patient-centered outcomes research. PCORI's mission is to help people make informed healthcare decisions, and improve healthcare delivery and outcomes, by producing and promoting high-integrity, evidence-based information that comes from research guided by patients, caregivers, and the broader healthcare community. In PCORI-funded research, patients and other healthcare stakeholders are equitable partners, as opposed to research subjects, who leverage their lived experience and expertise to influence research to be more patient centered, relevant, and useful. Their early and continued involvement throughout a study can lead to greater use and uptake of research results by patients and stakeholders within the healthcare community.

Many faith-based communities support and serve vulnerable and minority populations who experience the poorest health outcomes and adverse impact of health disparities shown by local and national health statistics. Faith-based organizations are "beloved communities" (Warren et al., 2011), a term which Martin Luther King Jr. used to signify a society based on justice, equal opportunity, and love of one's fellow human beings. ...also one in which all are embraced and none discriminated against. Community members are supported by a "healthy grapevine"

capable of disseminating and sharing health information during events like prevention screenings, community health fairs, and after-school programs. For example, recently faith-based communities have become essential to the front-line response to virulent coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic by offering drive through food banks, as well as, ongoing ministry support. The effects of COVID-19 on the health of racial and ethnic minority groups is still emerging (CDC, 2020; Chicago Urban League, 2020), however, the data suggests a disproportionate burden of illness and death among racial and ethnic minority groups. Due to ongoing health disparities and inequities, those of us who live and/or work within communities of color are not surprised that this current global health crisis of a COVID-19 pandemic places communities of color and minorities at higher risk of poor adverse outcomes and/or death from virus related complications. Early scientific COVID-19 data and reports indicate that people with existing chronic health problems and/or co-morbid health conditions such as cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancers, and asthma are more vulnerable to the disease (Chicago Urban League 2020) and “the majority of the black COVID-19 patients who died had underlying health conditions including respiratory problems and diabetes. 81% had hypertension or high blood pressure, diabetes or both.” More recent report of new CDC data, for example, The Marshall Report, 2020, shows deaths in Illinois from all causes, COVID and otherwise, have gone up 9% among White Americans, but more than 30% in communities of color (+37% Black; +70% Latinx; + 54% Asian). Online city and local media updates on COVID-19 cases and deaths has placed a magnifying glass on pre-existing inequities in our communities with residents able to search Chicago by zip code for updates on mortality rates within racial and ethnic community areas (CDPH, 2020; South-Side Weekly, 2020).

Triedstone’s Bishop Simon Gordon has a history of leadership within the Full Gospel Baptist Church Movement with regional and international ties, as well as, networking with national and local policy makers and politicians. Most recently, Bishop Gordon and other clergy heeded the Governor of Illinois’ service call to join and work closely with his COVID-19 Health Equity Taskforce (Chicagobusiness, 2020). Within communities of color, minorities, and low-income earning families, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is devastating for communities already experiencing living conditions where there are food deserts, limited access to healthcare, and sparse affordable housing. During this pandemic, faith-based leaders and the (Illinois) Health Equity Taskforce face the “ethical challenge of doing good in the face of chaos” by arranging for a fair distribution of health resources and more accessible COVID-19 testing sites in the predominately at-risk African American communities in order to “put our community on a better place for longevity and strength” (Earl, 2011; Scriven, 2011). Church leaders have also taken the lead in messaging the governor’s mandate of social distancing and size limits to gatherings, including offering virtual spiritual services.

Triedstone’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic is a recent illustration of how quickly and effectively faith-based communities can mobilize and respond to public health crises. The unique combination of collaborative partnership and networking on display within and beyond the State

of Illinois illustrates how faith-based organizations are uniquely placed to network with multiple stakeholders to deliver locally focused community-led engagement with public health issues of national relevance. Through this collaborative effort and “ethic of mutual respect” (Earl, 2011), faith-based communities and governmental agencies have intentionally worked together for the common public good and wellness in addressing the communities’ needs and to mitigate the impact of this global pandemic, COVID-19. To those of us who had worked with P4P, this was not a surprise. Pre-COVID Tiedstone had led the way in pioneering pertinent research questions and selecting the appropriate methodologies to pilot a sustainable community-academic partnership between TRCDO and Northwestern University as authors now describe

Research question/inquiry

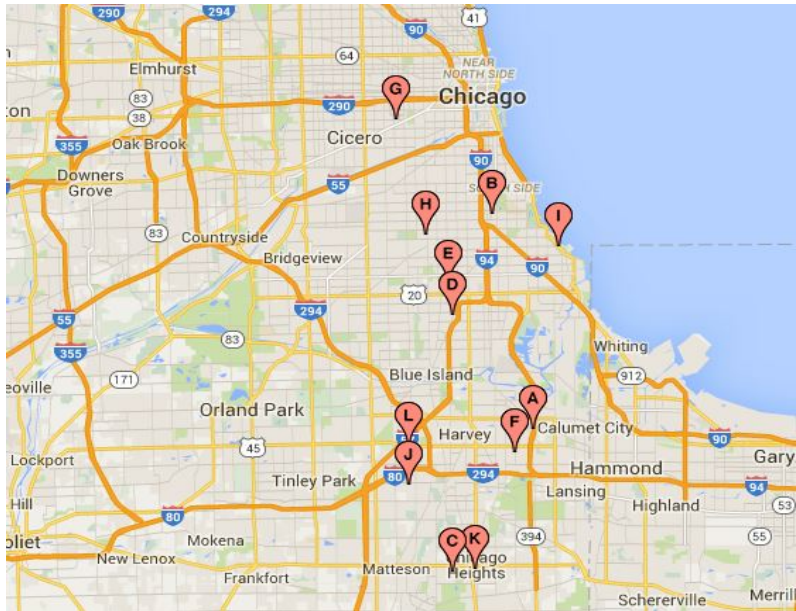
In PCORI-funded research, the focus of inquiry is science which leverages lived experience and expertise to influence research to be more patient-centered, relevant, and useful. The premise is that early and continued involvement throughout the phases of a research study can lead to greater use and uptake of research results by patients and stakeholders within the healthcare community. Key questions prefacing P4Ps building of a Community Support HUB have included asking faith-based leaders: (1) Why engage with research; and (2) When, how and where can my lived experience make a difference? Equally important for P4P has been the effort to document the journey and show that a grassroots-initiated CAB/HUB model can deliver the key governance processes essential to the delivery of an effective research engagement infrastructure.

Methodological Approaches

In 2015, P4P was awarded its first Eugene Washington Award (EW) and became the first grassroots faith-based entity funded by PCORI to host and operationalize a network of churches interested in learning more about and patient centered research engagement. Between 2016 and 2018, leaders of seventeen churches across Chicago ranging in size from less than 50 to over 2,000 members signed up to join the P4P network, completed Institute Review Board (IRB) training, and endorsed their representatives to be trained as P4P Research Ministry Ambassadors (RMAs) (see Appendix B). Figure 2 shows the geographical distribution of churches who completed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and sent church representatives to be trained as Research Ministry Ambassadors (RMA) and research survey methodology. Training was led by co-authors (RJ and DI), two academic partners from Northwestern and Rush Universities.

In 2017, building on the experiences of delivering the RMA program, Pastors4PCOR applied for and received a second EW engagement award for a Train-the-Trainer program (PCORI, 2017). Our goal was to equip others with the training tools and methods for engaging faith-based communities.

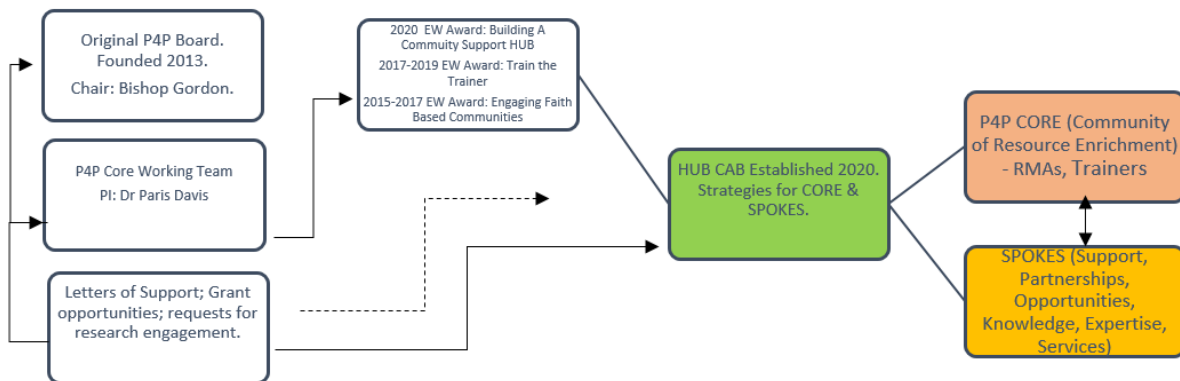
Figure 2. Geographic distribution of participating churches.



In 2019 P4P was awarded further funding to build community capacity to connect patients, stakeholders, and researchers.

Figure 3 illustrates the operative journey to date from CAB to Community Support HUB (PCORI, 2019). It should be noted that EW funding for capacity building was never guaranteed. The team submitted new applications for each contract. Success depended on the report of evidence of research engagement and success in P4Ps chosen methods.

Figure 3. from CAB to Community Support HUB (PCORI, 2019).



In what follows we share what we consider to be the essential components of our research engagement science.

Establishing a Community Advisory Board for the “beloved community” (Warren, et al., 2011). (1st EW Award: 2015-2017)

P4P’s original Community Advisory Board (Table 1) was recruited from existing networks. An explicit goal of Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute (PCORI), authorized by United States Congress under the 2010 Affordable Care Act, is to increase minority ethnic representation in health research. Our CAB diversity was 70% African American and 30% White. PCORI holds accountable medical and public health researchers by ensuring that identifiable patient-focused proposals are submitted when seeking grant funds (PCORI, 2020). They also look for active engagement with the research cycle. CAB oversight was therefore guided by PCORI’s principles and values. This means patient engagement is placed at the heart of practice and delivery of health disparities and health equity research (Huang, et al., 2017; Tai-Seale, 2016).

The collaboratively authored vision for P4P (by its founders) was “to increase the participation of underserved communities of color in comparative effectiveness research and patient-centered outcomes research.” CAB activity was informed by P4P’s mission and vision “to inform, inspire and engage congregations in research through partnership” together with the longer term dream “to increase the participation of underserved communities in comparative effectiveness research and patient-centered outcomes research through the design, development, implementation, reporting, and dissemination of research.”

Table 1. Pastor4PCOR Community Advisory Board: Original Member Role, Affiliation and Skills (2015)

<i>Board Role</i>	<i>Affiliation</i>	<i>Skills</i>
Advisory Board Chair	Church Leader	Senior Pastor
Advisory Board Co-Chair	Senior Church Leader	Reverend and Pastor
Executive Director	Church Elder, Lead Administrator	PhD, MBA
Advisory Board Member	Academic Research Partner	PhD, researcher
Advisory Board Member	Academic Research Partner	PhD, MPH, researcher

Advisory Board Member	Community Advocate/Church member	MPH, LLC
Advisory Board Member	Healthcare Provider/Hospital System	MD, clinician
Advisory Board Member	Community Business Advocate	BA, JD, Policy Advocacy
Advisory Board Member	Community Advocate/Church member	Patient/Caregiver Advocacy
Advisory Board Member	Church member	Patient
Advisory Board Member	Broadcast Journalism/Community Media	BS, MS

The CAB's first major task was to guide the design and development of a Research Ministry Ambassador (RMA) training curriculum and materials suitable for faith-based community leaders and/or their nominated representatives and approve the engagement methods and strategies used to recruit participants.

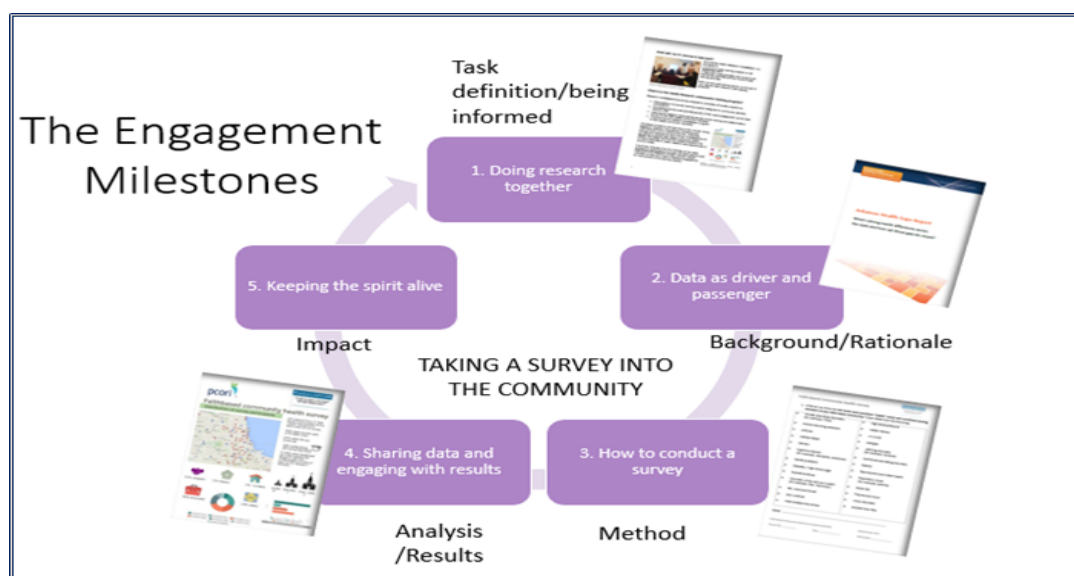
The P4P CAB Chairperson enlisted the Executive Director (ED) of the home church's community development services (TRCDO) to oversee the management of a faith-based network infrastructure capable of recruitment. The ED created participant recruitment materials including information sheet, memoranda of understanding, data sharing agreement, pre and post-learner assessments, evaluations, and dissemination strategies. To join the network, a Pastor committed to sign a Memorandum of Understanding, nominated a church representative(s) to attend the training program and complete Institutional Review Board (IRB) certification.

Developing a Research Engagement Training Program (2015-2017 and 2017-2019)

Historical mistrust resulting from evident racism, discrimination, and bias is a key reason why underrepresented people and communities of color have negative perceptions of research, medical institutions, and researchers (Solomon, 2013). The Tuskegee clinical trials, the case of Henrietta Lacks and genetics research casts a long shadow within communities of color (Braithwaite, et al., 2020; Buseh, et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2019; Thompson, 2014). Community leaders also share frustration with researchers not sharing findings back to the communities participating (Petkovic et al., 2020).

As illustrated in Figure 4, P4Ps RMA training included preparing trainees to engage with research milestones. Five training modules orientated learners to the research cycle and included preparation to take a community health survey into the community.

Figure 4. Research Engagement Steps 1-5



Although the education and training proposed was deemed to be IRB exempt, CAB board members were insistent that respectful research engagement behavior needed to be included in the RMA engagement training. IRB certification was made a program pre-requisite for both CAB membership and the trainees, Research Ministry Ambassadors (RMAs). The CAB agreed that it should be a pre-requisite for at least one representative from each church wishing to complete the survey component of the training program to have completed IRB training. IRB Reliance and Education Leads from the IRB Office of Northwestern University delivered interactive in-person human research protections certification training on three occasions for community partners and Certificates of completion. This CIRT-ification (Community Involvement in Research: Training for Community Partners) program includes: (1) Human Research Rules and Regulations; (2) Asking People to Participate in Research; (3) Being Careful with Research Information; and (4) How this all applies to you and your study. Developed specifically to meet the needs of community research partners, CIRT-ification was designed collaboratively by institutional review board and community-engaged research partners at University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Chicago, and Northwestern University. The popularity of the course with participants encouraged the P4P ED, Davis (co-author), to serve as an expert reviewer for an online training program in human research protections for community

research partners. Developed by a team at Loyola University, CIRTification online was launched in January 2020 (Matthews, et al., 2018).

Table 2. Community-based IRB Training (2015-2018)

Pastors, leaders and other church member participation in Community IRB Training				
Participants	2015 ^a	2016 ^b	2018 ^c	Comments
Pastors, Church Leaders, and Advisory Board members	17	-	-	<i>“I liked the review of the Belmont Report and the importance of informed consent” (2016)</i>
Research Ministry Trainees and Train-the-Trainers**	22	11	24	<i>“I appreciate the pace and content delivered during the training today” (2018)</i> <i>“Very informative information about IRB”</i>
Total	39	11	24	(100%) agreed the understand the rules and regulations protecting community members. (2016). (67%) agreed their knowledge/skills regarding the ethical issues of doing research together had significantly increased. (42%) agreed their knowledge had somewhat Increased. (2018)

^a IRB Training taster (2015)

^b IRB Training for period May – October (2016)

^c IRB Training for period January – September (2018)

Analyses, Results and Legacy

In Chicago, we know that each community has a unique sound. Our trained IRB-certified ambassadors have become bilingual in the languages of their communities and the language of the research world. Ongoing iterative evaluation of each phase of P4P’s research engagement shows the impact our approach to engagement science has had on three key audiences. Firstly, on the community individuals who completed training and engaged community members in a basic survey of health conditions and health factors impacting faith-based communities. Secondly, on the researchers who have engaged with P4P and thirdly, on stakeholders and policy makers who have supported the P4P mission since its inauguration.

Impact on Faith-based Trainees and Communities

Improved education and understanding of patient-centered research engagement has been the biggest outcome for our faith-based community participants. A primary P4P CAB goal was to train a cadre of RMAs ready to serve as knowledgeable advocates for faith-based communities across Chicagoland (see Figure 2). Our hypothesis was that building the “research-ready” capacity of faith-based communities would not only promote equitable engagement with researchers within the medical and scientific arenas but also prepares these entities for non-traditional research engagement. The authors who are P4P academic partners and co-founders jointly worked in developing the research educational program to provide the tools necessary for RMAs to understand and navigate databases and interpret health-related projects from design through implementation and dissemination of results. There was a crucial need to have the voice of the communities at the table when research topics are being developed and data collected and analyzed.

Learner pre and post-assessment of trainees was conducted by the academic trainers from Northwestern and Rush Universities (co-authors RJ and DI), to ensure continuous quality improvement and evaluation of the fit between training content and learner expectations and experiences. The CAB-approved strategy facilitated accessible and easy monitoring of learner progress towards project aims and objectives and overall program performance. Using a single pre and post-assessment model supplemented by regular learner evaluation, the CAB used the data to iteratively review project progress and address issues as they arose. Data collected from pre and post-assessment included valuable demographic information about participant characteristics (see Appendix B). For example, participating Research Ministry Ambassadors, all of whom were members of faith-based communities across Chicagoland (Figure 2) shared that in their own church environments they held variety of church leadership roles: elders, pastors, and leaders of a church ministry (for example, members serving under ministries focusing on health, youths, caregivers, etc.). Trainers learned that RMAs represented churches of different sizes and that churches were varied in their use and familiarity with social media. Of note to researchers should be the need to take extra care when conducting pre-assessments. Pre-assessment took place during the first meeting of RMAs before IRB training. Everyone attending the session was new to the project and uncertain about its value and as a result unsure as to whether to trust the academic trainers and share information with them.

Upon completion of the training program, participants were asked to select all roles they would like to pursue post-training from the following list: (1) disseminate research findings; (2) join a PPRN; (3) renew community IRB; (4) conduct a second survey; (5) learn about clinical research; (6) become an educator about health behavior; (7) champion a health condition; (8) promote awareness about priority conditions; (9) become a trainer for research ministry; and (10) become a PCOR ambassador. They were also invited to pledge a project-related action for the coming year. Table 3 showcases a sample of pledges shared.

Table 3. Post Assessment Sample of RMA Pledges and Preferences

Participants	Sample Pledges	Engagement Preferences
Research Ministry Trainees	<p><i>I have been energized to take things forward in my faith-based community Health Ministry</i></p> <p><i>I have truly been enlightened about how research is so important</i></p> <p><i>I pledge to help raise men’s awareness about the importance of participating in health research</i></p> <p><i>I liked that I can help my congregation because I am educated with information to help them have a better quality of life.</i></p>	<p><i>Become an educator about health behavior</i></p> <p><i>Conduct a second survey</i></p> <p><i>Learn about clinical research</i></p> <p><i>Promote awareness about priority conditions</i></p>

Since its inception, P4P has graduated 72 IRB-certified Research Ministry Ambassadors (RMAs), trained 26 Research Ministry as Facilitators/Trainers (RMTs) from more than 12 zip codes and self-published the trainer facilitator manual, *Engaging Faith-Based Communities with Health Research: Research Ministry Ambassador Facilitator Manual* using Kindle Direct Publishing (Davis et al., 2017). During post-training sessions, trainers learned about some of the “ripple effect” (Hardy, et al., 2018) the community-based training program and research engagement had had on individual participants.

In actuality, several RMAs used their training and expertise to continue to engage with research. One RMA became a champion for a community engagement and early recognition project addressing disparities in stroke (the CEERIAS project). Another shared her expertise and knowledge of being an informal caregiver to improve home care aide understanding of client health and wellbeing topics for research (Johnson, et al., 2018) and was a key community stakeholder reviewer of a freely available website designed to assist seniors with later life planning (PCORI, 2017). Other RMAs are respected community voices within the UIC Cancer Center Patient Brigade (a group set up to ensure that the patients and communities have an active voice at the table regarding the center’s research and community engagement activities), and the Chicago Community, Media and Research Partnership (PCORI, 2019) where the focus is to improve the dissemination and accessible communication of research findings. Two lay members of the CAB have served on PCORI National Advisory Panel on Patient Engagement. 12 RMAs continue to be members of the Pastors4PCOR Google classroom and GroupMe text. Members exchange resources and events, as well as, survey requests from trusted sources such as Illinois Department of Health (IDPH) and Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and reflections

from events attended. RMAs have advocated for community members at research focused events on “Men Living Well with Sickle Cell” hosted at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC), Stem Cell Therapy and Regenerative Medicine hosted by the Bayer Stem Cell Institute and have co-presented at more community focused events such as the “Fourth Annual Faith, Health and Research Dialogue” hosted at Chicago State University (CSU). Learning, resources, and information from those events have been shared with other trained RMAs and also on church websites. In 2017, P4P successfully partnered with another PCORI EW awardee to build the capacity of a rural FAITH network to engage in research. Nine faith-based communities in and around the Little Rock, AR area undertook an abridged version of the training including taking the survey into the community.

Impact on Researchers

Community generated survey data has been the biggest factor in building our capacity to impact and partner with researchers. P4P developed and delivered two cycles of P4P Community Health Surveys that resulted in data collected from over 1,400 survey participants in Illinois and Arkansas. Dissemination of survey results via scientific poster presentation has proved particularly effective in communicating the aims and goals of the P4P partnership to public health researchers and clarifying our status as a community-based anchor. Since 2015, we have presented the results of our work by participating in both oral and poster presentations and/or as panel speakers at a range of academic, public health and community health conferences sponsored by important scientific and peer associations (e.g. PCORI, American Public Health Association, Society for Behavioral Medicine, Community-Campus Partnership for Health, Balm in GiLead Healthy Churches 2020), and local community health events. Going forward, HUB plans include co-authoring articles on the research educational program and community health survey results. Our CAB-approved dissemination policy requires community-academic co-authoring and co-presentation of all findings.

Our capacity to operate as an effective community-based anchor helped us to become a “test partner” in a PCORI funded comparative effectiveness study of treatments for one of the priority conditions flagged by community survey (heart disease). In collaboration with program lead, Duke Clinical Research Institute (DCRI, Duke University) and study site at Northwestern University (Evanston, Illinois), the P4P Network partnered with researchers on with ADAPTABLE (aspirin) study as one of two community-based organizations.

DCRI collected information on people with heart disease and the effects of taking a certain aspirin regimen [regular (325 mg) or low-dose (81 mg) aspirin] with goal to determine which dose of aspirin was better. Our network was utilized to assist in the recruitment of eligible participants. As a community partner under direction and subcontract of Northwestern University, P4P was responsible for assistance with the initial participant entry (recruitment) into

the RedCap portal system for participant consenting, randomization and early visit conducted via the online patient portal format. The main goal of the trial partnership was to assess P4P's capacity to engage with clinical health researchers.

Valuable lessons learned from this “test partnership” between community anchor and clinical research team are fully documented elsewhere. (Zimmerman et al., 2018) Particular concerns and barriers to participation arose around differences in operational infrastructure, particularly budget and contractual issues, equipment and secured IT routes (off-campus); and registering P4P as a federally approved site for data collection. For example, academic institutions leading public health research characteristically operate cost-reimbursable subcontracts. This means communities invoice monthly to report work completed, whereas, community organizations would prefer to have a fixed cost deliverable contracts such as those offered by PCORI.

Building on this wealth of experience, the Pastors4PCOR network is continuing to work with the ADAPTABLE clinical research investigator. The ADAPTABLE Northwestern University lead researcher/partner supported P4P's engagement throughout the lengthy onboarding process. This persistence led to P4P serving as the community engagement partner lead (one of three PIs), on a recently awarded federally funded clinical trial with a goal to coordinate a community-centered intervention to reduce cardiovascular disease in Chicago (see Figure 1).

Impact on Stakeholders and Policy Makers

The multifaceted collaborative relationships formed during P4P's evolution from CAB to HUB (see Figure 3) has a lasting legacy. As detailed in the introduction to this article, from 2018 onward, we have engaged representatives from the Chicago 3 (C3) Clinical Translational Sciences Institutes (CTSIs) and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) in the building of the new HUB capacity to connect leaders of organizations to the lived experience of underserved members of communities across the Chicago area and vice versa. The HUB CAB includes members with affiliations and skills to advance research engagement driven by the community to impact data driven policy making. A Community of Research Enrichment (CORE) (which includes trained RMAs) is supported to take the lead in pinpointing topics and discussions for collaborative action. Stakeholders willing to provide access and linkage to knowledge, expertise, and services needed to progress research engagement identified by the community, are sources of Support, Partnership, Opportunities, Knowledge, Expertise and Services (SPOKES) (Figure 1). The HUB model allows for and facilitates the engagement of patients and stakeholders throughout the healthcare and research communities.

P4P's HUB CAB and CORE is also helping us to adapt and respond to COVID-19. Going forward, P4P aims to be a 21st century community support HUB for research engagement relevant to post COVID-19 urban growth and quality of life. Through community-led research

engagement, our HUB anticipates focusing on issues which align the incentives of faith-based communities, the private sector and federal, state, and local governments to unlock the full potential of the community. We anticipate that this will include housing, food, education, and access to healthcare in a world where insurance has disappeared along with job loss and COVID-19 testing and social distancing have become the norm.

Rationale and Reflection

Racial and ethnic disparities in health and health care have long persisted in United States communities and one way to address this is to increase participation of underserved populations in health research. Pastors4PCOR (P4P) began this process by developing a CAB and training program to build capacity of faith-based communities to engage in equitable partnerships with researchers. Our Research Ministry Ambassadors (RMAs) have the tools to navigate and interpret research projects and conduct community asset mapping to describe key health priorities and resources within their community. In addition, the RMAs are equipped to interact with existing church ministries in caregiving, health care, and cluster engagement discussion groups on specific health topics.

This article provides additional evidence that faith-based communities can be valuable community-based anchors able to nurture and develop non-traditional research engagement in reducing health disparities and promoting health equity in practice and delivery. (Zimmerman et al., 2018; Richmond et al., 2017). Our approach illustrates how community-academic collaboration around health conditions and factors prioritized by faith-based communities can benefit communities. In addition, how community anchors can provide strategic oversight of multiple interventions as opposed to the more opportunistic engagement offered by university leads. The urgent need for continued accountability and attention to patient-focused experience has been evident during the current COVID-19 climate. In David Satcher's article, "The Impact of Disparities in Health on Pandemic Preparedness," he labels the greatest barriers to being prepared for a pandemic as health disparities and global health inequities. These barriers impede pandemic preparedness due to disparities in health outcomes, health knowledge and awareness, early detection, early interventions as treatment and access to healthcare and treatments to prevent disease outcomes. A key component of attempts to overcome these barriers is being prepared and connected (Satcher, 2011).

Conclusion

As Bishop Simon Gordon, TFGBC Pastor and Chairperson of Pastor4PCOR, has observed while living in the face of the current global health pandemic, we see that our "community leadership and landscape are changing." Endemic longstanding issues of disparities in health care and economic hardships are not new challenges but rather stark realities and more commonly

experienced by minorities and communities of color. By building the capacity of faith-based communities to lead research engagement with academic and medical researchers and health providers, P4P aims to enable individuals and organizations new to research to identify health research questions which matter to them, and give them the information for how to make informed choices about participation in research studies. Learning about the process of engaging community members with collection of community health data about priority health conditions and factors impacting communities collected by our RMAs, shared and disaggregated by the P4P network has led to lively discussions within the community not only about participant experience of disseminating a survey but why survey respondents may have prioritized the conditions and factors as they did. P4P survey results underlined the need for better preventive education amongst faith-based communities around the prevalent health conditions impacting communities and better access to health care and supportive services. Since then, COVID-19 has provided real-time lived experience of how data and science can be used to inform policy makers, as well as, to show the strengths and weaknesses of data as a driver. The appropriate representatives now more than ever must be seated at the discussion table for important data interpretations, preparedness, community-based decisions to answer the call for action to mitigate adverse community impact during such critical times as an emergency, like a global public health pandemic.

