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## **Faith-Based Foundations of Social Justice: Where learning and life converge**

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**Faith-Based Foundations of Social Justice:  
Where learning and life converge**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies from  
The College of William and Mary

by

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Accepted for High Honors  
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## Introduction

What drives people to do good deeds? This question has been contested in courtrooms and classrooms throughout the centuries, and is a prominent speculation in conversation today. Is it the inspiration from one's upbringing? A court ordered penance for a wrong doing? A necessary requirement for school? An application or résumé builder? Some innate quality that is cultivated from one's religious practices? The list goes on and on. There is a plethora of reasons why people may decide to help out within society, but the real question boils down to what is that underlying motivator that grants a person initiative to go out and make a difference in some way or another?

To begin dissecting this issue, a major component of decision making relies on one's moral code. The ethical structures exhibited in most practicing religious people are shaped by their involvement in a religious institution. Born and raised in the Roman Catholic faith (also known as a "cradle Catholic"), the structures and practices of the Catholic religion have functioned in my life as innate instincts. With knowledge of what was right and wrong intertwined with lessons on how to live a good and faithful Catholic life, for me the knowledge that performing acts of kindness and good deeds was right was literally a "no brainer," it came with the territory of my existence. Failing to fulfill these standards brought regret and guilt upon which I took notice. Well aware that the world is comprised of many religions, cultures, and backgrounds, I began to wonder what triggers other members of society around the world to perform acts of goodness.

Religion plays a major part in creation of the world's societal structure and the way in which the roles of each individual person are to function within it. Religion, or more pertinently

the faith one holds and practices, theoretically impacts much of their daily life by mapping out the correct way to live. Acknowledging the importance of Catholicism in my own life, and its emergence from Judaism, the focus of my study will revolve around the core theology found in biblical times and the way in which this theology has evolved from one religion to the next and developed into modern day foundations of religious institutions. What are the implications of faith in relation to one's drive to perform good deeds? How does one's religious institution of choice impact their daily livelihood in serving the world around them?

My research is continually inspired by a summer mission trip program called "WorkCamp" founded by the Catholic Diocese of Arlington in 1990.<sup>1</sup> WorkCamp is a six day "mission" trip located within the Diocese of Arlington's boundaries occurring each summer for all high school youth. I have attended WorkCamp over the past seven years, and served various roles: participant, planning team member, and work crew leader. WorkCamp focuses on a "start at home" service ministry, targeting local areas which are in desperate need of help. Building wheelchair ramps, repairing roofs, replacing doors and windows are just a few of the many projects teenagers are assigned to each week. Serving one's neighbor in the most literal sense was what struck me about WorkCamp. Growing up in the Washington D.C./Metro Area, poverty always seemed distant. American society emphasizes its successes and structures and shies from its faults and failings, especially in relation to underprivileged citizens. People in need oceans away are placed at the forefront of service, although their need is great, this country has plenty of need as well. Working in neighborhoods that fed local high schools opened my eyes to the true need for action right in my back yard. With a fire for service burning in me, and a new direction in life set forth, WorkCamp inspires my investigation into what elements can motivate a

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic Diocese of Arlington, "Over 1,000 Arlington Diocese Youth and Adults Prepare for WorkCamp." Last modified June 17, 2013. Accessed January 21, 2014. <http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/newsdetails.aspx?Pageid=422&id=5499>.

community to engage in service activities to perpetuate the movement for helping others in the community.

### Terminology

Dealing with a concept such as “good deeds” or “works” in modern vernacular, the term which most commonly emerges is “Social Justice,” but this term in itself is loaded with connotations; political, social and religious. An all-encompassing definition of social justice as given by The Center for Economic and Social Justice, a non-profit organization located in Washington, D.C., reads:

Social justice is the virtue which guides us in creating those organized human interactions we call institutions. In turn, social institutions, when justly organized, provide us with access to what is good for the person, both individually and in our associations with others. Social justice also imposes on each of us a personal responsibility to work with others to design and continually perfect our institutions as tools for personal and social development.<sup>2</sup>

This overarching definition highlights three key components: good for the individual, good for the institution, and good for the society. These components are malleable and can be manipulated to serve the religious or other institutional purpose, and for that reason more specific terms will be used as definitions for this thesis.

### *Catholic Social Teaching*

The Roman Catholic Church expounds upon the concept of Social Justice in their doctrine known as Catholic Social Teaching. Catholic social teaching deals with matters relating

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<sup>2</sup> Center for Economic and Social Justice, "Defining Economic and Social Justice." Accessed December 18, 2013. <http://www.cesj.org/thirdway/economicjustice-defined.htm>.

to respect of an individual's human life. Preferential options for the poor and most vulnerable are "founded on the life and words of Jesus Christ" and the "understanding of human life and human dignity [in which] every human being is created in the image of God [and thereby] worthy of respect as a member of the human family."<sup>3</sup> Catholic Social Teaching is comprised of seven themes each expanding upon an aspect of human equality and justice.

