

Interfaith



religion and labor organizing and advocating for worker justice since 1996

Analysis of Structures and Strategies of Faith-Based Community Organizing offered by Kristina J. Meyer, Honors Project, Elon University Class of 2019

Is Faith-Based Community Organizing Still Relevant? How Cultural Shifts are Shaping the Conversation

CONTEXTUAL SHIFTS AND CORRESPONDING CHALLENGES

increasing religious diversity

How does the faith voice speak in a multi-religious context?

loss of members and financial resources of mainline churches

How can pastors and volunteers generate power with fewer resources?

a perceived dichotomy between secular left and Christian right

How do people of faith incorporate a specifically progressive faith voice into public discourse dominated by either conservative Christianity or liberal secularity?

an increasing awareness of privilege

How should privileged people of faith share space with minoritized communities without ceding their voice or becoming paralyzed by guilt?

a hostile economic-political environment

How can progressive activists effectively respond to contemporary political issues?

FAITH & ORGANIZING:

MUTUAL PARTNERSHIP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

In response to the changes of the social, political, religious, economic, and demographic landscapes in the 21st century United States, faith communities need to discern how to speak in this new context in ways that mobilize the moral authority of faith voices to advocate for social justice in partnership with those most visibly impacted by injustice.

STRUCTURES & STRATEGIES FOR ADVOCACY

Examples of progressive faith based organizing in the US impacting their communities, through mutual empowerment in organizing and advocacy for social justice and social transformation:

Building Networks

- creating connections
- national and regional gatherings
- relationship/community building
- sharing information internally

Advocacy

- support of national and local campaigns by clergy and laity
- actions to create public awareness
- partnering with other organizations
- support for legislation
- social media and outreach

Worker Centers

- guiding workers with individual cases
- empowering works through supportive community
- grassroots organizing
- creating resource and training on worker justice: rights and abuses

Interfaith Coalitions

- Faith community education
- leadership training
- internships
- creating resources about faith beliefs supporting worker justice
- training on advocacy and action

Progressive Religion informs faith-based organizing

(Braunstein)

Progressive values

commitments to transformational social justice

Progressive identity

identification with individuals or groups that are accepted as progressive

Progressive action

participation in social action towards a more equitable society

Progressive theology

active deconstruction and reformation to create inclusive theologies

Note: People engaging in progressive religion do not always exhibit all four dimensions, but rather various combinations.

CONSTRUCTED KNOWING

Constructed knowing occurs when individuals integrate knowledge from own experiences of the world with knowledge from the experiences of others. Marginalized groups must often fight to assert that their own experiences are as valuable as those of the dominant group. White Christians often minimize the value of their own experiences due to guilt stemming from awareness of privilege.

Intentional partnering and mutual learning can lead healthier organizations as they work for social justice. *(Belenky)*

MUTUAL SOLIDARITY

Social transformation requires those with privilege to form mutual relationships with the minoritized, who have a greater understanding of how the system perpetuates oppression and must be included in order to create effective and sustainable change that benefits the whole community.

Through these relationship, people of faith can understand how to best engage their own moral agency to advocate for justice from a particularly faith lens. *(Peters)*

Religion and organizing merge when people from various contexts engage in mutual empowerment seeking justice through action and advocacy.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

METHODS

This 3-year project involved participant-observation (June-July 2018) at the national office of Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ.org) and local affiliates and interviews with staff, board members, local clergy, and volunteers, which provided insights into how each organization functions and how it impacts the community. (IWJ, Chicago; Memphis, Madison, Boston)

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RELATED READING

-Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule. *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*, 1997.

-Ruth Braunstein, Todd Nicholas Fuist, and Rhys H. Williams, eds. *Religion and Progressive Activism: New Stories About Faith and Politics*. New York: NYU Press, 2017.

-Joy Heine, Cynthia Brooke, and Interfaith Worker Justice (Organization). *A Worker Justice Reader: Essential Writings on Religion and Labor*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2010.

-Rebecca Todd Peters. *Solidarity Ethics: Transformation in a Globalized World*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014.

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“Being in it felt I was coming home because before that, I was union over here, faith over here, and then it came together.”

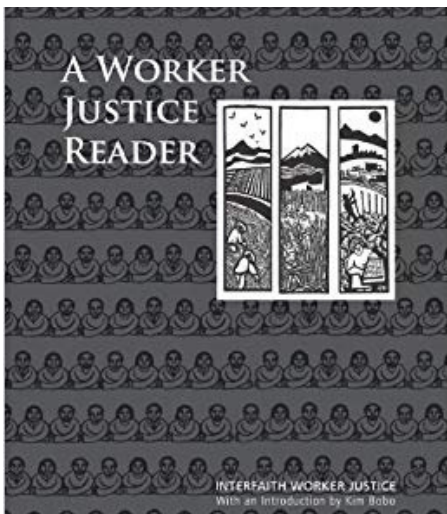
*-Craig Myrbo
(Local Volunteer-
Worker Justice Wisconsin)*



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“We all bring who we are and you got to take advantage of that. But you got to surround yourself with people who share the values, who are of other traditions.”

*-Kim Bobo
(Founder of IWJ)*



INTERFAITH WORKER JUSTICE

Motto: All Religions Believe in Justice

Mission: Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) advances the rights of workers by engaging diverse faith communities into action, from grassroots organizing to shaping policy at the local, state and national levels.

Focus Issues: Just wages
Equal Protection
Safe Working Conditions
Collective Bargaining

Organization Ethos: Faith is Important:
To workers. To employers. To the public.

Affiliates: Interfaith Coalitions
Worker Centers