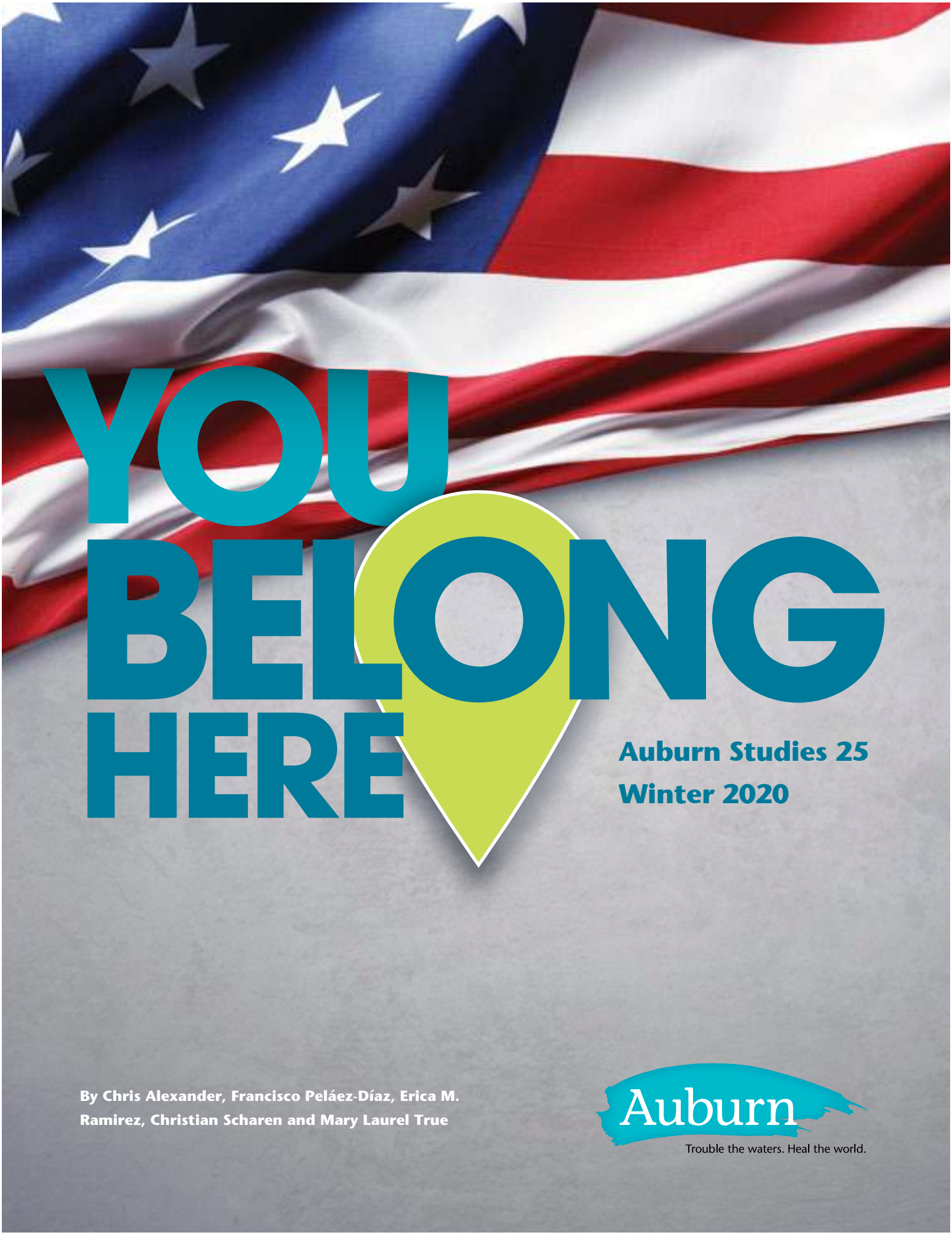

YOU BELONG HERE

Auburn Studies 25
Winter 2020

By Chris Alexander, Francisco Peláez-Díaz, Erica M. Ramirez, Christian Scharen and Mary Laurel True

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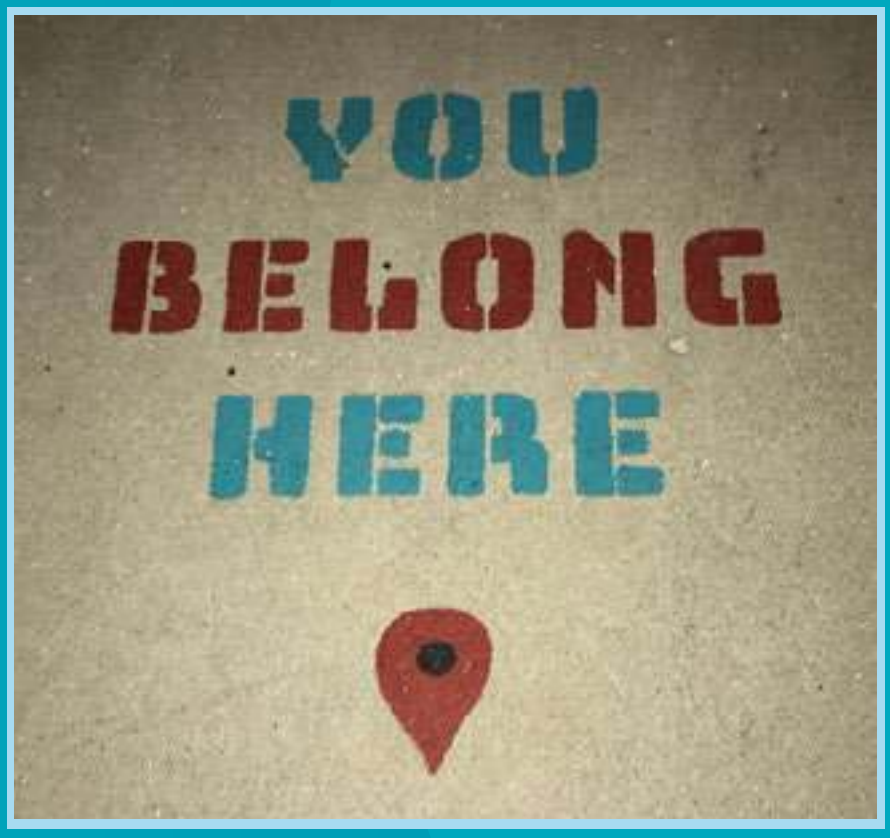

Welcoming graffiti on sidewalks in Dayton, Ohio

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Executive Summary

This is a future story for our nation as a place where instead of denying human dignity and dreams we signal to all those who reside in these lands, "You belong here."

The campaign slogan of President Donald Trump, "Make America Great Again," may seem to some as patriotic but it trades in an unpatriotic and dangerous version of our nation. America's fifth inaugural poet Richard Blanco calls this danger out in his volume, *How To Love A Country*. Blanco argues in powerful poems that true love of America does not erase difference, does not dream of a nation without immigrants and without diversity, but rather celebrates our vibrant democracy in all its complexity and beauty. A close examination of the broad statistical data reveals that a majority of Americans in fact favor immigration and feel the growing diversity of our nation to be a good thing.

This report, rooted in vibrant case studies of three major cities in the heartland of the United States, gives flesh and blood to these encouraging statistics. In fact, vibrant alternatives to Trump's vision for the nation are already alive and growing. As researchers and community partners, we invite everyone — especially those of Euro-American backgrounds who have historically held privilege and power in our national life — to join us in leaning into a future story for the United States that embraces our cultural diversity as beautiful, necessary, and desired. This is a future story for our nation as a place where instead of denying human dignity and dreams we signal to all those who reside in these lands, "You belong here."

We posit that the three cities featured in this report — Dayton, Ohio; Omaha, Nebraska and Minneapolis, Minnesota — are just such vibrant alternatives. Each represents a compelling case study from which we as stakeholders in this nation can learn. In these cities, we found seven key characteristics that have been crucial to creating spaces in which all people can belong. Perhaps the most important and surprising headline of our study is that, in these cases, religion is visibly working for the common good. In all three cases, we have noted the active contributions of long-term clergy who have played, and continue to play, key roles in spurring communities to see and live into just visions of the world — despite ugly, competing alternatives.

The debate about "who belongs" in this nation is, unfortunately, becoming a culture war — not over individual hot-button issues, but instead over American identity itself. In their own ways, each of these communities is writing a story for the future of the nation where all belong, where cross-sector partners build structures of support for welcoming all residents in their communities, and wherein every resident has real, public space in which to appear in his/her/their full dignity. That such stories exist, even now, is a beautiful miracle. If through our partnership and engagement these stories and the seven key characteristics we demonstrate that they share can be more widely circulated, we hope that readers can grasp hold of fresh possibilities — not just for a brighter future, but for a more hopeful present.

Seven Key Characteristics

- The presence of **long-term clergy**, usually more than a decade;
- A **bridge person** whose job is to go between communities and institutions;
- A **clear moral imperative** for welcoming;
- New **community bridging practices** gathering people across differences;
- **Cross-sector partnerships** creating an ecology of skills and commitments;
- **Adequate resource streams** to support the launch and growth of th efforts;
- A **willingness to risk and experiment**, learning together what is effective.

Introduction

Inaugural poet Richard Blanco reciting his poem, One Today, in January 21, 2013

The challenge of welcoming and belonging in America today

Richard Blanco writes, "Let's Remake America Great ... Yes: Let's reshoot America as a fantasy, a '50s TV show in clear black and white." That Blanco — a gay Latinx immigrant — would not be included in that fantasy version of America led him to write a book of patriotic poems, titled *How To Love A Country*. Blanco's collection of poems effectively refutes Trump's campaign slogan, "Make America Great Again," as trading in bad patriotic faith.[1] Blanco's exemplary work counters: we have never been, as Trump seems to invoke, a non-immigrant, strictly Euro-America nation.[2]

Despite the extensive coverage that a surging nativism enjoys in the media, a close examination of broad statistical data reveals that a majority of Americans agree — not with Trump's regressive, reactionary vision but instead with Blanco's vision. More Americans favor immigration as an American tradition and embrace the substantial and still-growing diversity of our nation as a good thing.