The term justice itself falls under the category known as "cardinal virtues also called moral virtues" where "virtue is a habit that perfects the powers of the soul and disposes you to do good."<sup>4</sup> This disposition towards good can be strengthened through right actions and is initially given through the grace of God. Justice in this category is the "virtue that seeks to promote fair play" or "give each person his due," while "social justice concerns the relationship of both individuals and groups between one another and everyone. The [...] common good – the public welfare of all."<sup>5</sup> Bearing all this in mind, social justice from the standpoint of Catholic Social Teaching shall henceforth be defined as: a common understanding and respect for human life which works towards the eternal welfare for all as exemplified by the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

It is important to note that Catholic Social Teaching's "roots are in the Hebrew prophets who announced God's special love for the poor and called God's people to a covenant of love and justice" which is why to fully understand the motivations found within Catholicism, its origins in the Hebrew Bible and biblical Judaism must also be analyzed.<sup>6</sup> The modern American

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<sup>3</sup> United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, "Catholic Social Teaching." Last modified 2014. Accessed August 9, 2013. <http://usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/index.cfm>.

<sup>4</sup> John Trigilio, and Kenneth Brighenti, *Catholicism for Dummies*, (Indianapolis: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2003), 200.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 202, 204.

<sup>6</sup> United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, "Catholic Social Teaching." Last modified 2014. Accessed August 9, 2013. <http://usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/index.cfm>.

Reform Jewish movement emphasis a drive for social justice its constructs of good will also be used to compare.

### *Tikkun Olam*

The term social justice is once again applicable in the Judaic realm; however a post-biblical term *Tikkun Olam* most accurately satisfies the modern theological motivations for good deeds. *Tikkun olam* is a Hebrew phrase which means “to repair the world” and is part of Jewish tradition which “encourages everyone to help those less fortunate than themselves.”<sup>7</sup>

*Tikkun olam* is not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible, but can first be found in the Mishnah, around the year 200CE. In passages where the rabbis of the Mishnah attempt to standardize Jewish law, the phrase “*mipnei tikkun ha-olam* 'for the sake of order in the world' or even 'in the interest of public policy'” is used.”<sup>8</sup> The *Aleniu* prayer, incorporated into the daily liturgy around the 1300s, “pray[s] for God to *tikkun olam* 'fix or perfect the world', [meaning] that God will be recognized by everyone as the supreme ruler,” a different message than the one thought of today following the same *Aleniu* prayer which associates congregants with direct societal needs.<sup>9</sup> This interpretation emerges from a supposed amalgamation of the biblical terms, “*tzedakah* (financial support of the poor), *g'milut hasadim* (acts of loving kindness), and *tzedek* (justice)” which were combined in the sixteenth century following a Kabbalistic movement.<sup>10</sup> Kabbalists' urge a sense of agency and control over the events of the world during a time of pogroms and blood libels,

<sup>7</sup> Richard Michelson, *A is for Abraham: A Jewish Family Alphabet*, (Chelsea: Sleeping Bear Press, 2008), 28.

<sup>8</sup> The Movement for Reform Judaism, "Tikkun Olam." Last modified 2014. Accessed April 1, 2014. <http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/a-to-z-of-reform-judaism/?id=152>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Jacobs, Jil. Zeek, "The History of "Tikkun Olam"." Last modified June 2007. Accessed January 21, 2014. <http://www.zeek.net/706tohu/>.

The Movement for Reform Judaism, "Tikkun Olam." Last modified 2014. Accessed April 1, 2014. <http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/a-to-z-of-reform-judaism/?id=152>.



viewing the world as a ceramic vessel which could break at any moment and required “retreating into [...] inner lives and working to become one with God [...] to find purpose in a world where the Jew was powerless.”<sup>11</sup> With rising equality in the world, Jews shift from the Kabbalistic movement, but maintain the ideology of repairing this broken vessel. “It has become axiomatic that to be a Jew is to care about the world around us [...] to be engaged in the ongoing work of *tikkun olam*; to strive to improve the world in which we live.”<sup>12</sup> The different meanings of *tikkun olam* highlight that the actions of social justice are “bound” in the Reform Jewish tradition, and integral to Jewish life.<sup>13</sup> For the purposes of this research, the definition of social justice from the standpoint of *tikkun olam* shall henceforth be: a call to repair the world through acts of kindness, support of the less fortunate, and human justice.

### *Social Justice versus Social Service*

Service projects, philanthropies, rallies, petitions, are a few of the many examples of what will be referred to as social service. Social service is a term used to describe any activity, event, or participatory involvement which takes a step towards helping/serving those in need, but is not a permanent solution. Social service activities do qualify as good works and deeds, but for the purpose of this investigation must be delineated for the expanse of involvement in social service is immeasurable.