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Appendix A

C3 partners (C3, 2017)	CAPriCORN network sites (CAPriCORN, 2017)
<p>C3 has established a multi-institutional administrative structure that includes faculty, staff, and partners from the following:</p> <p>AllianceChicago Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) Northwestern University University of Chicago and its partner, RUSH University University of Illinois at Chicago</p>	<p>Contributing strategic leadership, data, and/or data stewardship:</p> <p>AllianceChicago Cook County Health Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital and Jesse Brown VA Medical Center Loyola Medicine Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children’s Hospital of Chicago NorthShore University Health System Northwestern Medicine (lead) Rush University Medical Center University of Chicago University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences System Medical Research Analytics and Informatics Alliance</p> <p>A Patient Community Advisory Committee (PCAC) has worked with CAPriCORN since its inception to elevate the patient voice in research.</p>

Appendix B

Demographics of Research Ministry Ambassadors (RMA) participating in training at Triedstone Full Gospel Baptist Church (pre-assessments conducted in 2016 and 2018)

Demographics	2016	2018
Participants in RMA training	N (%)	N (%)
Total	20 (100%)	16 (100%)
Age Category (years)		
18-24	0	2
25-39	4	3
40-49	6 (30%)	5 (31%)

50-59	6 (30%)	2
60 and over	4	3
DNA	0	1
Gender		
Male	4	5
Female	16 (80%)	11 (69%)
Missing	0	0
Race		
Black or African American	20 (100%)	16 (100%)
Education		
Less than high school	0	0
High school diploma (GED)	4	2
College degree or higher	15 (75%)	12 (75%)
Some college		2
Missing	1	
Faith-based Community (congregation size)		
26-100	0	3
101-499	6 (30%)	5 (31%)
500-999	1	4
1,000-1,499	1	1
Over 2,000	1	1
Not Known	4	0
Social Media used by participants		
Internet	18	13
Smart phone	15	13
Email	20 (100%)	13
Facebook	0	11
Twitter	0	5
Don't use	0	0
Social Media used by home church		
Internet	19	13
Smart phone	17	10
Email	18	12
Twitter	7	7
Facebook	17	11
Don't use	0	0

Faith in Action, Adult Learning, and Immigrant Justice: Bringing Mission to Life

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Abstract

This article emerges from a collaborative research project between a religious studies professor at DePaul University and the executive director of the Chicago-based non-profit Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants (ICDI). In 2016, we forged a community partnership to explore and enhance the relationship between pedagogy, faith, and social justice. In this article, we share the results of our research on how exposure to and involvement with the work of ICDI impacts students, staff, and volunteers. Our research reveals the powerful effect that a community-engaged partnership can have not only on adult learning but also on spiritual development. Our findings suggest that faith in action may take several forms, including encounter, accompaniment, advocacy, and social justice, and that those who engage the work of ICDI may engage them in different ways. These insights will be useful for institutions, both universities and community organizations alike, in enhancing adult learning and spiritual growth.

Keywords: Spirituality, religion, action research, adult learning, community engagement

Faith in Action, Adult Learning, and Immigrant Justice: Bringing Mission to Life

In 2016, the authors of this article, a professor of religious studies at DePaul University and the executive director of the Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants (ICDI), forged a community-engaged partnership that examines how immigrant-advocacy work impacts those who engage it. Students in Tirres's religious studies class participated in three half-day ICDI-related immersion experiences and were then invited to reflect on their experience. As we have shown in our first article from this partnership, these community-engaged immersion experiences proved significant not only for student learning but also for institutional identity and mission (Tirres and Schikore, 2020). We found that for institutions like DePaul University, the largest Catholic university in the United States whose mission is centered around faith in action, this type of community-engaged learning can be a potent site for realizing mission.

We were also interested in how exposure to the work of faith-based institutions informs an individual's faith journey. Both DePaul University and ICDI are faith-based organizations, rooted in the Catholic tradition, that honor and value religious pluralism. Additionally, both put a premium on active forms of faith that do the work of social justice. Thus, rather than approach faith primarily as assent to doctrine, both DePaul and ICDI understand faith largely as transformative praxis, or faith in action. How do institutional values like these shape the faith journeys of individuals within the organization? We posed this question to ICDI staff and volunteers, who have sustained contact with the work of ICDI and who represent a variety of religious traditions. A majority of respondents reported that their work with detained immigrants indeed helps to reinforce and strengthen their faith journey. Many also suggested that ICDI's interfaith context added new dimensions to their faith experience.

As we formulated the project and reviewed the initial qualitative data that were collected through a survey, we kept returning to questions like the following: (1) What does "faith" and some of its related usages mean within the context of our community-engaged project?; (2) In particular, how does "faith in action" shape an individual's "faith journey" in the context of "interfaith advocacy" for detained immigrants?; and (3) In what ways is the concept of "faith" functioning in each of these key phrases, and how might these different aspects of faith intersect with one another?

In what follows, we make explicit some of the different ways that faith is deployed within our community-engaged project. The first section describes our respective institutional contexts and missions, which are centered around faith in action. The second section makes explicit some of the theoretical resources that inform how we think about faith in action in the context of a religious plural university, DePaul, and a multi-faith organization, ICDI. As we will show, we have found it helpful to approach faith not only in terms of formal institutional religious affiliations, but also in terms of how faith functions in helping individuals and communities to

grow. Such a focus speaks to our interest in constructive-developmental approaches to faith, such as found in the work of Parks (2010), Tisdell (2003), Fowler (1996, 1981), and Dewey (1934). As such, we are interested in how meaningful encounters with detained immigrants, which take place within a context that values religious pluralism, may lead to significant learning experiences that deepen and expand the spiritual journeys of those who engage the work of immigration advocacy. Section three shares some of the most recent data we have collected from ICDI staff and volunteers. In light of this data, we offer two conceptual frameworks that shed light on some of the different ways in which faith in action may manifest itself within this constructive-developmental process. In the final section, we summarize these findings and discuss their larger implications.

DePaul University and ICDI: Faith-based Institutions with ‘Faith in Action’ Missions

Founded in 1898 in the name of St. Vincent de Paul, DePaul University in Chicago is the largest Catholic university in the United States. With over 22,000 students, DePaul remains dedicated to its core mission, which is to provide access to higher education for those who have been historically unable to pursue it, including first-generation college students, low-income students, immigrants, and/or students of color. Today, DePaul’s student body is racially diverse -- 19% of students identify as Hispanic, 8% identify as African American, and 6% identify as multiracial. The school is also economically diverse -- 47% of freshmen come from households with an adjusted gross income of \$100,000 or less, 32% of all freshmen receive Pell Grants, and 6% of freshmen are from families with an adjusted gross income of \$20,000 or less.

DePaul University has also long been a haven for people of all faiths, including, perhaps most notably, Jewish students. As evidenced by its early promotional literature from the 1920s, “DePaul clearly declared itself open to students of all religious backgrounds, and pointed to the presence of non-Catholic students throughout the university.” By the 1930s, Jewish students constituted as much as 25% of the student body at DePaul’s Loop campus and as much as 40% of the student body at the law school (Rury, 1998).

The life and work of St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) serves as the core blueprint for the university’s continued commitment to the historically underserved. Vincent de Paul was born to peasant farmers in the south of France. Like so many of his generation, he initially entered the priesthood to secure economic stability for himself and his family. As he was studying to become a priest, de Paul befriended numerous societal and church leaders, including the noble and influential Gondi family. de Paul became the family’s chaplain and tutor, and he was often asked to accompany Madame de Gondi on her trips to inspect her extensive properties throughout France.

Through these trips, de Paul interacted with the rural poor, and these experiences began to reshape de Paul's sense of calling and mission. On one such trip, Madame de Gondi turned to him and asked what has become known as "The Vincentian Question," which is "What must be done?" (Holtzschneider, 2001, p. 342). This question proved to be a turning point in de Paul's life. For the remainder of his life, de Paul dedicated himself to this question, focusing on how the most pressing social challenges of his day could be addressed not only through acts of charity, but also through institutional and structural change. Today, a loose and diverse worldwide network known as the Vincentian Family seeks to coordinate its efforts to collaborate for systemic change.

DePaul University's Mission Statement (2016) reflects these core commitments. As it reads, "the distinguishing marks of the university are its Catholic, Vincentian, and urban character (p. 1). It is "dedicated to teaching, research, and public service" (p. 1) and it places a high priority on "programs and instruction and learning" (p. 1). The university also makes explicit its commitment to public service, especially given its urban setting. "In meeting its public service responsibility, the university encourages faculty, staff, and students to apply specialized expertise in ways that contribute to the societal, economic, cultural and ethical quality of life in the metropolitan area and beyond. When appropriate, and mutually beneficial, DePaul develops service-learning and educational partnerships with other institutions and agencies" (p. 2).

DePaul University has long been a leader in public service initiatives. The Irwin D. Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning (CbSL) enables the integration of project-based and service-learning pedagogy. The Egan Office of Urban Education and Community Partnerships, a part of the Steans Center since 2013, directly assists community organizations with community engagement processes. Additionally, the Assets-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute, housed within the Steans Center since 2016, provides faculty and staff with resources and tools to identify and nurture neighborhood assets. This approach helps students and faculty to respect the experience and knowledge produced in communities, rather than focusing on what is wrong or missing, or treating them merely as objects of study or research.

In the last few years, the above units, along with DePaul's Division of Mission and Ministry and the newly created university-wide Council on Community Engagement, have made important strides in thinking more intentionally about DePaul's commitment to public service. Now more than ever, much attention is being given to how the university can forge educational partnerships with other institutions and agencies in a mutually beneficial way. The Steans Center, for example, encourages cultivating community partnerships for the long-term. Similarly, the Council for Community Engagement has created a set of guiding principles for community engagement that champions an assets-based approach to community partnership that is explicitly and intentionally reciprocal. Likewise, DePaul's Division of Mission and Ministry fosters

mutually-beneficial and sustained partnerships through co-curricular programs like the DePaul Community Service Association (DCSA) and Alternative Break Service Immersions (ABSI). As cases like these illustrate, multiple units at DePaul are viewing community engagement and public service less as acts of charity “for” the underserved and more as sustained relationships “with” community partners, from whom there is much to learn.

Like DePaul University, ICDI has Catholic roots and a deep appreciation for faith in action. Its mission is to provide spiritual support and accompany people affected adversely by the immigrant detention system and to advocate for systemic change. This mission has its roots in the core values and critical concerns of the Sisters of Mercy, the religious order of ICDI Founders JoAnn Persch and Pat Murphy.

The first Sisters of Mercy arrived in the United States from Ireland in 1843 and have been ministering to and with immigrants since then. In 2005, they formalized this commitment and issued a statement that calls them to "recognize an urgent duty and challenge to stand in solidarity with immigrants seeking fullness of life." (Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 2005).

The Sisters of Mercy (2020-a) articulate four core mission values:

- **Spirituality:** The example of Jesus leads us, the Gospel guides us and Catherine McAuley’s spirit enlivens us. Ours is a life of contemplation and action, prayer and service.
- **Community:** Living in community deepens our relationship with God, strengthens us for mission, and continually inspires us in our call to serve others.
- **Service:** We see Jesus in the most marginalized people and take a vow of service to perform works of Mercy that alleviate suffering. We strive to follow Jesus’ example in all that we do.
- **Social Justice and Our Critical Concerns:** We work passionately to eliminate poverty, the widespread denial of human rights, the degradation of earth, the increase in violence and racism, the continued oppression of women, the abuse of children, the mistreatment of immigrants and the lack of solidarity among people and nations.

The Sisters of Mercy’s (2020-b) commitment to immigrants comes out of their deep belief in the dignity of each human person. It is also reflected in their more than 150 years of ministering to and with immigrants in hospitals, parishes, social service centers, and schools, which includes 17 colleges and universities. Mercy Sisters advocate for the safety and protection of all migrants, and for just and humane immigration reform in the United States that reunites families, provides a pathway to citizenship, protects young people, and provides for fair enforcement of the law.

ICDI’s mission is rooted in the work of the Sisters of Mercy and further informed by the interfaith perspectives that come from volunteers, staff, and the people served by ICDI. The

dignity and worth of each person, the desire for justice, and the awareness that we are all connected and need to concern ourselves with the well-being of our fellow humans are some of the common values around which ICDI convenes faith-diverse people. People from more than 17 different religions and denominations participate in the work of ICDI and are able to find meaningful ways to express and exercise their faith through the work of the organization.

The mission of ICDI is carried out through various programs and interfaith ministries. ICDI volunteers provide pastoral care in four different county jails where immigrants are detained. Volunteers also visit the children's centers where unaccompanied minors are held until they can be reunified with family. Through a daily court-watch program, volunteers serve as eyes and ears in the immigration court system to identify human concerns that need attention. Through a hotline, volunteers respond daily to calls from people released and in need of food, clothing, transportation, and other help. ICDI volunteers also assist immigrant travelers passing through Chicago via a daily presence in the Greyhound bus station. Volunteers in the deportation ministry assist families who are losing a loved one to deportation and pray with the people being deported. Through various housing opportunities, ICDI provides shelter, case management, and accompaniment to people released from immigration detention with no family or friends in the United States.

A Shared Understanding of Faith: "Religion" and "the Religious" in the Context of a Community Partnership

Today, it is not uncommon to hear someone say "I am spiritual but not religious." As recent data from the Pew research center suggests, over 25% of the United States population now identifies as such (Lipka & Gecewicz, 2017). Several important recent studies examine how emerging adults navigate their spiritual journeys. Drawing on constructive-developmental research, Parks (2010) offers one of the most compelling accounts of how young adults in their twenties navigate meaning-making and questions of faith. As Parks suggests, "Faith is often linked exclusively to belief, particularly religious belief. But faith goes far beyond religious belief, narrowly understood. Faith is more adequately recognized as *the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience*—that is, *faith* is as much a verb as a noun" (p. 10, emphasis in original). Tisdell (2003) offers another insightful account of the role of spirituality in teaching and learning. She focuses on the potential role of spirituality in teaching for cultural relevance with multicultural populations in higher and adult education. As Tisdell makes clear, "*spirituality is not about pushing a religious agenda*" (p.10, emphasis in original). Instead, Tisdell articulates a set of assumptions that guide thinking about spirituality, which include the following: (1) spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people they are interrelated; (2) spirituality is an awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of what many refer to as the Life-force, God, higher power, higher self, cosmic energy, Buddha nature, or Great Spirit; (3) spirituality is

fundamentally about meaning making; (4) spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning environment; (5) spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity or to a more authentic self; (6) spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often made more concrete in art forms such as music, image, symbol, and ritual, all of which are manifested culturally; and (7) spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise (p.xi).

Around the same time, Astin, et al. (2005) shared their findings of the first national longitudinal study of spiritual growth among college-age students. One of their central research questions was: “What are institutions doing that aids or inhibits students in their spiritual quest?” The research team developed five measures connected to religious qualities and five measures connected to spiritual qualities. Whereas the religious qualities largely pertain to elements connected to organized religion, the research team describes spirituality in terms of the following measures:

[Spirituality] involves an active quest for answers to life’s “big questions” (Spiritual Quest), a global worldview that transcends ethnocentrism and egocentrism (Ecumenical Worldview), a sense of caring and compassion for others (Ethic of Caring) coupled with a lifestyle that includes service to others (Charitable Involvement), and a capacity to maintain one’s sense of calm and centeredness, especially in times of stress (Equanimity).

All three of these studies share a common assumption around the distinction between organized religion, on the one hand, and a more comprehensive sense of faith or spirituality, on the other. But one may ask: from where does this distinction arise? If we trace sources, it becomes clear that Parks and Tisdell are drawing heavily on constructive-developmental approaches as found in the psychological work of Erikson, Piaget, Kegan, Gilligan, and others. Fowler’s (1981, 1996) groundbreaking work, which explores spirituality as a developmental process, is particularly central for both.

All of these approaches, in turn, owe a debt to the groundbreaking work of educator and philosopher John Dewey, who also made significant forays into psychology. In 1934, Dewey published *A Common Faith*, a short and provocative book about the religious dimension of human experience. His central claim, which has proven quite generative for later thinkers, is that there is a fundamental difference between traditional conceptions of “religion” and a more pragmatic understanding of “the religious.” Today, we may roughly translate this distinction into the difference between “religion” and “spirituality.”

Dewey’s first chapter, titled “Religion Versus the Religious,” elucidates the difference. Religion, Dewey explains, is often conceived of as a noun substantive (p. 9). It usually “signifies a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization, loose or tight” (p.

9). In contrast, “the adjective ‘religious’ denotes nothing in the way of a specifiable entity, either institutional or as a system of beliefs” (p. 9). Instead, “the religious” denotes attitudes that may be taken toward every object and every proposed end or ideal” (p. 10). Thus, rather than focus on the question of what “a religion” is, Dewey urges his readers to consider how we may enact a sense of “the religious” in our everyday lives. He reminds us that, like all living creatures, we are organisms who interact with our environment. In particular cases, this interaction involves the creation of powerful ideals that may stir and re-orient us in deep-seated ways. For Dewey, such interactions need not be limited to the experiences of organized religion. If our transactions with our environment lead to a deep-seated re-orientation or “adjustment” in life, then by virtue of this effect, the experience is a religious one.¹ Dewey goes on to say that “the actual religious quality in the experience described is the effect produced, the better adjustment in life and its conditions, not the manner and cause of its production. The way in which the experience operated, its function, determines its religious value” (p. 14). Dewey thus flips the script here on our traditional conception of religious faith. Religious studies scholar Eddie Glaude, Jr. aptly describes this as Dewey’s “inversion strategy” (Glaude, 2018, p. 8). Rather than assume a priori that religious institutions are automatically and necessarily the source of deep-seated and enduring changes in attitude, Dewey turns the statement around, positing that “whenever this change takes place there is definitely a religious attitude. It is not a religion that brings it about, but when it occurs, from whatever cause and by whatever means, there is a religious outlook and function” (1934, p. 17).

We find value in these insights. As mentioned earlier, an overriding question for us has been: How does first-hand experience with faith-based experiences with immigrants impact DePaul students as well as ICDI staff and volunteers? Reframed in slightly more Deweyan terms, we are asking: How do faith-based experiences (such as student immersion experiences and/or ongoing ICDI staff and volunteer advocacy) lead to deep-seated and enduring changes in attitude? Moreover, how do these changes in attitude manifest themselves in socially-engaged practice?

Faith-in-Action in the Context of Immigrant Detention: A Line of Inquiry

As the first section of this article made clear, DePaul and ICDI are faith-based entities that put a premium on faith in action. As such, they speak both to Dewey’s sense of “religion” and to his more engaged and dynamic sense of “the religious.” Whereas Dewey himself tends to draw a sharp distinction between these two ideas, our missions suggest another picture, wherein both exist in a mutually beneficial relation, even amidst inevitable tensions and contradictions. The missions of our respective contexts invite us to see this relationship in a more nuanced way.

¹ For a discussion of Dewey’s somewhat technical understanding of “adjustment,” see Tirres (2014), p. 95-96 and Alexander (2013), p. 362-368.

That said, mission statements are only as good as the deeds and acts that actually help bring them to life. If our missions reflect our institution's most cherished ideals, what other concrete evidence can we draw on that shows that we are effectively enacting mission? What does our collaborative work with ICDI teach us about how we actualize faith in action? And how can our community partnership itself help to create meaningful mission-related learning experiences? The following section describes the methodology that we used to tackle these questions, and it shares some of our basic findings.

Methodology

Our collaboration utilizes a framework of action research, which orients inquiry toward the enhancement of direct practice (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) and leverages research “to bring about social change” (Bogdan and Biklen 1992, p. 223; Lewin, 1946). We are interested in both of these aspects as we each strive to improve our practice as facilitators of adult learning and spiritual formation. We value the dialogical, sustained, and iterative nature of our partnership and find resonance with Greenwood and Levin's (2005) assertion that action research can be an effective way to bring together university research and teaching with community needs. Through action research, we are able to move constantly between practice and theory so that we can “address questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co-researchers” (Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p.1).

Additionally, we are particularly interested in the meaning that students, volunteers, and staff are making of their experiences with immigration-related activities. Following a qualitative research approach, we are interested in what Eisner calls “the virtues of subjectivity” (p. 48-49). As with the parable of the blind men and the elephant, we recognize the rich benefit that can come from all the different perspectives of knowing the elephant, none of which is true or complete and all of which capture a piece of the experience.

Our collaboration emerged out of our shared work with ICDI. In 2015, I (Chris Tirres) began volunteering with the organization. About a year later, I approached Dr. Schikore to see if she might be interested in working on a shared project. We discussed what each was interested in learning and accomplishing through the partnership. I wanted to know how exposure to work of ICDI would influence my students and how I could best integrate immersion experiences into his class.

For my part, I (Melanie Schikore) wanted to better understand what it was about a person's faith that called them to the work of accompanying and walking with detained immigrants and how serving as an ICDI staff person or volunteer impacted their faith journey. Knowing more about this would help ICDI to strengthen our interfaith aspect of the organization, recruit and support

volunteers, and shape donation appeals. Both Dr. Tirres and I anticipated that we would each benefit and learn much from doing this work collaboratively.

Working collaboratively, the overarching question that guided our research was: “How does direct engagement with the issues faced by those in immigrant detention affect people?” In order to address this question, we designed two rounds of qualitative research that explored two key sub-questions: “How do immigration-related immersion experiences impact students?” and “How does working or volunteering in the field of immigrant accompaniment impact the faith journeys of staff and volunteers?”

We used two instruments for anonymized data collection: a writing prompt for students and an online survey for ICDI staff and volunteers. Students were asked to address the following prompt:

In this class, you participated in three different immersion experiences: the ICDI Prayer Vigil, the *Días de los Muertos* exhibit in Pilsen, and the ICDI Courtwatch program. In roughly a page (~300 words), reflect on what was most significant for you in two of these experiences. (After briefly describing each experience, consider questions like: What was most valuable to your learning? How did the experience open up new insights or questions for you? What take home idea(s) from these experiences are most likely to stick with you over the next 15 years?)

The online survey for ICDI staff and volunteers consisted of 14 questions that were designed to explore the relationship between their faith and the work of ICDI (see Appendix). For the purposes of this article, Question 10 is of particular relevance: “How, if at all, have your experiences with immigrants and ICDI informed or impacted your faith journey?”

Tables 1 and 2 show the participation rates and self-identified faith traditions.

Table 1. Participation Rates among DePaul Students and ICDI Staff and Volunteers

Participation

Students	Staff	Volunteers
21/27 (78%)	3/7 (43%)	55/300 (18%)

Table 2. ICDI staff and volunteer self-identified faith tradition

Catholic	24
Jewish	8
Lutheran (ELCA)	4
Unitarian Universalist	3
Episcopalian	3
Protestant	2
United Church of Christ	2
Kindness	2
Church of Christ	1
Muslim	1
Jewish agnostic	1
Buddhist	1
Sikh	1
Mennonite	1
American Baptist	1
Progressive Presbyterian	1
Christian	1
Interfaith	1
Spiritual	1
No answer	1

Data Analysis

Because we were at an early stage in this research and without a pre-determined understanding of what we were looking for, we wanted the themes to emerge from the data. Additionally, we wanted to see if there were shared themes while also respecting the unique themes of each data set and of each individual. We are interested in meeting each student or volunteer where they are so that we can support and enhance their learning. Using a "a general method of [constant] comparative analysis" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. vii) over the course of our iterative action research, we will generate theory from the data, elaborating and modifying theories as we learn more.

We recruited an undergraduate assistant to help code the student data, and we enlisted another professor (who also volunteers with ICDI), to help code the ICDI staff and volunteer data. For each data set we employed generative coding. We used a combination of deductive and inductive approaches (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and drew on grounded theory as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Our process of open coding consisted of identifying concepts, phrases, key words, and quotations in order to categorize responses. After doing so individually, we met to share and discuss our notes in order to achieve inter-coder agreement.

Limitations

We acknowledge several methodological limitations to our study. First, because we anonymized all data, we could not follow up with particular students or ICDI volunteers/staff to probe further any responses which were unclear or incomplete. Second, we currently only have two sources of data. In the future, we anticipate collecting data through additional means including in-depth interviews, observations, field notes, classroom notes, and other artifacts. Third, the data sets were not entirely comparable because we asked different questions. Whereas students were asked to reflect broadly on what proved most significant for their learning, ICDI staff and volunteers were asked to focus more narrowly on how their work with ICDI impacted their faith journey. Lastly, due to small sample size we analyzed the volunteer and staff data as one set but are aware that looking at the staff and volunteer data separately may provide additional insights given that staff have many more hours of engagement.

Findings

These above limitations notwithstanding, our data analysis reveals a variety of ways in which the work of ICDI impacts students, volunteers, and staff and offers insight into our ongoing conversation about faith, faith journeys, and pedagogy.

Student Data. As we discuss in our first co-authored publication (Tirres & Schikore, 2020), five themes emerged from the student data:

- 1) Most students reported a change in perspective through the immersion experiences.
- 2) A majority of students reported that the immersion activities provoked psycho-emotional responses.
- 3) Many students expressed awareness of their own social location.
- 4) A majority of students conveyed a desire to make a change in the world.
- 5) Several students connected their immersion experiences to the current political situation.

We analyzed these five themes in light of Clingerman and Locklin's (2016) "CLEA" model of civically engaged learning. Briefly, this model identifies four capacities that are engendered through civically engaged learning: the power to entertain intellectual complexity (C), the ability to recognize one's social location (L), the capacity to be empathetically accountable (E), and the impetus to move toward motivated action (A).

Although we did not specifically ask students to reflect on how their experience of immigration-related work intersected with their own faith journeys, it is worth noting that a number of responses referenced matters of faith.

References to faith	<p>“I thought it was so powerful for a group of people from different faiths and cultures to come together to fight for one cause and bring comfort to the families and immigrations through the power of prayer.”</p> <p>“What was most significant to me from the immersion experience at the ICDI Prayer Vigil was that people of different religions organized and came together to show their solidarity with those being processed for deportation and their families at the Broadview Detention Center.”</p>
References to interfaith	<p>“The prayer vigil opened my eyes to how other religions besides Catholicism have an impact on Latinos. This is because we attended the interfaith section. I had known that Mexico has a notable Jewish population, having provided refuge to Jewish people escaping persecution during World War II. Also, I knew that my neighbor who is Mexican is Jewish, but it never really clicked to me just how much more important Judaism can be for Latinos until the rabbi said the prayer in Hebrew.”</p> <p>"I will continue the rituals of interfaith prayers and altars for my loved ones and our struggles, and I will pass these rituals on to my children."</p>

In references to faith, students acknowledged the presence of both formal religious traditions (i.e. “a group of people from different faiths,” “people of different religions”) as well as more active expressions of faith (i.e. “com[ing] together to fight for one cause,” “bring[ing] comfort” to others through the practice of prayer,” “[coming] together to show their solidarity.”

In references to interfaith, this element of the prayer vigil enabled the student to see how other faith traditions work toward social justice and a student expressed how the interfaith aspect of the prayer vigil will inform future actions

ICDI Staff and Volunteer data.

In our initial coding of the ICDI staff and volunteer data, two prominent themes emerged. Respondents reported that the work of ICDI: (1) strengthened their faith. Respondents also reported that their involvement with ICDI helped them to appreciate their work with ICDI as a form of (2) faith in action.

Strengthened their faith	<p>“My interaction has only made my faith stronger”</p> <p>“It strengthens my belief that we are all one human family and it is incumbent upon each of us to work for the betterment of the world for each other’s sake.”</p>
Faith in action	<p>“It helps me see my faith in action. Working with immigrants deepens my understanding of what it means to love my neighbor and work for social justice.”</p> <p>“Felt it was time to stop sitting on the sidelines. There were great needs all around me and needed some way to give back. Finding ICDI was a great blessing. It allowed close involvement with a community in ways I could have never accomplished on my own, and felt greatly strengthened by people I was meeting in ICDI.”</p>

We continued to discuss the coding and made connections between the student data and the ICDI data. We realized that there were certain parallels between the two data sets in terms of cognitive and spiritual development among adult learners. The CLEA model, which we utilized to better understand how immersion experiences were impacting students, shed light on the fact that civically engaged activities helped students to grow not only in terms of intellectual complexity (C), but also in terms of their becoming more aware of their own social location (L), their empathetic accountability (E), and their expressed desire to engage in some form of motivated action (A). As we re-visited the ICDI staff and volunteer data, we noted that there was a

somewhat homologous learning process at play. We thus revisited this data set in terms of (1) how individuals internalize meaning from their own faith journey; (2) how a dialogic process of engaging immigrants impacts one’s spiritual development; and (3) the ways in which these experiences may open up onto questions of social justice. In short, we saw a pattern that moved more or less from the “I” to the “we” to the “should” of spiritual discernment. This pattern shares certain affinities with Kegan’s (1994) five order of consciousness which move from an egocentric “me” perspective to an ethnocentric “us” perspective to a world-centric “all of us” perspective (Kegan, 1994 and Kegan and Wilbur, 2013). Since we specifically asked ICDI volunteers and staff questions related to faith, we have rich data referencing different aspects of faith as it relates to these ideas.

Respondents expressed various ways in which they were personally impacted by their work with ICDI. Such responses connote a certain inward focus that highlight how some individuals assess their own spiritual development.

Personal impact	<p>“My own need for prayer and meditation has grown.”</p> <p>“It opened my eyes”</p> <p>“It gave me an opportunity to share my faith.”</p> <p>“I feel joy”</p> <p>“I enjoy being able to ‘be there’ for the detainees”</p> <p>“I have been renewed.”</p>
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At the same time, many respondents also noted that their spiritual growth is closely tied to a dialogical and intersubjective encounter with detained immigrants. For many, spiritual growth takes place through learning from immigrants and accompanying them on their journey. These statements underscore the dialogic nature of providing spiritual care and how being in a sustained relationship impacts one’s faith journey.

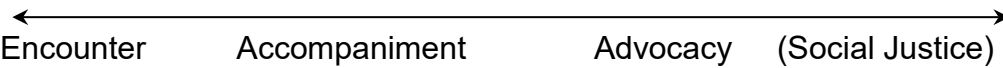
Learning from immigrants and accompaniment	<p>“These people challenge and inspire me to have a deeper, healthier spiritual life myself.”</p> <p>“I am continually challenged to examine the core of my beliefs by the unadorned faith of those we meet in jail.”</p>
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Additionally, ICDI volunteers and staff noted that their work with ICDI had inspired them to live lives of faith in action and to work toward social justice. Several answers indicated that this was something respondents had moved towards.