This report, rooted in vibrant case studies of three major cities in the heartland of the United States, gives flesh and blood to the statistics. In fact, vibrant alternatives to Trump's vision for the nation are already alive and growing. While we as co-authors and research partners of this report are ourselves diverse, and think this report is of importance for the diversity of America as it is now, we issue a special call to those of Euro-American background who have historically held privilege and power in our national life to take the lessons of this report to heart. It is crucial for those historically in power to help tell a future story for the United States that embraces our cultural diversity as beautiful, necessary, and desired. Furthermore, we envision telling a future story-as these communities from whom we learned so much already do--of our nation as a place where, instead of denying human dignity and dreams, we signal to all those who reside in our lands, "you belong here."

In his powerful memoir *Dear America: Notes of an Undocumented American*,[3] journalist Jose Antonio Vargas describes in vivid detail what it is like for an undocumented immigrant to live in "the most anti-immigrant era in modern American history."[4] The President of the United States has made opposition to immigration a central concern, peppering nearly every speech he makes with dehumanizing, alienating rhetoric. Speaking in April 2019 from the United States border town of Calexico, California, Trump made his position abundantly clear: "Our system is full ... We can't take you anymore. Sorry, can't happen. So turn around, that's the way it is."[5]

His statement is merely one in an almost unending stream of much more forceful attacks — a strategy that Trump embraced from the beginning of his campaign for president in June of 2015, at which point he referred to Mexican immigrants as "criminals, rapists, and murderers."[6] This rhetoric courts violence. For example, in a May 2018 immigration policy forum, Trump denounced immigrant gang members, stating, "These aren't people, they are animals."[7] Trump's related efforts to enforce a so-called Muslim ban have been accompanied by similar accusations, which depict Muslims as dangerous, uncivilized and terrorists.

That these violent words have inspired violent actions is, sadly, no surprise. The white and male shooters in the subsequent Christchurch, Canterbury, New Zealand and El Paso, Texas massacres both explicitly named Trump as a central inspiration for their actions.[8]

Trump's related efforts to enforce a so-called Muslim ban have been accompanied by similar accusations, which depict Muslims as dangerous, uncivilized and terrorists.

Jose Antonio Vargas - journalist and outspoken critic of xenopobia

While the anti-immigrant voices are loud, they are not the majority and their strength is actually shrinking. According to the Pew Research Center, a longer view gives a very strong indication of where the ethos of nation is moving.

Today, a majority of Americans (62%) say immigrants strengthen the country because of their hard work and talents, with only 28% saying they are a burden through taking jobs, housing and health care from native-born Americans.

This is a striking reversal from a quarter-century ago when 63% of Americans surveyed reported that immigrants were a burden and only 31% stated that immigrants strengthen the country.

Our sentiments have changed but they have not changed evenly across the generational spectrum. When broken down by age, only 44% of those in the so-called Silent Generation (born 1928-1945) say immigrants strengthen rather than burden the country, compared to a robust 75% of Millennials who say the same.[9] The Gallup organization reports that 67% of Americans say immigration should be increased or kept at its current level, the highest number since Gallup began asking this question in 1965.[10] A 2018 PRRI poll found that two out of every three respondents think it would be a positive development for the United States to become a majority-nonwhite country by 2045.[11]

In a time when political leaders on local, national and global levels espouse hostile and exclusionary rhetoric and policies, we take heart in these broader trends which point decidedly in the opposing direction. We add to those heartening statistics a nuanced, case study-based research report that illustrates how people actually act on such opinions. In their own ways, these local stories are, as the title of the project puts it, versions of the claim, "You belong here." They share a vision for expanding practices of civic trust and democratic pluralism. After a year spent looking for, partnering with and then listening to these local leaders, we are convinced their stories illustrate the crucial effects of what authors Jenny Gellatly and Marcos Rivero have termed, "radical municipalism."[12]

The entrance of Countryside Community Church in Omaha

In their work, Gellatly and Rivero track the varied ways governments and societies have responded to economic crises, mass (im)migration, climate change and more. One response that they present features a reemergence of nationalism and a revival of racist and xenophobic discourse that readily entails fear-inducing violence. However, this report highlights and celebrates a counter trend often hidden from view — one that arises from neighborhoods, towns and cities around the world, "to defend human rights, democracy, and the common good."

We posit that the three cities featured here — Dayton, Omaha, and Minneapolis — are just such cities, where residents and local leaders are choosing to be the counter trend. Each city readily becomes a vibrant case study from which to learn. When taken all together, we posit they all model seven key characteristics which have been crucial to their successes in creating spaces for all residents to belong:

1. The active leadership of **long-term clergy**.
2. The contributions of **bridge persons**.
3. A **clear moral imperative** to which to appeal and lay claim.
4. The creation of **new bridging practices**.
5. The institution of **cross-sector partnerships**,.
6. Acquiring **adequate resource streams**,.
7. A **willingness to risk and experiment**.

Much to the surprise of some organizations who work on progressive social change, our study found that in these radical municipalities religion is not only a source of division, but is at work for the common good. In each case, long-term clergy play a key role in spurring communities — and especially those of the Euro-American dominant host culture in these communities — to create a more just public sector.

The debate about "who belongs" in this nation is unfortunately becoming a culture war-not over individual, hot-button issues, but instead over American identity itself. In their own ways, each of these communities is writing a story for the future of the nation where we will all belong, where cross-sector partners build structures of support for welcoming all residents in their communities, and wherein every resident has real spaces in which to appear in his/her/their full dignity.[13] We and our partners in these three communities want these stories to be more widely known. If, through our partnership and engagement, these stories --and the seven key characteristics common across the cases--can be more widely shared, we hope that new communities can grasp hold of fresh possibilities, not just for a brighter future, but for a more hopeful present.

Omaha's Tri-Faith Initiative: "A little taste of paradise"

They saw a vision of creating peace between three communities representing the three great Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Islam and Christianity.

"We didn't create Tri-Faith just to tolerate each other," says Rabbi Aryeh Azriel, now retired after serving for over a quarter-century as the Senior Rabbi of Omaha's Temple Israel. As he recalls the origin story of this remarkable partnership between Jews, Muslims and Christians, he notes that it began unpredictably in a place of tragedy and fear. As soon as the identities of the leaders of the coordinated attacks of September 11th, 2001 became public, a wave of reactive violence arose against American Muslims and their mosques, and more broadly anyone who looked foreign or Middle Eastern. Fearing for their neighboring mosque in downtown Omaha, which housed a community of immigrants from all parts of the world, Rabbi Azriel led members of Temple Israel to encircle the mosque. In so doing, they offered their bodies as a human wall of protection and solidarity for their Muslim neighbors. While these communities enjoyed a loose connection based in mutual understanding and dialogue prior to these events, this moment bonded the Rabbi and leaders of the mosque, and in turn their respective communities, in a whole new way. Their friendship deepened; a new pathway to mutuality opened. They began to share meals, and attend special events and religious holidays of each other's group.

Circle of Peace on the 15th anniversary of 9/11 at The Tri-Faith Initiative in Omaha

By responding out of a moral imperative to protect the vulnerable, Temple Israel planted seeds for a unique experiment in peacemaking. A few years later, as Temple Israel debated a pressing move away from its too-small and aging downtown building, Rabbi Azriel hatched a plan with a Temple member, a well-connected Omaha lawyer named Robert Freeman. They saw a vision of creating peace between three communities representing the three great Abrahamic faiths: Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Together, Rabbi Azriel and Robert Freeman approached Dr. Syed Mohiuddin, an established leader at a neighboring mosque. Dr. Mohuiddin is local cardiologist who immigrated to Omaha from his native India to attend medical school at Creighton University in the early 1960s.

Dr. Mohuiddin, Rabbi Azriel and Robert Freeman agreed on a new vision: to relocate their communities to plot of land they would share and to find a Christian partner to represent the third of the great Abrahamic faiths. Describing this vision, Rabbi Azriel readily quips, "If you can't create peace in the Middle East, what about the Midwest?" After many conversations with potential Christian partners, the visionaries secured a partner in the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska, with the Rev. Canon Tim Anderson as their lead representative there. The "Tri-Faith Initiative" was officially incorporated in 2006. Though they knew it would be no easy task to find the adequate land and funds to develop this vision, together the leaders dove into the work and into the journey ahead of them.

Rabbi Azriel, Rev. Dr. Elnes, and Imam Daudhi of The Tri-Faith Initiative.

As these leaders began to articulate their emerging partnership, they grounded their vision in a moral imperative to live as intentional neighbors. "In working together," they wrote, "our vision is to build bridges of respect, trust, and acceptance, to challenge stereotypes of each other, to learn from one another, and to counter the influence of extremists and agents of hate." [14]

Central to their vision is shared location. Tri-Faith's leaders premise that their daily proximity to one another forces their partnership to move beyond interfaith dialogue, in which conversation partners can nevertheless maintain a sense of ethnic or religious superiority, and simply walk away afterwards. Instead, the vision is to be equals. Each partner remains distinctive in their own traditions, yet committed to living in relationship as neighbors over time. After a kick-off fundraiser, "Dinner in Abraham's Tent," — which was attended by nearly a thousand curious Muslim, Jewish and Christian friends — the search for land to share began in earnest.

In 2011, their prayers for land were answered, if in a palpably ironic way. They purchased a 35-acre plot of land in West Omaha that was formerly part of the Highland Country Club, a Jewish golf club founded in the 1920s at a time when no other country clubs in Omaha admitted Jews.

Temple Israel was the first to open their building on the Tri-Faith Commons in 2013, followed by the American Muslim Institute (AMI) in 2017. AMI is the most diverse Muslim community in Omaha — a refuge for immigrants from around the world who have settled in the city. At a recent Friday prayer service at the mosque, nearly 120 worshippers gathered, representing the global breadth of the Muslim world.

The American Muslim Institute

The skin colors of worshippers ranged from pale, luminous white to glinting obsidian — all prostrating (called Sujud, the basic prayer posture of Muslims) and chanting prayers in unison.[15] Imam Jamal Daoudi, himself an immigrant from Syria, describes the mosque as the home for those seeking a public-facing Muslim identity — something its very name declares and which participation in Tri-Faith serves to deepen. This identity was claimed early on by Dr. Mohiuddin, who served as founder and first president of AMI. In articulating the distinctive vision for AMI, he said, "There are three mosques in Omaha, but they are simply small prayer places. None of those have any capability of providing educational or civil services. What we have built is not only a prayer center but also a center for education and for support of the Muslim community, especially for new arrivals, who need a lot of help and support and anything else the community might need."