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<sup>11</sup> The Movement for Reform Judaism, "Tikkun Olam." Last modified 2014. Accessed April 1, 2014. <http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/a-to-z-of-reform-judaism/?id=152>.

<sup>12</sup> Feldman, Rabbi Marla. Union for Reform Judaism, "Why Advocacy is Central to Reform Judaism." Last modified 2011. Accessed April 1, 2014. <http://urj.org/socialaction/judaism/advocacy/>.

<sup>13</sup> The Movement for Reform Judaism, "Tikkun Olam." Last modified 2014. Accessed April 1, 2014. <http://www.reformjudaism.org.uk/a-to-z-of-reform-judaism/?id=152>.

Social justice will be used to satisfy the main investigatory goal of this thesis, in that social justice is a call for permanent solutions and everlasting societal balance henceforth defined as: permanent actions taken to satisfy the need for equality and the common good. When referring to catholic social teaching and *tikkun olam*, the general phrase social justice will be utilized.

### Case Studies

To best observe the effects of biblical teachings, doctrines, and theological practices, St. James Catholic Church located in Falls Church, Virginia and Congregation Beth Ahabah located in Richmond, Virginia will serve as the models of modern day religious institutions. St. James is a Roman Catholic parish and Beth Ahabah is a Reform Jewish congregation. Both institutions were founded the 1800s, and each of the two communities have provided a fair amount of change within their local communities due to social justice efforts as well as establishments of and participation in local social justice organizations.

The Diocese of Arlington's WorkCamp, Congregation Beth Ahabah's Mitzvah Day, and the Union for Reform Judaism's Mitzvah Corps program, provide current examples of social service events which continually pursue social justice efforts. Both WorkCamp and Mitzvah Corps create a modern working platform for the methods upon which social justice efforts are implemented into modern society as well as the manner in which these occasions inspire eager volunteers. Through the analysis of both these projects, a comparable equivalency emerges as to what factors lure the current religious observer into spending, whether time, money, or both, to serve others.

## Methodology

Much of the information concerning WorkCamp is gathered from my participant observation research throughout the twenty fourth WorkCamp located in Quicksburg, Virginia, from June 22-28, 2013. WorkCamp, being a prominent event in my life annually, is something I am so familiar with, that the stepping back into an observatory stance was necessary. Attaining a researcher's perspective allowed for a clear separation between my personal history and observatory experiences. This distinction is very important, for my involvement prior to this year most certainly included elements of motivation that I desire now to study from afar.

To fully investigate the intricacies of WorkCamp, a weeklong event which is planned throughout the two years prior, I interviewed several of the most prominent figures within the Office of Youth Ministry for the Diocese of Arlington, as well as Youth Ministers in the diocese who have served different roles throughout the program's history. The Office of Youth Ministry is responsible for the planning and production of WorkCamp each year, and several of its members were WorkCamp participants in their youth, and others have been with the program since its inception. These interviews provide for an in-depth look at almost all of the facets of the program, from beginning phases to over-arching themes, the day to day run down to the take away moments. Each interview holds a crucial part in this research, by providing background information such as the individual's upbringing and the reasons for each individual's initial and continual involvement in the WorkCamp program.

In comparison to WorkCamp, Congregation Beth Ahabah hosts an annual spring event called "Mitzvah Day" which fills the city of Richmond with service projects targeted towards the entire community. Unfortunately due to the time constraints of this thesis, I have yet to

experience a Mitzvah Day; however I have poured through Beth Ahabah's extensive archives as well as held interviews with several co-directors of Mitzvah Day who have walked me through the process. The Executive Director of the congregation was also able to further illuminate the process of Mitzvah Day as well as explain personal and communal motivations for its inception and annually consistent participation from the congregation.

Mitzvah Corps lasts for two to six weeks each summer and is located all over the county. Research concerning Mitzvah Corps was gathered through interviews of past Mitzvah Corps directors and participants, as well as through the analysis of online summer Mitzvah Corps blog posts. I have yet to attend a Mitzvah Corps program, but through the interviews I am able to understand the evolution of the program over the last decades as well compare it to the WorkCamp experience.

The interviews were valuable research tools for understanding each event, but more importantly for expanding the horizons of my research. Each interviewee's personal story provided a new path to research. Whether it was the biblical verse quoted, or the childhood memory shared, these interviews led to many different areas of exploration including developmental psychology, institutional religious education, and social media.