Inspired to faith in action/social justice	<p>“ICDI has given me the opportunity to live out my faith commitment to social justice on an ongoing basis, at least weekly, and sometimes daily.”</p> <p>“I am getting braver about speaking out to advocate for those seeking asylum”</p> <p>“I feel more committed than ever to be involved in the pursuit of justice for immigrants.”</p>
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Discussion

From the data we can see that ICDI-related activities impact DePaul students and ICDI staff and volunteers in significant ways. Given our action research framework, we are interested in further understanding and supporting significant learning experiences and spiritual development in our respective contexts. Accordingly, we have begun thinking about our two sets of data as representative of a continuum of spiritual development. The framework that we have developed can be described in terms of encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy, which may then open up onto larger questions of social justice. This framework could be represented as the following:



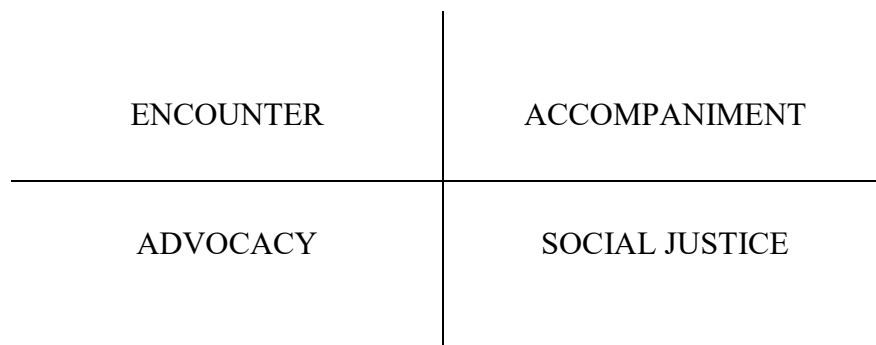
Through various encounters with detained immigrants and their families, both DePaul students and ICDI staff and volunteers learn firsthand about the lived realities that immigrants face. They learn directly about their histories, their legal struggles, and their sense of hope and faith. Participants feel the plight of the immigrant in palpable ways. Through various modes of accompaniment, such as listening, praying, laughing, crying, witnessing, and being present, participants both give and receive. They witness firsthand the tremendous hope, resiliency, and faith that many detained immigrants carry with them, even in the bleakest of situations. In so doing, they learn how to walk with immigrants at various stages of the process. Through sustained forms of accompaniment, some participants are compelled to advocate for detained

immigrants and their families. This may take the form of writing letters or assisting family members of someone who is detained. All of these forms of faith in action, encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy, can bolster in significant ways the faith journey of participants, and, in many cases, they can further shape one's commitment to social justice. Without a doubt, praxis-centered missions also significantly inform the process.

It is instructive to note that this journey of encounter → accompaniment → advocacy → social justice is present in both the student data and the ICDI staff and volunteer data, though to different degrees. For example, the half-day immersion experiences can be seen as clear examples of encounter. Because these experiences are not ongoing, accompaniment and advocacy are less pronounced in the student data. That said, there are certainly at least some gestures in these general directions, as when students reflect on what it was like to observe immigration court, which can be seen as a form of accompaniment, and when students express a desire to make a change in the world, which can be seen as an early form of advocacy and engagement with social justice. That said, more clear-cut examples of encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy can be seen in the ICDI staff and volunteer data, owing to the fact that participants partake in the work of ICDI in an ongoing and sustained way.

Having acknowledged a certain parallel between the two sets of data in terms of a developmental continuum, it is equally important to note that this process is not as simple, linear, or unidirectional as a continuum suggests. Factors such as previous life experience, faith origin, and proximity to directly impacted people can influence where one is and how one moves on the continuum. For example, if someone comes out of a religious tradition that is focused somewhat narrowly on charity, then a commitment to social justice may not be part of one's spiritual trajectory. Likewise, if one is already intimately familiar with lived realities of undocumented immigration or immigrant detention, then acts of encounter and accompaniment are likely to be less pronounced in the process, given that may be already implicitly presumed. Furthermore, as just noted, the extent to which one is involved in the work also affects where one might place oneself on the continuum. After all, working with immigrant populations on a regular basis is qualitatively different from participating in a limited set of immersion experiences.

To address some of the shortcomings of the continuum framework, we have imagined a quadrant that allows for a more interrelated and fluid understanding of a person's location and movement between categories:



In the quadrant model (which is distinct from an overlapping Venn diagram model), one can move from any one point to another, and overlap between the quadrants is not necessarily a given. Indeed, within ICDI there have been volunteers who came to the work good-hearted and with a passion for direct advocacy but fairly naive of the actual issues facing immigrants. Nevertheless, over time and through various forms of encounter and accompaniment, they developed a social justice mindset. Conversely, there have also been volunteers who came to the work owing primarily to a strong sense of justice. In their case, their faith journey was deepened by forms of accompaniment, such as working alongside immigrants as well as other volunteers from diverse faith traditions. As such cases illustrate, the starting points of faith in action may be vastly different among participants. The quadrant thus serves as a tool that can help locate the various entry points of participants. It might also be useful in helping to articulate how someone engages with the work at any given time.

If nothing else, both the continuum and quadrant framework help us to identify some of the concrete ways, such as encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy, in which faith in action actually manifests itself in the context of our work with detained immigrants. Based on what we have learned so far, we hope subsequently to explore questions such as the following: How can we further shape the pedagogy within our respective settings, a university classroom and a nonprofit organization, to best nurture and support the faith journeys of adult learners? How can student engagement with ICDI-related activities inform the ongoing work of ICDI staff and volunteers, and, conversely, how can experiences of ICDI volunteers and staff inform student learning and spiritual growth?

Implications

We have learned much from our collaborative action research in terms of both the process and the substance of our inquiry. As it regards to process, we acknowledge just how valuable a shared sense of mission has been for our community partnership. Both DePaul University and ICDI are grounded in faith traditions whose founding congregations put a premium on faith in

action. Today, this charism remains tangibly present in our respective institutions. In addition, we recognize that our institutions also provide crucial resources in the way of human capital (i.e. leadership, scholarly expertise, and practical know-how), material infrastructure, and historical memory. Such resources help to support in a very direct way that work of faith in action.

As regards the substance of our research, we continue to gain clarity on the various ways in which faith, spirituality, inter-faith, and religion function in the context of our community-based research project. As we have seen, faith is indeed something that runs much deeper than the question of one's particular institutional affiliation. Whereas faith may well be understood as a noun, as in a particular faith tradition, it is the adjectival or adverbial sense of the term, that is, how human experience and action function and manifest themselves in a faith-filled way that gets us closer to its core meaning.

But just as soon as we make this distinction between faith in action and institutions of faith, we must nevertheless ask: as important as it may be to differentiate the religious aspect of human experience from institutional religion, are the two mutually exclusive? Are *religio* and “the religious” really as separate as Dewey would lead us to believe? Or, to put the matter in more contemporary terms, is being spiritual necessarily at odds with being religious? As we have found, institutional religion, at its best, can indeed help to cultivate organic expressions of human spirituality, which may extend well beyond any particular institutional affiliation.

Our study has shown that faith in action may manifest itself in a variety of forms, including encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy. These are all ways of doing faith. Furthermore, such activities may contribute to significant forms of learning and spiritual growth, which necessitate a certain level of reflection. The former president of DePaul, Dennis Holtschneider, underscores the interconnection between doing and reflecting in his description of Vincentian formation, which he identifies as a “Go-Then” philosophy:

Vincentian formation doesn't begin with a classroom, or a book, or a lecture. The philosophy of Vincentian formation is a “GO-THEN” philosophy. Go serve them, then come back and talk about it. Go serve them, then begin to ask what works and what doesn't work. Go serve them, then begin to figure out why they (and others like them) are poor in such a wealthy society. Go serve them, then begin to ask others who serve them how they keep serving over the years. The best learning happens when it's grounded in real life and real questions. The Vincentian mission must always be deeply rooted in the lives of the poor. Start there. We don't learn the Vincentian Spirit from a book. We can only get it working with the poor (2005, p. 3).

Implied here is a form of deep learning that is at the same time a form of spiritual formation in the widest sense. One engages Vincentian learning and, by extension, Vincentian spirituality, by doing. The same can be said of ICDI. Although the faith dimension of ICDI can very well be

understood in a formal sense, i.e. as a reflection of the organization's inter-faith commitment to work with variety of religious traditions, more potent expressions of faith emerge when one looks at how participants actually encounter, accompany, and/or advocate for detained immigrants and their families. In such cases, both faith and mission are brought to life.

As we have shown, one can engage faith on a variety of levels. For some, faith is a highly personal matter of assenting to doctrine. In such a case, it is often presumed that the more one adheres to established teachings, the more faithful one becomes. For others, engaging a faith tradition may happen in more impersonal ways as an institutional fact of life, regardless of one's personal religious convictions. For example, non-religious students may attend DePaul, just as non-religious individuals may volunteer with ICDI. In these cases, although one may not engage faith as a matter of personal conviction or belief, one is still engaging with a faith-based tradition at an institutional, or formal, level.

Although the examples above vary in significant ways, they all share one thing in common: they tend to approach faith as primarily a question of institutional affiliation. As we have argued, however, faith has other possible starting points, including the praxis of social engagement. Our community partnership has yielded many valuable insights for us, but one of the most valuable has been the recognition that the two of us (Tirres at DePaul, and Schikore at ICDI) are both fundamentally committed to socially-engaged learning that creates significant learning experiences for adult learners. Furthermore, we have come to realize that socially-engaged learning may take a variety of forms, including encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy. Such forms of engagement prove to be religious through their function and effects more so than through their formal connections to religious institutions. That being said, in both of our cases, there is significant overlap between institutional religion and a more diffuse sense of the religious, making the question all the more interesting. For example, the mere fact of being within a faith-related context has implications for faith journeys, even for those without a profession of faith.

The point that we would like to stress here, however, is that for both of the adult populations with whom we work, DePaul students and ICDI staff and volunteers, the very act of engaging detained immigrants and their families may contribute significantly to one's spiritual journey. This engagement may open up a new way of doing faith. As we have seen, this journey need not be linear, and people may enter and exit the process at various points of engagement. But in all cases, the process of engaged learning and engaged reflection can be a valuable part of one's spiritual journey. Faith-based institutions and organizations often have high aspirations for bringing their mission to life and for contributing to the spiritual formation of those under their care. They would be well served to remember that such high aspirations may very well begin to take root in the granular and pedagogical experiences of engaged learning, especially when it is connected to community outreach and social justice.

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Appendix

ICDI Staff and Volunteer Survey Questions (online)

- Q1 Do you consent [to taking this survey]?
- Q2 How do you most identify your role with ICDI at present?
- Q3 If you have served in another capacity within ICDI previously, what was it? Please explain.
- Q4 How long have you been involved with ICDI?
- Q5 In which age range do you fit?
- Q6 Which ICDI program(s) have you been involved in? (You may check more than one).
- Q7 Please identify your faith tradition(s).
- Q8 Describe your faith journey up to this point in your life. For example, how has your faith journey changed, grown, or deepened over time? How, if at all, is your faith experience different now from earlier periods in your life?
- Q9 How, if at all, has your faith journey brought you to the work of ICDI / immigration?
- Q10 How, if at all, have your experiences with immigrants and ICDI informed or impacted your faith journey?
- Q11 As you know, ICDI is an intentionally interfaith organization that serves people of all faiths. How, if at all, has the interfaith aspect of ICDI impacted your faith journey?
- Q12 Does your faith have a public stance or statement on immigration? What is it? How does it align with your personal beliefs?
- Q13 What has been most valuable to you about your experience with ICDI?
- Q14 How has your involvement with ICDI opened up new insights or questions for you?

Faith Community and Campus Engagement in Immigrant Integration

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Abstract

Immigration is one of the most contentious topics in contemporary American politics. This study presents the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a program of faith community dialogues on immigration developed in partnership between a public university, a faith-based group of volunteers, and Catholic congregations. Based on data from dialogue transcriptions, exit questionnaires completed by participants, observation notes, and reflections shared by students and faith community leaders, the study shows the outcomes of the program for the congregations, the volunteer group, the students, and the faculty leader. The volunteer group was able to launch a new program that helped immigrant and United States-born members of faith communities develop feelings of mutual understanding and collaboration. Students had the opportunity to learn research skills and better understand people's perspectives on immigration and race. The faculty leader produced community-based scholarship that otherwise would not have been possible. The study concludes that cumulative collaborative learning, the inclusion of a religious dimension, and support from faith leaders are key for the success of partnerships between academic and faith-based organizations.

Keywords: dialogue, religion, immigration, community-based research

Introduction

Faith-based stakeholders are key members of the communities with whom colleges and universities engage. Partnerships between institutions of higher education and faith-based groups and organizations have resulted in many teaching and service-learning programs as well as research projects (Friedrichs, 2012; Janzen, Pomazon, & Hrynkow, 2017). This article presents the planning, implementation, and evaluation of a program of faith community dialogues on immigration carried out in partnership by a public secular university, the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC) and a faith-based group of volunteers, the Latino Racial Justice Circle (LRJC). From design to evaluation to reflection, the program involved collaboration between a researcher and community partners in the collection and analysis of data about a major social issue: immigration. As such, the work combined community-based research, engaged scholarship, and evaluation methods. While community-based research implies an equitable inclusion of community members in all stages of the research process, engaged scholarship refers to research that connects the “resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic, and ethical problems” (Boyer, 1996, p. 19). By analyzing this experience in light of the literature, the author seeks to identify conditions that contribute to the success of research partnerships between academic and faith-based organizations.

The article is organized in five sections. In the following section, the researcher describes the context of the organizations in partnership and reflects on their positionality in the program. Next, the researcher reviews the literature of evaluations of research projects that engaged faith-based organizations. In the subsequent section, the researcher presents the design and implementation of the program in a narrative form of program evaluation for the reader to see how the program evolved through three cycles, each one taking advantage of lessons learned in the previous cycle. From summer 2018 to March 2020, the projects corresponding to the three cycles are: (1) a short dialogue at an ecumenical workshop on immigration in October 2018, (2) a set of two three-week dialogues in Catholic parishes, one in an urban and predominantly African American congregation in February-March 2019, a second in three suburban and predominantly White American congregations in May 2019, (3) a three-week dialogue in two urban Catholic faith communities, one predominantly Latinx and one predominantly White American, scheduled for 2020. In the final section, the researcher presents the results of the evaluation of the program, discussing its outcomes for dialogue participants, host faith communities, the LRJC, students, and the researcher. The article ends with a discussion for future research and a reflection on the challenges and lessons learned in the partnership between UMBC, the LRJC, and faith communities.

Context of Organizations in Partnership

After conducting research on immigration in Baltimore for a few years, the researcher realized the need to conduct research with immigrant communities rather than just about immigrant communities. In interviews with leaders of immigrant-serving organizations, the researcher heard complaints of research fatigue, which happens when community members feel overwhelmed by requests from researchers, especially when they do not see tangible results from research activities (Way, 2013). The researcher had also lost interest in scholarship whose results remained within the confines of academia. Moreover, after each research project was completed and no matter how methodologically rigorous the study was, the researcher would often ask: “But is this really how immigrants have experienced this?” Instead of designing their next research project purely on intellectual considerations, the researcher started to volunteer at immigrant-serving organizations to directly contribute through service, build relationships, and identify community aspirations to which research could make a contribution. Working from within immigrant communities would also give the researcher deep experiential knowledge that could minimize doubts about research findings.

In 2017, the researcher became a volunteer for the LRJC, which supported Latinx immigrants in Baltimore through educational and legal assistance programs. As a faith-based group of volunteers affiliated with a Catholic non-profit organization, the LRJC aims “to educate and inspire people of all faith traditions. Working together, we will recognize and then act to eliminate systemic racial injustice and everyday incidents of bias and discrimination toward the Latino community. The Circle is committed to healing the wounds of racism by seeking to understand and respect one another. The Circle also strives to change human behavior so that we might change the human heart” (LRJC, 2015). The vision of the LRJC is “to create opportunities throughout Maryland for meaningful, authentic dialogue about race relations with people of different cultures. As a result, the Circle hopes to form cross-cultural, faith based communities focused on spiritual growth and improving social relationships” (LRJC, 2015). The LRJC mission and vision are consistent with the mission of UMBC, a midsize research public university located just outside of Baltimore City. UMBC prepares students for “community service and leadership” and “is dedicated to cultural and ethnic diversity” and “social responsibility” (UMBC, 2020). In early 2020, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching honored UMBC with the Carnegie Classification for Community Engagement, recognizing the university’s commitment to the larger academic movement toward community engagement.

The researcher’s identity as an immigrant from Latin America facilitated their entrance in the LRJC, which was seeking to increase its Latinx membership. The researcher’s Catholic identity also facilitated participation in the group, which has strong ties to the Catholic Church and starts and finishes every meeting with a prayer. Despite these affiliations, there were differences in class position and phenotype between the researcher and members of the community served by

the LRJC which, occasionally, made the researcher feel like an outsider. With time, the volunteering evolved into the faith-based campus-community partnership presented here.

Although playing simultaneously the roles of program leader and researcher could introduce bias into the study, it allowed for the generation of what Dezerotes (2018) called “practice-based evidence.” Dialogue practitioners use practice-based evidence to assess and evaluate their work relying on direct participant feedback and direct observation the dialogue process (Dezerotes, 2018, p. 42). To further minimize the risk of bias, the evaluation methods were made explicit, were applied systematically at multiple points in time, and included discussions of findings with LRJC members.

Leaders of the LRJC wanted to create a program of faith community dialogues on immigration. A volunteer with experience in classroom dialogue facilitation, the researcher offered to lead the creation of the program as a community-based research and evaluation project. The first dialogue was held in October 2018 as part of an ecumenical workshop on immigration and more dialogues were held since then.

Literature Review: Lessons from Evaluations of Research with Faith-Based Organizations

To identify program evaluations of research projects conducted in partnership with faith-based organizations, the researcher used the terms “faith” or “religio*” combined with “community research,” “community-based research,” “campus-community” or “university-community” on Google Scholar. The large majority of the evaluations resulting from that search assessed research on public health with qualitative evaluation methods.

Some findings of those evaluations coincide with conclusions of the broader literature on community-engaged scholarship: (1) researchers need to screen potential community partners to check if they have capacity to participate in a project (Hippolyte et al, 2013); (2) power over the project needs to be shared between researchers and community partners (Hippolyte et al, 2013; Laken et al, 2007; Oppenheim et al, 2019; Szaflarski et al, 2014); (3) researchers and community partners need to communicate regularly and transparently to build trust, assess progress, and solve problems (Easley et al, 2003; Hippolyte et al, 2013; Laken et al, 2007; Szaflarski et al, 2014); (4) researchers should include members of community organizations in the research team (Derose et al, 2010; Hippolyte et al, 2013; Xiaoming, 2007); (5) researchers and community partners should recognize each others’ diverse and complementary set of skills and resources (Szaflarski et al, 2014); and (6) researchers need to invest time for building relationships in the community (Kaplan et al, 2009).

Other findings are specific to research that engages faith-based organizations. Although the literature on community-engaged scholarship has recognized the importance of building relationships with community leaders to gain access and trust in the community, evaluations of research with faith-based organizations emphasizes faith leaders as community members whose support is crucial (Hippolyte et al, 2013; Kim, 2004). Faith leaders can advocate for the project, for instance, during religious services (Kaplan et al, 2009) when a critical mass of community members are present. Researchers need to be culturally sensitive when engaging with faith leaders because some research topics or methods might raise concerns from the perspective of their religious traditions (Szaflarski et al, 2014). Researchers need to be accommodating of faith leaders' demands and try to strike a balance between rigorous scholarship and the comfort level of leaders and members of faith communities (Kloos & Moore, 2000; Szaflarski et al, 2014).

Previous evaluations of research that engages faith-based organizations have also stressed the need to include a spiritual component in the research project (Doyle et al, 2007; Kaplan et al, 2009; Kim et al, 2017; Kitzman et al, 2017; Rodriguez et al, 2009). Examples of this are opening a project meeting with a prayer, starting a community forum with a sermon by a pastor, and connecting the process, goals, and outcomes of the project to scripture. The inclusion of a spiritual component in the research project can also motivate the support of faculty, administrators, staff, and students who are inspired by their faith (Janzen et al, 2017). Researchers and faith-based community partners should, however, be cautious about the religious component of a project overpowering the scientific component (Rodriguez et al, 2009).

In sum, we expect the likelihood of success of research partnerships between academic and religious institutions to increase with: (1) transparent, participatory, and sustained interactions between scholars and faith partners, (2) the commitment of faith leaders to the partnership, and (3) the inclusion of religious rituals and values in the partnership.

Program Design and Implementation

In summer 2018, an LRJC leader proposed to the group the organization of an ecumenical workshop to educate members of local faith communities about immigration. As a volunteer of the LRJC, the researcher joined the planning committee of the workshop and became responsible for a dialogue that would happen as part of the event. From the beginning, the researcher wanted to combine a programming opportunity with research on intergroup community dialogues and on the intersections of faith and relations between immigrants and people in the United States. In the designing stages of the program, research consisted of: (1) a review of the literature on intergroup community dialogues, (2) a review of the literature on religion and immigration attitudes, (3) a pre-dialogue facilitator training session and focus group with LRJC members to discuss the dialogue guide. This initial research sought to make the dialogue evidence-based and culturally sensitive.

The researcher designed the dialogue following the principles of intergroup community dialogues: the dialogue would happen in small groups of participants, have trained facilitators, ground rules, and open-ended questions for participants to think critically about commonalities and differences between immigrants and people born in the United States (Herzig, 2011; Hope in the Cities, 1995; McCoy, Flavin, & Reaven, 1997; Study Circles Resource Center, 1998; U.S. Department of Justice, 1998; Nagda et al, 2012).

The researcher also took into account theories about the intersection of religion and immigration attitudes (Bloom et al, 2015; Brenneman, 2005; Brown & Brown, 2017; Kang, 2017; Knoll, 2009; McDaniel, Nooruddin, & Shortle, 2011; Paterson, 2017; Wallsten & Nteta, 2016). For instance, Bloom et al (2015) found that religious social identity increases opposition to immigrants who are dissimilar to in-group members in religion or ethnicity, while religious belief engenders welcoming attitudes toward immigrants of the same religion and ethnicity but only among the less conservative devout. To mitigate the social identity effect, in the introduction of the dialogue, the facilitator asked participants “Please say your name and which country you or your ancestors came from” to make participants acknowledge their immigrant background. To heighten the religious belief effect, the researcher included the question “What does your faith tradition say about immigrants?” which makes participants ponder what would be an immigration attitude consistent with their religious beliefs.

One week before the event, the researcher trained LRJC members to work as dialogue facilitators. Each facilitator received a guide for the dialogue, which presented the ground rules, organization, dialogue questions, evaluation procedures, and recommendations for effective facilitation (see Table 1 below for a sample). The training also included a simulation of the dialogue. Participants made a few suggestions for the dialogue, such as changes in the language of some questions to make them culturally appropriate from the perspective of immigrants.

Table 1. Examples of ground rules, facilitation guidelines, and dialogue questions

Ground rules	We agree to dialogue in good faith. We will listen to others carefully, speak honestly, and be open to thinking together.	We will raise our hands to the facilitator every time we want to speak. We will talk one person at a time and keep our comments brief.	We will face and work through disagreements respectfully. Disagreements will be about ideas and not personalized.
Facilitation guidelines	Your main task is to keep the discussion focused, stay neutral, and enforce the ground rules. Do not act as a teacher or expert. You should not become the “go to” person to answer questions.	Value people and their ideas, promoting critical thinking on those ideas without being judgmental. Ask questions about the pros and cons of ideas or facts and about assumptions and concerns underlying ideas.	Prevent outspoken participants from monopolizing the conversation.
Dialogue questions	How do you decide who your “own people” are?	Have you seen or experienced in your community tensions between immigrants and those born in the United States around cultural issues such as language, religion or ways of life?	If we had excellent relations between immigrants and people born in the United States, what kinds of things would we see, hear, or feel in the communities?

The LRJC decided the dialogue would be the last activity of the workshop and last for 40 minutes. Participants could share personal stories, feelings, and thoughts about immigration, explore commonalities and differences between immigrants and people born in the United States, discuss visions of how participants’ communities should deal with immigration, and propose actions they should take to achieve that vision. To recruit workshop participants, the LRJC distributed flyers about the workshop to local public libraries, colleges, neighborhood groups and associations, but mostly to religious groups and organizations. Twenty-eight people participated

in the workshop. For the dialogue activity, participants were randomly split into small groups, each with a facilitator. The workshop took place at a private Catholic school in an area of Baltimore largely populated by Latin American immigrants.

Redesigning the Program

The evaluation of the ecumenical workshop dialogue informed the LRJC decision to scale up and redesign the dialogue. The researcher drafted an extended version of the dialogue guide according to which the program would now take place over three sessions of one hour and thirty minutes over three consecutive weeks with one session per week. The extended version of the dialogue would also encourage participants to talk in terms of personal stories (to reproduce in the dialogue the appeal of personal testimonials by immigrants, which workshop participants had highly appreciated).

The researcher shared the draft of the dialogue guide in a focus group with LRJC members for discussion. The group provided suggestions, mostly about language, which the researcher followed in the revision of the draft.

Since the evaluation of the ecumenical workshop dialogue indicated that the LRJC should expand its recruiting efforts to get a more diverse pool of dialogue participants, the LRJC decided to partner with faith communities of specific demographics and locations for subsequent dialogues. One dialogue would happen at a predominantly African American urban congregation and another would happen at a predominantly White American suburban congregation. The selection of those two settings was done to allow for comparisons and because of the biracial demographics of the Baltimore area, a predominantly African American urban core surrounded by predominantly white American suburbs. The different locations and compositions of dialogue groups could also reveal different power dynamics between participants.

Scaling up the program

Scaling up the program and engaging specific faith communities as partners was costly. The researcher applied for funding from Maryland Humanities, a statewide educational nonprofit organization. Members of the LRJC were listed in the grant application as members of the project team. The LRJC contacted two Catholic congregations that matched the criteria stated above. The application was successful.

In early 2019, the researcher met with members of the LRJC and the pastoral team of the urban predominantly African American congregation to plan the first dialogue, which happened in late February and early March 2019 in the church dining room. To recruit participants, the pastoral team suggested the researcher, being Catholic, attended a Sunday mass at the congregation to

speak about the program. Parishioners interested in the program wrote their contact information on a sign-up sheet. Between 12 and 14 people participated in the dialogue, depending on the day, including members of the congregation and members of the LRJC who were brought in to increase the number of Latinx participants. Some participants missed one of the three dialogue sessions.

After the LRJC concluded the dialogue at the urban congregation, the group contacted the pastor of the suburban predominantly White American parish that had initially accepted to host a dialogue. Although this parish was historically White American, an inflow of Latinx immigrants to the area had led to the establishment of a Hispanic ministry, including masses in Spanish. The LRJC thought the program would be a great way of building relationships between the English-speaking and the Spanish-speaking parishioners. However, the pastor decided to withdraw the parish from the program fearing that open conversations about a divisive issue such as immigration at this time of the nation's history would jeopardize the incipient interethnic relations among members of the parish.

The LRJC then reached out to other suburban predominantly White American parishes and, after several weeks, received a positive response from the pastor of three parishes. The LRJC met with the pastoral team to present the program, answer questions, and decide on dates and recruitment of participants. The pastoral team decided to be in charge of the recruitment. The LRJC asked only that they invited a diverse group of people in terms of their home parish, ethnic background and political ideology, if known. The dialogue happened in May 2019. Between 11 and 14 people participated in the dialogue, depending on the day, including members of the three parishes, several of whom were immigrants, and a member of the LRJC. The pastor, a White American man, was so enthusiastic about the program that he proposed the LRJC organize a broader event on immigration open to more members of their congregations. In one of the dialogues, the pastor talked about their previous experience of service to Latin American immigrants in New York.

The researcher acted as the facilitator of both dialogues, which were held in English with as needed translation to and from Spanish. The researcher was assisted by four undergraduate students, who helped with set up and cleaning the space, distribution and collection of informed consent documents, and exit questionnaires. All dialogues were audio recorded.

In spring 2020, a leader of the LRJC told the researcher that her own congregation, an urban predominantly White American Catholic community, was interested in hosting a dialogue on immigration. The researcher proposed the LRJC organize a dialogue between members of that congregation and members of an urban predominantly Latinx Catholic congregation. The LRJC met with the pastor of the Latinx congregation, a White American man who was very receptive to the program and even offered to connect the LRJC to pastors of other Catholic parishes.

Currently, the LRJC is creating a committee of members from both congregations and the LRJC to implement the program. As the LRJC learned from the previous dialogues, members of host faith communities, not just faith leaders, need to be actively involved in the implementation of the dialogue. In this upcoming dialogue, the researcher-facilitator will use the *LRJC Guide for Faith Community Dialogues on Immigration* that was created based on the dialogues held at the Catholic congregations in spring 2019, as discussed in the next section.

In sum, the LRJC, leaders of host faith communities, and the researcher designed and implemented the dialogue program in collaboration. Since participant feedback on the ecumenical workshop emphasized the importance of personal testimonials to educate the public on immigration, the researcher invited another UMBC professor, Tania Lizarazo, to partner with the LRJC to work with dialogue participants in the production of digital stories. Lizarazo is an expert in digital storytelling and had already collaborated in teaching and research with members of the local Latinx community. She attended the dialogues held at the Catholic congregations and invited participants that seemed engaged in the conversations to produce digital stories about their experiences with immigration and how they understand the role of dialogue in improving relations between immigrants and those born in the United States. Lizarazo and an undergraduate research assistant taught six participants the concept of digital stories and guided them through the production process. Participants chose the images and text, used their own voice, and had control over the final content of the stories.