During the course of moving the Tri-Faith plan forward, the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska transitioned leadership, and amidst shifting priorities, decided to pull out of the partnership. While this could have been a fatal wound for the process, instead it seems to have allowed the initiative to flourish. Tri-Faith leaders reached out in 2013 to long-time supporter of the initiative, Countryside Community Church (UCC) who, in turn, entered into a deep discernment process led by one of their pastoral team, Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander. It was significant that this community had already built a working, spiritually-rooted, congregational discernment process for just such major decisions. Countryside, as a community, was prepared to decide whether this depth of interfaith ministry was something they were called to embrace together. The ask was, as Alexander put it, no small thing: "to sell our current facilities, purchase new property just west of where we already are, and raise up to twenty-seven million dollars to construct a new building on that property!"

After a well-orchestrated "Forty Days of Discernment" process, Countryside Church voted in June 2014 that they were indeed being called to this ministry, and began a second process of discernment to determine the resources needed to accomplish their call. In Spring 2015, the congregation voted

to join the Tri-Faith initiative as the primary Christian partner, and began planning in earnest for the transition.

The Rev. Dr. Eric Elnes, senior pastor for Countryside, was crucial in casting a vision for how this move would enact deep alignment with God's work in the world. Over his decade of ministry at Countryside, Dr. Elnes was instrumental in building a vibrant interfaith ministry. Speaking just after the 2017 terrorist attacks in London, Elnes said, "Tri-Faith would have made sense throughout any of our religious histories, but in this time, it makes more sense than ever." Elnes acknowledges that the move entailed hard to predict risks, but reasons, "If you're risk-averse, you are really peace averse at the same time." Having raised nearly all the funds needed by the time they broke ground, Countryside's new church building was finished in time for Easter 2019. Now, the last pieces of Tri-Faith's plans are underway: a dramatic circular bridge called "Abraham's Bridge," which connects all three communities across Hell's Creek, a small waterway that just happens to run between them (the humor inherent in the name of the creek is lost on none of the participants), and a welcome center and educational building for the Tri-Faith Initiative itself, as a fourth entity.

No one person could navigate all the twists and turns that this project presented, nor offer all the key leadership interventions it would ultimately require to be brought to life. Instead, a group of key persons and institutional partners helped to bring this beautiful experiment to fruition. In what follows, we highlight some of the key persons and institutional partners that helped bring the Tri-Faith Initiative into reality. We then name some tipping points in their progression, and indicate which cultural characteristics, values, and practices effectively undergirded Tri-Faith's efforts and commitments. We will also take a glimpse at the challenges presented to this Tri-Faith community as it moves into its second generation of leadership and living into the ideal vision that brought it into being. In so doing, we endeavor to share what we have learned from the Tri-Faith Initiative about how its participants are together finding, as Rabbi Azriel puts it, "A little taste of paradise."

Rev. Dr. Elnes, pictured with Rabbi Azriel

Abrahm's Bridge at Tri-Faith

Key characters

In Omaha, religious leaders have been pivotal. Temple Israel's Rabbi Azriel, of course, hatched the vision. It is important to note his long tenure — over 25 years — provided him broad credibility in the community. He now has key partners in the pastors at Countryside, Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander and Rev. Dr. Eric Elnes, as well as Imam Jamal Daoudi from American Muslim Institute. The Temple's new Rabbi, Brian Soller, brings additional vitality to the partnership. Stoller offers that he has come to view himself as, not only the Rabbi for the Temple, but as Rabbi for the Tri-Faith as a whole; Stoller is exploring what it means to feel a rabbinic duty to the other two Tri-Faith religious communities.

They readily admit tensions exist, yet the very nature of their agreement to "move into the neighborhood together" is an agreement to lean into tensions when they arise and trust their friendship and history together for the resources needed for this remarkable experiment.

At the same time, it is clear that many other kinds of advocates and institutional partners were crucial to getting Tri-Faith's partnership off the ground. Robert Freeman, the lawyer who first shared the initial idea with Rabbi Azriel, serves as a primary legal counsel for the Omaha Chamber of Commerce, and had cultivated vibrant relationships in the business community. Another Temple member, Vic Gutmann, who runs a local marketing and event planning company, helped recruit Sister Maryanne Stevens, the highly regarded president of The College of St. Mary in Omaha, to serve as president of the board. Gutmann then also recruited a major local philanthropist, Susie Buffett, to serve as the vice chair. Gutmann chaired a major capital campaign for the initiative as well. Deb McCollister and Rick MacInnes, both long-time Countryside Community Church members, played important roles as well. MacInnes, an experienced businessman, chaired Countryside's relocation process, perhaps the most complicated of the three moves. McCollister has been a lead organizer for their major yearly fundraiser, Dinner in Abraham's Tent, and chairs the Tri-Faith's program committee. Her husband, John, represents Tri-Faith's district in the state senate. While no one person, save perhaps Rabbi Azriel, was a linchpin to the process, the board has been built to represent all sectors of Omaha: higher education, nonprofits, business, health care,government and more — a concrete way to gain both visibility and stability for Tri-Faith.

Sister Marryane Stevens
President of The College of St. Mary

Tipping points

As we listened to the story of Tri-Faith's unfolding to this point, and with the third partner finally moving into the neighborhood, it became clear to us there were tipping points in this process — places in which things might have gone awry or halted the process altogether. That the project moved forward is largely due to the interventions of the key characters above. It was a challenging process to find the right three partners and get their buy-in.

Rabbi Azriel tells the story of a fearful and critical congregant who just couldn't see past his fears of partnering with Muslims: "What if Islamic extremists attack the synagogue? What if there's a live hand grenade rolled down the aisle during high holidays?" Rabbi Azriel replied he'd have two options, "One is to run away, but as a polio survivor, I can't run fast. The other is for me to fall on it." Rabbi Azriel's obvious love for his community brought the other man to tears and he became a donor to the project in response.

Rabbi Azriel's successor, Rabbi Stoller, points to the fact that each partner had a different origin story and set of hurdles to overcome in order to join the initiative. This was in no small part because of the work entailed in securing a second tipping point: finding adequate funding for all three houses of worship and the land, as well as for the Tri-Faith Initiative organization and building itself. But perhaps the most important tipping point of all was finding a way into meaningful relationships — relationships that could foster enough trust to ground this partnership in a deep and integrated way. Because those relationships were born out of the risk of offering protection after the 9/11 attacks, they have grown rooted in the knowledge that partners are willing to risk personal harm for one another.

Culture/norms/practices

The tipping points that key characters negotiated were achieved in the context of a particular local culture and grounded in specific norms and practices of this culture. While often in the background, lived into rather than talked about, cultural norms and practices play a fundamental role in what is possible to imagine and do in any given context. For this story, the wider culture of Omaha matters profoundly. First, Omaha is often referred to as Nebraska's east coast — a way to signal that its geographic place is on the very eastern edge of the state hugging the Missouri River, but also to denote that Omaha is a kind of mirror of the eastern edge of the USA: more diverse, densely populated, and politically liberal compared to the more rural and politically conservative outstate regions. Second, while Omaha may well be Nebraska's east coast, it is still Nebraskan and accordingly it retains a hospitality rooted in both religious and rural values. Dr. Syed Mohiuddin credits Omaha's intentional culture of hospitality as being key to his staying in Omaha. Third and perhaps most unsurprising, is what we might call "the Buffett effect." While hard to measure, the fact that one of the wealthiest families in the world calls Omaha home contributes not only to its culture but also to the philanthropic

assets of the city for an initiative as expensive as Tri-Faith. While the donor base for the Tri-Faith Initiative is broad and deep, the partners are fierce in their assertions that the funding is homegrown — despite attacks claiming foreign funding is behind it.

Important fundamental norms and practices have also played and continue to play a guiding role in the unfolding life of Tri-Faith. The whole initiative emerged from a practice rooted in the norm of protecting the vulnerable, in this case Jews protecting the new immigrant community of Muslims after 9/11. Such actions arise from core biblical texts such as Leviticus 19:34: "The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." Other norms are obvious in the Tri-Faith story, such as a commitment to seek peace through building relationships and being neighbors across difference — perhaps this is best seen in the importance given to sharing meals.

Tri-Faith partners value each other's presence at religious celebrations and holy days but they also value sharing ordinary meals. The Tri-Faith's winter potluck night and summer picnic, for example, and many less formal events, give opportunities to share not only food but lives, cultures and religious convictions, all with a graciousness that makes space for the inevitable cross-religious and cross-cultural mistakes. Rev. Dr. Chris Alexander, from Countryside, puts it this way:

"We are also more accepting of our missteps with one another. We allow for a learning curve among the people in our communities as we are courageous enough to ask questions of one another in order to learn, rather than to judge. So, when Christians unintentionally bring salads with bacon to a Tri-Faith picnic, our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters do not judge us for our ignorance, but rather simply mark the dish so that those who do not eat pork will be aware of the presence of the bacon. In this way, we all learn about each other in an environment of kindness and hospitality. After our fourth or fifth annual picnic, the presence of bacon among the potluck dishes has lessened considerably!"

We have to find a way through to living together. This is the point to the initiative. Now that we are all here — the fun is just beginning."

A picnic event at Tri-Faith

Challenges within the next phase of development

The experiment of co-location among these three faith traditions and defining their relationship to the fourth entity, the Tri-Faith Initiative, brings with it many initial challenges which these neighbors are facing together and finding their way through. However, there are many challenges still ahead of them for which they will need to construct new pathways of communication and new patterns of behavior if they will thrive as an ongoing and developing community. Getting along in order to come together in separate buildings in the same neighborhood is one thing but how will they balance the relationships and learning among the faith communities with the work of the fourth entity, the Tri-Faith Initiative, trying to develop curriculum and policies to engage the broader, secular community on interfaith issues? What happens when these communities start working together on projects that push their limits for organization and community building? Crucially, what will happen if (when) political events in Palestine/Israel accelerate, thereby adding pressure on the relationships being built within the Tri-Faith? What recourse will be needed if one of the faith communities, for example, continues to be out-voted on matters of procedure? Will the developing relationships of the leaders and congregations be strong enough to carry them through?

As Dr. Alexander puts it, "Becoming the Tri-Faith Initiative seemed much easier than actually being the Tri-Faith Initiative. We have many hurdles still in front of us that need to be negotiated with care. But none of us can just pick up our things and go home — we already are home. We have to find a way through to living together. This is the point to the initiative. Now that we are all here — the fun is just beginning."