Textual sources ranging from newspaper and magazine articles to novels and folk tales offer further examples of what has and continues to motivate social justice work. Many articles explain examples of successful social justice movements, and how each is created and then lived out. Rescuers of the Jews during the Holocaust shed light on the characteristics of people who do ultimate good in the face of danger to make a permanent difference. What I sought in each of these stories were the factors in the rescuers' upbringings that led them to be rescuers. These and many more resources shape the path of this research helping to unravel the central question of

how religious institutions, and one's own faith within them, determine the impact one has on the world.

Verses from both the Hebrew Bible (Christian Old Testament) and New Testament construct the framework for this overall analysis. Focusing primarily on verses relating to social justice, serving others, living out "God's will," and being righteous found in both parts of the Holy Scriptures allows for the creation of a structural framework in which analysis can be made with modern day vernacular.

### Theological Road Map

This analysis will begin by breaking down the biblical verses into thematic groups which connote valuable and repeated lessons. These thematic groups will then be applied to the case studies of St. James Catholic Church, Congregation Beth Ahabah, WorkCamp, Mitzvah Day, and Mitzvah Corps. A historical background for each institution and program will be provided along with a thorough extraction of the most prominent components which perpetuate social justice action. These case studies will be compared and contrasted allowing for further separation of religious and societal stimuli.

Interviewees' upbringings inspired by Eva Fogelman's work on rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust in "Conscience and Courage" will work comparatively to unravel the psychological from the theological motivators which inspire these interviewees to continue pursuing lives dedicated towards social justice. Influential factors such as parents, saints, story characters, non-religious inspirations, and more will be considered in the process of determining the religious institution's impact within the broader context of one's childhood surroundings.

## Cultural Context

Roman Catholics and Reform Jews who are considered participants in their local congregations due to job title or annual involvements comprise the bulk of the data for this research. This research does not analyze the multitude of people who participate in social justice activities and have never been exposed to, or who have turned away from a religious institution. There are a plethora of explanations as to why and how people come to social justice work, but this thesis is investigating the American institutions of Roman Catholicism and Reform Judaism predominantly in Virginia and the ways in which these institutions cultivate a greater awareness and passion for social justice efforts.

The fact that all of the case studies, supplementary activities, and interviewees are American also calls for attention to the broader cultural context found within American society. American influence is important to keep in mind, for this is a nation which places an interesting dichotomy on social justice work. Part of the American culture encourages people to “pull themselves up from their own bootstraps” discouraging others to step in and help, while another portion of society contains secular programs such as the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) which works to aid those in need around America. “CNCS is a federal agency that engages more than 5 million Americans in service through its core programs -- Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, and the Social Innovation Fund,” and acting upon the President’s directive and nationwide motto: “United We Serve.”<sup>14</sup> America’s multitude of rights and freedoms permit such differing ideologies to persist, and continue on successfully throughout generations, providing a unique division of social justice participation among citizens.

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<sup>14</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service, "Who We Are." Last modified 2014. Accessed April 1, 2014. <http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/who-we-are>.

Beth Ahabah, Mitzvah Day, Mitzvah Corps, St. James, and WorkCamp all exist within American society and successfully emerged in part due to the American culture in which resources and rights make serving others more tangible. With all this being said, it is important to be aware of the large scale, but small scope of this project, meaning there is a great amount of detail within each of these case studies, but these case studies represent a small sample of the larger phenomena of social justice initiatives. All assumptions are operating under an American framework where all people are created equal, and all people have the freedom of religion.

### Deciphering the Discourse

The core research analysis lies among the shifting and evolving of the discourse throughout the centuries. Where the discourse remains firmly rooted in the theology of old, the innate call to action goes beyond that of social service work and permeates a desire to perform acts of social justice. The understanding of the difference between the social service, effective, yet Band-Aid solutions and the permanent repairs of social justice efforts causes a vast change in the manner with which one adheres and fulfills the principles of social justice. When religious institutions are able to ingrain the deep theological reasons for why social justice (through catholic social teaching and/or *tikkun olam*) is so vital for the success of human society, people are more likely to invest in a life of social justice work – to fix the problems permanently rather than prolong situations with minute repairs. Programs which become self-sustaining and promote equality among people evolve from the desire to make change and improvement permanent instead of temporary. The key, as simple as it may seem, lies within the language, when one

understands what one is doing, or being asked to do, one most literally takes to heart the message and lives it out with a fuller exuberance.



## **Section 1: Theological Framework**

To construct the proper framework, an analysis of verses from both the Hebrew Bible (known also as the Christian Old Testament) and the New Testament begin this research. The selected verses are based on their content in relation to social justice. Five main themes emerge amongst the hundreds of verses which discuss some aspect pertaining to social justice: determining God's will, the importance of action, defining community, Jesus as a living example of the commandments, and the rewards for being righteous. Each theme appears over and over again throughout the texts and combining to form a solid basis for the case studies under examination.