Program Evaluation

Program evaluation is a major field of opportunity for partnerships between academic institutions and faith-based organizations. Unlike government agencies, business corporations, and professionally staffed non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations (especially individual congregations and volunteer groups) often lack the capacity to conduct evaluations independently. Evaluations do not only provide faith-based organizations with the knowledge necessary to develop programs but also provide demonstrated program needs and outcomes that can justify requests for resources in grant applications and fundraising efforts.

Two undergraduate students participated in the evaluation of the partnership between the LRJC and UMBC that materialized in the dialogues. They collected, transcribed, and analyzed data from the program. The researcher considered the effects of the program on faith communities, the LRJC, students, and themselves as a scholar-teacher. While the LRJC was interested in the evaluation primarily as a means to develop a program, the researcher was also interested in using the data to investigate the efficacy of intergroup community dialogues in improving relations between immigrants and people born in the United States, and to explore the role of faith in those relations. The evaluation of the 2018 dialogue draws extensively from Filomeno (2019a), a

publication that resulted from the partnership. The research protocols used in the evaluation of the dialogue program were approved by the UMBC Institutional Review Board.

Evaluation Methods

The evaluation used a mixed-methods approach. In terms of quantitative methods, the evaluation used data collected through an exit questionnaire completed by dialogue participants. Near the end of the 2018 ecumenical workshop on immigration, an undergraduate student provided a questionnaire to the 28 participants in which they provided basic demographic information and evaluated the workshop. The questionnaire contained five questions that asked participants to self-report attitudinal changes resulting from the workshop, namely feelings of mutual understanding and inclination for collaboration between immigrants and those born in the United States (see Appendix). Participants answered according to a Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). A compound index consisting of the average score for those five questions was generated to assess the results. The questionnaire also asked workshop participants for suggestions for improvement and other comments. At the end of the last session of each dialogue held in Catholic congregations in spring 2019, an undergraduate student provided a questionnaire for participants to evaluate the program. Like the questionnaire used in the October 2018 ecumenical workshop, this questionnaire asked participants to self-report attitudinal changes in a Likert scale that allowed for the calculation of a compound index (see Appendix).

In terms of qualitative methods, a week after the 2018 ecumenical workshop, the researcher conducted a focus group with LRJC members to discuss the event and the findings from the questionnaire data. The focus group had 13 participants, including four members who had worked as facilitators in the workshop and five members who were participants in the workshop. The focus group was audio recorded, transcribed, and thematically analyzed. The evaluation of the dialogues held in Catholic congregations in spring 2019 included a thematic analysis of observation notes, dialogue transcripts, post-participation reflections by students and faith leaders, and answers to open-ended questions of the exit questionnaire completed by participants.

Since the dialogue transcripts were extensive, the researcher used the software NVivo to thematically analyze that data. The researcher coded the first dialogue and then the second dialogue. The coding followed an open coding approach, starting with a set of codes based on theories of dialogue and on a review of observation notes. Codes related to the process and outcomes of the dialogue were, for instance, “critical thinking” and “empathy.” After the first round of coding, the researcher analyzed the data again to make sure that codes created during the analysis were applied consistently across the data.

Evaluation Results

Outcomes for Faith Communities

Considering all participants of the 2018 ecumenical workshop on immigration, the compound index of attitudinal change calculated from the exit questionnaire was 4.45, near the midpoint between “agree” and “strongly agree”, indicating stronger feelings of mutual understanding and inclination for collaboration between immigrants and those born in the United States as a result of participation. The questionnaire did not allow the evaluation to distinguish between effects of the dialogue portion of the workshop from the effects of mini-talks about immigration and testimonials by immigrants. The question about suggestions and comments prompted a wide variety of responses but one theme emerged from five responses: to increase the duration and/or frequency of the workshop. Participants also expressed strong appreciation for the testimonials by immigrants. Like workshop participants, the follow-up focus group with facilitators agreed on the strong appeal of testimonials by immigrants and on the need to increase the duration of the workshop. LRJC members who worked as facilitators said there was not enough time for the dialogue portion.

For the dialogue in the predominantly African American Catholic congregation, the compound index was 4.57, or 11 respondents. For the dialogue in the predominantly White American Catholic congregations, the compound index was 4.1, or 10 respondents. The high values suggest participation improved feelings of mutual understanding and inclination to collaborate across differences. The small number of participants in each dialogue makes it difficult to verify statistically the reason for the slightly weaker attitudinal change among the predominantly White American congregations, but this might be due to the higher proportion of conservative participants in those congregations.

Consistent with the findings from the questionnaire applied at the congregations, the thematic analysis indicated that the dialogue promoted mutual understanding and collaboration between immigrants and citizens born in the United States. For illustration, see the following exchange between an African American and a Latinx participant in the first dialogue (which was edited for shortness):

African American participant: What is it that makes you feel uncomfortable [among non-Hispanic Americans]? Is it something that people do directly or is it just generalizations?

Latinx participant: Sometimes people give you “the look.” You have an accent.

African American participant: I do those looks too. But they’re not all negative. They’re more inquisitiveness than negativeness [sic]. I would just say that, you know, talk to the people. You would be surprised. People aren’t all negative.

In the above exchange, the African American participant challenged an assumption of the Latinx participant, making her understand that “the look” might just be a benign sign of noticing difference. The African American participant, in turn, learned that immigrants might interpret “the look” in negative ways. In the following exchange from the first dialogue, also edited for shortness, an African American and a Latinx participant connected their experiences with discrimination:

Latinx participant: I worked at a school and I got promoted while I was working there. And the young lady that had my position before I got promoted had a starting salary that was \$5,000 higher than mine. We had the same educational level, same experience. [Was that] because I'm a woman, a Latinx woman?

African American participant: I worked in a doctor's office and there was another woman that worked with the doctor and we both did the same job and we both made the same salary when we came in. But then the doctor gave me a raise, and so he gave her a raise, and every time he gave me a raise, he would give her a thousand dollars more than I had [been paid] because he could not stand for somebody black to make more money than a white person.

In both dialogues, participants often engaged in critical thinking about immigration interactively by scrutinizing, elaborating or corroborating each others' statements. The result of those critical thinking moments was not necessarily a consensus among participants, but each group was able to move from stereotypical statements about immigration to more nuanced understandings in a friendly manner.

Several passages of the dialogues also show participants' inclination to collaborate across differences, especially in response to the dialogue question about actions that participants could take to improve relations between immigrants and citizens born in the United States in their communities. Actually, as a result of the dialogue at the predominantly African American congregation, the LRJC and the congregation cross-marketed community events and a member of the LRJC was invited to give an “immigration 101” talk to the congregation. Participants of the dialogue at the predominantly White American congregations decided to organize a multicultural, multi-parish potluck, which happened a few weeks after their last dialogue session and had 30 participants from four different parishes and several different countries, a rare occurrence in a city as racially segregated as Baltimore.

After the conclusion of the dialogues at Catholic congregations, the researcher asked the faith community leaders that collaborated with the program to write letters of testimonial. The LRJC received two such letters. A faith community leader said she “would highly recommend that other parishes be afforded opportunities to meet and have honest conversations with members of various ethnic, racial and cultural groups to help eradicate racism and unfounded biases that separate us as members of God's family.” She also suggested that “In order to more fully appreciate the diversity of the groups, the location of the [dialogue] meetings should be rotated

between the two groups [host congregation and LRJC].” This rotation format, in fact, was already adopted in the dialogue at the predominantly White American congregations. According to the letter from another faith community leader, the dialogue “allowed for a safe and non-judgmental environment where individuals could share their life stories and experiences they encountered and continue to encounter as immigrants in this country ... Moreover, the [dialogue] helped to develop deeper and long lasting relationships with those who participated where, otherwise, we might not have had the opportunity do so.”

Outcomes for the LRJC

The UMBC and LRJC partnership launched the dialogue program that had been envisioned by the group’s leadership. The LRJC brought its community connections and its mission provided a strong social justice framework lacked by traditional academic research. UMBC brought expertise in grant writing, evaluation methods, and production of digital stories. In addition, UMBC made available a classroom where several LRJC meetings related to the project were held as well as the university’s graphic design services for the production of publications from the program. UMBC also provided students to assist in the execution of the program, who, in turn, gained skills and knowledge. To guarantee the sustainability of the program, the researcher wrote, in consultation with LRJC members, the *LRJC Guide for Faith Community Dialogues on Immigration*, which is available to the public for free (Filomeno 2019b). The guide teaches step-by-step how to implement a three-week dialogue on immigration in faith communities of any denomination. The digital stories produced with dialogue participants are published on the LRJC [YouTube page](#) will also contribute to the sustainability of the program. The presence of UMBC service interns in the LRJC, discussed below, is another positive outcome of the partnership for the group.

Outcomes for Students

Five undergraduate students participated as assistants in the project. Not all students were involved equally in all tasks and all students missed at least one dialogue session, which makes difficult a standard assessment of their learning outcomes. To evaluate what they gained from this experience, the researcher relied on notes from conversations with students during the project and on reflections they shared with the researcher via email.

In an interview for a story of *The Baltimore Sun* on experiential learning that featured the program, one of the students said, “the project helped me to understand what assumptions people have regarding race and the immigration process and how these assumptions shape their outlook on people who are different from themselves” (Scarff, 2019). In a conversation right after one dialogue session, three students said they were surprised by the stories of activism shared by elderly dialogue participants. One student said her generation thinks of themselves as the most

conscious about racial justice and environmental problems but the elderly participants of the dialogue session were already mobilizing around those issues decades ago.

Three students also expressed appreciation for dialogue across differences as a mode of communication and developed active listening skills by observing dialogue sessions. One student said “if I did not agree with [a participant’s] viewpoint. Instead of feeling defensive or upset, I became curious and tried to understand their point of view” (personal communication, Feb 13, 2020). Another student said “The biggest change that is suggested from the study is listening to others. This does not mean just listening to hear words. It means really enveloping yourself in someone else’s perspective” (personal communication, Feb 15, 2020).

One student specifically connected the religious component of the dialogue to their experience with religion: “as someone who has had a rocky relationship with religion throughout my life, I was able to see the positive impact that the church had on some individuals. It helped me to look past my own experience and to appreciate the experience of another. I also saw how the common thread of religion created the ability to have the conversation” (personal communication, Feb 15, 2020).

Since the partnership between UMBC and the LRJC in the dialogue program has worked out, the researcher asked the LRJC if they would like to host UMBC students in service-learning. Their response was positive and, in February 2020, two undergraduate students became service-interns for the LRJC.

Outcomes for the Researcher

The partnership between the LRJC and UMBC has given the researcher opportunities to develop their scholarship and teaching. In terms of scholarly outcomes, the researcher has published an article about the ecumenical workshop on immigration (Filomeno, 2019a), obtained a grant to fund the dialogues in Catholic congregations as a community-based research project, and has started a book project on cosmopolitan dialogues in faith communities. The researcher has also given scholarly talks about the project at UMBC and at a local public library. In terms of teaching outcomes, in spring 2020 the researcher started to teach a service-learning course on global citizenship and had two students placed in the LRJC for service-learning. More broadly, the partnership allowed the researcher to transition from research about communities to research with communities. As scholar who is also a person of faith, the researcher feels the partnership has been personally enriching, allowing them to combine rigorous academic work with service to faith communities.

Implications for Practice to Challenge Anti-Immigrant or Racist Beliefs

At last, the dialogues at Catholic congregations also generated insights about the intersection of religion and immigration that can inform the work of faith leaders and communities interested in pro-immigrant advocacy and, more broadly, partnerships between colleges and faith communities for social justice. Participants of both dialogues connected specific religious beliefs and metaphors to immigration, such as “All are welcome,” “We are all God’s children,” “Jesus was a refugee,” “all people are the body of Christ,” “do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” and “you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.” Interestingly, politically conservative White American participants who had made anti-immigrant statements were quick to bring up pro-immigrant religious beliefs. This finding is consistent with the claim by Bloom, Arikan and Courtemanche (2015) that religious beliefs can generate pro-immigrant attitudes, but only among the less conservative devout. The more conservative devout might understand those religious beliefs but still display anti-immigrant attitudes.

In the dialogue at the predominantly African American congregation, after one participant brought up that religion had also been used to the detriment of immigrants and other minorities, such as when religious beliefs were used to justify slavery or when immigrants of religious minorities were discriminated, other participants agreed that religion can work for both the inclusion and exclusion of immigrants. Indeed, Bloom, Arikan and Courtemanche (2015) found that, across religious denominations, religion as social identity – as opposed to religion as a set of beliefs – has a parochialist effect, increasing opposition to immigrants who are dissimilar to in-group members in religion or ethnicity. By contrast, participants of the dialogue at the predominantly White American congregations saw the Catholic Church only as an institution that contributes to immigrant integration. They mentioned, for instance, the welcoming and vibrancy of Hispanic parishes in the United States and the church as a source of information and charity for immigrants. As social theory would expect, members of dominant social groups can be oblivious of the exclusionary aspects of social institutions. It is, therefore, important that partnerships between universities and faith-based organizations for social justice bring together people of dominant and oppressed social groups. Dialogue across difference in the context of those partnerships can help surface blind spots that some people of faith might have about religion and society.

Furthermore, at times, White American dialogue participants articulated American national identity in a Christian nationalist fashion. For instance, a White American participant mentioned the phrase “in God we trust” as a principle that Americans have used as guidance. In response to the dialogue question about what it means to be an American, two other White American participants connected the founding of the United States to Christianity, saying the founding fathers were believers and that they were guided by the Holy Spirit. Articulations of Christian nationalism were not present in the dialogue at the predominantly African American congregation, whose participants expressed more positive immigration attitudes and reported

more positive attitudinal change in comparison to participants of the predominantly White American congregations. This finding is consistent with the claim by McDaniel, Nooruddin and Shortle (2011) that Christian nationalism is associated with negative immigration attitudes. Leaders of partnerships between universities and faith communities that are geared for social justice in urban settings should be aware that religion is not necessarily a progressive force for social justice. Critical self-reflection informed by evaluation research can help partnership leaders navigate the complicated relationship between religion and social justice.

Discussion for Future Research

The partnership between the LRJC and UMBC materialized in the dialogue program evaluated generated benefits for the LRJC, faith communities, faculty and students from UMBC. The LRJC was able to launch a new program. Community engagement through local volunteerism led a faculty member to develop relationships and understandings that then became the natural platform for community-based scholarship. Students had the opportunity to learn dialogical skills and better understand people's perspectives on immigration and race. Immigrant and United States-born members of faith communities developed feelings of mutual understanding and collaboration across differences. The continuity of the program since mid-2018 and the recent placement of UMBC students as service-interns in the LRJC attest to the mutual benefits of the partnership. As the program engages other faith communities, those outcomes are likely to develop.

The LRJC-UMBC partnership included collaborative learning in the co-creation of the dialogue program. There were several built-in opportunities for program evaluation from its inception. Evaluation procedures, such as the focus group with facilitators of the ecumenical workshop on immigration or the questionnaire for dialogue participants, can be seen as formal procedures for active listening to program stakeholders. Punctuating the timeline of the program intentionally with evaluation moments allows one stage of the program to inform the next. In the case of the LRJC-UMBC partnership, the evaluation of the ecumenical workshop informed the design of the dialogues at Catholic congregations, whose evaluation informed the creation of the *LRJC Guide for Faith Community Dialogues on Immigration*, which will be used in upcoming dialogues.

Faith and scholarship are often understood as alternative approaches to knowing the world. The LRJC-UMBC partnership, however, indicates there is potential for mutually beneficial and synergistic relations between faith-based organizations and secular universities. In the case of immigrant integration, there is an interesting synergy between scholars and faith-based pro-immigrant actors. While the first think critically about immigration using logic and evidence from research, the latter think critically about immigration from the cultural perspective of cosmopolitan religious values such as “welcome the stranger.”

Previous evaluations of research based in faith-communities underscored the inclusion of a spiritual component in such projects. In the LRJC-UMBC dialogue program, meetings with faith leaders would usually start with a prayer, all dialogue sessions started with a prayer, and the dialogue script specifically encouraged participants to think about what their faith traditions say about immigration. However, leaders of partnerships between universities and faith communities should be aware that religion is not necessarily a progressive force for social justice.

As previous evaluations of research based in faith communities suggested, when exploring partnerships with faith communities, academic representatives should see faith leaders as crucial stakeholders. In the LRJC-UMBC experience, the embrace by pastors of the dialogue program as a type of intercultural ministry that can integrate diverse yet segregated parishes were indispensable. Working with faith leaders requires flexibility. Many of them are overworked and their pastoral committees work on a volunteer basis. Faith leaders also tend to be protective of their faith communities and will need to be convinced that the collaboration will not hurt their communities. In the dialogues in Catholic congregations, for instance, the researcher negotiated the participant recruiting method with pastors. While, as a scholar, the researcher would have preferred a random selection of participants, pastors wanted control over who would participate.

The LRJC-UMBC experience also suggests that not only the leaders but also members of faith communities should be involved in the planning and implementation of the collaborative project. Members of faith communities can provide valuable input to project design, increase the trust of the community in the project, and help with participant recruitment and in the actual implementation of project activities. In the case of dialogue programs, the LRJC-UMBC program still faces the challenge of sustaining collaborative action between immigrants and United States-born people after dialogue ends. To go beyond one-time events, such as a multicultural potluck, the *LRJC Guide for Faith Community Dialogues on Immigration* now ends the dialogue with a deliberation on a single issue that participants will collaborate on over an extended period of time. The LRJC also faces the challenge of scaling the program out to other denominations and up beyond the congregation level. Again, the support from faith leaders will be essential to encourage other communities to welcome the program and to recommend it to higher clergy.

Conclusion

Immigrant integration is a key area for partnerships between urban institutions of higher education and faith-based organizations. Immigrants tend to settle in urban areas and faith-based organizations have historically played an important role in immigrant integration. Universities and faith-based organizations are, therefore, bound to encounter each other when working with immigrant communities. Overall, the LRJC-UMBC dialogue program suggests that partnerships between secular public universities and faith-based organizations are not only possible but likely

fruitful for communities, faculty, and students. Like previous evaluations of research based in faith communities, this study affirms the importance of power sharing between universities and faith-based organizations and the value of regular communication between academic and faith-based stakeholders for program assessment and cumulative learning.

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Original Research

Solidarity, Reflection, and Imagination: Exploring Student Formation and Community Engagement from a Faith-Based Anchor Institution Perspective

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Abstract

The Catholic, Jesuit inspired mission of Saint Louis University (SLU) – “the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity” – firmly places serving humanity in line with the institution’s goal for academic excellence. Importantly, service in the tradition of Catholic, Jesuit education is embedded in a broader vocational goal of forming people to build a just and equitable society. It remains to be seen in what manner and to what degree SLU students reflect the qualities such experiences are intended to aid and develop. What follows is an attempt to identify contemporary expressions of Ignatian education, a well-educated solidarity, depth of thought, and depth of imagination, within the students who took part in community engagement activities supported by SLU’s Center for Service and Community Engagement. The present study drew upon assessment data from three distinct undergraduate experiences. Each of the three attributes were evident, either directly or in a latent form appropriate to the nature of the activity and the level of the student participants. While it is not possible to quantify a direct measure, the results indicate that the programs are generally succeeding in promoting an Ignatian inspired formation for its students.

Keywords: community-based learning, Jesuit higher education, faith-based institutions, vocation, place-based community engagement

Saint Louis University (SLU) is one of 27 institutions that make up the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) in the United States and part of the network of approximately 189 Jesuit institutions of higher education around the world. Jesuit higher education is guided by a spirituality that seeks justice. Inspired by the tenets of Catholic social teaching and its intellectual and social justice traditions, a Jesuit education places great emphasis on forming people for others. Students are “exploring the distinctive and constructive ways in which their knowledge and talents will best serve society” (Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities, n.d.). As such, the Catholic, Jesuit inspired mission of Saint Louis University, “the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God and for the service of humanity,” firmly places serving humanity in line with the institution’s goal for academic excellence.

Importantly, service in the tradition of Catholic, Jesuit education is embedded in a broader vocational goal of forming people to build a just and equitable society. Additionally, a common feature amongst many of the United States based colleges and universities is that they are situated in urban environments. The main campus of SLU is located in midtown Saint Louis at a nexus of the city’s cultural and social life. This reality both challenges and invites SLU to live its mission in real time as both neighbor and resource for the immediate community. This opportunity for a place-based approach to education and engagement is consistent with an anchor institution mission. According to Sladek (2017), “The stronger and more broadly held anchor mission goals become within institutions, the more opportunities will be identified to help reduce disparities in home communities, and build meaningful partnerships with outside groups to advance those goals” (p. 25). While this focus has been central to the Society of Jesus since the beginning of the Order (Bergman, 2011), the Jesuits revisited their mission in 1975 and unequivocally stated, “The mission of the Society of Jesus today is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement” (“GC 32”, 2009). Interestingly, this declaration was preceded some two years by remarks of the Superior General of the worldwide religious order, Father Pedro Arrupe, S. J., on the nature of the Jesuit educational enterprise. In 1973, he argued that seeking justice must be the cornerstone of Jesuit schooling and in the process coined a phrase that has served as one of the principle standards for Ignatian identity in Jesuit education ever since. “Today our prime educational objective,” he stated, “must be to form men-and-women-for-others; men and women who will live not for themselves but for God and his Christ” (Arrupe, 2004, p. 173). To stress this point, he continued, “men and women completely convinced that love of God which does not issue in justice for others is a farce” (p. 173).

Arrupe’s successor, Fr. Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J. further articulated this emphasis on the relationship between faith and justice. Throughout his years as Superior General, he continued to develop a contemporary understanding of this commitment to education in the Ignatian tradition.

In 2000, speaking to the American Jesuit Colleges and Universities, Kolvenbach asked his audience to consider the qualities of a graduate of a Jesuit university (2008). He reflected, “The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become” (p. 155). He suggested the notion of a “well-educated solidarity” (p. 155) as a way to encapsulate the Ignatian character of educating the whole person. Such a graduate would possess an “educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world” (p. 155). In order to do so, he made an assertion that, like men-and-women-for-others, has become an icon of education in the Ignatian tradition:

Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering and engage it constructively. They should learn to perceive, think, judge, choose and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed. (Kolvenbach, 2008, p. 155)

Building upon the work of his predecessors, Fr. Adolfo Nicolás, S.J. continued to develop a contemporary understanding and application of Ignatian formation in higher education (Nicolás 2009, 2010). Once again, considering the current cultural climate, Nicolás spoke of a “globalization of superficiality” (2009, p. 2) as he noted some of the negative attributes of the information age. Evermore “connected,” equipped with continuous, instant access to nearly unlimited sources of data, our students are at increasing risk of superficial relationships as well as underdeveloped comprehension and shallow insight. “Shallow, self-absorbed perceptions of reality make it almost impossible to feel compassion for the suffering of others; and a contentment with the satisfaction of immediate desires or the laziness to engage competing claims on one’s deepest loyalty results in the inability to commit one’s life to what is truly worthwhile” (p. 3). He reflected that Jesuit higher education is challenged to “promote in creative new ways the depth of thought and imagination that are distinguishing marks of Ignatian tradition” (p. 3). As with the others, he explained that such an education, “encompasses and integrates intellectual rigor with reflection on the experience of reality together with the creative imagination to work toward constructing a more humane, just, sustainable, and faith-filled world” (p. 5). The Jesuits clearly articulate that to really be people for and with others, indeed, to be educated within the Ignatian tradition, community engagement is a constitutive element. Students’ community engagement efforts do not simply begin when their schoolwork is done. This approach to education is not only consistent, but meant to be in dialogue, with the scholarship of the broader academic community. “The Jesuit tradition,” Nicolás stated, “has always combined a healthy appreciation for human reason, thought, and culture, on the one hand, and a profound commitment to faith, the Gospel, the Church, on the other” (Nicolás 2010, p. 10). According to Mitchell (2008), critical service-learning encourages students to “see themselves as agents of social change, and use the experience of service to address and respond to injustice in communities” (p. 51). Thus, scholarship such as critical service-learning (e.g., Mitchell, 2008;

Stoeker, 2016), which seeks social justice and embraces a more political nature of community engagement informs and extends the Jesuit position. Similarly, the charge to connect learning with Nicolás' experience of reality roots Jesuit education in the community and supports the anchor mission, "to accept responsibility for the collective well-being" (Gomez, et al., 2019, p. 92). University resources along with faculty, staff, and students working with community partners, can fuel positive growth and development in local communities.

There is a danger that community engagement, if not grounded in proper relationships with community members, risks bolstering hierarchical power structures (i.e., "power over" others, Kreisberg, 1992) and relational asymmetries (e.g., more skilled or competent, more financially stable, more social capital versus less...). However well intended, this can inadvertently drive a deeper wedge between self and other, the "server" and the "served," and create an "us-versus-them" mentality (Sokol, Hammond, Kuebli, & Sweetman, 2015). Ultimately, such encounters do not represent what Nicolás referred to as a "profound engagement with the real," (2009, p. 4) nor do they lead to Kolvenbach's well-educated solidarity.

Within this context of the evolving identity of education in the Ignatian tradition, SLU endeavors to create learning environments that equip students to discern and develop their sense of calling and leadership in light of their faith commitments and their academic and professional pursuits. Service at SLU is inextricably linked with educating men and women about the importance of building God's kingdom by seeking greater justice in the world (Sokol, Sweetman, Wassel, Franco, Huffman, 2020). Service is not an arbitrary addition to academics, Jesuit schooling and the university experience. As Kolvenbach (2008) explained, "when faculty do take up interdisciplinary dialogue with socially-engaged research in partnership with social ministries, they are exemplifying and modeling knowledge which is service" (p. 158). The calling to serve is embedded in the essential work of the University, in teaching students to discover their vocation and a deeper sense of purpose, as well as the anchor mission of urban, Jesuit institutions. This is evident in the development of a new undergraduate core curriculum that will go into effect in the fall of 2022 (Saint Louis University, 2020b). The Center for Service and Community Engagement (CSCE) staff and other community-engaged scholars on campus helped to ensure that the Core would exhibit qualities of Ignatian tradition. This is especially clear in the *Cura Personalis* sequence and the Reflection-in-Action attribute. *Cura Personalis*, a Latin phrase for "care of the whole person," is the name of a three-requirement sequence in the new Core focused on students' holistic development. The sequence asks students to "explore fundamental questions of identity, history, and place," and reflect on how being situated in their particular communities, such as urban, midtown St. Louis, impacts and becomes part of who they are (Saint Louis University, 2020b, p. 6). Students will be guided in structured processes of vocational reflection and discernment to foster justice in their personal and professional lives and then to turn their focus outward to their communities to address "how their skills, competencies, and knowledge transfer to professional, personal, and/or civic vocation(s)" (p. 7). The Core's Reflection-in-

Action component is an experiential component via which students engage in meaningful learning opportunities beyond the walls of the University and reflect on how their community engagement enhances their understanding of acting, in the Jesuit tradition, “with-and-for-others” (p.11).

SLU’s annual Survey on Student Service consistently shows that nearly 80% of enrolled students engage in volunteerism during their time at SLU, as compared to the national average of 26% for college students (Corporation for National and Community Service, 2015). As an institution, SLU has received many community engagement accolades, including several Presidential Honor Roll recognitions by the Corporation for National and Community Service, a 2015 Community Engagement Classification by the Carnegie Foundation, and a Number 1 ranking for community service by the *Princeton Review* (Franek, Soto, Koch, & Aliperti, 2018).

Yet, with all of these efforts and intentions, it remains to be seen in what manner and to what degree SLU students reflect the qualities such experiences are intended to aid and develop. What follows is an attempt to identify the qualities of Ignatian education that are envisioned by the Society of Jesus within the students who took part in community engagement activities in the urban context of St. Louis supported by SLU’s Center for Service and Community Engagement.

Method

The CSCE engages in ongoing, programmatic assessment of all of its work. The present study draws together assessment data from three distinct undergraduate experiences, developed and supported by the CSCE: the New Student Day of Service, the Vocational Inquiry Through Advocacy and Service Program (VITAS), and Claver House. These data do not represent a unified longitudinal study, as the individual students vary from program to program. Nonetheless, the conclusions we draw form a uniform narrative of the impact of community service and its value in promoting students' vocational choices. Such a programmatic analysis is helpful for understanding how CSCE-supported activities contribute to Ignatian formation and vocation development and what might be done to enhance or improve outcomes at the program, center, and university levels.

Drawing upon the remarks of Frs. Kolvenbach and Nicolás, three primary questions guided the study:

1. How did students exhibit qualities indicative of formation consistent with a “well educated solidarity?”
2. How did student reflections reveal qualities that suggest a depth of thought?
3. How did student reflections and actions reveal a depth of imagination?

Data collected from the three programs varied in nature. The New Student Day of Service program provided 621 student responses to a survey designed to assess questions of purpose and openness to diversity. VITAS supplied data from a pre/post-test style survey of 106 students. Claver House furnished four project posters authored by seven students as well as observations from faculty and staff advisors. The results of each of the data sources were then analyzed for evidence or attributes of the research questions (Patton, 1997).

Historical Context of CSCE

In the fall of 2000, the Lilly Endowment invited SLU to submit a proposal for their Programs for the Theological Exploration of Vocation. This invitation gave rise to SLU's VOICES Project and a model for students, faculty, and staff to integrate their scholarly and professional pursuits with an explicit focus on personal purpose and meaning-making. Faculty developed new reflection modules and service-learning courses, student leaders participated in retreats, and dozens of speakers talked about "wisdom in the professions" and living lives committed to service and justice.