Summary

Tri-Faith is more than a decade old, and at the same time, it is just being born in 2019 as the third partner moves into its building on the campus. As a highly visible initiative, they have profound meaning — both individually and together — for Omaha's immigrant community and for the whole community and wider, watching world. As Ronny Chieng, a comedian on Comedy Central's "The Daily Show with Trevor Noah" observed in a 2017 segment on the Tri-Faith Initiative, "Don't you think it is pretty arrogant to fly in the face of 1400 years of hating each other?" In so far as they boldly answer yes, they make a particular and compelling case for a new nation with enough space for all to belong.

Minneapolis' Cedar-Riverside neighborhood: "Loving neighbors whomever they are"

"We believe we are called to serve our neighbor," the huge billboard declares at the entrance to the new Hagfors Center on the campus of Minneapolis' Augsburg University. As I sat across from Augsburg's long-serving president, Paul C. Pribbenow, he readily affirmed this core mission of the university, but with this nuance: "We are called to be neighbor to and with each other." The mutuality is intentional.

Augsburg was founded on Dakota land after a terrible period of Native genocide and expulsion from the state.[16] In the wake of these bloody clashes, the early history of the university is that of a fledgling immigrant college born in the basement of Trinity Norwegian Lutheran Church in the 1870s, intended by its leaders to serve the Norwegians who lived in the surrounding Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. Pribbenow, however, credits sociology professor Joel Torstenson[17] with galvanizing the faculty and the college as a whole towards a much deeper and more intentional engagement in the life and circumstances of those living in the city around them with his 1967 faculty lecture, "The Liberal Arts College in the Modern Metropolis." That legacy has been tended robustly by many up to today, perhaps none more enthusiastically that Torstenson's successor in the Sociology department, Garry Hesser, whose commitments to experiential education and local community engagement fueled the dynamism of Augsburg's part in the neighborhood's complex, interconnected relationships.

The stated mission "to serve your neighbor" means going beyond hospitality and into the work of equity and justice.

Paul C. Pribbenow
Augsburg Unversity President

Today, those newest to the neighborhood are mostly Somali Muslims. The first large wave of Somali people to resettle in Minnesota after the start of the civil war in Somalia came in the early 1990s. Most new arrivals did not come from Somalia itself, but interim years spent in refugee camps in Kenya and other African nations to which people intermittently fled in an effort to save themselves and their families. The Riverside Plaza, a collection of high-rise apartment towers in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, soon became a magnet for Somalis, gathering nearly 8,000 new immigrants into its living quarters. While some worry the term is meant, at least in part, in a derogatory sense, others proudly claim the neighborhood's nickname: "little Mogadishu," as representative of its actual status as the center of Minnesota's Somali community, the largest diaspora community of Somali in the world.

Fears regarding anti-Muslim sentiments and accusations of terrorist connections — especially after the terrorist attacks of 2001 — kept the Somali community insular initially. Yet, in the 1980s and early 1990s, Rev. Paul Rogers, along with members of his congregation at Trinity Lutheran Church, unwittingly set the stage for a connection by reaching out to waves of new immigrants to the neighborhood fleeing conflicts in Southeast Asia and East Africa. It was natural for Rogers to partner with Augsburg for this effort. Ever since interstate highway construction destroyed Trinity's building in the 1960s, the church has been meeting in Augsburg's chapel, with offices in a building just on the edge of campus. Rogers found a willing partner in Mary Laurel True, initially hired part-time at Augsburg in 1990 with a

The Riverside Plaza, home to nearly 8,000 Somali immigrants.

Fears regarding anti-Muslim sentiments and accusations of terrorist connections kept the Somali community insular initially.

modest grant from the State of Minnesota to serve as a community outreach staff person. With roots in an activist Catholic family and formation in methods of popular education in Cuernavaca, Mexico, True threw herself into the task of connecting university resources to neighborhood resources. With Rogers, True started a free Wednesday Night Suppers program using donated food from Augsburg's food service, hosted in the Trinity office building and staffed by Augsburg students. Following a similar model of partnership and responsiveness to neighborhood needs, they started Homework Help, an after school tutoring program, again staffed by Augsburg students and hosted in the Trinity office building. These two programs were the initial bridges between Augsburg, Trinity and the neighborhood.

When the new pastor, Jane Buckley Farley, arrived at Trinity in 1996, Somali refugees were arriving en masse. Early on in an effort to connect, she and Mary Laurel True formed a group for women and their children. With these programs they built a partnership with Dr. Said Fahiya, director of the East African Women's Center, as part of the Bryan Coyle Center, a community center at the nearby Riverside Plaza. Through these bridge programs, they met and began a tentative relationship with Imam Sharif Mohamed and the newly founded Dar Al-Hijrah mosque and cultural center. Mosque leader Abdisalam Adam describes the choice of mosque's name: it refers to "the experience of leaving your homeland to settle in another land that embraces you." The character of the mosque is one measure of their commitment to belong, a commitment that only deepened over time. In fact, just 13 years after its founding, they took on an umbrella name for the mosque and civic center, the Islamic Civic Society of America, because members see it as an American institution and want to show that Islam and democratic principles are compatible.

Dar Al-Hijrah Mosque

Pr. Buckley Farley's relationship with Imam Sharif built slowly until a dramatic fire destroyed Dar Al-Hijrah early in 2014. Three people died and it was a very traumatic moment for the Somali community. The mosque held meetings at the Brian Coyle Center in the days and weeks after the fire, trying to discern a path forward. Pr. Buckley Farley recalls, "We attended community meetings at which we understood very little ... in all honesty I felt pretty stupid and useless, but Iman Sharif came over and said, 'Thank you, sister, for being with us.' Shortly after that, the mosque, being homeless, took up residence in our [church office building's] lower level for a year and a half. And our fledgling friendship blossomed." They now share, among many points of connection, common meals during the Christian season of Lent and the Muslim season of Ramadan, joking with each other about which group is the more disciplined with the common practice of fasting.

Both Pr. Buckley Farley and Mary Laurel True point to long-time Augsburg President Paul Pribbenow as fundamental to deepened relationships and access to resources for the Somali community. Having done his Ph.D. dissertation in social ethics about Jane Addams' famous Chicago settlement house, Hull House, Pribbenow came to see Augsburg as a "21st Century equivalent" to Hull House: an institution that sees its mission as listening and learning "how to be a neighbor."[18] Not long after his arrival now over a decade ago, Pribbenow drew on research about the importance of "anchor institutions" for neighborhood development to broker a Cedar-Riverside Partnership. It brought together major players in the neighborhood, including Augsburg, the University of Minnesota, Fairview Hospital, the City of Minneapolis and others.

Just months after their initial convening, a young Somali man, Ahmednur Ali, one of a growing number of Somali students attending Augsburg through an innovative scholarship program, was shot and killed after leaving his job tutoring neighborhood youth. The tragedy galvanized the partnership, honing Pribbenow's conviction that their stated mission, "we believe we are called to serve our neighbor," meant going beyond hospitality to the work of equity and justice. An early success not only led to robust community policing, but recruitment of Somali officers to be deployed in the neighborhood.

This deeper partnership paid off when ISIS rose to prominence in the Middle East and targeted Somali teens, via recruitment websites, to come and join them. As a response, among other efforts, they also raised millions to build and fund an Opportunity Center focused on entrepreneurial skills and economic development, now housed in the Cedar Riverside Plaza across the street from the Brian Coyle Center.

Muslim police officers have helped connect the community

Entrepreneurial energy was already present in the neighborhood thanks to Hussein Samatar, an early arrival from Somalia's civil war in 1993. An inspiration, he learned English at the Minneapolis public library and went on to get a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Business Administration from the University of St. Thomas, a local Catholic school. He founded the African Development Corporation (ADC) in 2003, just across the street from Trinity and Augsburg and blocks from Cedar Riverside Plaza.

Somali women are the main business owners in the community, outstripping male ownership by a factor of 4-to-1. As a beautiful example, young Somali women meeting at the Brian Coyle Center's Youth Entrepreneurship Program dreamed up and started a second-hand fashion store, the Sisterhood Boutique, supported by and housed above the ADC. Mary Laurel True helped broker a partnership on behalf of these women with the MBA program at Augsburg, which assisted the young entrepreneurs as they developed business and marketing plans, and provided an art class to help them develop a design identity. Then while leading a tour of the neighborhood with heads of local anchor institutions, True walked by a vacant building across from the University that was owned by Fairview Hospital and propositioned CEO Rulon F. Stacey on the spot to make it available for the Sisterhood Boutique. With a positive answer arriving only three days later, the boutique moved into a beautiful corner location. As they built the business, they also built a women-in-business internship program, which now boasts over 140 graduates who are better prepared for careers. Khadra Fiqi, one of the founders, wanted to give other new immigrant girls like herself the confidence and skills to overcome "barriers to economic success for young women in this neighborhood."

Beautiful developments like the Sisterhood Boutique are the result of a long, hard and often uncertain efforts by key persons and institutional partners who in grabbing hold of tipping points and drawing upon shared culture, norms and practices rallied efforts toward success and stability. We turn now to tease out these elements, and as we do, we further highlight a sentiment echoed by many partners in this dense network of connected relationships in Cedar Riverside, a sentiment that Pr. Jane described as at the heart of being neighbors: "It is about presence, listening, and walking alongside one another."

Ubah Diriye of Fahmo Fashion

"It is about presence, listening, and walking alongside one another"

Key characters

The key characters of this story of welcome and belonging, of finding how to be neighbors with both hospitality and justice at the forefront, are first and foremost long-term religious leaders. Set up in important ways by earlier faith leaders, including Trinity's Pr. Paul Rogers, the remarkable quarter-century tenure of Pr. Jane at Trinity and Imam Sharif at Dar Al-Hidjra are the heart of this remarkable story. Pr. Jane's beautiful blog, Seeing God in Little Mogadishu, recounts the efforts of a " less than 4'11" pastor and the congregation she serves" to "practice radical hospitality in a primarily Muslim neighborhood."[19]

In the words of Imam Sharif, they, and partner institutions in the neighborhood, have been "building a shared civic vision with the families and the faith centers in our community that is a vision where we take ownership over the full development of our children to insure that our children become wise, faithful, active and informed leaders."