A disclaimer must be made now concerning the "legitimacy" factor of these texts. This study is not intended to prove validity or superiority of one text over another or in comparison to ideologies of modern society. The purpose of the utilization of these works is to analyze and craft a framework, using the core educational materials within religious institutions. It is important to keep unbiased what one believes and follows, and to solely look at the lasting influence such practices have on the individual's life. It is very important to remove any preconceptions of the sacred texts. This research understands the significance of the sacred texts on the same level with which each institution respectively values them. The opinions of those outside the realm of modern Americanized Catholicism will not be taken into account when analyzing the New Testaments works and the Hebrew Bible will be viewed from the generally respective perspectives of American Reform Jewish congregations and American Roman Catholic Churches.

When reading through the beginning of revelation and the commandments, in the Hebrew Bible, almost all of the passages refer to a responsibility, a duty, or an obligation which calls one to follow the “will of God” or do what “God asks,” or “instructs.” The composition of the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh is as follows: the Torah which contains the books Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, followed by the Nevi'im (prophets) and the Ketuvim (writings). Within the five books of the Torah, God reveals to God's people the commandments which mark the beginning of a covenant, or relationship between the people and their supernatural creator. All of the commandments ask the people to do something, or to not do something, and can be broken into positive and negative commandments. None of the commandments in the Torah require belief of any kind, rather they require study, and observance, and love. It can be assumed that God's will is a compilation of all that God asks from the people in order that they live lives justly and as God plans. In modern times, however, many people talk about following the personal call God has for them, or fulfilling the will God laid out in their life.

Verses in the New Testament, particularly found in the letters ascribed to the apostle Paul, elaborate on what people are called to do as faithful and dutiful servants of God to attain eternal salvation. Much of what is described in the New Testament reflects back to the life of Jesus and the example Jesus exhibits by following the full array of Gods commands. Jesus' teachings modernize biblical viewpoints while maintaining a solid foundation in the core of the commands. Jesus applies Jewish traditions and parables to his daily interactions, but flips what is known as a tradition or folk tale upside down, making punishment or rebuke an opportunity for

forgiveness and love.<sup>15</sup> Keeping in mind the very important centuries which lie between the revelation of the Hebrew Bible and the recorded teachings of Jesus and his apostles, the similarity in content is astounding, and I argue intentional. The “Jesus Movement” so to speak, is something that can be compared to a modern day revival of fashion; bringing back the 1970s bell bottom jeans and pairing it with a 1990s half t-shirt. This analogy only goes to show the retaining of the principles from the Jewish tradition thus far and their vernacular expansion and transformation during the time of Jesus. Jesus comes to reform the minds of God’s people to understanding God’s commands once more, never to begin a new religion.

Looking first at a fairly self-explanatory commandment, Deuteronomy 10:12 reads “And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God demand of you? Only this: to revere the Lord your God, to walk only in His paths, to love him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and soul.” God explains the expectations God holds for God’s followers in this verse with overarching, yet straightforward commands: revere, love, serve.<sup>16</sup> Jesus brings these commands to the forefront of his teachings in the New Testament, which the apostle Paul boils down in his letters to the word “faith.” Responsibilities for how to live life, and how to properly revere, love, and serve God all fall under the umbrella category of having faith in God. A letter to the Corinthians reads “for we walk by faith, not by sight,” indicating the path of righteousness for Christianity lies in the possession of faith.<sup>17</sup>

Faith although a seemingly all-encompassing term raises concerns because some associate faith to mean belief, others use faith to mean belief with no need for evidence, and still

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<sup>15</sup> See the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) or the Lost Son where Jesus tells a well-known moral story of biblical times, but changes the ending from what the Jewish people know as rebuke and punishment to a lesson on endless forgiveness and love.

<sup>16</sup> It is important to note that this service is in relation to serving God and therefore our needs. It is also important to remember this service and how it becomes transformed into serving others is a part of serving God, and the God found within all peoples.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:7.

more use faith as a secular term for hope. Belief eradicates the serving portion of God's will, and retains only the requirements to revere and to love God, and the secular usage removes God from the equation completely. In biblical times, James addresses this issue of faith (belief) without service, which reads "What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?"<sup>18</sup> James is saying that faith, if maintained as an additional term for the totality of revering, loving, and serving God, can save. Faith without service (referred to as works), is not enough, for it does not fulfill all God asks. The challenge found here in the letter from James will remain prominent in discourse throughout the centuries and even today. What reward comes from having faith alone, if faith alone is separated from doing works?

The notion of works, service, and deeds for God and for others in the community is not a new concept, "for we are what [God] has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life."<sup>19</sup> God prepared the way of life for the people from the beginning, asking the people to follow God's way; "Thus said the Lord: Do what is just and right; rescue from the defrauder him who is robbed; do not wrong the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow; commit no lawless act, and do not shed the blood of the innocent in this place."<sup>20</sup> Each of these concrete practices of doing good works that are just and right outline the perimeter of the will of God, the path that God calls each of God's people to walk.

