

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

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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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