It is compelling to see younger members of the community, like Fardosa Hassan, a Muslim chaplain at Augsburg who grew up in the neighborhood, come into leadership roles of their own. With the full support of Christian chaplain Sonja Hagander, Hassan works simultaneously in two directions: helping Muslim students navigate what can be a threatening environment given rising Islamophobia and normalizing Islam to non-Muslims who too often hold inaccurate stereotypes of Islam as violent and oppressive.[20]

The dense ecology of support these faith leaders can depend on includes many advocates and institutional partners starting with, of course, Mary Laurel True, whose tenure in the neighborhood predates most of the clergy and institutional leaders, all of whom turn to her as a trusted friend and colleague. She bridges so many spaces, connecting and interpreting community dynamics and desires with passion and clarity. Her advocacy for the Sisterhood Boutique with the Fairview Hospital CEO is just one example of an ongoing relationship between the University and many stakeholders in the surrounding neighborhoods.

Women's Night Out at Brian Coyle Community Center with Miski Abdulle and @AugsburgU student Hibak Roble (event organizer) and Mary Laurel True, Sabo Center.

At Augsburg, many other key advocates--starting from President Pribbenow--figure significantly. Steve Peacock, Augsburg's Director of Community Relations, functions as Pribbenow's eyes and ears at neighborhood meetings. Religion professor Matthew Maruggi helped to found the Interfaith Scholars program, a year-long (application-only) leadership program, and partners with Fardosa Hassan, Augsburg University's first Muslim chaplain, to do interfaith programs for faculty, staff, students and a public Interfaith Ally program. In another inspiring partnership, the Augsburg music department and a local world music venue, The Cedar Cultural Center, jointly created the Midnimo Project (meaning unity in Somali), an ongoing effort funded by the Doris Duke foundation to highlight and support Somali music.[21]

Success in the Somali community means optimism and opportunity for the community at large

The City of Minneapolis and especially former mayor R. T. Rybak support major cross-sector partnerships for neighborhood development, such as the current initiative between the city park board, the YMCA and Augsburg to build a recreation center.

The political success of the community matters, too — the rise of U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar, one Somali student said, "makes me know anything is possible for me in this country."

Omar has deep ties to the neighborhood despite not growing up there: her sister, Sahra Noor, served as a highly effective CEO of a dynamic neighborhood health services organization, the People's Center Clinics and Services.

Abdisalam Adam, chair of the board for the Islamic Civic Society of America and its Dar Al Hijrah mosque, and one of the only Somali public school teachers to become a principal and school board member, is a strong advocate building a pipeline for growing the numbers of Somali teachers. Through the East African Student to Teacher (EAST) program based at Augsburg, they both accelerate the pipeline of Somali teachers into the Minneapolis/Saint Paul public schools, now at around 20% Somali students. And Imam Sharif has partnered with the health care sector, training to become a hospital chaplain, and becoming an advocate for wellness, most recently around cancer prevention for Somali women. The interwoven connections and commitments across institutional sectors are remarkable testimony to both the achievement of this community and the complexity of the real work of belonging.

Tipping points

Through the many meetings and conversations with leaders in the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, it became clear that a number of tipping points were crucial to catalyzing these developments. First, the long-time investment in neighborhood relationships — especially between long-term clergy —led to early bridging programs like the Wednesday Night Suppers and the Safe Space: Homework Help. These programs began initial and tentative connections between Augsburg, Trinity and the growing new immigrant population in the neighborhood. However, after Ahmednur Ali was murdered, the fledgling Cedar-Riverside Partnership marshalled the resources of major anchor institutions towards the needs of the neighborhood.

Tutoring Somali youth helps them bridge the gap and get ahead

This ecology of connections helped in many ways when the tragic fire struck the Islamic Civic Society of America and its Dar Al-Hijra mosque. In addition to Trinity offering a temporary home to the Muslim community, Augsburg's music department partnered with the Cedar Cultural Center for a concert fundraiser that planted the seed for the Midnimo Project.

Culture/norms/practices

As in each case, these key characters and the tipping points they traversed together arose from and in turn shaped an operative local culture with specific norms and practices. Our conviction is that these factors work as grounds of identity and action, and are formative of the same. The deeply religious culture of Minnesota and its long-term commitment to caring for others led to building some of the most robust faith-based social service institutions in the nation.

Indicative of this commitment, Lutheran Social Services and Catholic Charities played a central role in settling war refugees in the Twin Cities going back to the Vietnam war era, and did so as well with Somali refugees. Added to this, community members mentioned the paradox of the extremely cold winters and very warm, neighborly people (often humorously characterized as "Minnesota nice"). Principal Abdisalam Adam recalls the paradox:

"I used to hear about Minnesota as a very cold state, the snow and the ice. That experience I heard about before coming. But, also, I heard that it's a state that's very welcoming. Its people are friendly...When I came here, I did find all that to be true!"

Perhaps it is the case that Minnesotans need one another to make it through the winters!

However, the culture of welcome and care for community arises from specific norms and practices present very clearly in the story of the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood. Obviously, the moral norm to love and serve the neighbor, rooted in religious teachings shared by Muslims and Christians alike, plays a major role in this story. While the challenges can seem daunting, given the struggles of new immigrants and the overall climate of growing Islamophobia in the country as a whole, Chaplain Hassan breaks it down:

> "A lot of times, people are afraid even to ask the questions of people who are different. So, I say: begin with friendship. Start by saying hello."

Pastor Jane responds similarly, saying, "It's about being a presence, it's about listening and walking alongside the community. It's about being with the community through all that comes its way. It's about not leaving."

Augsburg University has played a vital role in the bridging of cultures

Many bridging practices follow from the call to love and serve the neighbor, including tutoring, shared meals and many more. Those very bridging practices also create social bonds and through them a sense of belonging. Belonging is more than a set of practices derived from other norms, however. It is an important moral norm itself. The commitment to belonging is embodied in the very name of the Islamic Civic Society of America and is visible in the inroads made by so many Somali people across sectors — nonprofit, business, government, the arts, and more.

While certainly highly visible fruits of this commitment to belonging jump to mind — Rep. Ilhan Omar being the first Somali-American elected to Congress, for example — we might instead highlight the Sisterhood Boutique's annual March fashion show and fundraiser. The vibrant event, complete with strutting young, hijab-wearing women is punctuated by other young, female spoken-word artists. The show is designed to platform — literally — their lives, beauty and entrepreneurial spirit as young Muslim women. From start to finish, they in effect say: "We dare you to tell us we don't belong."

Belonging can be challenged, as we know, and a third key norm has to do with responding to a crisis with love — that is, to see and respond to the needs of another. The community response to the student shooting and to the mosque fire gave way to practices of generosity — financial, of course but, perhaps more importantly, of generosity in relationship — of the very kind Pr. Jane describes when she talks about "not leaving."

Pr. Jane recounts the experience of a young Somali Muslim high school student having a white woman shout, “Go back to your country, we don’t want you here,” as she waited for her ride to the tutoring program. She recalls being shaken: her safety threatened and her identity as a Minnesotan, born and raised, erased. Pr. Jane remembers telling her, “She was wrong to say that, you belong here, and you are safe with us.” This student said in response, “This is one of my safe spots. Thank you for being here.” After President Trump’s Muslim ban, a call went out for allies to gather outside Dar Al-Hijdra to offer hot tea and words of support. Upon emerging after prayers, the Muslim worshippers were at first taken aback to see a crowd of white people gathered. But as tea was shared and the message, “You belong here, we welcome you as our neighbors,” was shared, smiles broke out and the conversations buzzed.

Sisterhood Boutique Fashion Show

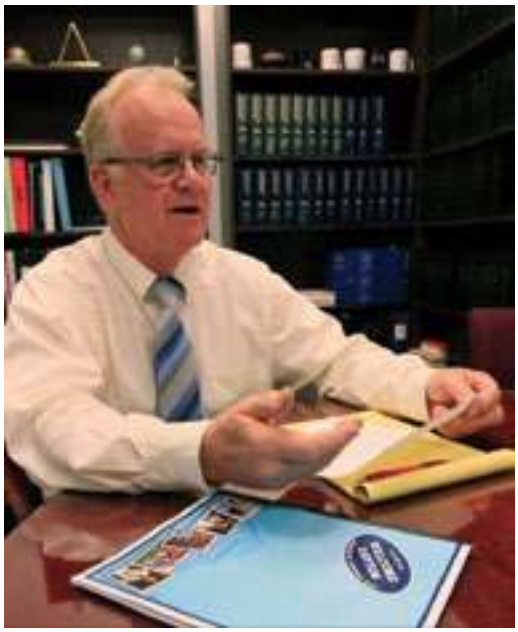
“We dare you to tell us we don’t belong.”
- Sisterhood Boutique

Summary

The ecology of support and connection that make up “Little Mogadishu” are many decades in the making. Yet it seems as if there is a freshness to the community and the wider Somali experience in Minnesota. A new generation of young adults, born and raised in Minnesota, are taking leadership in many sectors of society; Minneapolis and its institutions are being changed in the process. Augsburg University is a case in point. It has stayed in the neighborhood, engaged deeply, and its historic Norwegian Lutheran student body is now nearly 50% students of color and 20% Somali. The Rev. Jim Wallis, opening convocation speaker at Augsburg in September 2016, addressed the theme “The Bridge to a New America.” After touring the neighborhood and looking out over the gathered crowd of students, staff and faulty, he simply said, “You already ARE the new America.”

Dayton's crash and reinvention: "This is what the kingdom of God looks like"

"It takes moral courage. It takes courage to be a sanctuary city. It takes courage, for example, to let the community know that ICE is going to do some raids right here in the next couple of weeks. And it takes courage in the face of threats from the federal government to withhold funding from the city to continue [taking such actions] anyway."



Tom Wahlrab

Speaking of the manifold efforts that dedicated citizens of Dayton, Ohio have made toward becoming "a welcoming city," community leader Tom Wahlrab forthrightly asserts that these efforts required, in addition to organizing and commitment, something more fundamental, something like mettle.

Conditions were not favorable when Wahlrab and a few trusted colleagues invited Dayton's citizens into a conversation designed to double down on the development of Dayton's welcoming capacities. The city had seen an obvious influx of new Latinx residents, even as it faced the nation's most challenging recession since World War II.[22] Greater Dayton, a Midwestern city of about 800,000 people, was then also beginning to see the outlines of an opiate epidemic that would eventually grow to proportions that would make Dayton a symbol of the nation's struggles with heroin and fentanyl. Yet when Walhrab and partners invited Dayton's residents to discuss the future of their city, they audaciously opened discussion by posing two related, optimistic questions: "What have you noticed about how our city has benefited from its new residents?" and "What is possible if Dayton became a city that intentionally welcomed immigrants?"