For some, the concept of God's will contradicts God's promise of free will; this higher power determining the right path prohibits any deviance. These thoughts are rebuked in Paul's letter to the Galatians which reads "for you were called to freedom, brothers and sisters; only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for self-indulgence, but rather serve one another humbly

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<sup>18</sup> James 2:14.

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 2:10.

<sup>20</sup> Jeremiah 22:3.

in love.”<sup>21</sup> God’s will appears now to be a choice, an opportunity for righteousness, a model to follow for the most abundant life. God presents the options on a platter, for “[God] has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: only to do justice and to love goodness, and to walk modestly with your God, then your name will achieve wisdom.”<sup>22</sup>

Wisdom is one of the many things that come as a reward for doing “what is good,” and wisdom in itself is what most people ultimately desire or assume to possess when making choices. The word “humbly” appears in close range to obeying the will of God, and with wisdom as a gift, it is safe to assume that an “all-knowing” person may not be the most righteous. The heart plays a big part in the success of following God’s will; the mind alone is not enough.

“Thus said the Lord: observe what is right and do what is just.”<sup>23</sup> Two factors are brought to the table with Isaiah’s prophesy, observing the commandments and doing the commandments. Separating these verbs, which are not considered synonyms of one another, emphasizes the need for action beyond understanding. The verbs “to observe” and “to do” as defined by Dictionary.com are respectively “to see, watch, perceive, or notice, to regard with attention, especially so as to see or learn something,” and “to perform (an act, duty, role, etc.), to act or conduct oneself; be in action; behave.”<sup>24</sup> Observation can be comprehended as the developmental learning process, the time in which one grows to understand what is being asked of them through the example of others, where doing marks the time of individualized action, where the knowledge that has been accumulated is put to practice. Just as faith without service is not enough, so too is observance without action.

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<sup>21</sup> Galatians 5:13.

<sup>22</sup> Micah 6:8.

<sup>23</sup> Isaiah 56:1.

<sup>24</sup> Dictionary.com, s.v. “Observe,” accessed January 29, 2014, <http://dictionary.reference.com/>.  
Ibid., “Do”.

The New Testament harkens back to the imperative nature of God's request to not only observe, but also to do:

Understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger; for your anger does not produce God's righteousness. Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act – they will be blessed in their doing.<sup>25</sup>

The overarching question in my mind is what causes, or more pertinently, inspires people to perform good deeds, or self-less acts of kindness for another person. James, the ascribed author of this letter, brings about a very powerful analogy of how people who hear and do not follow through with action lose that which was heard. According to James, the combination of knowledge and exerted action to further advance righteousness is the key to success and blessings. What stands out most here, and is pivotal to the central line of this study is that the hearing, or observing, or learning, does not stick if it is not implemented.

God gives many applicable examples to the Israelites of how they should conduct themselves in daily manners of service to one another, seamlessly weaving the laws with action. God commands that “when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap all the way to the edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not pick your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen fruit of you vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the stranger,” a practice for the harvest which becomes ingrained in society to benefit all involved, but does not necessarily inspire further acts for the needy in itself.<sup>26</sup> Later on in Deuteronomy, God commands that “if, however, there is a needy person among you, one of your kinsmen in

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<sup>25</sup> James 1:22-25.

<sup>26</sup> Leviticus 19:9-10.

any of your settlements in the land that the Lord your God is giving you, do not harden your heart and shut your hand against your needy kinsman. Rather, you must open your hand and lend him sufficient for whatever he needs.”<sup>27</sup> Both of these commands give very detailed instructions on how to exist in a society at any level. If one is poor, they know the gleanings and edges are theirs, if one is wealthy they are told to lend sufficiently to their fellow kinsman. All of this constructs a very amicable exchange of justice within society, but does it become a joyful part of livelihood, or does it remain solely an obligation?

James’ letter helps to narrow in on some formulaic way of understanding the role religion plays in influencing a person’s desire to pursue acts of social justice.<sup>28</sup> There is a rhyme and a reason to all that has been discussed thus far; God asks and people respond and those that do are given blessings, but this equation falters for it does not account for the innate passion which drives people to do good without being told or without fearing guilt or repercussions; it is missing an aspect of love.

“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. How does God’s love abide in anyone who has the world’s goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.”<sup>29</sup> Love for others becomes another channel in which people are to express their love, reverence, and service for God. It is only through the recognition that loving, revering, and serving the world around, is in itself loving, revering, and serving God. Refocusing duties to God through the reflection of God in the world is a central component to the Christianized model of salvation. All Christian ideals relating to this all abounding love, however, emerge from some thread in Jewish theology.

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<sup>27</sup> Deuteronomy 19:9-10.