In 2009, SLU launched the Center for Service and Community Engagement, intended to carry forward the mantle of the VOICES Project by bringing together students, faculty, staff, and community partners through service, community-based learning, and research. VOICES strengthened partnerships with key institutions in the city, including Saint Louis Public Schools and the Archdiocese of Saint Louis. The CSCE has continued these partnerships and formed new ones. The CSCE scaffolds programs to encourage personal and social responsibility by transforming student volunteers into effective servant leaders and advocates of social justice. The CSCE's goals are threefold: (1) Serve by connecting students, faculty, staff, and alumni to volunteer opportunities in the community, both locally and globally; (2) Learn by promoting community-based scholarship through campus-wide service-learning efforts and university-community research partnerships; and (3) Engage by encouraging personal and social responsibility in SLU volunteers and challenging them to become effective servant leaders and advocates of social justice.

The New Student Day of Service

To recognize SLU's long-standing commitment to the community and to better introduce new, incoming undergraduates to the university's culture of service, a "New Student Day of Service" program was launched as part of fall welcome activities during SLU's bicentennial year of 2018. In the short time since its inception, the CSCE has used the opportunity of this new service tradition to reinforce messaging about the mission-centered significance of using one's education to promote the common good.

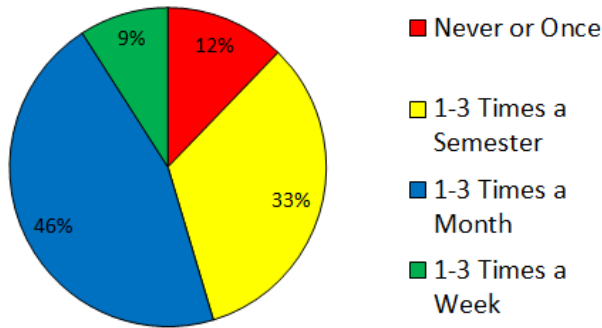
Method

In 2019, the 1,800 new students who were participating in the service day's activities were asked to complete an assessment of their experience and attitudes and thoughts about being challenged by the world's complex social issues and diversity. About one-third of the students ($n=621$) finished the questionnaire that was emailed to them the day after the New Student Day of Service experience. 70% of the respondents were women and identified as white; almost all were traditional first-year, residential students. The undergraduate population at Saint Louis University is 66% white and 60% female (Saint Louis University, 2020a). Based on past assessments administered by the CSCE, the demographics of the survey respondents are not unusual.

The principal metrics used in the questionnaire were Ernest Pascarella and colleagues' *Openness to Diversity and Challenge Scale* (1996; Whitt et al., 2001) and Kendall Cotton Bronk and colleagues' *Claremont Purpose Scale* (Bronk, Riches, & Mangan, 2018). The first scale is an 8-item measure that gauges college students' attitudes toward challenging ideas and new people on a standard 5-point Likert scale. For the most part, the items assess students' openness to connecting with others, especially those who are different from them (e.g., "I enjoy having discussions with people whose ideas and values are different from my own"). Higher scores indicate a sense of connectedness to others and an attitude of being "at home" among differences, a "one world" mindset, so to speak. The second scale is a 12-item measure, again on a 5-point Likert scale, designed for use with later adolescents and emerging adults, and assesses three inter-related dimensions of both short- and long-term purpose: 1) goal-directedness (e.g., "How hard are you working to make your long-term aims a reality?"); 2) personal meaningfulness (e.g., "How well do you understand what gives your life meaning?"); and 3) a beyond-the-self orientation (e.g., "How important is it for you to make the world a better place in some way?"). Higher scores, as Bronk et al. have said, suggest a "long-term, forward-looking intention to accomplish aims that are meaningful to the self and of consequence to the broader world" (Bronk et al., 2018, p. 2). Pascarella's measure is frequently used in higher education settings and was developed by student affairs professionals. Bronk's scale was also developed for use with adolescents and emerging adults and, given the questions emphasis on community and service, was a reasonable fit for the nature of the service day program.

The student participants were also asked to report on their community service experiences that they completed during the 2018-2019 academic year before entering SLU. They rated the frequency of their service (see Figure 1) as either none or just one experience ($n=74$), 1-3 experiences per semester ($n=200$), 1-3 experiences per month ($n=275$), or 1-3 experiences per week ($n=55$). We explored students' responses with one main question in mind: Does amount of service make a difference? That is, does amount of community service impact incoming college students' sense of purpose and openness to being challenged in diverse contexts?

Figure 1. Community Service Experiences for Incoming SLU Students ($n=621$)



Data analysis

First, the researchers analyzed the impact of students' frequency of service on their attitudes of *Openness to Diversity and Challenge* and found a significant effect. Because of the positive, moderate correlation between the two primary dependent variables, the researchers conducted individual One-Way ANOVA's, instead of MANOVAs which are best conducted when dependent variables are highly negatively correlated or when they are strongly correlated, around or higher than 0.60. In order to control for the increase in Type I error rate with multiple ANOVAs, Bonferroni correction was employed.

In Post-Hoc, follow-up T-tests, the difference between engaging never or once in service and more frequent, consistent service (of 1-3 times per month or week) on students *Openness* was significant (see Figure 2). That is, more consistent, frequent service experiences were associated with higher self-reported levels of openness and connectedness to others different from oneself.

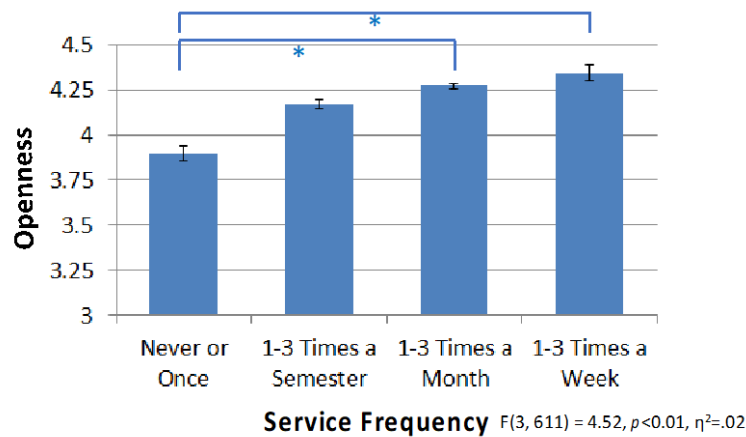


Figure 2. Relationship between Amount of Service and Attitudes of Openness to Challenge

Second, the researchers analyzed the impact of service frequency on students' self-reported *Purpose in Life* scores. Similar to *Openness*, the researchers found an overall significant difference in service frequency on students' *Purpose* (see Figure 3). In Post-Hoc, follow-up T-tests, a similar pattern emerged for the impact of service frequency on *Openness*, in that more consistent, frequent service was associated with higher levels of *Purpose*.

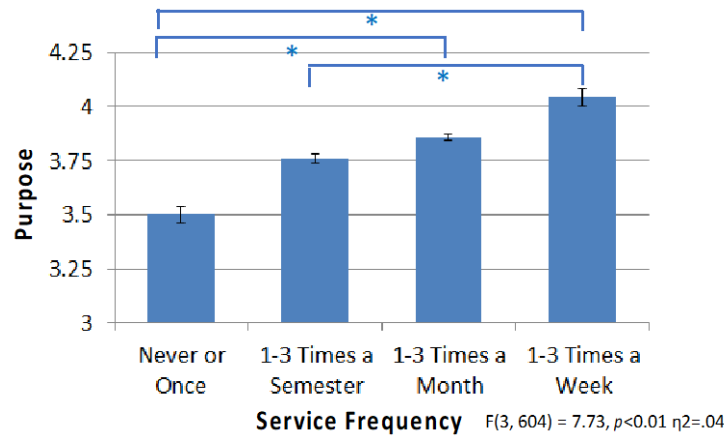


Figure 3. Relationship between Amount of Service and Sense of Purpose

Finally, the researchers also found students' scores on the *Purpose* and *Openness* scales were positively, significantly correlated, as shown in the following correlation matrix (Table 1).

Table 1. Correlations between *Purpose* and *Openness to Challenge* scales

	Openness	Purpose in Life	Goal Directness	Personal Meaningfulness	Beyond-the-Self Orientation
Openness	1.00				
Purpose in Life	0.38**	1.00			
Goal Directness	0.31**	0.82**	1.00		
Personal Meaningfulness	0.17**	0.83**	0.53**	1.00	
Beyond-the-Self Orientation	0.47**	0.67**	0.42**	0.28**	1.00

n=621; *p<0.05; **p<0.01

Overall, then, we surmised that more frequent, consistent service experiences positively impacted college students' sense of purpose and openness to challenge and diversity. Community engagement experiences become opportunities for intersection and connection with others who support students' meaning-making, personal growth, and spiritual formation, while at

the same time contributing to a greater collective sense of social responsibility and purpose (Laboe & Nass, 2012; Sokol, Donnelly, Vilbig, & Monsky, 2017). Creating experiences like the New Student Day of Service provide worthwhile and challenging opportunities for students to enrich their sense of purpose, and they provide an important touchstone for vocational discernment. Other SLU-supported service activities promote similar opportunities for growth, while at the same time, enhance important urban university-community partnerships.

The VITAS Program

Through mentoring and reflection, the Vocational Inquiry Through Advocacy and Service (VITAS) Program provides students who are engaging in community service and social justice advocacy a chance to explore how that work will influence their lives after graduation. The program was launched during the 2016-17 academic year with seed funding from the Lilly Endowment and NetVUE (Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education). VITAS serves as both a professional development opportunity for faculty and staff mentors, as well as a personal development opportunity for students.

Participants

In the fall semester, faculty and staff who were selected as mentors engaged in a series of sessions to prepare them to work with students on the topic of vocational discernment. This included reading and discussing two primary source materials: *The Purposeful Graduate: Why Colleges Must Talk to Students about Vocation (2015)* by Tim Clydesdale and *Designing Your Life: How to Build a Well-Lived, Joyful Life (2017)* by Bill Burnett and Dave Evans. Mentors represented diverse areas of campus. In the spring semester, students who were accepted into the program were divided into small groups of four to six. Each group met periodically throughout the semester with their assigned mentor. These small-group sessions consisted of activities designed to provide students a chance to reflect on and discuss the concept of vocation, and to explore their purpose and calling in life. At the conclusion of the program, each student wrote an essay on their experience.

Method

Participants in the first cohort ($n=63$) were administered a pre-test survey to measure, among other items, how often they talk to peers and SLU advisors about vocation, how often they seek out resources about vocation, and how much time they spend reflecting on their potential vocation(s). The same participants were then administered a post-test survey measuring the same items, as well as levels of agreement on how beneficial the program was, how effectively they were able to connect their community service and/or social action activities to vocational discernment, and levels of anxiety about their future. Both surveys utilized a 5-point Likert scale model to gauge frequency of or level of agreement with the above behaviors.

Participants in the second cohort ($n=43$) completed a written reflection at the conclusion of the experience, which addressed 4 questions:

1. What does vocation mean to you?
2. How did VITAS affect your vocational discernment process?
3. What did you learn about yourself through VITAS?
4. As of right now, what do you see as your vocation(s) after graduation?

Faculty and staff mentors then read the reflections essays, with key themes emerging through codification as well as through direct observations made by the same mentors while leading the small group reflection sessions.

Data analysis

During the first cohort, 63 student participants were administered a pre and post-survey. Results included: (1) 91% of students said the VITAS program was beneficial for their vocational discernment; (2) 78% reported feeling less anxiety about their future as a result of the small-group sessions; (3) 88% were able to effectively connect their community service and/or social action activities to their vocational discernment; and (4) In the post-test, students reported a significant increase in how often they talk to peers and SLU advisors about vocation, how often they seek out resources about vocation, and how much time they spend reflection on their vocation, compared with pre-test scores.

During the second cohort, 43 students submitted a reflection essay at the end of the experience. Key themes from the essays (by question) included:

1. What Does Vocation Mean to You?
 - a. Students were asked this question before the program started as part of the application process, as well as on their final reflection essay.
 - b. Pre-program definitions were largely split into either a focus on Career or Calling.
 - c. Post-program definitions reflected a stronger vocational understanding of career and calling not being mutually exclusive, but cohesive. See Figure 4.

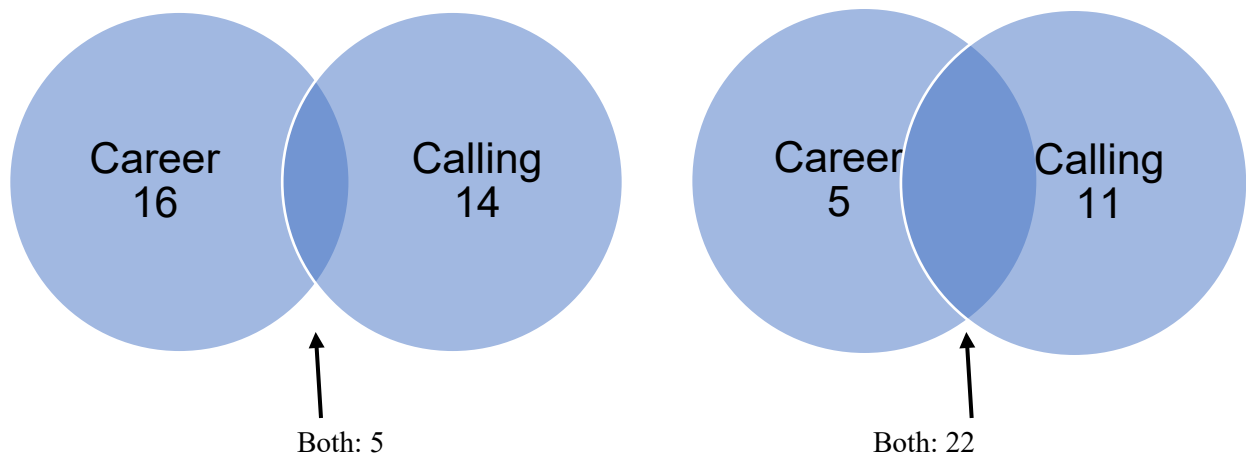


Figure 4. Students' understanding of vocation, pre and post VITAS Program.

This was illustrated in a student's reflection:

Before completing the VITAS program, I believed the meanings of vocation and occupation to be the same. I now realize that vocation means so much more than the career path or job that I have. I now view my vocation as the intersection between my passions/interests, the ways in which I can tangibly make a difference and where the world needs me the most.

2. How Did VITAS Affect Your Vocational Discernment Process?

- a. The program provided a rare opportunity to reflect on how current activities and experiences may be shaping vocation.
- b. VITAS eased anxieties associated with the future. Students were able to come to peace with their academic majors and career decisions. They benefited from improved self-confidence.
- c. It was a chance to connect with other students who share same anxieties and concerns, listen to their stories and go from feeling a sense of competition to vulnerability.
- d. Vocation is not a finality; it is ever evolving. Students recognized that it was okay not to know exactly what they want to do after graduation, and they understand it may change on a regular basis

One student shared:

What VITAS clarified for me was not the surface level, what-job-am-I-going-to-have aspect of vocation – this has actually become a little less certain. Rather, what became

clearer were the underlying realities, the inner movements of the heart and the patterns of thought accompanying my prayer and action as I discern.

3. What Did You Learn About Yourself Through VITAS?
 - a. Practicality vs. Imagination: It is okay to make decisions with your heart too, not just your head.
 - b. Students discovered their true passions and strengths. They understood what was energy-giving, and they rediscovered their childhood interests.
 - c. They learned a different definition of success: It isn't just about money or job prestige, but how you engage with the community around you. Careers are not the only thing that will define who they are (i.e., the concept of multiple vocations).

From a student:

I learned that it is okay to be vulnerable, and it isn't a sign of weakness. It's okay to not have my entire life planned out. Through VITAS, I feel that I have rediscovered some of the things in life that make me happy and give me joy, and how I can incorporate those into my everyday life, as well as into potential careers.

4. As of Right Now, What Do You See as Your Vocation(s) After Graduation?
 - a. A majority reported a reaffirmation of future plans/career/life goals.
 - b. Four students reported an intent to change a major or career path.
 - c. Thirteen students intended to engage in a year of service post-graduation.

A student reflected on their interest in pursuing a new experience:

Through our intentional discussions as a group and with guidance from my mentor, I have felt more and more confident in my decision to not take the GRE at this time and delay graduate school to pursue a year or more of service. Specifically, I have grown incredibly interested in pursuing the Peace Corps after graduation.

Based on the data above, it was clear that the VITAS program had a significant impact on the students who participated. Through sharing thoughts and experiences in a small group setting, led by a trained faculty or staff mentor, students were less anxious about the future, were able to engage in reflective conversations that they normally would not have, and were able to expand their concept of vocation beyond just a career.

Claver House Community in St. Louis

Responding to Nicolás' globalization of superficiality and tenants of critical service-learning, SLU has invested in place-based community initiatives that deepen relationships with partners, build a sense of the common good and shared humanity, and challenge the structural causes of injustice. This response is clearly evident in the monthly meetings of the Ville Collaborative, a grassroots organization that gathers neighbors as well as non-profit, faith-based, and local governmental organizations to share information and seek ways to work cooperatively in order to support and empower the neighborhood. The Ville neighborhood is in North St. Louis, about 1.5 miles north of SLU's main campus, and, for nearly 100 years, it had been a center of African American culture, and home to many Black professionals, businesses, and entertainers (4th Ville, n.d.). While once a thriving community, the Ville is now one of the more distressed areas of St. Louis. Nevertheless, it contains a variety of strong organizations working to stabilize and revitalize the community. SLU has been heavily involved in service activities in the Ville for many years (Belt & Bollock, 2020; Sweetman & Sokol, 2016). These activities have been built from many of the existing strengths of the neighborhood, particularly Claver House, a SLU-supported community and active member of the Ville Collaborative.

Claver House is an intentional faith community centrally located in the Ville, just around the corner from St. Matthew the Apostle Catholic Church. It was established in 2001 to be a place of hospitality and prayer. While the character of its mission has varied over the years to reflect contemporary expressions, it remains grounded within the Ignatian notion of experience-reflection-action (Korth, 2008). Claver House provides a place-based introduction to the Ville: a point of introduction to the residents, a place of reflection on the realities they face and our common humanity. Thus, it is uniquely situated as a setting that promotes relationships and active engagement. The house makes available a residential opportunity for individuals to live in community and to be immersed in solidarity with our neighbors. Over the years, this community has been home to a wide variety of individuals from many walks of life.

Extending beyond the residential community, Claver House Commons brings together several initiatives that seek to enable individuals and organizations to engage with the neighborhood and work together to respond to the challenges facing its residents. Science Saturdays, Project Read and Feed, and Claver House Commons STEAM Summer Camp are three such programs. On any given Saturday and all through July, children learn about nutrition and biology in the garden, explore circuitry and coding in the electronics and robotics class, discover aerodynamics and piloting skills in the flight simulation lab, learn about DaVinci and create their own murals and mosaics, read in the library, and develop and act out their very own improv scenes, and many others. Activities are limited only by the interests and abilities of the children who participate and the volunteers who organize and offer them. And no one goes home hungry. With support

from the greater community, Claver House Commons is able to provide breakfast and lunch for the children. Oftentimes, they are able to offer care packages for families.

Method

In 2018-19 Claver House hosted a number of SLU students, both as residents and volunteers for Claver House Commons Saturday morning activities. Members of the research team supported the student activities as advisors and collaborative volunteers. At the conclusion of the year, the students were invited to share their insights and experiences at the North Saint Louis Symposium via poster presentations. Four of these posters, broadly summarized in the excerpts below, were analyzed to evaluate how these students might reflect the characteristics of Ignatian formation and explore the challenges posed by the Jesuit leadership.

Claver House Community (Hennessy, C. & Belt, S., 2019)

Claver House provides an immersive environment for its residents to grow in relationship with one another and the community they serve. SLU students volunteer every Saturday and serve as mentors to youth in the Ville. Serving as youth mentors provides the opportunity to develop as competent and sensitive leaders. Through this collaboration, SLU students and faculty learn in action what it means to walk with others and to be for others, sharing in all the successes and obstacles that arise along the process.

Flat Stanley (Klco, N. & Belt, S., 2019)

To learn about ourselves, reach out globally, promote writing skills, and form relationships, the youth at Claver House have initiated the Flat Stanley Project with St. Martin De Porres School in Belize. With a liaison in both locations, the youth are finding their voice and diving into the opportunity to learn about a new culture and the individuals who live there.

Improv (Allen, K., DeLorimier, J. & Belt, S., 2019)

Children of all ages are invited and encouraged to creatively express themselves through improv. They are challenged to think out of the box and respond, react, and contribute in creative and thoughtful ways throughout these activities. Through listening, laughing, and performing together, the children hone their public speaking abilities and build confidence in themselves.

Robotic Operations Billiken Outreach (R.O.B.O.) (Muhammad, J., Pidatala, S., Shekar, A. & Belt, S., 2019)

The National Society of Black Engineers (NSBE) and Society of Women Engineers (SWE) at Saint Louis University established a robotics program in partnership with Claver House Commons' "Science Saturdays." R.O.B.O. is conducted at Claver House.

Representatives from NSBE and SWE who serve as positive role-models with diverse backgrounds would help increase minority contribution in STEM fields. The program seeks to encourage the students' passion for science and build upon their desire to learn.

Data Analysis

While it was more apparent in some, each poster revealed a quality of engagement with the children that appeared to be appropriately suited to the activities that were presented. The Improv activity sought to, "allow children to explore different emotions through creative and artistic expression in hopes of promoting and cultivating emotional intelligence, recognition, and expression on all fronts." The students involved in the robotics program recognized that there was room to foster deeper connections with the children by having them help, "developing future experiments." The Flat Stanley poster presented what the project hoped for the children involved: "Through this activity, relationships will continue to be built and discovery will flourish in the hearts and minds of our Ville youth."

Helping the children grow in their own sense of agency was another quality that emerged from each of the presentations. The community poster summarized this effort in terms of how the space aspired to be open to the children: "Claver House Commons strives to create a community where children in the Ville neighborhood can feel they belong." The Flat Stanley poster echoed this sentiment in terms of outcomes to which the project aspired: "Our youth have a place in this world and by asserting their communication skills they will be able to confidently claim it." Improv spoke of helping children "build confidence" and gain "emotional maturity", and R.O.B.O sought to foster a "diverse and supportive environment in creative thought." Returning to the Claver House Community poster, it appeared to gather these sentiments under the very purpose of the house itself: "We hope that these activities aid to stimulate a curiosity and enthusiasm that a child is able to follow by their own volition."

It is not known to what degree the different groups collaborated or discussed their individual poster presentations. However, it was rather clear that the students were operating along similar lines and shared a common sense of purpose. This quality revealed a sense of community to which the programs aspired. These students were invited to engage in the reality of the Ville neighborhood, and enter into relationships with children who live there. They were challenged to share their unique and varied passions. Each excerpt revealed a remarkable degree of agency with which the SLU students met this challenge. In each case, the focus remained squarely upon the relationships that the community engagement activities facilitated. One poster expressed this aspect of the experience in this way:

As St. Louis city has historically been separated by negative and divisive perceptions and policies, it is easy for a St. Louisan to stay in one's own separate world. Claver House

hopes to breach some of these divides by creating a space where these trends of separation are broken and the unusual can become more unremarkable.

While the posters revealed a quality of thought and imagination that was consistent with Fr. Nicolás' invitation, the encounters with the public during the symposium provided another glimpse of the depth to which the students were moved by their experiences. They spoke of their relationships with the children they had come to know. The development was likewise evident to the coordinators throughout the Saturday morning experiences. The students entered into the experience according to their own unique personalities and passions. Some were relatively shy, and it took them more time to begin to connect with the children. Not all of the children gravitated to the activities, which caused additional challenges and, at times, frustration. Not all of the projects proceeded as they were conceived, and plans had to be changed along the way. Students often went home exhausted but also inspired.

It is not easy for university students to find the time necessary to plan how they might go about sharing their unique talents and passions. Nor is it easy to compel them to give up Saturday mornings. Many of the students who completed these projects were already strongly motivated to engage in such activities. It remains to be seen how such an experience can be expanded to reach a greater number of university students. However, these programs are being developed to respond to newly established core curriculum requirements and preliminary efforts are encouraging. It will be interesting to follow these programs as they become more explicitly embedded in academic programs, particularly those that do not have direct connections to community engagement or social justice concepts.

Discussion

1. How did students exhibit qualities indicative of formation consistent with a “well educated solidarity?”

The New Student Day of Service revealed a clear association between community engagement and both openness and sense of purpose. Similarly, the VITAS program reported that 88% of the students effectively connected community service or social activities to their vocational discernment. The Claver House posters consistently revealed a sense of connection to the children, an investment in their success and well-being. It appeared to the researchers that this attribute was evident in each of the three programs in ways that were appropriate to their specific goals.

2. How did student reflections reveal qualities that suggest a depth of thought?

The New Student Day of Service correlations suggested a maturing depth of thought as participants considered their realities and advanced in their openness and sense of purpose. From the Diversity scale, 90% of students responded that they somewhat agree or strongly agree to the statement “I enjoy experiences that are intellectually challenging” Also, the service day was one of the highest ranked orientation activities and appeared to resonate with students’ reasons for attending SLU in the first place.

In the VITAS program, this quality was clearly evident from the survey results as well as the qualitative themes and selected participant quotes. All of the results pointed to a successful effort to help students engage in thoughtful reflection. As one participant remarked, “what became clearer were the underlying realities, the inner movements of the heart and the patterns of thought accompanying my prayer and action as I discern.” Similarly, the reports prepared by the students at Claver House revealed a quality of consideration that pointed to a developing depth of thought.

3. How did student reflections and actions reveal a depth of imagination?

The nature of the data presented from the New Student Day of Service survey did not provide a ready avenue for insight into depth of imagination. However, the results did suggest a favorable disposition to this quality. In particular, responses to two questions seemed to indicate that the students possessed a positive inclination toward a deepening imagination. Included in the Openness to Diversity and Challenge Scale, “The experiences I enjoy most are those that make me think about things from a different perspective” 80% of students responding to the survey agreed or strongly agreed. Moreover, from the Claremont Purpose scale, students were asked, “How well do you understand what gives your life meaning?” 45.2% of the student respondents indicated that they understand quite well or extremely well, suggesting room for development in this area.

The VITAS program exhibited a depth of imagination in a couple of instances. The finding that 88% of the students were able to effectively connect their community service or social action activities suggests the sort of outcome that is made possible through the “real creativity” (Nicolás, 2010, p. 4) which is born of a depth of imagination. Furthermore, the themes that emerged as participants reflected on what they learned all point to this quality: (1) Practicality vs. Imagination: It is okay to make decisions with your heart too, not just your head; (2) Students discovered their true passions and strengths. They understood what was energy-giving, and they rediscovered their childhood interests; and (3) They learned a different definition of success: It isn’t just about money or job prestige, but how you engage with the community around you. Careers are not the only thing that will define who they are (i.e., the concept of multiple vocations).

As one participant reflected:

What VITAS clarified for me was not the surface level, what-job-am-I-going-to-have aspect of vocation – this has actually become a little less certain. Rather, what became clearer were the underlying realities, the inner movements of the heart and the patterns of thought accompanying my prayer and action as I discern.

Somewhat surprising to the researchers was the degree to which depth of imagination was evident in VITAS and Claver House and foreshadowed in the New Student Day of Service. It was assumed that this would be the more elusive trait. This result may serve as further motivation for those who develop such programs to provide ample opportunity and encouragement for students to engage on their own terms and to bring their unique gifts to bear. Finally, as noted above, the activities represented by the posters provide a compelling example of the sort of creativity that Fr. Nicolás described when speaking of depth of thought and imagination. The students reflected on the needs of the children and considered how they might bring their own talents and passions to the service of those needs.

Limitations

The New Student Day of Service survey response rate (33%) coupled with the pre-college service experience, suggest that those who responded to the survey were strongly predisposed to service. This can also be inferred from the student population who participated in VITAS and at Claver House. While SLU can rightly be inspired by these success stories, it presents a limitation to the study. It is likely that the students here represented a strongly favorable segment of the overall student population as they related to the questions posed by this study. It was unclear the degree to which this identity was present or developing in the general student population. A more universal response would provide a clearer understanding of how the university is doing along the lines of Ignatian formation. Still, the results serve to validate the approaches to these questions. The poster presentations offered students an opportunity to describe their experience in their own terms. They were simply asked to present their project to the broader community. The nature of the posters reflected individual personalities and forms of expression and communication. In this way, they offered an insight into the ways the students engaged the children with whom they worked. Again, this project may wish to develop the parameters of the presentation while striving to maintain as much autonomy as possible.

Another limitation of the study was that it did not address the identity and development of the faculty and staff. As Fr. Nicolás stated, “Jesuit education should change us,” as well (2010, p. 5). Additional research that includes the faculty and staff involved in Jesuit education would provide valuable insight into the progress of identity and formation in the Ignatian tradition.

Conclusion

This study explored three different community engagement activities sponsored by SLU's Center for Service and Community Engagement and attempted to identify qualities of Ignatian education within the participants. Each of the three attributes that framed the research questions were evident, either directly or in a latent form appropriate to the nature of the activity and the level of the student participants. While it is not possible to quantify a direct measure, the results indicate that the programs are generally succeeding in promoting an Ignatian inspired formation for its students. The ultimate question, who the students become, is an open question that exists beyond the scope of this project. Indeed, it is a question worthy of future consideration.

Jesuit education is grounded upon the development of a spirituality informed worldview that stresses God's love and desire for justice in the world. Returning to remarks of Fr. Nicolás, "In Jesuit education, the depth of learning and imagination encompasses and integrates intellectual rigor with reflection on the experience of reality together with the creative imagination to work toward constructing a more humane, just, sustainable, and faith-filled world." (Nicolás, 2010, p. 5). Such an approach naturally stands to enhance community engagement efforts of the academic institution. The examples considered in this article represent only a few of the ways that SLU and other Catholic, Jesuit institutions value and prioritize the intersection of academic excellence and community engagement from a faith-based position. They also represent how Jesuit higher education promotes and informs anchor mission work. Indeed, an institutional commitment to "depth of imagination" serves to inspire developing approaches that consider and embrace contemporary pedagogy and theory.