This invitation to talk over the future of the city was no mere formality. Instead, in inviting Dayton residents into the process of making decisions for the good of the city, Walhrab posits that he was actually engaging valuable members of the community who have autonomous agency and who have unique possibilities to contribute to a different future.[23]

Back in 2011 when Walhrab reached out to the community for this dialogue, Dayton residents were not supernaturally fearless about their futures; many of them indeed felt concerns about the scarcity of their local resources.

Yet Wahlrab skillfully directed the conversation to help participants find — and focus on — the community's shared, intrinsic resourcefulness.[24] Such a project, Walhrab suggests, begins with neighbors engaging with and listening to each other.

Dayton has been ravaged by the scourge of opiode and heroin abuse

Indeed, many pivotal prior conversations to this one had already resulted in vital alliances which could now serve as groundwork for the community-wide dialogues that Wahlrab endeavored to host. For example, some eight years before, through an exchange program within the Presbyterian Church (USA), Rev. Robert E. Jones, the longtime African American pastor of College Hill Community Presbyterian Church and Rev. Francisco J Peláez-Díaz, a Mexican pastor, set out to work together in service to a diversifying Church. Rev. Peláez-Díaz arrived in Dayton in 2004 with an invitation from Rev. Jones — not just to fully contribute to the life College Hill, but to become an active member of Dayton's civic leadership.

College Hill Community Church

Through his participation on various boards in service to the community of Dayton, Rev. Jones was well-aware that the city of Dayton's demographics were changing and that many of its newer residents were from Latin American countries. Through Rev. Jones' involvement in the Dayton's Diversity Caucus in particular, he had learned of University of Dayton professor Theo Majka's advocacy for making connections to the city's growing Hispanic community. As a result, Rev. Jones was sharply aware of possibilities for Rev.

Peláez-Díaz to contribute leadership, both to the church and for the broader Dayton community.

Professor Theo Majka's work, housed in the Human Rights Center, draws from Catholic social justice traditions to affect tangible changes in the surrounding community and the world. Since its founding in 1997, the Human Rights center has consistently drawn energy, resources and dialogue partners into its mission to "lead the global human rights community in the search for transformative solutions to systemic patterns of injustice that will affect real change in the lives of the poor and the persecuted." In 2003, this Center had hosted a conference called, "Bring Durban to Dayton," which focused on the problems of racism and xenophobia in the U.S.

Professor Theo Majka

By 2004, Professor Majka was already advocating for conscientious engagement with Dayton's Latinx residents; that is, long before Trump would, instead, posit them as a crisis.

Rev. Jones characterizes Majka's work, though the Human Rights Center, as "pulling people in," "both those of us who already had concerns about the city's ability to integrate newcomers, as well new conversation partners who became interested in the conversation." [25]

Many of Majka's dialogue partners decided to take part in efforts to "push the city" toward passing legislation that would allow for Mexican residents to use the Matricula Consular, cards issued from the Mexican government to nationals living abroad, as a legal form of identification in Dayton in 2004.[26] In April 2005, Dayton City Commission voted unanimously to accept the Mexican and Guatemalan Matricula Consular (Consular Identification) for the city's business purposes. Reflecting on this early, successful intervention, Rev. Jones points up that a cross-sector collaboration, between the Human Rights Council, the University of Dayton and the city's religious leadership, lent vitality and strength to the bid, which he says proved crucial to the measure's success.

This experience augmented Rev. Peláez-Díaz's ideas about the role that clergy can play in public life. "I was a pastor in Mexico," Rev. Peláez-Díaz explains, "but it's a totally different way of doing things, so Reverend Jones' leadership style was crucial. He was heavily involved in the community. He served

on a number of boards and committees throughout the community. He also gave me full freedom to get involved, too, in the ways I felt fitting. He was, for example, the one who pointed me to the Christian Connection, one of the first [non-profits] that I joined as a board member."

Rev. Francisco J. Pelaez-Diaz

Rev. Jones' value for being involved in community leadership, as clergy, helped to add new dimensions to Rev. Peláez-Díaz's own leadership and influence in the community. In addition to welcoming Rev. Pelaez-Díaz's use of Spanish at College Hill Presbyterian, Rev. Peláez-Díaz was welcomed to join the Human Relations Council (HRC) of Dayton. The Human Rights council was formed in the early 1960s in effort to fight discrimination in the city; it's often described as the "moral conscience" of Dayton. Rev. Peláez-Díaz's placement on the HRC, in effect, established a new line of communication between immigrant communities and city leadership. This ability to communicate to city leaders proved crucial when Rev. Peláez-Díaz became aware of ongoing difficulties being experienced by Latin American immigrants in the Dayton rental market, which issues he had the opportunity to present to the Human Relations Council, whose board members (in turn) listened and opted to respond. From September 2009 through August 2010, the Board of the Human Relations Council carried out a Racial Equity Assessment of discrimination in housing within the city of Dayton. When their investigation found clear evidence of discrimination, the Human Rights Council voted to intervene.

While these efforts concerning the rental market were gathering steam, similar initiatives were elsewhere gaining traction. In May 2008, Dayton's Police Chief Richard Biehl, officially put Executive Order No 12-2008 into place, which specifies when arrests should not be made in the case of persons who are stopped while driving without a license. Later in June 2010, then-Mayor Leitzell and City Manager Tim Riordan met with leaders of the Ahiska Turkish Community to discuss ways Dayton could better assist in their resettlement and integration. Over time these varied projects and tangible "wins," lent city leaders across sectors the palpable sense that Dayton was ready to take on an even more intentional and explicit approach toward embracing its newer residents.

Wahlrab discerned that such a cultural shift would need broad buy-in from the Dayton community. So it was with the goal of finding willing partners in the Dayton community that the Human Relations Council invited neighbors to the dialogue that first opened this narrative, one based on a belief in everyone's individual capacity for agency and contribution, and that focused on community resourcefulness. From February through April 2011, Tom Wahlrab, then-executive director of the HRC, facilitated a series of four exploratory meetings through which a substantive dialogue developed. The conversation, being open-ended, surfaced some residents' fears of displacement and some long-held tensions over a lack of services in Dayton. Yet, taking into account the real concerns expressed among some of the city's underserved groups, residents still collectively determined they wanted to focus on becoming a place that ensures the rights and promotes the dignity of all its residents.

Dignity for all residents is a communal value

The resulting plan, "Welcome Dayton: An Immigrant Friendly City," reflects the efforts of over 100 volunteers who met over a period of three months to imagine a Dayton that is really accessible for all, many who had been part of the earlier efforts listed, including Rev. Peláez-Díaz.[27] In its introduction, drafters of the plan admonish, "Communities across America are at a crossroad: to welcome and integrate new residents and help them on a path to citizenship, or to allow old stereotypes, fears and preconceptions to hinder future success."

Welcome Dayton began, Wahlrab notes, with willing individual partners. He muses: "The Chamber of Commerce wasn't invited, the library wasn't invited, the school system wasn't invited, East End wasn't invited." Instead, initially people simply showed up based on their own desires and commitments. The early consensus for becoming a welcoming city was based on person-to-person, voluntary commitment. Yet crucially, over time many Dayton institutions became involved.

The Ethnic and Diversity Caucus of the National Conference for Community and Justice of Greater Dayton, for example, and a nonprofit law group, Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, have each lent support and partnership to Dayton's welcoming efforts. Support has taken on numerous modes: whether through creating a new residents' package for learning English, as did the Dayton Metro Library, or through sponsoring immigrant-services dedicated groups, as did East End Community Services with a group it created, Milagro de Mujer. East End Community Services formed Milagro de Mujer after it received a grant from the Ohio Commission on Minority Health.

As community coordinator Julie Arias looks back at the work of Milagro de Mujer in its early days, it is clear that the meetings, which were designed to bring doctors and nutritionists into the group to give bilingual sessions, effectively created opportunity for neighborly exchange. Arias reflects, "I think we had been going for six months and it was September, and my birthday and my colleague's birthday fell both in September, and somehow the women found out when our birthdays were. We were planning a potluck for all the families to come and all the families came...and they surprised us with a birthday cake and candles like at the end of the meal and they sang to us. We were really surprised. And then the women stood up and started saying, 'Milagro de Mujer means so much to us, thank you so much.'"

In 2012, with a grant funded from the Ohio Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Human Rights Council hired a Colombian-born woman, Martha Jeannette Rodriguez, as their Immigrant Resources Specialist, hoping to deepen their connections to the Latina/os that they wanted to serve. The Council understood that having latina/os in leadership roles would greatly increase the likelihood that this work would be done well. Rodriguez concurs. She feels able to discern the real needs of the Latinx community, in part, because she herself is an immigrant working to build her life in Dayton.

A natural connector, Rodriguez reflects on the success of another effort made under the umbrella of the HRC, one called Supporting Natural Helpers. Through grant funding the Natural Helpers Initiative aimed to equip non-native persons who were already avidly helping new immigrants into Dayton. Rodriguez notes that, today, many of the strongest women leaders from Dayton's immigrant Hispanic communities came through that program. The leaders who participated in Natural Helpers, Rodriguez additionally notes, feel proud of the work they do, they see its value clearly in part because the city has placed clear value on these and similar forms of community engagement.

Welcome Dayton Plan: the result of over 100 volunteers and three months of effort

Martha Jeanette Rodriguez

Key characters and institutional partners

Today, immigrants to Dayton encounter a web of welcome, one that reflects the pre-history of Welcome Dayton, its development and implementation, and the subsequent growth of the city's welcoming capacities. Part of this connection can be seen in Dayton's becoming Welcoming America's first Certified Welcoming city (a collaboration started in 2012, with this status achieved in September 2017), which has effectively placed Dayton in a wider ecology of welcoming work at the national level.

Dayton: A city of welcoming and tolerance

Within this network, Dayton stands as an example of innovation. In 2015, for example, the White House Task Force on New Americans released a Strategic Action Plan on Immigrant and Refugee Integration that cited Dayton as a key example for the work being done in Dayton Public Schools.[28] However, the connections between Dayton and the wider, national ecosystem of welcome is also personal: Welcome Dayton's former Program Coordinator, Melissa Bertolo, is now in senior leadership in Welcoming America, where she is the Certified Welcoming Manager. Melissa's connections to the Dayton groups help tighten the ties that lead Dayton to a more robust conversation about the future of our nation.