<sup>28</sup> James 1:22-25.

<sup>29</sup> 1 John 3:16-18.

Posted on door frames of many Jewish homes today is a mezuzah, which is representative of the *shema* prayer, found in the book of Deuteronomy: “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day.”<sup>30</sup> This commandment, although not the first in recorded order, is seen as one of the most prominent and all-inclusive instructions revealed to God’s people. Jesus revitalizes and expands upon this verse from Deuteronomy as a response to a question of which commandment is the greatest, saying “‘you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”<sup>31</sup> With a response that encompasses the commandment known well to the Jewish people and an expansion that, unbeknownst to many appears several times throughout the Hebrew Bible, Jesus’ words attempt to redirect the practice from long ago with a reordering of what has already been revealed.

Who is this neighbor that Jesus speaks of? The commandments are clear in directing service to the poor, to the widow, to those within the bounds of the community, yet the term neighbor opens the door to a fair amount of options. A passage from Deuteronomy says to help “the Levite, [...] and the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow in your settlements” which can be interpreted as meaning only those within one’s most literal settlement lands.<sup>32</sup> In comparison to this more specific example, the term “kinsman” is used as seen above and within many other passages. The term “kinsman” contains definitions ranging from “a blood relative, especially a

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<sup>30</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4-6.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 22:37-40. The interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees can be found almost identically in Mark 12:29-31 and Luke 10:25-28. The way in which this conversation of Jesus’ is so precisely recorded and repeated emphasizes the great importance it holds within Christian history and the formation of Christian theology.

<sup>32</sup> Deuteronomy 14:29.



male,” to “a relative by marriage” to “a person of the same nationality or ethnic group.”<sup>33</sup> Each of these definitions expands the bounds, yet contains the service to a specified relation, area, or type of community. This notion of kinship is one likely factor which leads Jews, until modern times, to limit social justice to other Jews.

Love becomes an eminent factor in serving society, and this love is not allowed to be restricted. Jesus says “If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners to the same [...] but love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return.”<sup>34</sup> Enemies are used to depict the last person one would ever desire to serve and exemplify how even the most loathed deserves love. A verse from Proverbs describes the nature of society through the eyes of God in saying “Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is Maker of them all,” and if the Lord, God is good and love, then none of God’s people can be unworthy of receiving love, service, and reverence.<sup>35</sup> The evolution of the ideology of communal service to encompass all people is necessary for any progressive society which, as history shows, must interact with outsiders, strangers, and even enemies.

Almost all New Testament verses reflect a comprehensive sense of service to God and society. The instructions emanate from Jesus’s teachings, and continue through disciples and apostles arriving at communities infiltrated by Roman authorities or filled with refugees from distant lands. The emerging diversity and integration in biblical times called for a universal code of conduct to develop. New Testament sayings, parables, and interactions define the boundlessness of love, while still giving weight to the importance of each individualized segment in society, saying “So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all,

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<sup>33</sup> Dictionary.com, s.v. “Kinsman,” accessed January 29, 2014, <http://dictionary.reference.com/>.

<sup>34</sup> Luke 6:33,35.

<sup>35</sup> Proverbs 22:2.

and especially for those of the family of faith.”<sup>36</sup> An endnote such as this is left as a reminder to people that serving their own community is just as important as serving someone in need outside of the community. Today, the term neighbor as Dictionary.com defines it can mean “a person or thing that is near another” or, and most likely due to the initial Christianization of society during the days of the pilgrims and founding fathers, “one's fellow human being.”<sup>37</sup> American culture, although not specifically Christian, pertains to many aspects of monotheistic religious beliefs. From the pledge of allegiance, ‘one nation under God’, to the song ‘God Bless America,’ monotheistic vernacular remains in the core structures of American society. The worldliness found within these definitions supports the idealized form of social justice: one without limitations.

Jesus becomes the living example for those in the first century, for Jesus evokes all of the teachings from the initial revelation of the commandments and exemplifies them in everyday life. “Whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.”<sup>38</sup> Jesus, the Christ, is believed by most Christians to be the fulfillment of the predictions of old, bringing about the Messianic age; “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from among your own people, like myself; him you shall heed.”<sup>39</sup> God tells the people to listen to the messages of the one which God sends, which for some, is believed to be Jesus. Jesus’ messages then transform the teachings of old to be vital for people everywhere.

A huge call to action resounds from Jesus’ urgency to love one another:

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my

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<sup>36</sup> Galatians 6:10.

<sup>37</sup> Dictionary.com, s.v. “Neighbor,” accessed January 29, 2014, <http://dictionary.reference.com/>.

<sup>38</sup> Mark 10:43-44. Matthew 20:28 also explains the role of Jesus as a servant to all, not one who desires to be served.