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The Long-Haul: Buddhist Educational Strategies to Strengthen Students' Resilience for Lifelong Personal Transformation and Positive Community Change

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Abstract

For decades, community engagement scholars have built a robust body of knowledge that explores multiple facets of the higher education community engagement domain. More recently, scholars and practitioners from mainly Christian affiliated faith-based institutions have begun to investigate the complex inner world of community-engaged students' meaning-making and spiritual development. While most of this fascinating cross-domain effort has been primarily based on "Western" influenced Judeo-Christian traditions, this study explores service-learning/community engagement themes, approaches, rationale, and strategies from an "Eastern" perspective based on the rich tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. This case study research focuses on curricular approaches, influences, and impacts of Buddhist philosophy/spirituality on community engagement endeavors in the context of Maitripa College, an urban graduate higher education institution located in Portland, OR. Researchers corroborate key findings from previous faith-based institutional studies as well as extend the literature in two specific areas: 1) providing strategies for and discussing the role of spiritual formation and development in relation to community engagement; and 2) the Buddhist view of seeing obstacles as opportunities (Thubten Zopa Rinpoche & 'jig-Med-Bstan-Pa'i-Ñi-Ma, Rdo Grub-Chen III, 2001) as a way to increase effectiveness and harmony in all aspects of life, including academic service-learning endeavors.

Keywords: service-learning, Buddhist, faith-based, spiritual, formation, community engagement, urban

Over the past decades, community engagement scholars have built a robust body of knowledge that explores ways in which engagement with community, writ large, impacts various key stakeholders, including students, community members and organizations, faculty, institutions, and academic departments (Clayton et al., 2013; Furco & Billig, 2002; Holland et al., 2001; Giles & Eyler, 1994; Kecskes, 2015). Concomitantly, community engagement scholar-practitioners have creatively developed, tested, and disseminated an equally impressive set of strategies to increase pedagogical and community development outcomes (Stoecker et al., 2009; Longo, 2007; Zlotkowski & Saltmarsh, 2011). Much of this important work has focused on augmenting foundational skills, attitudes, and behaviors associated with democratic or civic principles (Johnson, 2017; Ehrlich, 2000). However, until a decade ago, the inner world of community-engaged students' spiritual development was significantly underrepresented in the literature. More recently, due in large part to Higher Education Research Institute's (HERI's) landmark, longitudinal study (Astin et al., 2011), scholars, especially those from faith-based institutions, have begun to explore the complex world of students' spiritual meaning-making (Ackerman et al., 2010; Dirksen, 2020; Kozlowski et al., 2014). Welch and Koth (2013) specifically connect the domains of service-learning and students' inner development with their highly useful metatheory of spiritual formation. While most of this fascinating cross-domain effort has been largely based on "Western" influenced Judeo-Christian traditions, this study explores similar themes, approaches, rationale, and strategies from an "Eastern" perspective based on the rich tradition of Tibetan Buddhism.

Judeo-Christian associated institutions have dominated the private higher education landscape since the founding of the country. However, American society remains open to multiple faith-based educational traditions today. In fact, in recent years, a great deal of work has been done in the realm of the interfaith movement in education, especially by the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), a national organization founded in the wake of the September 11 attacks on the United States. IFYC is dedicated to interfaith education as part of the college experience, and, ultimately, interfaith cooperation as "a positive force in our society" (Interfaith Youth Core, 2017, Mission section, para.1). Simultaneously with this more visible appearance, approximately a dozen Buddhist-affiliated colleges have entered the higher education milieu. Among them is Maitripa College, a small Tibetan Buddhist graduate school offering masters' degrees in Buddhist studies and divinity. The college is a non-residential, urban institution, located in the inner-southeast neighborhood of Portland, OR, a mid-sized city in the Pacific Northwest. Maitripa College was established in 2006 on the basis of the aspiration to educate students through the framework, or "pillars," of rigorous scholarship, reflective meditation, and active service in the world. Exploring the formation and interconnection between these three pillars and their impact on students, in the context of Portland's urban environment, provides the inspiration for this study.

Since the 1980s, higher education community engagement scholars have investigated the need and outlined strategies to adequately prepare students for appropriate community interaction (Boyer, 1987; Garoutte & McCarthy-Gilmore, 2014; Karasik, 2019). Most academic service-learning/community engagement strategies include some type of orientation to the community or to the hosting community-based organization, often including in-class or in-community visits with key neighborhood or organizational leaders as part of preparation for more active engagement, or service. If the community-engaged work is technically oriented, pre-service strategies may include specialized training in a necessary domain or activity, such as canvassing or phone-banking practice, or perhaps web design, data analysis training, language acquisition, and so forth (Kecskes et al., 2016; Long et al., 2006). The need for establishing and enacting some type of pre-service orientation or training for students, and more broadly for all participants, before community engagement activities commence is well established in the literature.

While some scholars demonstrate the power of students taking charge of their own learning in the community engagement process (Diambra & McClam, 2001; Van Der Ryn, 2007), the literature speaks less to the imperative of developing students' emotional or behavioral maturity for sustained community-engaged work. Scholars have begun to explicate the ties between faith, service, and social justice (Dalton, 2007) and the impacts of religious beliefs on civic engagement activities (Kozlowski et al., 2014), however, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have explored the proposition of designing integrated curricula to intentionally develop students' personal-spiritual formation in the context of Buddhist higher education community engagement. Indeed, our study did not start with that end in mind, either. Rather, our intent was to do an exploratory study using a case study methodology (Mills et al., 2012) to explore why and how a Buddhist higher education institution in North America implements academic service-learning programs for students. After briefly discussing the literature on faith-based institutions and service-learning, we will present an overview of Maitripa College's curricular approach and underlying rationale, our study design, results and limitations, and a discussion and presentation of potential implications of this work for higher education scholars, curriculum designers, and practitioners, especially those in urban settings. The city block-long series of physical buildings that comprise Maitripa College are located at the interface of a light industrial zone with a bustling, independent small business and diverse residential area in inner southeast Portland. The internal environment of the College, however, with its ambiance of quiet and respectful activity more akin to a monastery than a traditional college campus, is juxtaposed with the busy streets just outside its doors.

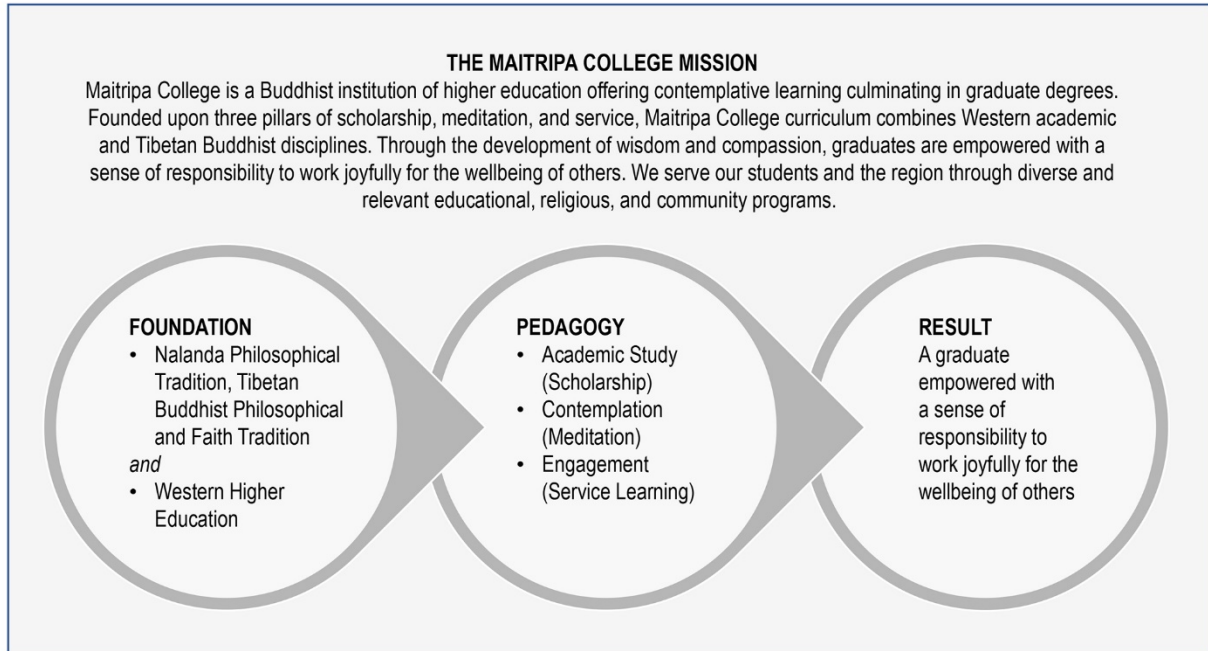
Faith-based Institutions and Service learning

Given the hallowed history of the nexus between clergy education in the Americas and the founding of the earliest higher education institutions in the United States (Veysey, 1981), it should not be surprising that today's faith-based institutions continue to provide opportunities for students to explore religion, faith, and service within the context of their unique educational environments and worldviews. Many institutions of higher education were, in fact, originally founded upon a faith-based mission in order to propagate that faith, and although that is not necessarily the case in contemporary times, it does follow that faith-based higher education, like all forms of education in our world today, is seeking relevance in an increasingly secularized society (Aadland & Skjørshammer, 2012). Daniels et al. (2016) point to the particular role that faith-based institutions have in the lives of their students and in the contemporary world, often rooted in the very foundations of their missions, in promoting the public good through service. Other authors (Ackerman et al., 2010; Welch & Koth, 2013; Roso, 2019) speak to specific ways in which service/community engagement can be operationalized through service-learning to bring about spiritual maturity in students, and some authors (Smith, 1996; Schaffer, 2004) cite an emphasis on the "spiritual development" of students as a distinct characteristic of religious (in these reviewed cases, Christian) institutions of higher education. Notwithstanding the fact that Schaffer's (2004) study includes only Christian affiliated institutions, he suggests that the integration of service and learning is "naturally fostered" in faith-based colleges and universities. Schaffer notes that service-learning, in fact, furthers the educational, faith-based missions of these institutions; respondents in his study reported overwhelmingly that "service-learning can be used as a tool for integrating faith and learning" (Schaffer, 2004, p.136).

Each of these aspects point to themes that arose as elements for consideration in our study, directly or indirectly, and will be explored in this treatment, especially: (a) the particular role of faith-based institutions in furthering the public good; (b) the emphasis of the spiritual development of the student as part of an education in a faith-based institution; and (c) the integration of service and learning as a pedagogical method.

Context of Maitripa College

Figure 1. The Maitripa College mission statement and curriculum are indicative of its unique learning environment:



The Maitripa College curriculum was constructed with the intentional objective of producing graduates that view service/community engagement as a natural extension of their spirituality. The assumption that being of service to others should be grounded in a process of spiritual formation significantly informs this curricular approach. Therefore, the Maitripa College curriculum is designed to shepherd the student through the study and deep development of their faith using contemplative pedagogy framed around first person experience (Simmer-Brown, 2019). This approach guides the student through a process of learning to bring their faith to life through active service. Through their educational journey, the intention is for students to become not only informed individuals empowered and prepared to work in service with communities, but also equipped with readily accessible internal resources necessary to sustain themselves throughout the day, and throughout life or, for Buddhists, for the very long-haul of equipping oneself for lifetimes. For the founders and faculty of Maitripa College, this is both a spiritual matter of insight as well as a practical matter of resiliency. Engaging others harmoniously with equanimity, especially in a complex, major North American urban environment like the Portland Metropolitan area, requires training and practice—these key assumptions undergird the Maitripa College curriculum.

Education Informed by Buddhism

As one of only a few Buddhist institutions of higher education in the United States, Maitripa College has taken inspiration from many sources. Rooted historically in the Nalanda tradition of Indian Buddhist scholarship, directly informed by the living example of the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet and other well-established Tibetan Buddhist lineage holders, and inspired practically by the rigor of the contemporary academy of the West, Maitripa College stands at the intersection of diverse traditions. The college has drawn carefully from each complimentary domain and constructed its educational model in like manner. In particular, the framing of service as a key element of Buddhist education and of a life rooted in faith reflects the propensity in some forms of Buddhism to incorporate social justice as part of the lived tradition of the faith. In the United States, in particular, the term “(Socially) Engaged Buddhism,” coined by the Vietnamese Buddhist master Thich Nhat Hanh, refers to the elements of the Buddhist tradition that seek to apply the understandings gleaned from (a) meditative practice and (b) the discernment of the world based on the Buddhist worldview to salient social, political, environmental, and economic challenges and injustices (Hanh, 2017). The Maitripa College curriculum embraces this approach and worldview.

Additionally, three key assumptions inform the Buddhist philosophy, education, and formation approaches evident at Maitripa College. First, not unlike other spiritual traditions, spiritual formation is viewed as an excellent foundation for a life of service in the world (*The Making of a Jesuit* - IgnatianSpirituality.com, 2009). Second, an advanced component of the Buddhist tradition is the practice of taking obstacles into the path (Thubten Zopa Rinpoche & 'jig-Med-Bstan-Pa'i-Ñi-Ma, Rdo Grub-Chen III, 2001). This daily practice refers to the development of a sort of mental dexterity within the individual Buddhist practitioner that, over time, allows them to interpret the difficult things that arise in life as obstacles to be embraced on the spiritual path. Indeed, rather than responding to life's challenges with aversion and/or a strong sense of injustice or self-pity, Buddhist practitioners are trained to utilize these experiences as opportunities to deepen one's personal resilience, formation, commitment, resolve, and compassion for others. In the results sections later in this presentation, readers will see subjects' responses that demonstrate the active presence of this foundational perspective in students' and alumni worldviews. Third, Buddhists assume both pragmatic and hopeful views towards challenges and afflictions extant in the world; texts associated with the life and teachings of the historical Buddha utilize the word “suffering” when discussing life's challenges. Indeed, suffering is the key subject matter of one of the Buddha's best recognized teachings: the Four Noble Truths (Gyatso, 1998). In short, the Buddhist perspective on this subject is pragmatic because of the recognition that suffering is present and pervasive in the world. This perspective is equally hopeful because of the belief that suffering can be transformed, even eradicated, at the individual and eventually at the universal level.

The elimination of suffering, and the subsequent personal freedom it provides, informs adherents' approach to engaging with, or serving others. For Buddhists, the highest spiritual goal is to help every living being transcend all forms of suffering (Gyatso, 1998). Therefore, from a Buddhist perspective, individuals are highly motivated to work in service to and with others in order to eliminate suffering in the world. This effort is carried out on the basis of faith that suffering can and must be transformed in order for individuals, and all beings, to become fully free. This freedom from suffering and its causes is generally referred to as "enlightenment" (Gyatso, 1998). Although there are many arguments that attempt to delineate the boundaries of liberation in terms of the individual versus the greater good, there is agreement in all forms of Buddhism that suffering can and should be eliminated. These three key assumptions are important as they represent a set of foundational understandings upon which all Buddhist philosophy and education approaches depend. Thus, for Buddhist students and teachers alike, developing one's ability to embrace all forms of suffering in the world and to enthusiastically work to overcome it by eliminating its causes directly informs the rationale for the inclusion of service as a curricular priority at Maitripa College.

Pedagogical Model Connects Faith and Service

The Maitripa College curricular approach encompasses a pedagogical model that relies on three levels of interaction with the subject matter: philosophical doctrine, meditation, and service.

The foundation of Buddhist Studies in the context of graduate study at Maitripa College is the philosophical doctrine of the tradition. This tradition is associated with the Indian dialectical approaches of Nalanda University in India, which functioned as an important seat of learning in Asia from the 5th-13th century (*Oldest university on earth is reborn after 800 years*, 2010).

In addition to engaging with traditional academic material that is read, discussed, and key points committed to memory, students at Maitripa also learn Asian and Tibetan history and language. Further, contemporary disciplines related to ways in which Buddhism functions in the modern world, such as classes on compassionate communication, women in Buddhism, race and Buddhism, and so forth, are also integrated. This first level of learning corresponds to "foundational knowledge" in Fink's (2013) modern learning taxonomy and to the first level, "knowledge," in the esteemed educational taxonomy of Benjamin Bloom (1979).

The second level of interaction with the curriculum is based on contemplative practices, or meditation. At this level, faculty at Maitripa College seek to deepen the educational approach by focusing more on an integrated level of learning in the mind of the student. Animating the meditation pillar, students are guided through the material with the use of a contemplative lens, through introspection and reflection. The dynamics of a contemplative approach to learning have a long and deep history in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition (Dreyfus, 2003). This level of learning

does not have a commonly known historical correlate in mainstream modern Western higher education, although contemplative education is an evolving field in the United States today (Morgan, 2014).

The third level of learning embodied in the Maitripa College curricular structure is embodied in the service pillar, or area of study. The service pillar at Maitripa College has, from its founding, held a place of significance in the curriculum, with approximately 20% of required credits for a graduate degree at Maitripa College fulfilled through the service pillar. The Maitripa College service curriculum focuses the first year on developing the students' internal, or personal, capacity to serve and lead. In year one, these internal capacities are developed primarily via service within the college community, primarily at Maitripa College itself. In the second year of study, students' external service capacity is intentionally developed in more traditional, community-based placements in the Portland Metropolitan region. This service rationale is depicted in the Maitripa College materials as follows:

The service pillar is where the “rubber meets the road” within the Maitripa College education. Exploring relationships outside of College grounds, students are paired with a community partner with whom they dedicate their time and effort in service. Working in hospice, in prisons, at schools, with the homeless community, in interfaith environments, or in any number of other volunteer capacities in and around Portland, students are guided to develop personal spiritual formation as a basis from which to take their study and practice off the cushion and into the world to benefit others. (*Make Your Practice Your Life ~ The Three Pillars*, 2019)

Study Design

Research Methodology

Seeking to understand students' experiences of serving with communities as part of a Buddhist graduate degree program is a unique undertaking. Dynamics of such an endeavor that were of greatest consequence to the researchers were the elements of investigating their experiences in the context of their role as students of Buddhism. According to Yin (2014), case study research design is an appropriate research methodology to use when the context in which the phenomena exists is relevant to the phenomena being researched. An exploratory research design is most appropriate when there is no pre-determined outcome for the research, and when there is no hypothesis to be tested (Mills et al., 2012).

In terms of this exploratory study, the context is the Buddhist education of the research subjects, and based on the research question and the frame of the study, is a most relevant consideration. Thus, in this case, in addition to the literature and documentary review, human subjects' approval was obtained and individual semi-structured interviews were conducted, recorded, and

transcribed for the data collection phase. The study was comprised of three cases, the experiences of two Maitripa College graduate degree alumni (one with experience doing extensive work in homeless shelters and soup kitchens and the other with significant engagement experience in both maximum and minimum security prisons) and one current second year Master of Divinity student (whose current community engagement/service effort is in an area hospital).

Research Questions, Interview Protocol, and Participants

Maitripa College counts learning through service/community engagement as one of its three primary pedagogical methodologies. Assessment of traditional scholarship is easily accomplished through readily available evaluation strategies, and Maitripa uses both quantitative and qualitative evaluation tools to ascertain academic learning achievement, but the assessment of less traditional pedagogies, such as the meditation and service curricular aspects at Maitripa College, pose unique challenges that are beyond the scope of this current effort. However, an intention to begin to establish and record the impact of the service-learning curriculum at Maitripa College on students, community partners, and stakeholders, in alignment with the literature of the field (Gelmon et al., 2018), led to the development of the following research questions: (1) How does faith influence, shape, and inform community engagement through the service-learning curriculum at Maitripa College?; and how does service/community engagement inform faith and spiritual development in Maitripa College students?

Through the use of a semi-structured interview protocol, the researchers began by asking background questions in order to gain basic information from each participant. Following this introduction, participants were asked a series of questions relating to:

- (1) their personal definitions of “faith” and “service”;
- (2) their understanding of the mission of Maitripa College and how faith informs this mission;
- (3) the place of interfaith initiatives in their education; and,
- (4) the urban nature of the educational environment.

Data Analysis

After discussions about and strategies formulated to attempt to mitigate the impact of interviewers’ positionality on respondents, interviews were conducted with both researchers present at all times. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by a third party. Complete transcripts were coded independently by the individual researchers. The researchers then met to determine emergent themes in the data; in this way, investigators were attentive to maintaining the validity of the research through ensuring interrater reliability (Ravitch & Carl, 2019). Upon conclusion of this process, four metathemes materialized. The researchers engaged in respondent/member checking with each research participant based on the emergent metathemes which now form the basis of the data analysis herein.

Results

The results of this study demonstrated a strong relationship between students’ education and faith development, with special focus on the integrative function of the service/community engagement aspect of the curriculum. Four metathemes that emerged from the data:

- (1) Service functions as a point of integration for students’ faith and faith-based education into their lives;
- (2) Service experience impacts students’ faith and spiritual formation;
- (3) The urban environment is an important container for such; and
- (4) Obstacles or barriers students encountered while engaging with community were viewed as opportunities for learning and growth.

See Table 1 for the themes and associated quotes that emerged from the data.

Table 1. Themes and Narrative Data

Theme	Quotations from Subjects
Service functions as a point of integration for students’ faith and faith-based education into their lives	<p>“My faith ...supports and drives how I engage with the world and why I engage with the world in the way I do...It's kind of all integrated.”</p>
Service impacts faith and spiritual formation	<p>“My work and my practice can become indistinguishable. They’re the same to me...learning that part of being a Mahayana Buddhist is service, is helping others... I don’t distinguish the two, to me they’re the same.”</p>
Service impacts faith and spiritual formation	<p>“Just having the desire to benefit others woven into everything we do here is really amazing and makes it all feel a lot more relevant and a lot more—kind of—urgent. Others really need to be benefited. There's a lot to do... that's a big part of what we learn here....”</p> <p>“...And that (the service-learning) was again, like the missing piece. The piece I was missing, to help me see the craziness of my own mind, and to have more love and kindness...”</p>
Service impacts faith and spiritual formation	<p>“...meditation, working with the mind, retraining it, the view of the mind, karma,</p>

The urban environment is an important container for learning

all of these aspects that interrelate to support all the other parts. They kind of all work together... It becomes pretty clear when you reflect back on how you changed over time....” And finally, “I think that here is a big part of that and it’s an ongoing process of just self-acceptance, self-love, kind of letting go of that self-critic... that practice component in conjunction with working with people in the jail, and the prison, and hospice, and CPE, all of that has been huge... it’s action, reflection, action, reflection, action, just going in this constant loop and keep refining and sharing and growing, and accepting that it’s okay. I’m a process and it’s a good process.

“[T]he urban setting... has a potential for more diversity and I think that’s important.” Another responded, “[B]eing in a city gives you lots more opportunity to practice than... if you were at a monastery.” Connecting to this sub-theme, yet another interviewee mentioned “[P]eople used to come to Kopan (a Tibetan Buddhist Monastery located in the Kathmandu, Nepal valley), and they say this place is so wonderful. How do you practice (here)? And we would all laugh, and we’d say, ‘Well, you go to India because India gives you lots of opportunities to practice.’ Being in a city gives you lots more opportunity to practice than you would be if you were at a monastery or out at some calm place.”

“I think that for service, being in an urban environment is really rich with opportunities because there are so many ways to serve in a city. Also, I think probably the kids where I’m serving right now come from all over the place and that’s because we’re in an urban center. So finding a place like that I’m guessing wouldn’t be as likely in Estacada.”

Viewing life's challenges and obstacles as opportunities. (Obstacles or barriers that students encountered while engaging with community were viewed as opportunities for learning and growth).

“[I]f I’m stuck in traffic and the light is going to turn but then everybody is going so slow and the light turns green, and then it turns yellow and then red and I have to wait for three cycles, then I’ll think ‘somebody else in this is waiting for this light, has to get home or to their kids or to sick relatives or some more important reason than me’, and so then instead of thinking about my own self and how I want to get home I’ll think about them and I just pray that they get there when they need to and I’ll think ‘may they get home quickly, may they have what they need’ and then I feel better. And hopefully they get home.”

“I do practice a lot, and in the car, stuck in traffic...love and kindness practice...it's such a good time because you get so mad and you have all these horrible feelings when you're driving and (you think) ‘these people are in my way,’ ‘why is everyone driving so slow?’, ‘everyone is bothering me,’ ‘I hate all the people’. But then you can work with that, and that's really helpful. I find it really helpful.”

“All the things that felt like barriers... at first especially I would bump up against my ego and all my neuroses and feeling awkward...it felt like an obstacle at the time but it was just part of how I could learn and develop my practice, so it was really fine.”

“It's all supportive, even the obstacles or challenges. They're part of what makes it work.”

Service Functions as a Point of Integration

This theme emerged from each interview. Respondents discussed the Maitripa College service curriculum and fieldwork in terms of being a point of integration at which the principles of Buddhist doctrine and guidelines for conduct were readily applied and more deeply understood in practice. In particular, students spoke about how their faith, as they were exploring it in the Maitripa College curriculum and in their lives, was a motivating and influential factor for how they engaged in the world. In particular, all subjects discussed how their faith and faith development provides an important point of integration between their study, practice, and the ways in which they interact with the external environment.

Service Impacts Faith and Spiritual Formation

This theme emerged from each interview. All respondents discussed the impact of learning, internalizing, and serving from the perspective of their faith as an experience that was deepened by their service-learning experiences at Maitripa College. For aspiring Buddhist students, there is an explicit recognition of the central role of one's mind/mental framework in the development of one's practice, especially the daily practice of living and positively functioning in the external environment of the world. Further, for Buddhists, there is an embedded faith-inspired orientation toward cherishing, or serving, others as a way to (a) help alleviate others' suffering as well as to, (b) decrease one's own mental afflictions. Indeed, a basic tenet of Tibetan Buddhist philosophical thought is that human's habitual tendencies to think first of themselves, or of one's individual or personal well-being, is a primary source of individual and global suffering. Therefore, quite practically, it follows that activities that support adherents in serve with others would be a great benefit, for all involved. Thus, when respondents discuss the "urgency" of service or mention how being in service to others helps them see the "craziness of my own mind" in the context of their community-based learning placement they are exploring the acceleration and deepening of their learning about the connection between themselves and all beings in the world. In terms of integration, one older alumnae respondent discussed their "self-acceptance...letting go of the self-critic...that practice component in conjunction with working with people in the jail, and the prison, and hospice...has been huge." From a Tibetan Buddhist perspective, recognizing and internalizing the fact that the outer world is intimately connected to individual interpretations in each person's inner world is a core (life) learning objective. Therefore, integrating the outer world of appearances with the inner world of experiences, in an ongoing and reflective manner, is critically important for both faith and social development. One respondent summed up her experiences of that integration by saying "...it's action, reflection, action, reflection, action, just going in this constant loop and keep refining and sharing and growing, and accepting that it's ok." All respondents spoke to the fact that actively engaging in service as part of their faith-based learning experience helped them to further develop the wish to be of benefit to others, thus simultaneously deepening their faith while informing their community actions.

The Urban Environment

This theme emerged from each interview. All students spoke of the effect of living, studying, and engaging in service in an urban environment. Diversity and opportunity for enhanced and accelerated learning emerged as sub-themes. To better understand the potential impacts of an urban environment on traditional Buddhist education and formation one need not look much further than the many readily-available images of Buddhist monasteries on the web. In Tibet, these centers of scholarship and meditative practice were traditionally situated in the isolated mountainsides of the Himalayas. In contemporary Sri Lanka, Thailand, or Vietnam one most often finds monasteries snuggled peacefully on hilltops or other secluded jungle locations that are set apart from the general population. Many who study at Maitripa College have been to one or more of these types of educational institutions in the East; all students know about them, if only from hearing numerous stories about such places from their peers or teachers. Yet, Tibetan Buddhist educational development is dependent on interaction with others as an opportunity to serve and grow and re-train the human habitual tendency to think first, or primarily, about oneself. In this light, the idea of traffic or parking problems, or noise, or prison populations, houseless individuals, or the hungry all provide promising opportunities to practice patience, kindness and general caring for all being as a primary focus of our day-to-day activities. Caring for others becomes the primary venue to develop and express one's faith. Where there are more beings, as is the case of urban environments, then the sheer volume of access increases the student's abilities to practice and develop and express their faith. Lastly, we see connections between this theme of the urban nature of Maitripa's location in Portland, OR to the final theme of learning how to re-frame life's challenge.

Life's Challenges and Obstacles as Opportunities

This theme emerged from each interview. A basis for this is the practice of thought transformation, a well-known philosophical orientation that is presented in traditional Buddhism philosophy (Gyatso, 1998). Given this, all interviewees spoke of strategies that they personally use to increase agility: questioning, challenging, and sometimes changing their perceptions of their experiences. This continual re-framing activity allowed them to question their interpretations of these barriers, in service and in their lives, and provided regular opportunities for them to view them differently. One more mundane example provided was the experience of driving a car in traffic. The respondent described, with significant detail, their internal work to transform their thinking from an egocentric, self-centered attitude to one focused on the well-being of others. In their case, the "others" were those who got through the traffic light before them.

Discussion

At Maitripa College, each student engages with an extensive community engagement preparation program before the inception of their service experiences. Respondents commented that Maitripa College's intentional approach focused on the personal (spiritual) formation of the student was, at times, frustrating, especially in the first year of study. In part because they viewed the service aspect of the curriculum most enthusiastically when originally applying for the program yet found out once formal study began that, in the initial year, students' engagement activities are focused internally on the Maitripa College community exclusively. One respondent remarked, "So there are classes called Community Service, like 301 or whatever...there is a service component to the class, but a lot of it is studying communication...about different aspects of being in service. Which turn out to be just helpful, in the service. But at the time I was kind of like 'get to the service part!'"