Mellissa Bertolo, helping Dayton serve as an example for the rest of the nation

Religious leaders have played an instrumental role in creating a new vision for Dayton, one in which all of Dayton's citizens are welcome, and belong, in which all are worthy of consideration. Reverend Robert Jones' long tenure at College Hill Community Presbyterian Church garnered him the lived experience, credibility and authority to take decisive action in response to the growing latinx community in Dayton. Thus Rev. Jones could, and did, simply decide to welcome changes in the College Hill neighborhood by making space for the Hispanic congregants at College Hill Presbyterian, which he did in part by welcoming Rev. Peláez-Díaz to integrate Spanish into the worship service.

Rev. Pelaez- Diaz, too, shared a vision for what a more just Dayton could be, in which the uniting of the city's diverse groups represents the social intentions of God, as he states, "This is what the kingdom of God looks like, in a more complete way." Additionally, Rev. Jones' long-term involvement on the Human Relations Council (HRC) proved vitally important as it enabled him to recommend Rev. Peláez-Díaz to the board. Rev. Peláez-Díaz's service

to the Presbyterian Church (USA) and his native familiarity with Spanish made him a key contact for communities facing housing discrimination and helped to facilitate respectful and strategic relationships between the HRC and spanish-speaking residents. Additionally Rev. Peláez-Díaz's longevity in Dayton meant he could consistently contribute to the momentum behind Welcome Dayton, both its development and its implementation.

Rev. Robert E. Jones

Tipping points

When Rev. Francisco Peláez-Díaz joined the Human Rights Council in April 2008, he was voted in by unanimous vote of the Commission and became the first member of Dayton's Hispanic community on the council. His appointment was part of a concerted Commission effort to request HRC attention on issues concerning more races and ethnicities. That same year, Dayton's Police Chief's put an Executive Order into place, which specified when arrests should or should not be made in the case of a person stopped who has no driver's license. The shared vision and collaboration of Dayton's civic leaders, religious leaders, and police leadership grant an integrity to Dayton's ethos of welcome and a coherence to its efforts to welcome.

So unified, Dayton's civic leaders continue to refine their vision and set sites on new markers of achievement for the work that they started. In August 2012, the mayor and city council agreed to work on a formal plan to become an official Welcoming America community. That same year, Dayton won funding through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to support Welcome Dayton efforts. State and national grant funding were important modes of support used to hire staff people initially, as the city geared up to take over the funding in their own budget. Dayton also undertook new modes of broad social connection when, in September 2012, the city held its inaugural Dayton World Soccer Games to bring Dayton's various communities together.

Soccer acting as a cultural bridge

Culture/norms/practices

These bigger achievements should not belie the manifold forms of smaller initiatives undertaken at will by Dayton's citizens, who apply their Midwestern pragmatism to the venture of welcoming new neighbors. Walhrab points to community involvement as the key in creating a really welcoming environment:

"Looking beyond government responsibilities and closer within the community reveals: an ESL staff person writing grants to develop welcome centers; the resettlement agency training volunteers to supplement their restrictive support for new refugees; a member of a church taking over unused space to teach sewing skills to refugees; a social worker knocking on doors to welcome a small circle of Eritrean families."

These quotidian forms of welcome are the warp and woof of daily welcome in Dayton. Examples of neighbors helping neighbors, Wahlrab notes, "seem endless and could be updated daily." Together, the big wins and the daily efforts create a new frame for Dayton's residents to live into: you belong here!

A local community that prizes itself for being innovative primed leaders for assuming creative, proactive roles in welcoming new immigrant citizens as contributors to Dayton's future. Innovation is a key part of the historical ethos of the city; it celebrates having long held the record for the U.S. city with the most patents licensed by its residents. To wit, the Wright brothers — first in aviation — remain a vibrant point of collective pride.

Dayton is also deftly pragmatic, a quality that has recently helped it stem an overwhelming tide of opioid overdoses. A time-honed pragmatism leads the city to respond to these needless deaths with a bevy of emergency personnel armed with methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone. Welcome Dayton is therefore just one way that Dayton is actively, pragmatically creating the future that Americans really want to live in, but it's an important one that has set an example for the nation.

A religious culture which values being involved in civic life has informed the thirty-year tenure of Rev. Robert Jones and shaped the role that Rev. Peláez-Díaz could play in bridging Dayton's community leaders with the immigrant groups with whom they were eager to connect. Additionally, the religious culture of the University of Dayton, with its powerful witness to the spiritual value of human rights, has infused Dayton with a moral perspective backed by institutional heft and presence. Additionally, many key contributors to Welcome Dayton and their closely affiliated colleagues are implicitly motivated by religious convictions (whether through Presbyterian, Quaker, Baptist, or Catholic commitments), believing that

welcoming neighbors is “just the right thing to do.” They adopt pragmatic framing of their work that builds on this assumption, allowing for the broadest possible engagement with the community at large. The influence of norms of faith is, in this respect, in the vein of virtue ethics, leading with an aspirational question that assumes virtue in welcome, i.e. “What could we do to be more welcoming?” Dayton has vibrant tributaries of spirituality lending vitality and authority to its civic vision.

Examples of neighbors helping neighbors, Wahlrab notes, “seem endless and could be updated daily.”

A community based on many cultures and values.

Summary

With time, through building strong partnerships across sectors including, crucially, the Human Rights Council, core leaders ‘flipped’ the narrative within Dayton from one about economic decline that casts new immigrants as threats to scarce jobs and resources, to a story about how new immigrants bring entrepreneurial energy, spur economic growth and help to stabilize flailing neighborhoods. By adopting a pragmatic framing oriented toward what is possible, leaders in Dayton created a pathway for the city to tap its own inherent resourcefulness — here broadly construed to include goodwill, personnel, funds, leadership and vision. This steady work has led Dayton to become an exemplar for our nation as we look to find our true north. Dayton makes clear that even cities facing daunting social challenges have within them the resources, both historical and social, to actively move toward an America that speaks to our highest hopes instead of our deepest fears.

Seven cross-cutting characteristics

Each of these complex case study cities is, admittedly, unique. To us, their common commitment to say in word and deed, "You belong here," is an important, valorous cross-cutting characteristic. Different as they are, these cities share a common vision put into inspiring action and each of them shows us a future story for our nation, one that has already been born. As we reflected about all we learned together with our partners in each community, seven cross-cutting characteristics or elements seemingly crucial to what each of them achieved have emerged. We turn to briefly highlight these now. These are not a short-cut for engaging the thicker stories represented by each case, being themselves only a surface reflection of the depth of the lived stories in each city. Yet highlighting them highlights the common ground that our case studies share and offers other communities a heuristic frame for reflection on their own progress — considering which of these characteristics they have in play and which they do not.

I. Long-term clergy

Faith leaders and their communities — congregations, mosques, synagogues and other religious organizations — played a major role, even a decisive one, in all three cases. We think it is particularly instructive to ponder that in each case long-term clergy in the community were instrumental in building movements for something different, something better in their communities — what Imam Sharif in Minneapolis named as "A shared civic vision with the families and the faith centers in our community." Although in each case community willpower, voice and organizing mattered, members came alongside visionary leaders and often after some resistance. It was, again and again, clergy leaders who connected with like-minded leaders in city government, in civic organizations, with the business community, higher education and with philanthropic partners. Institutional partnerships sprung forth from the prophetic passion of a band of leaders who shared a vision of what could be. In Minneapolis, for example, relationships between faith leaders and community leaders started small programs that, as they built steam, convinced larger institutions to come to the table, forming the Cedar-Riverside Partnership. In their book, *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed*, authors Francis Westley, Brenda Zimmerman and Michael Quinn Patton argue just this point in relation to complex social change, saying investment in leaders and their communities can help build capacity for the moment when many things align and a tipping point is at hand to effect change.[29]

II. A community connector

Seemingly as important as the long-term clergy, these community connectors are essential bridge persons who help create the bond between different constituencies and institutions. Yet in two cases at least, Mary Laurel True in Minneapolis and Martha Jeanette Rodriguez in Dayton, their positions were funded on a shoestring, initially through modest state grants (interestingly both from the offices of health and human services). The density of supportive connections within the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood has much to do with the bridging work True enacts through her relationships and presence. Yet even after multiple lines of support turned her position to full-time, her budget has remained very limited. Similarly in Dayton, Rodriguez was hired as the Fair Housing Mentor for Welcome Dayton part-time, and only full-time as the city slowly moved to adopt and fund the Welcome Dayton initiative. The nearest equivalent of this role in Omaha are a couple of members of Temple Israel, Bob Freeman and Vic Gutman. Both are long-term leaders at Temple Israel and deeply involved in Omaha, Freeman as a lawyer and Gutman as head of a major local event planning and marketing firm. Despite their relative prominence in the community, in most publicity about Tri-Faith, Freeman and Gutman most often remain in the background and are only rarely acknowledged for their catalytic roles.

III. A clear moral Imperative

Specific spiritual or moral imperatives or norms, often rooted in leader's faith traditions, were crucial in changes that built community and civic trust across divides of race and ethnicity, national origin, gender, class and religion. In Dayton, leaders marshaled theological claims about the God-given dignity of all humans and paired these claims with concern for civil and human rights, and in doing so were effective at building a coalition that moved people to create change. As Pastor Peláez-Díaz put it, a diverse community where everyone belongs "is what the Kingdom of God actually looks like!" It was one thing when Rev. Peláez-Díaz could valorize his multicultural, multilingual congregation this way; it was a much more expansive, complex thing to claim a multicultural ideal for the whole city! It is, in a sense, what Rabbi Azriel declares with the names their Tri-Faith peace efforts "a little taste of heaven." In both cases, they are drawing from the normative visions of their religious worldviews, allowing them to literally see the world differently, to see things "as they should be" or "as if things were set right," and then to invite people to live into that vision with them.

It is worth noting, however, that alongside these religiously and morally funded norms, there are also pragmatic norms operative. There are, our partners told us, real limits to the effectiveness of spiritual, moral or human rights-based arguments for change. While the leaders pushing for change were, in every instance, deeply grounded in such values, as they sought wider buy-in in their communities they found it necessary to engage other modes of persuasion — modes they describe as more pragmatic, "self-interest," win-win arguments, which they often coupled with "success" metrics to convince skeptical, or even hostile, potential partners. In Dayton, for example, city officials in the Welcome Dayton department took a couple of tacks. For some, they noted that publishing city materials in multiple languages would enable newer residents to more easily comply with city regulations, thus making the city employees' jobs easier. They also noted that a simple numbers argument regarding the positive economic impact of new immigrants, when combined with the positive community impact of new immigrants' rehabilitating boarded up homes, effectively persuaded initially reluctant partners to join in- — for the sake of building up the city. Call it, if you will, a results-based argument; it only works to bring along those who are resisting a new vision. Early adopters, actively inspired by moral and religious visions, are the ones who help create enough early success along with narrative reframing to help turn reluctant participants on pragmatic grounds.