Students were forced to slow down and begin with internal engagement, beginning with the self, engaging with and eventually learning how to begin to transform one's mind as a foundation for properly understanding all of life's activities. Building from there, first-year students were incrementally introduced to smaller service projects whose focus was primarily the deepening of their understanding of the nature of reality (known in Buddhist studies as "wisdom") as a necessary precursor to external community engagement/service, which in the Buddhist lexicon is referred to as "compassion" or "compassionate action."

Without exception, however, respondents discussed how in the second year of study (and in subsequent years since graduation for alumni interviewees) they felt a sense of calm strength that brought greater perspective, meaning, patience, and a sense of perseverance to their community engaged work. Respondents discussed their personal resilience in terms of the long-haul. Further, they mentioned how the external service activity in prisons, homeless shelters, soup kitchens, and in hospitals of year two informed them about, and increased their appreciation for, the internal service and other spiritual formation activities associated with the first year of curriculum. "Service" in Buddhism is understood as a two-way street: it is both the activity that naturally occurs when wisdom is deepened and made manifest in the world as well as a recursive activity that further deepens one's understanding of the challenging (suffering) nature of sentient beings. This growing "wisdom" is also recursive: awareness of the nature of reality inspires aspiring Buddhists to serve all the more so as to alleviate their own suffering and that of others. As one respondent mentioned, "service—it's kind of urgent!" The community engagement (or service activity in the world) then further informs students' depth of understanding about the nature of reality, or "wisdom." The cycle of service, study, and contemplation then begins anew.

Interestingly, in this case, each time the researchers queried subjects about barriers or challenges they encountered in the workplace or service site, the respondents seemed somewhat puzzled. Indeed, it seemed that each subject had internalized the idea that barriers/challenges are simply

part of life, or in Buddhist terms, pervasive suffering, and therefore not something strange or unexpected. At times, respondents spoke enthusiastically, even humorously, about their own former lack of understanding of this basic point and how they used to view “challenges” negatively, sometimes with impatience or even anger, and how unproductive those thoughts and responses now appear to them. This internalized ability to view all of life’s occurrences as a natural outcome of cause and effect and a natural process of intention and growth was clearly connected to subjects’ sense of responsibility-taking and empowerment to free themselves and all beings, eventually, from the mundane world full of challenges and frustrations most people currently know so well.

Finally, in terms of the urban location of Maitripa College in Portland, OR, respondents spoke in simple terms about the logistical advantages of urban living, including diversity of individual and organizational opportunities to serve and abundant number of people in proximity all of whom provided daily reminders of the suffering of all beings. When queried about the impact of their Buddhist orientation in the service site, none said that it seemed to make much difference. Site supervisors, community partners, and community members, they said, all viewed them as student learners who were present to serve and learn. One wonders if this is a regional phenomenon of the West Coast, given its proximity to the Asian Rim and relatively increased familiarity with Asian spiritual traditions, or whether this is partially due to Portland’s generally progressive citizenry, or even more generally to religious pluralism and freedom that formed part of the original founding of the United States.

Limitations

This is an initial, exploratory study focused on the impact of faith in Buddhist higher education. This research is based on the experiences of three current students and alumni from one institution only, which limits the generalizability of these findings. The next phase of this study will be enhanced by a larger and more diverse sample size, perhaps utilizing a mixed-method research approach and, ideally, by gaining insight by interviewing community partners and additional faculty about their perceptions of the students and of their service activity and outcomes. Also, increasing the sample size to investigate additional Tibetan and non-Tibetan Buddhist affiliated institutions (i.e., Zen or Theravadin traditions) would enhance overall understanding. The fact that one author of this study is the dean of education at Maitripa College and the other a long-term Buddhist practitioner is a potential advantage as well as a limitation. On one hand, familiarity with the philosophical and practice underpinnings of Buddhist formation allowed the researchers to be attentive to nuanced responses; however, despite researchers’ tight adherence to appropriate case study protocols, close association with the respondents could be seen to have compromised the distillation of several insights, among other limitations.

Implications for Practice and Areas for Future Research

The broader service-learning/community engagement community of scholars and practitioners may find the concept of student formation more intriguing after reading the results of our case study. In particular, the idea of re-framing challenges and barriers endemic to community engagement initiatives into opportunities for growth and learning is particularly promising. More broadly, educators may wish to pay even more attention to students' predispositions towards faith expressions and orientations to community engagement. For some students, having a spiritual practice or belonging to a faith community may be a facilitator for academic service-learning; for others, it may be a barrier; and still for the remainder of students in all types of higher education institutions it may not be an issue or area of awareness. Regardless, when students enter any learning environment, they bring with them the sum-total of all of their previous experiences. Augmenting educator awareness of this powerful fact, as well as increasing the creative application of pedagogical strategies to elicit conversations around students' familiarity and connection to their faith, may lead to deepening respect for the latent power and place of faith traditions in education, and in community engagement initiatives specifically, among all in the learning environment. More broadly, bringing conversations about students' past histories associated with faith, faith-in-action, and/or community engagement/service into the classroom thoughtfully, and earlier into the course and curriculum, may open up new avenues for learning and understanding for all involved, over time. Experimenting with classroom and community-based strategies that intentionally focus on eliciting discussion about students' service/community engagement, as well as their faith backgrounds and experiences, may help students situate their service-learning encounters in the larger context of their faith or former service efforts. Conducting research about the impacts of, and potential challenges associated with, bringing faith-related discussions more formally into the curriculum could inform the field as well as be helpful to practitioners and students. Popular service-learning courses with multiple sections featuring standardized curriculum across sections might be venue for this type of experimentation and research.

The researchers also see ample opportunity for future research in the area of faith-based service-learning in association with transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991). Transformative learning theory focuses on specific learning experiences that result in profound changes in adult learners. In particular, Mezirow's discussions of the construction and deconstruction of "meaning-making structures" and the strong reliance on reflective techniques as part of the learning process would be interesting and potentially insightful to apply to an analysis of faith-based service-learning. In particular, the assertion that transformative learning occurs when our frames of reference, defined as our assumptions and worldviews composed of habits of mind and resulting points of view, shift seems a rich topic for further research and development. An introduction to a service environment that challenges a student's existing worldview could potentially function as the first step of ten according to transformative learning theory (in Mezirow's terminology, a "disorienting dilemma") and a carefully constructed reflective process

rooted in and in combination with a faith-based curriculum could demonstrate real change in accordance with this model.

Conclusion

To conclude this research, we return to the metathemes uncovered in the study: (1) service functions as a point of integration for students' faith and faith-based education into their lives; (2) the urban environment provides diverse opportunities and is therefore an important container for such; (3) service experience positively develops students' faith and spiritual formation; and (4) obstacles or barriers students encountered while engaging with community were viewed as opportunities for learning and growth.

In particular, our study of the Tibetan Buddhist affiliated Maitripa College corroborates two key findings extant in the literature that emerge from predominantly Christian associated colleges and universities: (1) Faith-based institutions have distinctive opportunities to ensure the fulfillment of their unique missions which generally embody aspirations to both serve the public good and educate the individual through religious education; and, (2) this study also demonstrates the power and promise of service-learning pedagogy for non-Christian associated institutions to accomplish similar ends.

The study of Maitripa College's philosophical underpinnings and curricular approach also extends the literature on faith-based institutions' relation to community engagement in two additional areas: (1) "Barriers and obstacles" encountered by participants when engaging in service with community may be re-framed or transformed into opportunities for deeper learning; and, (2) focusing students' "service" activities for an extended period of time (for the entire first year of graduate school, in the case of Maitripa College) on internal spiritual formation bears further consideration. Indeed, alumni interviewees from Maitripa exuded a deep sense of purpose, calm, and resilience in their current community engaged work, they appear well-equipped for the long-haul of lifelong personal growth and service in community.

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The Application of Faith and Learning: Faith-Based Anchor Institutions and Community Engagement

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Abstract

Higher education institutions face many competing priorities and are still expected to serve the public good. Faith-based institutions, in particular, aim to meet a faith-inspired calling and serve the communities in which they are situated while guiding students in their faith formation by integrating service and academic priorities. In this paper, the authors explore, through a case study methodology, the unique positionality of Messiah University, a faith-based university located near the capital city of Harrisburg, PA. Specifically, this study explores the impact of a community engaged course with an urban nonprofit agency.

Keywords: community-university partnerships, experiential learning, cultural humility, service-learning, faith integration

Introduction

An anchor institution's ability to address the issues of their respective community has elicited much needed attention over the past twenty years. Hodges and Dubb (2020) suggest university leaders have not worked hard enough to address important national problems. The focus has primarily been on how anchor institutions situated in urban environments have served urban communities. Anchor institutions best serve others when they align their mission and strategic plans with priority concerns, not only within their local context but their surrounding regions as well. Cantor, Englot, and Higgins (2013) have specifically called on universities to consider how to leverage their unique strengths in order to break down university and community barriers. Universities can avoid being the expert in the ivory tower by truly working with communities, as

part of the community, to address need and generate solutions. Faith-based institutions are uniquely positioned to do this work. This paper provides an example of how a faith-based anchor institution located in a suburban context can fulfill its mission by extending its reach into an urban environment and work in concert with an urban place-based anchor institution.

Context of the Institution of Higher Education

Messiah University is a liberal arts university known for its orientation to Christian service (Messiah University, n.d.-a). The university was founded in 1909 on the outskirts of the capital city of Harrisburg, PA upon receiving a plot of land from the first university president. The mission of Messiah University, “to educate men and women toward maturity of intellect, character, and Christian faith in preparation for lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society,” reflects its commitment to faith and service (Messiah University, n.d.-b). Because service, leadership, and reconciliation are firmly rooted in the context of Christian faith, this impacts the university’s approach to service: “We don’t just serve because it’s the ‘right thing to do’; we serve because God calls us to open our hearts to the poor and needy and to work for justice wherever injustice prevails” (Messiah University, n.d.-b, para 4).

Messiah University is rooted in the Anabaptist tradition, which upholds pacifist beliefs (Messiah University, n.d.-c). Due to their status as conscientious objectors during World War II, many faculty completed Civilian Public Service in lieu of military service (Haynes, 2005). Service has, therefore, been an integral part of the campus culture for decades.

In the early 1990s, Messiah University was awarded with a Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) grant to develop “Innovative Projects for Student Community Service” to strengthen service-learning across the curriculum (Agapé Center for Service and Learning, 2012). In 1998, Messiah dedicated a newly renovated space on campus called the Agapé Center for Service and Learning. The Agapé Center houses co-curricular educators and faculty partners dedicated to ensuring community partnerships with areas of great need, such as inner city Harrisburg. Through the Agapé Center, students serve the local community by addressing needs such as hunger and homelessness, literacy, and health and wellness. The Agapé Center also connects faculty with community partners for academic service learning and provided tremendous support to the current research project.

The Context of Community: The Allison Hill Community (Harrisburg, PA)

Harrisburg, the capital city of Pennsylvania, is one of the most industrialized cities in the northeastern United States. It serves as home to heavy manufacturing, agriculture, and chocolate maker the Hershey Company. Despite the city’s decade-old financial troubles, it was ranked the second-best place in the United States to raise a family in 2010 and has favorable financial stability due to its high concentration of state and federal government agencies. It is a racially diverse city, majority-minority with 51.8% Black or African American, 21.8% Hispanic or

Latinx, and 22.6% White. The overall college attainment is 20.2% which is indicative of the median household income of \$37,356 and poverty rate of 27.7%. Additionally, only 34.6% of residents own their homes (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). As with most industrialized cities, the gradual loss of industry after WWII led to White flight to the suburbs.

The community of focus for this study is located directly east of downtown Harrisburg, PA and is accessed by bridges and across a wide path of train tracks along the Susquehanna River. Allison Hill, known by locals as the “Hill,” the “Ville,” and the “Third Ward” is Harrisburg’s first suburb and comprises many neighborhoods representing a variety of cultures such as West African, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Latin American, African American, and European American populations. The majority of residents are low income and one third are under the age of 18 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). Over the years, a number of homes and buildings have fallen into disrepair and have been condemned. One source reported 199 buildings in the neighborhood as “abandoned” and another 121 as “vacant” (Malawskey, 2014).

Literature Review

Anchor Institutions

While universities, the government, and hospitals have always played an important role in our communities, it was not until 2002 when the term anchor institutions was coined by Michael Porter to emphasize the long-term and vested nature of these institutions in a particular city or region (Rutheiser, 2016). Dubb, McKinley, and Howard (2013) further define anchor mission as “a commitment to consciously apply the long-term, place-based economic power of the institution, in combination with its human and intellectual resources, to better the long-term welfare of the communities in which the institution is anchored” (p. 48). It is for this reason that higher education institutions (HEIs) are uniquely situated to do this work due to their vast network of knowledge and resources located within a geographic location or community.

William Rainey Harper, the first president of the University of Chicago, had an evangelical view of the university as a “prophet of democracy” (p. 43), a place embedded in the issues and life of urban America with the purpose of serving the city and country and fulfilling the university’s democratic promise (Benson et al., 2017). The United States has a long history of community engagement partnerships with HEIs. In the nineteenth century, many states established land grant universities linking higher education with agriculture, heavy industries, and local communities (Jacob, 2015). Those strong ties have persisted with many land grant universities, but with the growth of system-wide educational entities (e.g., R1, community colleges, regional comprehensive universities), community engagement efforts have seemed to shift in priority based on the HEIs designation. As such, public institutions are not inevitably vested in community engagement efforts. Many HEIs have competing priorities such as recruitment and retention of students, maintaining a high-level research profile, and fundraising to meet multi-

million-dollar campaign goals. Faith-based institutions have to weigh these priorities, but their faith mission also heavily influences how they enact their mission and what drives leadership decisions. In considering the unique make-up of HEI's as anchor institutions, we must consider how community engagement is viewed by leadership as central to the mission of the university. For example, even though community engagement, along with teaching and research, is considered a core function of HEIs, it is not generally given equal weight in their reward systems (Saltmarsh, 2011). Therefore, any opportunity to link teaching and research with community engagement initiatives is advantageous to meeting the commitments of faculty and the institution writ large.

University–community partnerships encompass many iterations in linking teaching, research, and service, with opportunities such as community-based research projects, service-learning activities, and community-based training programs (Russell & Flynn, 2001). Yet, by and large studies show that universities tend to benefit from these long-term partnerships more than communities do, creating a sense of resentment and mistrust (Gray, 2000; Perkins et al., 2004). Whereas engaged campuses advance the concept of full participation and are both in and of the community, participating in reciprocal, mutually beneficial partnerships between campus and community (Strum, 2011). One such campus is the University of Pennsylvania, which serves as a model in developing and implementing an effective response to urban issues by partnering with local communities advancing the core purposes of the university and the wellbeing of the community (Benson et al., 2017). In essence, full participation requires people, including students, faculty, and community members, within and beyond the university coming together to transform a community with the foundational understanding that HEIs are rooted in and accountable to multiple communities. HEIs are accountable to students who matriculate within their walls and they are also accountable to entities connected via physical space (e.g., adjacent residential neighborhoods) and collaborative projects (e.g., nonprofits dependence on service-learning classes).

The intersection between faith and community engagement has implications not only for college students but for communities as well. The faith tradition of an institution is imbued in the intentions of faculty, staff, and students; ideally, their intentions embody the very nature of living out faith through actions in one's community. When examined in relation to place-based anchor institutions, the call to serve in one's community, to seek justice and defend the oppressed, and be good stewards of our resources and time seem to go hand in hand. Wuthnow (1998) emphasized a spirituality of seeking, which readies the spiritual sojourner for the road. Taken literally, we might even suggest that where faculty and students seek out their spiritual experiences as a member of an institution is logically going to be influenced by how and where the institution is integrated in their community. College and university campuses have a responsibility to communicate the context of the community to students early on and help students understand they are part of an ongoing effort to serve the community.

Integration of Faith into the Classroom and Curriculum

In *Mapping the Terrain*, Huber and Hutchings (2004) define integrative learning as “connecting skills and knowledge from multiple sources and experiences; applying theory to practice in various settings; utilizing diverse and even contradictory points of view; and, understanding issues and positions contextually” (p. 13). Integrative learning experiences provide an opportunity for the learner to address real-world problems, adapt their intellectual skills, and understand and develop individual purpose, values, and ethics (Rhodes, 2010). When applying Christian theology to address real-world problems through service-learning, Christian colleges and universities are positioned to help their students frame engagement around faith principles such as to love their neighbors.

Messiah University has established learning objectives for undergraduate students that are accomplished through curricular and cocurricular learning structures. Through *Social Responsibility*, one of the six university-wide educational outcomes, students demonstrate a commitment to service, reconciliation, and justice, and respond effectively and ethically to the complexities of an increasingly diverse and interdependent world. Specifically, students (a) gain an appreciation for cultural and ethnic diversity; (b) become servants, leaders, and reconcilers in the world; (c) develop a sense of civil responsibility and commitment to work with others for the common good; (d) develop the courage to act responsibly and redemptively in a complex world; (e) practice good stewardship of economic and natural resources; (e) act in ways that respect gender, cultural, and ethnic diversity; and (f) make decisions that reflect an ethic of service, a concern for justice, and a desire for reconciliation (Messiah University, n.d-d) Service-learning provides an opportunity for students to integrate their faith and learning through service to the community.

Accomplishing Educational Goals Through Experiential Learning

Messiah University aims to achieve educational outcomes through curricular and cocurricular structures, and one of the major ways is through the Experiential Learning Initiative (ELI). Students participate in an approved experiential learning activity that involves goals of meaningful career development and community engagement (Messiah University, n.d-e). This involves a guided process where students are challenged to learn, apply and integrate knowledge and skills in an authentic context (Messiah University, n.d-e). Service-learning courses are one of the ways students fulfill their ELI requirements. These courses engage students in community service beyond the classroom while employing intentional reflection to help students connect their service with course content. Service-learning has been shown to have positive benefits on academic learning, promotes civic engagement, and builds strong partnerships with communities (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001). Saltmarsh and Hartley call for democratically engaged work, which is “framed as inclusive, collaborative, and problem-oriented work in which

academics share knowledge-generating tasks with the public and involve community partners as participants in public problem solving” (Benson, Harvkavy, & Puckett, 2007, p. 20).

Description of the Service-Learning Course

Health Promotion Management (APHS 220) is a three-credit course offered as an Applied Health Science elective within the Health, Nutrition and Exercise Science Department at Messiah University. Students in the Applied Health Science major are required to take several of these elective courses to complete graduation requirements. The course is offered every other academic year, during the fall semester. Since 2017, APHS 220 has been approved by the institution as an Experiential Learning Initiative (ELI) course, designed to support self-awareness, professional preparation, and community engagement. To complete the ELI component, all students establish and evaluate personal learning goals regarding professional development and community engagement during the semester. At semester conclusion, they also create resume wording regarding their experience.

In the course, students collaborate with Brethren Housing Association (BHA), located on Hummel Street in Harrisburg, PA to promote health in areas identified by staff and interested participants. BHA operates the Transitions, Side-By-Side, and Next Steps programs, employs eight staff members, and owns 10 parcels of land for 22 apartments for supporting families. BHA’s mission is “to help individuals and families, who are experiencing homelessness, achieve their God-given potential by providing a holistic program of stable housing, supportive services and loving relationships.” (Brethren Housing Association, 2019-2020, para 6). This shared mission between BHA and Messiah University is an effective foundation for collaboration and partnership. Students are required to be on-site at BHA several times during the course. During on-campus class time throughout the semester, students engage in communication with staff members, creating sustainable wellness support for BHA within small group learning communities. Students authentically work through the health promotion process through the creation of health interest surveys, implementation plans, sustainable support tools, and assessment plans. At the conclusion of the semester, students share their process and support tools with staff and families at BHA.

Community-Based Learning Pedagogy

Within a traditional classroom setting, addressing tangible societal issues with faith integration may be challenging. However, engaging students in service and partnership encourages realistic practice and reflection on experiences (de Groot, Alexander, Culp, & Keith, 2015). Creatively pursuing community engagement can enhance student learning and provide an opportunity for authentically exploring faith as students learn with and from community partners. Within the applied health science field, a pedagogical emphasis on service and community relationships

involves learners in sustainable practices to enhance wellness and address social justice through stewardship (Culp, 2016). Through personal reflection and listening to the stories of others, learners are equipped to pursue action steps toward community engagement in their own future professional work. Instead of a singular discussion or one topic in the syllabus, each class encourages students in exploring the integration of their faith and work. They have opportunities to reflect on their own personal experiences of privilege and oppression, consider areas of explicit or implicit bias, and develop relationships with a foundation of cultural humility. APHS 220 aims to enhance student learning while also addressing a significant community need.

Methodology

Qualitative research is a process of inquiry that strives for a greater depth of understanding of social phenomena (Creswell, 2018). Qualitative methods were employed to explore students' experiences and engagement through the service-learning course, providing thick, rich descriptions. These "participant perspectives" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) facilitated the exploration of the students' experiences as well as the perceptions of the community partner. This case study was guided by the following research questions: (a) What themes emerged that demonstrate the impact of the service-learning course on students' career application and faith integration? and (b) In what ways does the community-university collaboration have an impact as described by the community partner?

Context of the Course

The APHS 220 course meets twice a week for 75-minute class periods. The students are required to complete two on-site visits to Brethren Housing Association (BHA) in Harrisburg, PA and have additional volunteer opportunities, such as organizing a Thanksgiving dinner and assisting with weekly childcare for BHA support groups. Students are challenged to take input from staff and families to create supportive wellness tools that are useful and sustainable at BHA.

Participants

In fall 2019, there were 25 students ($N = 25$) enrolled in the APHS 220 course. Regarding gender, seven students were male ($n = 7$) and eighteen students were female ($n = 18$). In terms of class status, two students were sophomores ($n = 2$), 15 students were juniors ($n = 15$), and eight students were seniors ($n = 8$). While service is a required component of the course, the students know about this requirement when registering for the class. Students have the opportunity to choose between this course and other courses once they learn about the required service with BHA.

Community-based Learning Experiences

In the initial weeks of the course, students worked in their small group learning communities to design a health interest survey to gather relevant information regarding the primary nutrition interests and goals of staff and participants at BHA. Before preparing their survey, students were required to do background research to assist in their design. As they created their surveys, they were reminded to maintain clear organization and formatting while using audience-appropriate language, which included clarity, as well as statements that were empowering and not assumptive. Students included scaled items for respondents to check interest level in nutrition-related issues, as well as open-ended questions. In addition, at least one question was designed for respondents to discuss other holistic wellness interests (i.e., physical, emotional/mental, environmental, spiritual, social). The surveys were reviewed and edited by the instructor and then distributed to staff and participants at BHA. Staff responses (n = 4) to the survey revealed that the majority of BHA families would benefit from practical nutrition education and strategies and simple, healthy recipes (n = 4). They also affirmed that families have enough supplies for cooking, but strongly disagreed that families have a lot of knowledge about nutrition (n = 4). The students compiled the feedback in class and established themes for their initial project implementation plans. These plans were shared with BHA staff for feedback before students begin actively creating their nutrition support tools. The collaboration continued throughout the semester, as students shared their progress and asked for insight from staff who work directly with participants on a daily basis.

With continual feedback from staff at BHA, the five student learning communities designed and created nutrition support tools for 20 families who would be living in apartments at BHA. The student-designed tools included interactive laminated placements for children, a nutrition infographic to place on kitchen walls, a nutrition logbook for grocery shopping and reflection, a cookbook including breakfast, lunch, dinner and snack recipes, and physical activity cards for families and youth staff. During the final week of the semester, students were on-site at BHA to share their tools with staff and available participants. This was an important component of student learning and partnership. Students shared the educational components of their tools, the rationale for their designs, and their hopes for how they can be used in the future. The students asked for questions from staff and received feedback on how the tools would be integrated with BHA.

Course Reflection Activities

The students responded to specific questions used in the “Reflection and Application” assignments in APHS 220 throughout the semester:

- Professional development: What specific skills will you work to develop through our course this semester that can enhance your professional effectiveness? Please describe one or two skills in detail, including action steps you will take.
- Community engagement: What do you hope to learn about community or do as a member of a community this semester? Consider our class community, as well as our involvement with the BHA community.
- Listen deeply to the TED talk by novelist Chimamanda Adichie, “The Danger of a Single Story.” Then, respond to the following questions. In your own words, how is a “single story” of people formed? What are practical suggestions for how our class can avoid a single story of homelessness as we work with BHA?
- Using your own words, create a definition for cultural humility. What are practical ways that we can approach our work with BHA this semester with a commitment to cultural humility?
- Go to the Project Implicit website and choose two Implicit Association Tests (IAT) to take for personal reflection: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>. What two IATs did you choose to complete? Reflect on the experience of taking IATs (most of our scores do reflect some bias). How can tests like this be helpful? Why do you think you scored as you did?
- Revisit the personal commitments that you set at the beginning of the semester (professional development and community engagement). Discuss your progress and any adjustments that you would like to make in these areas for the remaining weeks of the semester.
- (ELI question) Consider the knowledge you gained and the skills you practiced in this course that can be applied within a professional context. Describe two transferable skills you gained or improved from this course experience. Describe how these skills might benefit you in a professional setting in the future.
- (ELI question) What did “community” look like in your experience this semester within the Health Promotion Management course? As you reflect on your experience, what is one specific way you believe you will engage in and contribute to a specific community in the future?
- Discuss a significant moment during this experience that left a lasting impact on you. What made this moment significant for you?

Data Analyses

Students were invited to respond candidly to the reflection and application assignments throughout the semester. An overall construct that emerged from the data was the notion of authenticity. Students’ reflections were honest and authentic. The concept of authenticity is liberating in the sense that one acts out of commitment and choice through their existential experiences not out of duty to external constructs (Kirylo & Boyd, 2017).

An inductive research approach was employed as well as a constant comparative analysis of the data to draw three major themes Cultural Humility, Knowledge of the Community, and Faith and Vocational Application. Table One includes the major themes that emerged, including a description of the theme and an example quote from the data.

Table 1. End of Semester Student Reflections

Theme	Theme Description	Example Quote
Cultural Humility	Reshaping a privileged mindset to adopt a posture of cultural humility, similar to Christ.	<i>The concept of cultural humility was a brand-new idea this semester. I loved learning about the mindset “[allow the client to be] the expert” and applying it by being mindful of the vocabulary we used. I think this can transfer to physical therapy when I get people of different minorities and backgrounds.</i>
Cultural Humility	Reshaping a privileged mindset to adopt a posture of cultural humility, similar to Christ.	<i>As each individual comes to me, they all have their own stories. I will not let my story shape my perspective, rather I will love as God loves and support them as they are entering the rehabilitation process which can be both painful and frustrating on some days.</i>
Cultural Humility	Reshaping a privileged mindset to adopt a posture of cultural humility, similar to Christ.	<i>I learned what good teamwork is and how much that can impact the project. The fact that we knew our [projects] were going to be used by real people also had an impact on how we worked on it. We had to create ways to portray information that was easily understood, which is how I improved my professional language skills. I had never had to create something that was going to be used in real life. So, this course was eye opening and I learned so much about how to talk and appeal to real people, something no other class has offered so far in my college career.</i>
Knowledge of Community	Realizing the importance of knowing the people served and their distinct needs.	<i>I was humbled by how much I didn’t know but I was very surprised at how much others in our class didn’t know about the community that we were about to serve. It was seriously eye opening how much an average Christian college kid (including myself) doesn’t know about their local community that is struggling. It caused me to reflect</i>

		<i>on what I am involved with and what the real purpose behind those things is.</i>
Knowledge of Community	Realizing the importance of knowing the people served and their distinct needs.	<i>As a class, we had established a community that saw the BHA as not something we needed to conquer, instead, we needed to join forces, form a partnership and seek positive change together.</i>
Faith and vocational application	Understanding the importance of a Christian mission and calling and applying these concepts through authentic service to others.	<i>When I think about the people in community surrounding/supporting BHA, I'm able to see different parts of the body of Christ work together. Our class is just one part of the body, which is focused on physical health. Some BHA staff were another part of the body, focused on childcare. Other BHA staff were another part, focused on finances. Then other parts of the body were leaders – kind of like joints in the body connecting one moving piece to another. It was cool to see how all these different parts of wholeness were expressed through different parts of the community to serve alongside BHA, and how beautiful it was for them to all come together.</i>
Faith and vocational application	Understanding the importance of a Christian mission and calling and applying these concepts through authentic service to others.	<i>Community means recognition of difference, while simultaneously loving and affirming the group or individual. If only we could all see the world from the point of view of the Father. Imagine viewing every single individual as a carefully crafted & wonderfully made individual. To me, this is the community of the kingdom.</i>

In addition to the qualitative data, end-of-course evaluations were used to triangulate the data (Table 2). Creswell and Miller (2000) define triangulation as “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study” (p. 126). Examining student satisfaction with the course helped to determine the validity of the student reflections. By participating in an anonymous survey, students were able to indicate their honest perception of the course effectiveness. Students responded to a 5-point Likert scale survey indicating their agreement to course effectiveness in accomplishing course objectives.

Table 2. Student Perceptions of APHS 2020 Course Effectiveness (N = 25)

Course Effectiveness Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation
Helped students to interpret subject matter from diverse perspectives	4.9	0.27
Encouraged students to reflect on and evaluate what they have learned	4.9	0.27
Demonstrated the importance and significance of the subject matter	4.9	0.27
Formed teams or groups to facilitate learning	5.0	0.0
Related course material to real life situations	4.9	0.27
Created opportunities for students to apply course content outside the classroom	4.9	0.32
Involved students in hands-on projects such as research, case studies, or real-life activities	5.0	0.2
Asked students to share ideas and experiences with others whose backgrounds and viewpoints differ from their own	4.6	0.56
Overall, excellent course	4.9	0.27

Note. 100% response rate, Likert scale, 5 = strongly agree.

Community Partner Reflections

Once the APHS 220 course was completed, one of the research team members who did not have a previous relationship with the community partner and who did not work for Messiah University conducted an in-depth interview with the program director of the Brethren Housing Association. The purpose of this interview was to explore the perceived impact of the community-university collaboration. The program director shared that the Harrisburg area “has a lot of resources such as food pantries, but there is no education on how to do meal planning” (M. Bellesfield, personal communication, August 17, 2020). She went on to describe the importance of learning about the families first and how they feel about nutrition. This was a positive confirmation to the use of an assessment survey before the project even started. In addition, the director shared that the agency does not want to “showcase” the families or make them feel like they are on display, so students

must read the feedback from the needs assessment survey carefully and listen well to the feedback from the survey and community partner. When asked how the local community perceives Messiah University students, she responded that they “connect with people, have an understanding of empathy, incredible character, are dependable, and are high-level students” (M. Bellesfield, personal communication, August 17, 2020). Many of the characteristics described by the community partner aligned with the themes derived from the student reflections.

Implications

While the residential campus of Messiah University is rural, Harrisburg, PA is an urban community located less than 20 minutes from campus. Many students within APHS 220 had never been to Harrisburg, and most had not spent any time in the Allison Hill neighborhood where Brethren Housing Association is located. Embedding service within a course gave students an extended opportunity to serve their community and allowed the BHA to build off of the work that had been done in prior semesters. As the director of BHA shared, “The [students] provided me with tools, such as the menu planner, that help on a daily basis. This was very educational for the women, and never had anyone talked to them about this” (M. Bellesfield, personal communication, August 17, 2020). Students were able to practice authentic professional skills in small group collaboration and by creating wellness support tools. They engaged in listening to the stories of others, both inside the classroom and through their interactions at BHA. Students found commonalities among people who have had different life experiences than their own. By engaging their local urban community, students experienced long-lasting effects through faith and vocational applications as well as compassion for the community. Creative collaboration led to opportunities to provide holistic support for student learning and growth, as well as sustaining partnerships with community neighbors. BHA “depends on volunteers” to accomplish their mission to serve Harrisburg residents (M. Bellesfield, personal communication, August 17, 2020), and they continue to welcome Messiah faculty and students to partner in service to the community.

Challenges and Lessons Learned for Future Practice

There are several challenges and lessons that were learned throughout the semester. First and foremost, there is greater faculty effectiveness with an emphasis on community partnerships, not just projects. When students saw the staff and families at the Brethren Housing Association as people from whom they can learn and walk alongside, their classwork was more authentic and the implications were longer lasting. When the emphasis is simply on creating a project to “serve” others, there is risk in creating an unhealthy hierarchy between “us” and “them.”

Each student responds to course experiences in different ways, and it is essential to support the individual journeys. In APHS 220, some students completed the coursework, but did not pursue additional engagement beyond what was required. In contrast, there were other students who

chose to volunteer at BHA on a weekly basis and became deeply involved in the lives of the families who live and work there. As educators, our job is to encourage personal and professional growth, but to also recognize the unique ways these will be expressed for each student.

Reflection must be ongoing and formative, not only summative at the conclusion of a semester. Students need opportunities to think deeply about their own experiences and views and have opportunities to consider ways in which perspective can change throughout the course. Eyler, Giles, and Schmiede (1996) indicate that reflection should be continuous, connected, challenging, and contextualized for students to gain the most meaning from their service-learning. At its best, reflection should support growth in self-awareness regarding faith, relationships, and vocation. It should also provide opportunities for students to ask questions without easy answers and challenge systems related to social justice. Jacoby (2014) emphasizes critical reflection as “the process of analyzing, reconsidering and questioning one’s experiences within a broad context of issues and content knowledge” (p. 26).

Authentic service assumes that each person comes to the partnership with a common understanding and purpose of the issues they seek to address, and the change needed to bring about a solution. “Only through such praxis, in which those who help and those who are being helped help each other simultaneously, can the act of helping become free from the distortion in which the helper dominates the helped” (Dewar, 1998, p. 54). Students must, therefore, be encouraged to develop the practice of listening well. McEwen, Herman, and Himes (2016) indicate, “authentic dialogue requires active listening on the part of each participant with a deep respect for each other’s opinions—even if they differ from one’s own” (p. 313). University–community partnerships are a conditional response to social, political, and historical contexts. All stakeholders involved in establishing these partnerships have their own priorities that emerge as the collaborative efforts take place. As such, it is important to understand that current practices are predicated on past experiences. When partners choose to ignore social, political, and historical contexts, the possibility of working together toward equitable outcomes is lost (Miller & Hafner, 2008).

Conclusion

Faith-based anchor institutions are well-positioned to meet the needs of their local and regional communities as a place-based entity, with a vast network of knowledge and resources, and a commitment to service as a priority. When we think about the role HEI’s play in helping to positively transform communities, we have to consider both the individual and institutional commitment to this work. Students should have an opportunity to consider their biases, develop a sense of cultural humility, and connect their faith to their actions. Faculty need to assist students in exploring these aspects of their personal and social development through creating a curriculum

that aligns with these priorities. Similarly, faculty must be supported through professional development opportunities and be encouraged to seek out community partnerships to enhance the learning outcomes of their courses. At the institutional level, administrators have to lead by example and demonstrate the value of forging cross-sector collaboration by encouraging faculty and staff at all levels to leverage the strengths of the university to meet the challenges we face as a collective community. At the center of effective outreach are community partners who most often articulate the needs of the community and model collaboration. Most importantly, it is the community members—people who, time and time again, serve as the educators. Faith-based anchor institutions have the potential to be most effective when they are willing to authentically listen to and learn from those they serve.

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The Black Church and Liberal Arts Institutions: Forming Reciprocal Relationships for Thriving Urban Communities and Churches

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Abstract

Academic institutions engaged in partnerships with the Black Church, including small, independent, under-resourced churches as well as historically Black denominational churches, and other under-resourced faith-based organizations, are encouraged to consider collaborative educational opportunities around the issues of strategic financial sustainability and short and long-term stewardship. Four highly community-engaged academics offer a thought-experiment starting with their observations and experiences with respect to the need for such partnerships, and how these kinds of collaborations may be able to help strengthen the Black Church, in all its forms and faith-based communities and ground them for greater advocacy for demanding systemic and structural change.

Keywords: Black Church, community engagement, faith-based organizations, churches, sustainability, stewardship

The authors of this paper are engaged academics and community advocates who also have been highly active in small urban, predominantly minority-serving non-denominational and denominational churches and other faith-based community organizations for decades. As we have traversed the often-distinct spaces of small churches, faith-based organizations, academic, other non-profit environments, and underserved communities, we are keenly aware of the strengths, similarities, and opportunities for reciprocal learning in all of these environments. Together we bring more than 100 years of experience within churches and faith-based organizations, over 125 years of higher education and/or other non-profit career experience, and more than 50 years of post-secondary education. Based on these experiences, we offer the following thought-experiment. We find ourselves imagining the transformative potential of applying key liberal arts principles with which we have become accustomed in our academic lives to help address challenges we have observed for years in our various faith-based community engagements.

We have reached a point of great concern with respect to the future and sustainability of small, independent churches and faith-based organizations in underserved communities in the United States. This paper stems from the disconnects we experience as we maneuver between church, academy, and community. Although these environments are often physically close, there is a chasm between their approaches to future planning and problem solving. Our collective concerns have been exacerbated and made more urgent by the impact of the novel coronavirus pandemic.

For academic institutions who partner with small, independent non-denominational and denominational churches, or faith-based community organizations, this article poses a question for consideration. What would happen if small, independent churches, as well as denominational and other faith-based organizations more purposefully applied sustainability principles such as those common to liberal arts colleges? For example, Owens (2008) offered that churches should “preach what we should practice,” and that we must cross the gaps of science, religion, and culture in order to become literate in environmental, health, policy, and educational matters in order to lead God’s people. As responsible citizens, we must be fluent in speaking about issues that impact our communities on the local, national, and global levels, much like a sound liberal arts education.

Our aim is not to theoretically position liberal arts institutions as saviors to grassroots faith-based organizations, but rather, to leverage the unique resources within the academy and to create opportunities for mutual benefit. We have found that small, independent churches often operate in reactive-survival mode, with leaders necessarily focused on putting out proverbial fires. These organizations rarely have the time or inclination to consider leadership models to ensure their long-term success. Liberal arts institutions often employ strategies for sustainability that may be

of interest to small churches, including collaboration and interdisciplinarity, shared governance, strategic financial planning, equity, and diversity.

This paper is our thought-experiment to encourage others to consider liberal arts principles and their potential benefit to churches and faith-based community organizations. However, we first recognize the importance of faith-based organizations, and what academia can learn from them. Then we will describe challenges in small, independent churches that we have observed. Finally, we offer liberal-arts based theoretical components that could be proposed, employed, and tested within academic-community faith-based engagements.

What the Academy can Learn from Faith-based Organizations with Respect to Valuing Community Engagement

The role of faith-based organizations within underserved communities has been extremely important over the centuries and decades. The Black Church is a historical community anchor in both rural and urban communities and have been significant sources of family and community support. Although there is no established or universally accepted definition, Frazier (1974) described a merger of the “invisible institution” or “brush arbor” church and the established Black Churches of the north and south, which resulted in Black denominational churches with roots in the enslavement period wherein African people were involuntarily forced into migration and were brutalized and exploited. As a result, African people were made to worship in the Christian faith, especially as it pertained to submission and obedience of Whites in power. However, many Black congregants adopted its customs, practices, and policies to also provide much needed supports that were missing within the context of what the plantation provided. Many of these churches combined the African nations’ communalism with Christian and other religious rituals from Africa. The Black Church in these contexts were secret societies that coalesced to help ensure that all members of the enslaved community would be looked after as much as possible through the sharing of information, secret intelligence, extended family kinship (blood and non-blood) networks, shared food, and other resources. Regardless of the definition or version of the Black Church and their particularities and divergences, Barrett (2010) offers that “*all* Black Churches are likely to value educational success on the part of their young congregants and that many may work (or would be interested in working) to promote their success in similar ways” (p. 250).

It also is well understood that many Black Churches, along with young middle, high school, and college students collectively, were the backbone of the 1950s and 1960s civil rights movements, and even many movements prior to those and since (Lewis & Webb, 2010). The roles of the Black Church in families and communities historically have included: spiritual development; protection and advocacy for vulnerable families and communities; provision of family and

community; and provision of economic resources and social networking when needed. It also has served an important leadership role to families and communities, offering child-rearing support and extended family kinship support. Oftentimes the church has assisted in family and community conflict resolution; elderly assistance; and mentoring of black males and females and youth (Francis, 2015), although there still tends to be a great distance needed to go with respect to mentoring of LGBTQIA+ youth. Church-related activities have helped youth develop oration, and other educational and leadership skills (Toldson & Anderson 2010). These also are the places where many talented musicians, singers, and actors, even Grammy and Academy Award winners, honed their skills. The Black Church has been a base of social service provision for the poor, sick, and disabled. It has provided education and leadership concerning economics, material, and physical survival for minorities in a predominantly white world, serving as the nucleus of community and extended community advocacy and protest. The list could continue ad infinitum.

For underserved communities, the church is often where volunteerism happens, where those historically needing to be served the most do the most serving. This dynamic is often invisible to the mainstream which does not recognize this kind of non-documented or informal service. In these contexts, service is woven into the fabric of everyday being. Thus, hundreds of years later, black and urban churches still serve these same roles, often serving as a safety net for families getting lost in the broken economy, the systems of oppression, the war on drugs, the preschool to prison pipeline, and drug epidemics that are seen as criminal by the mainstream population, as opposed to a public health crisis when it hits opioid-addicted white populations. The small independent Black, urban, as well as rural churches often have served as community focal points, not only for support, but also for resistance against oppressive policies and practices. To this day, Black Churches position spiritual development as primary, but also prioritize protection and advocacy for the Black community. Many still offer a sense of community with church leaders being of utmost importance to families. When faith-based entities do not survive or do not reach their fullest potential, the impact of that failure ripples to families and communities, even to those who are not directly associated, that is, there are adverse effects for the entire community, municipality, and beyond.

Acknowledgment of a Tenuous History May Lead to Reciprocal Relationships

There are many needs that the Black Church will continue to lead in addressing. Similarly, there is much that liberal arts institutions may offer the Black Church. However, both will need to acknowledge the role of historical oppressions and biases in the continued existence of a gap between the Black Church and the academy. The origins of that gap relate to a mainly Black/White racial divide that originated with the founding of the United States but was exacerbated by anti-Black racism manifested through the institution of slavery (Drewry &

Doermann, 2001) that continue through and Post- Civil War, Reconstruction, Jim Crow, and the Civil Rights movements of subsequent generations.

The first Black Americans on record as earning baccalaureate degrees were Edward Jones and John Russworm, who graduated in 1826 from Amherst and Bowdoin Colleges, respectively. By the time of the end of the Civil War in 1865, the Black American population had reached 4.4 million, but only 26 more Black people are reported to have earned baccalaureate degrees (Drewry & Doermann, 2001). Prior to the Civil War, some schools for free Black Americans were founded and became the first Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). What are now Cheyney State, Lincoln, and Wilberforce Universities granted their baccalaureate degrees in the 1930s. Education continued and remains as an elusive endeavor for the descendants of enslaved Africans. Formal and higher education were institutions that were withheld, and presently, access to quality education remains a challenge.

Thus, the educational divide created a class divide among African Americans, as access to education was and is tied to racism, oppression, economic opportunity, and basic human dignity. There are historic, complex, and sometimes antithetical relationships between faith, education, and the Black community (Mitchell, 2010). Education, although seen as a way out, was also seen as a dividing point because it was not accessible to all. There were always free Black people, but social class is an important variable in navigating those relationships. Teachers and preachers were often among the more educated people in Black communities, the former profession being mostly women and the latter being mostly men. Accordingly, among the denominational and nondenominational Black Churches, social class and gender remain in terms of church leadership, worship style, music, and prescribed gender roles (Warnock, 2014).

Relationships with teachers, not professors, emerged as access to education increased. However, the presence of university professors has not increased to the point where they are commonplace in most Black Churches. Garnering trust in an educational system that has a history of racially exclusionary structural inequalities, built on foundational tenets of Black inferiority (Barrett, 2010) presents a grand challenge for collaborative progress.

There is a pride in and of the Black professional class, but there is also a suspicion of “educated people who acted as though they were ‘above’ less well-educated members of the community” (Siddle Walker, p. 85). Success in collaboration with the Black Church means reading the room, code switching, and being the person who can talk to less formally educated church leaders on their level while also being someone that they can look up to and trust. Black professors must behave in ways where our education is not threatening.

Learning from the Black Community

There is much that academic institutions can learn from engagement with small faith-based organizations and from academic peers who carry strong faith. First, many professors, staff, and students may not understand that for many people, faith is not secularized into specific spaces and timeslots, for example, Sunday morning. Many faith-based community partners and some academic partners carry faith with them 24-7, even into their classes, campus programs, and generally in how we respond to various situations. Those who operate with faith-based principles in academic settings often draw from their spirituality in their relationships and communications with students and colleagues, helping to foster a culture of inclusion and respect.

Secondly, academic institutions can learn that because academics may allow our faith to be seen, it does not mean that we do not respect or even appreciate the faiths of others. We may have a deep respect for other religions while clinging tightly to our own, which can put us at times at odds with our own faith-based organizations who may believe that there is only one way to love or serve God. Likewise, our faith-beliefs and practices can put us in awkward positions with our institutions, at times, feeling stuck between worlds as believers and academics.

Thirdly, there is a great deal that engagement with faith-based organizations can teach academics about the role of faith in everyday life, including the efficacy of the children, adults, and elders engaged within their faith-based organizations, and the social activism, networking, fund-raising, and creative problem solving that can occur within small, independent faith-based arenas. Thus, while we are focused on presenting liberal arts values and strategies as potentially helpful for small, independent faith-based organizations, we do not mean to suggest that partnerships and learning between academia and faith-based organizations are not mutually beneficial. We offer a potentially helpful theoretical framework for problem-solving, but do not intend to position academia as a paternalistic savior of vulnerable churches.

Challenges Observed within Small Independent Churches

The Pew Research Center (2018) reports a rapid decline of Christianity in the United States, with the largest decreases occurring in the Catholic Church as well as mainline Protestant denominations, yet 79% of African Americans self-identify as Christian. Nearly half of Black Christians are not associated with historically Black Protestant denominations. By measures of religious commitment, importance of religion, daily prayer, and weekly church attendance, African Americans are more religious than White and Latinx populations. However, the percentage of African Americans who are religiously unaffiliated has increased with differences in age. 18% of African Americans adults overall remain unaffiliated, but that increases to nearly 30% when the focus is young adults between the ages of 18 and 29. Comparatively speaking,

only 7% of Black adults over the age of 65 self-report as religiously unaffiliated. Thus, like other populations, membership in the Black Church overall is decreasing.

In spite of these trends, the Black Church, in all of its forms, continues to stand in the gap for children and families who may be struggling, although the churches simultaneously are also struggling. Under-resourced communities are very rich in creativity and resourcefulness, yet financially limited and vulnerable to sustainability challenges. Therefore, attention to community assessment, mission, financial planning, and sustainability are extremely important. Yet, these may be the areas with the least undergirding. Thus, the churches with the most to offer might have the fewest resources for assuring their sustainability. Every time a church that provides communal support to children and families closes, an entire community of people, sometimes numbering in the thousands if counting their collateral impact, are left to fend for themselves, or to seek another church that may not be a reasonable distance from home. Trust within a church community takes time, sometimes years to build among its members, so starting over in a new church can be very problematic, from the transportation to get there to the trust that also takes time to establish in any relationship. The fact that so many churches are closing, and at a rate higher than they are growing, presents a startling gap for minority children and families who rely on these churches to help them move from isolation toward community, and from disenfranchisement toward empowerment.

Historically, the Black Church has maintained its role as a hub for social services provided to predominately African American communities. As time has progressed, African Americans have obtained greater access to resources and education, which has been both a reward and a challenge for some Black Churches. In other words, some segments of the community have not had to rely on the church as much for assistance with basic, emotional, networking, and meditative needs, while the least resourced still do. Many churches are capitalizing on the diverse set of skills and knowledge offered by the current generation of African American and ally members that are highly educated, skilled, networked, and resourced. The churches that have found the most success in this era have been able to translate congregants' skills and education directly into church involvement and leadership.

Simultaneously, many Black Churches have relied on faith with little to no practical implementation. While Black communities are suffering from high levels of poverty, lack of education, inadequate housing, increased violence, health disparities and other social issues, what is the church's responsibility beyond having faith? Resistance against systemic barriers must accompany our faith. Relying on faith without also strategically planning and fighting for structural change may have contributed to a large number of churches becoming stagnant in their growth, even to the point of extinction. To this, the church must not only proactively engage short and long-term sustainable strategies, but also nurture their membership with tools to meet the demands for change. Thus, we have observed increasingly greater tensions within Black and

minority churches involving appreciation for diversity, expectations of transparency and accountability, and demands for shared governance and strategic sustainability.

We have noticed the tendency for the faith-based organizations not already embedded within a long-standing and/or well-functioning, minimally secure financial, and structural system to be especially at risk because they have no larger or protective organizational structure to fall back on when the going gets rough. Nonetheless, it is this independence that makes the non-denominational arm of the Black Church so important, because of their freedom from rigid religious structures and doctrines. The freedom where a church answers only to God may be attractive to participants who wish to avoid the politics of larger, more highly structured churches. It often is these small, independent churches that have great appeal to the younger generations, because they may not be as steeped in traditionalism, but that very thing also may be what also makes these churches most vulnerable. In other words, these independent churches may be less likely to have actively engaged governing boards that can proactively and critically look out for the interests of the church as a collective. Our years of experience in liberal arts environments have helped us understand some of the challenges faced by non-profit institutions of all kinds, including small, under-resourced churches. In the next section of this paper, we outline some of these challenges and offer strategies for consideration.

Challenge 1: A greater need for clarity of mission, shared governance, ongoing assessment, and consistent accountability

The Black Church includes organized denominations and conventions such as the African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), Church of God in Christ (COGIC), Church of God by Faith (COGBF), and several Baptist Conventions (e.g., National Baptist, Progressive Baptist, National Missionary Baptist, etc.) that have more centralized organizational hierarchies. It has been our experience that many small, urban, and rural independent faith-based organizations could benefit from assessment and accountability in mission, structure, and goals. A strong, participant-engaged mission statement serves as a declarative statement describing who a group is, what optimal goals are desired, and also gives insight on how those goals will be accomplished. Too often the goals tied to a church's mission statement only allude to the work that the church strives to do, but never ties it to an overall mission to be achieved. These organizations should embark on the project of reevaluating their mission statement and goals to be sure that they effectively are meeting the needs of their membership and those within the community. Assessment is an ongoing process to examine patterns, use and efficiency of resources, effectiveness, and cumulative impact. It has been our experience that without transparent assessment, resulting accountability is difficult or non-existent. Because independent faith-based organizations are not governed by any secular higher offices, it can be difficult to structure transparency and accountability. Some states require that nonprofits have a governing board, however, we have

observed that those boards often are in name only. Consequently, leadership may not be truly challenged to consider diverse viewpoints, or to try diverse strategies for developing and implementing policies and procedures. Decisions, therefore, may be made arbitrarily, authoritatively, emotionally, inequitably, self-servingly, or unsustainably. The solution is not necessarily for a church to join a hierarchically organized denomination, but rather non-denominational churches may develop well-functioning shared-governance structures, creating internal systems of accountability and oversight. Shared-governance may bring together leaders, congregants, and community participants who are faith and practical-minded to form a decision-making collaborative who will look out for the best interests of the independent church. If there is no transparency and no accountability, then the faith-based organization could be argued as being cultish by any number of definitions (Richardson, 1993). Academic institutions may be able to assist or at least model transparency for their faith-based community partners who may need more of it.

Challenge 2: Short and long-term sustainability plans and goals

The hope of sustainability begins with attention not only to the short-term survival of an organization, but also mission-driven strategic planning, including financial planning, toward long-term goals. A lack of financial acumen directly impacts sustainability when faith-based organizations are not educated on savings, development, investments, wealth management, and managing endowments. For example, small, faith-based organizations may be renting from expensive hotels in order to hold services rather than collaborating with community resources for free or nominal expense spaces enabling saving for a down payment to purchase a long-term space. Academic institutions engaged with small, independent churches might serve them well by offering spaces for holding services, youth programs, and other events while also assisting them with their financial sustainability plan if needed.

Challenge 3: Greater need for appreciation of diverse viewpoints and interdisciplinarity

We have found that like many faith-based organizations in our nation, the Black Church, as well as small, urban, and rural independent churches could benefit from diverse points of view and interdisciplinarity, beginning with an active board, and including the rest of its membership. Ideally, a governing board should include diverse membership, perhaps including at least one member from outside of the church structure, someone who can bring additional expertise to the governing board, such as a financial expert, attorney or other legal expert, a grant-writer, or a consultant, if such expertise is not already found among the members. Interdisciplinarity can also be nurtured by the sharing of ideas across occupations, topics, arts, sciences, programs, trainings, environments, and cultures so that learning and creativity do not come exclusively from church-related activities. In any case, academic institutions who work with small, faith-based

organizations may be able to assist them in understanding how appreciation for diversity and interdisciplinarity might help to strengthen the effectiveness of the governing board.

Challenge 4: Greater need for critical thinking and academic humility

Related to some of the previous challenges, in our decades of experience with small, the Black Church as well as small urban and rural churches, we have found a tendency at times for critical thinking to be frowned upon among membership and governing boards. At first blush, it may seem to be a direct challenge to critical thinking. Remembering that the historically the Black Church fosters education of its members as a mechanism for uplift, what may be misconstrued as anti-intellectualism may be a defensive posture to the revelation of deficiencies in knowledge, training, and skills. Academic institutions engaged with small, faith-based organizations may be able to gently educate and model, with humility, appreciation for critical thinking where needed.

Liberal Arts Leadership Principles

As faith-based-grounded scholars, it is common or natural for us to bring ideas from the academic world to our faith-based endeavors (e.g., the expectation of accountability), and vice versa, to bring our faith-based experiences to our academic life (e.g., “call and response” methods in our teaching). The more that we have found ourselves crossing among the academic, faith-based, and community worlds, we have found ourselves bringing our knowledge from all of those worlds everywhere we go, and it has changed us and our expectations in all of those spaces. We have learned to expect greater transparency, accountability, diversity, interdisciplinary, and sustainability in everything in which we expend our energies and resources. However, we also recognize the historical variables that may fuel the tensions between the Black Church and the academy.

There are many rewards in town-gown faith-based partnerships, including the potential of such partnerships to help make demands on systemic structures for equity and social justice while also helping to support community needs, something that the Black Church models for liberal arts institutions. Another reward, often less talked about, is the transformative power of such partnerships on higher education institutions such as the social learning and greater awareness of diversity issues that such partnerships bring to students, professors, and administrators. In honoring that power, liberal arts institutions may be able to partner with the Black Church in evaluating and revising mission and governance documents as well as sustainability planning and continuous leadership development.

Shared Governance

In the liberal arts environments that we have traversed, we have discovered a tendency and value for shared governance and wide-spread input. Shared governance involves a full participation process where all stakeholders have an opportunity to have their voices represented on policy decision-making either via representatives, survey, open meetings, democratic vote, and/or some other form of input and engagement on issues and decisions. It does not mean that a hierarchical structure does not exist, but that those hierarchies are entrusted to seek the input of those for whom they represent or are responsible. Shared governance seeks as much diverse and equitable input as possible, in order to ensure that all components of an organization, or even a household, has been heard and considered. Shared governance creates stakeholders who feel their input was heard and considered, even if not agreed upon.

Related to shared governance, research has proven that diversity and interdisciplinarity in the body of shared input gives greater problem-solving potential to an organization. Diversity and interdisciplinarity in backgrounds engender creativity across boundaries. A variety of perspectives enhances not only an organization's creativity, but also its problem-solving abilities. Appreciation of diversity is not just in terms of demographic percentages and numbers, but also the ability of an organization to consider, and if necessary, act on the diverse views, opinions, issues, and perspectives, and retain its diversity of members. In our thought-experiment, we propose that diverse shared governance principles may be applicable not only to traditional businesses, but also to faith-based organizations, and even to families.

We believe that higher educational institutions that are partnered with faith-based organizations, and especially churches are strategically positioned to assist urban churches by helping them to consider the power of shared governance, leveraged by various intersectional diversities. Together, these partnerships can maximize placement in leadership roles as well as creative succession planning to ensure the sustainability of these churches. This will require a greater respect for and appreciation for diversity and interdisciplinarity which might be a challenge for some churches. However, this might be an area where academia can help their faith-based partners understand the potential relationships among shared governance, diversity, interdisciplinarity and the creativity that it engenders, and sustainability, if they do not understand them well already.

Environmental Stewardship and Sustainability

Many Americans feel that small personal sacrifices are meaningless in terms of global environmental stewardship. As educators who hold positions of authority and respect in the Black community, pastors in the Black Church including small, urban non-denominational churches should equip ourselves to “practice what we should preach and preach what we should

practice” (Owens, 2008). In a viable partnership, liberal arts institutions may partner with pastors and church leaders to equip them with knowledge on environmental, health, and social issues in order to practice it and inform their congregations. Modeling sustainable behaviors at the church will likely lead to changes in personal and household behavior patterns. Environmental and sustainability partnerships may also bridge generation gaps by allowing youth and younger adults to work on projects that will benefit the whole church as well as offering opportunities for theological reflections on creation, responsible stewardship as well as church and household consumption habits (Owens, 2006).

Conversely, faithful academics may expand the research base on the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors of pastors and members in the Black Church, including urban communities. Irwin (2013) speaks of the average lifespan of a church being 70-100 years, which is about the same as the lifespan of a human being. Thus, we are at a point in history where many churches from the 1950s-1970s have aged, and are having difficulties with long-term viability within the church. The fight for social justice also is extremely important. Demanding change at the macrosystem levels, such as elimination of the preschool to prison pipeline, racist practices, health disparities, underemployment, joblessness, and environmental justice are efforts to be undertaken by academic institutions and churches alike.

The more practical aspects of sustainable survival that the small, independent church can learn from academic institutions, the more equipped the church will be for functioning sustainably over the course of a long span of time. These may include partnering with churches to assist them in developing creative and sustainable solutions, spaces for fellowshiping and meeting, grant-writing skills, financial budgets, board development, development of municipal advocacy and negotiation skills, social justice advocacy, and more.

Conclusion

The Black Church and the liberal arts institution have much to offer one another. Formed in response and resistance to enslavement and involuntary servitude, the Black Church is not reaching out to liberal arts institutions; they did not send for us. Alas, for many Black people, these institutions represent the American power structure that delivers intersectional inequities and oppression. In order to traverse barriers constructed via centuries of oppression and violence, Black professors at these institutions and their allies must approach the Black Church with profound faithful and cultural humility rather than with a paternalistic approach that indicates that the liberal arts institution knows what the Black Church needs more than the descendants of a faith that has sustained generations. Although liberal arts academics come in good faith, our missionary-like zeal may be off-putting and misconstrued as threatening. As Black educators, we must engage in introspection and self-reflection to make sure that our intent is and remains

genuine. Our Blackness may open the door for us, but it alone will not sustain a reciprocal relationship.

What the Black Church has sustained for generations may be also instructive to liberal arts institutions, thus forming viable, sustainable, and faithful partnerships. Academic institutions can be helpful by allowing these two major principles to help inform their engagement with faith-based organizations, and empirically research them to test their merits. We are hopeful that approaches such as those we have proposed may help to narrow the ever-widening chasm between faith and works, practical strategies for moving forward, so that churches will not merely survive, but also thrive. Hopefully small, independent churches and other faith-based organizations can increase their ability to model survival and thriving strategies for the health, welfare, and success of their congregations and individual members. Such strategies may help to strengthen small, independent churches, and therefore help to transform urban communities who may be supported and strengthened by them.

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