IV. New communal bridging practices

As these communities do their work, they have realized that the shifting patterns of relationship required by the desire to be neighbors, to create communities in which all belong, requires what we call communal bridging practices — practices that allow creation of new habits of being and belonging not previously present. As an example, as part of the Dayton case, Martha Rodriguez described how shifting a practice of assuming new immigrants are needy to the practice of recognition meant seeing how "immigrant communities are already good at caring for their own, people to people, offering each other help and wisdom on this or that." It was, in her own way, a shift from a deficit- to an asset-based practice of community engagement. Dayton also created a new way for the community to play together: World Soccer Day, now in its 8th year. The day begins with a Parade of Nations, and allows a new kind of visual understanding of who Dayton is and is becoming. In Omaha, multiple kinds of shared meals--potlucks, picnics, have been at the heart of interfaith learning. In Minneapolis, the Mosque, in partnership with Trinity and other neighborhood organizations, has begun to host "Friday tea" out on their sidewalk, allowing for the wider community to come and learn more in an informal and welcoming environment.

V. Cross-sector partnerships

We have seen again and again in this process how important cross-sector partnerships, and especially anchor institutions — inclusive of their staff and leadership — can be for creating welcome for new immigrants.[30] For example, Minneapolis presents beautiful examples of long-term welcoming partnerships between the religious communities and neighboring universities, hospitals and public schools, and more. Dayton, too, shows this dynamic growth of partnerships, beginning with a partnership between congregations, the University of Dayton and city government. Many community nonprofits also played very specific and critical roles. These relationships have very specific impacts, some in terms of how the anchor institutions operate, and also in how they make use of their resources. For example, it was powerful to see that after the Welcome Dayton movement caught steam, it impacted the hiring process for a new chief of police, Chief Beal, who vowed to protect all who live in Dayton and has instituted policy changes to assure this extends to those who are undocumented or otherwise marginalized.

VI. Adequate resource streams

By resources, we don't just mean money, but basic funding for new initiatives was an issue in every case. The most dramatic example is Omaha, where millions of dollars were required to buy land and build three completely new homes for the three faith communities. In that case, it is important to note what may have become obscured by time: that like the other cases, the launch of the efforts was generated by the long-term commitments of a few individuals, especially religious leaders, who believed they could make a difference. The complexity of human resourcefulness, here much of it underpaid, makes up the ground from which these various initiatives grew. It was clear, too, from our partners that at times the most key positions — for example the community connector positions —were underfunded initially and never became robust positions. In the end, it isn't surprising that multiple revenue sources combined in support of these initiatives and it is a key role of leaders of anchor institutions to marshal such funding. Other key assets come into play, too, as in Minneapolis where Augsburg students and faculty offer expertise — in the arts, in business and more — to aid neighborhood projects. Overall, it struck us how much can be done with so little and how a positive vision focused on abundance and life inspires all manner of investments as these projects develop over time.

VII. Willingness to risk and experiment

Perhaps the most clear and powerful naming of this characteristic came from the mouth of Rev. Elnes in Omaha who summed up their Tri-Faith Initiative by saying, "If you're risk-averse, you are really peace averse at the same time." We believe these cases show risk and experiment as a necessary strategy because the complex social change they imagine and enact has no recipe. Imams Sharif in Minneapolis and Jamal in Omaha have both risked their communities by opening them to public partnerships even as the public Islamophobic rhetoric in our nation has escalated. They hazard this risk because they believe that by leaning into deeper relationships and belonging they and their communities will actually become more safe, not less. Perhaps most disarming in this respect, Pastor Jane continually admits to not knowing the answers, or even the questions! Still, she believes that steady presence over time, grounded in a commitment to love the neighbor, whoever they may be, will open the right next doors. And so it has, again and again.

Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

Jim Wallis' impromptu comment at the opening convocation of Augsburg University in Minneapolis could well be extended to each of these cases: "You already ARE the new America." It is our hope that as we together share these stories —and common characteristics across them — many other communities who are, or desire to be part of this beautifully diverse new America will be encouraged. Encouraged, of course, in what has already been achieved, but also, we hope, encouraged by seeing what they might yet do to marshal powerful moral norms and related practices, policies and institutional partnerships that can comprehensively foster communities where all belong, where each person is recognized for the full dignity human beings bear simply by virtue of existing. That, perhaps, is the most radical claim these communities make, yet these claims are not made in insolation. As mentioned in our section on Dayton, it was the first city in the U.S. to develop a certified welcome plan but it has not been the last. Welcoming America is working with communities across the nation doing such work.[31] In a time of moral bankruptcy from the highest levels of our nation, these communities stand firm in the conviction that each person ought to be able, to quote the biblical cadence of our first president, George Washington, in his farewell address, "live under one's own vine and fig tree, at peace and unafraid."

Approach to the research

This project followed a modified participatory action research methodology. From the outset, we were interested to find and learn from communities in which progressive leaders have managed to achieve culture change (or: have managed to change their own cultures) through sustained public initiatives. At Auburn, we frequently employ a "bright spots" methodology that demonstrates what is actually possible, even in trying times and circumstances. In this case, we are interested in culture change that benefits immigrants. When we choose and study a "bright spot," we do so in order to learn how change has happened on the ground. We aim to backwards engineer the narrative so as to derive knowledge about what methods have already proven to be effective for advancing democratic values and culture. We savor these experiences in part because they surface and celebrate "outlier" norms and practices leading to results that make them stand out as particularly compelling examples of a hoped-for outcome. In this case, we aim to highlight what leads to communities of welcome for new immigrants, with a special interest in whether and how religious leaders and communities play a role in such welcoming work. The in-depth case study approach allows us to posit the complexity and "over-timeness" in the work of culture change.

With these aims, and using Auburn's wide network of leaders and partner organizations, we created a list of more than 20 potential sites nationwide, developing a large map for exploring potential case study options. We sought counsel with Auburn Senior Fellows and other faith leaders to surface potential sites. Our resulting list of possible field sites was expansive. Los Angeles' Future50, a cohort of LA's next generation of interfaith leaders sponsored by University of Southern California's Center for Religion and Civic Culture, and Uniting NC based in Durham, North Carolina, an organization that is building communities in which all North Carolinians, and especially new immigrants, can live and thrive, are two (not ultimately studied) examples.

We then pursued a preliminary investigation of each potential site. From the beginning, we were particularly interested in the impact of women leaders in these communities, both on the host and newcomer sides. Early on, we decided to focus on smaller cities, based on the strategic assumption that larger diverse cities like New York and LA are easier places for new immigrants to find a home, while smaller, more homogeneous cities and regions may be more difficult. We reasoned that, were we to look at those smaller cities where things have gone remarkably well (in short, why we call them "bright spots"), lessons emerging from these cities could yield significant cases from which other communities could learn. Next, from our list of potential sites, we agreed to prioritize cities relatively low national exposure, as we would ideally like for our project to enhance the dissemination of lesser known success stories, as well as to raise the profiles of local leaders in culture change. Lastly, our commitment to building lasting partnerships guided our focus toward cases where other Auburn projects had already built connections that this work could extend. In the case of Dayton, for example, a prior Ford grant on immigration and sanctuary began relationships that we have now been extended with this project. Likewise, in Minneapolis, a prior Arthur Vining Davis project on innovation in theological education connected us to local leaders.

Based on our conviction that integration into large cities is less challenging than integration into smaller, more homogeneous places, and with our preference for cities with a relatively lower national profile, the three heartland cities we covered in this report (Minneapolis, MN: pop. 400k; Dayton, OH: pop. 141k; Omaha, NE: pop. 447k) rose to the top of our list. While each city has a complex and distinctive history, we were keen to find threads of connection across the three sites. We were looking for shared characteristics we could extrapolate and combine to create a heuristic for others, by facilitating an understanding of the circumstances of success that could serve to inform the pursuit of a similar project in a variety of other locations, whether smaller towns or bigger cities. We visited each community on at least three occasions, working each time with local partners to gather, listen to, and learn from stakeholders of each respective initiative

At Auburn we aim for our participatory action research to both ground our knowledge through case studies and build capacity for the local leaders who are working for change in their communities. Our research process, given its participatory nature, allows for local leaders of churches, nonprofits, businesses and departments of city government to augment awareness of the roles they play in city leadership, where they are often only partially aware of the history and even current dynamics of the partnerships in which they presently play a role. Creating spaces for shared learning and connection, within the process of research, deepens relationships and encourages deeper ownership of these cities' own inspiring stories.

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About Auburn

Auburn was founded in 1818 by the presbyteries of central New York State. Progressive theological ideas and ecumenical sensibilities guided Auburn's original work of preparing ministers for frontier churches and foreign missions. After the seminary relocated from Auburn, New York, to the campus of Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1939, Auburn ceased to grant degrees, but its commitment to progressive and ecumenical theological education remained firm.

As a free-standing seminary working in close cooperation with other institutions, Auburn found new forms for its educational mission: programs of serious, sustained theological education for laity and practicing clergy; a course of denominational studies for Presbyterians enrolled at Union; and research into the history, aims and purposes of theological education. In 1991, building on its national reputation for research, Auburn established the Center for the Study of Theological Education to foster research on current issues on theological education, an enterprise that Auburn believes is critical to the well-being of religious communities and the world that they serve. In 2013, with its 200th anniversary in sight, Auburn embarked on a new strategic plan intended to marshal its many resources towards the central mission of equipping leaders of faith and moral courage to work to heal the world.

As part of this plan, we reaffirm a strong and enduring commitment to a vigorous research agenda on topics relevant to the Center's constituency in theological schools and continues the high-quality Auburn Studies many look to us to provide. In addition, under a broader umbrella of Auburn Research we will develop exciting new initiatives seeking to let deep theological convictions speak to pressing public issues.

This research was made possible through a generous grant from the Ford Foundation.
This report, as well as all previous studies, may be found on Auburn's website: www.auburnseminary.org/research.

Endnotes

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