<sup>39</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15.

friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my father.<sup>40</sup>

Jesus, as God intended, becomes the embodiment of God's teachings, and as God asked "[Jesus] you shall heed," empowering Jesus' teachings and lessons to be a model from God.<sup>41</sup> Jesus also utilizes this moment to show how God's will is no longer an intangible mystery, but a blessing given to the people for an idyllic life. Later apostles preach how people are "God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for [them] to do," and "by such work [they] must support the weak, remembering the words of the Lord Jesus, [...] 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'".<sup>42</sup> This principle of self-less giving will remain prominent for centuries to come, yet will also come as a continual challenge for people in society.

With all this laid out in most Christian teachings, the question remains as to how all Christians are not following this path. Human agency comprises a certain component, for some people do not desire to conform, however what is more crucial here is the separation between belief and followed action. One may say they believe in Jesus' ministry and the work he did for those in need, yet their actions do not reflect Jesus' call to serve. The disconnect between learned belief and applied action gives reason behind the lack of participation from a fair amount of proclaimed faithful Christians.

Humility is a fundamental component in performing works as God desires. As previously mentioned, the prophet Micah speaks about the need to walk modestly with the Lord, and the letter to the Philippians addresses a similar issue saying "do nothing from selfish ambition or

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<sup>40</sup> John 15:12-15.

<sup>41</sup> Deuteronomy 18:15.

<sup>42</sup> Ephesians 2:10. and Acts 20:35.

conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus.”<sup>43</sup> These directives demand a humble nature and spirit for the blessing given by truly performing an act of goodness for another.

If rewards for the righteous are so abundant – “one who strives to do good and kind deeds attains life, success, and honor” – how then could people ever choose to not do what is good?<sup>44</sup> People are not perfect, and some encounter discouragement and doubt easily, asking “why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are the workers of treachery at ease?”<sup>45</sup> These questions challenge notions of fairness, and deserving what is right for one’s actions, but can be answered by realizing “all day long [the wicked man] is seized with craving while the righteous man gives without stint,” and is rewarded tenfold for the accumulated good.<sup>46</sup> The apostles remind the people in their letters over and over again to remain steadfast in what is right, saying “let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up.”<sup>47</sup>

The path may be arduous, but it is not an impossible one to walk, for the prophets from Moses to Jeremiah, Jesus to the apostles and the disciples, lead the way, and ask that God’s people “keep on doing the things that [they] have learned and received and heard and seen [...], and the God of peace will be with [them].”<sup>48</sup> Commitment to hearing and doing the work God gives is what is desired among all of this. The connection between the instruction and the action is so much more than a line of communication; it holds a meaning filled with intentionality and love, which is why “everyone who hears these words of [God], and does not act on them will be

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<sup>43</sup> Micah 6:8. and Philippians 2:3-5.

<sup>44</sup> Proverbs 21:21.

<sup>45</sup> Jeremiah 12:1.

<sup>46</sup> Proverbs 21:26.

<sup>47</sup> Galatians 6:9.

<sup>48</sup> Philippians 4:9.

like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell,” just as humans will fall from the path God has directed, for “anyone, then, who knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, commits sin.”<sup>49</sup>

Guilt and fear, although established, are not to be motivators for good works. They are not the driving forces that produce successful and everlasting changes of heart, which is why those tactics are not as prominent in secular society today. There is no punishment for staying at home instead of working in a soup kitchen, which is why this analysis is possible; if there is no punishment for being self-absorbed, why do people differ from this natural tendency? What causes humans to extend themselves for another? Part of the religious answer lies in the eternal. Hope prospers above all else that righteous people will “enjoy the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.”<sup>50</sup> This notion of more to come, a greater reward, a peace, and blessing, may perhaps be underlying motivators.

Other hypotheses for the inspiration behind the performance of good works exist in the relationships between children and their parents. One’s cognitive perspective of the world forms due to experience and learned knowledge, gained with support from those around, predominantly parents. Each hypothesis functions as an unraveling thread of investigation throughout the upcoming sections.

A summation of the points under discussion: God calls God’s people to love, serve, and adore God which translates into being a follower of God with faith. This faith is only active if all aspects of God’s original request to love, serve, and revere are employed; therefore works become just as vital to the mission as the beliefs themselves. Practice makes perfect, and action is the path to completing the observances required, but it takes more than just observation and

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<sup>49</sup> Matthew 7:26. James 4:17.

<sup>50</sup> Psalms 27:13.

doing to ignite a desire to serve. Love becomes a key emotion which transcends borders and unites the world as one people under God's domain. To live up to the will of God, one must do so lovingly with all their heart, mind, and soul, and exhibit the same love to each and every person they encounter. The shift towards love emerges with the fulfillment of the messianic prophesy through Jesus' ministry. Jesus exemplifies the perfect ways to live on a day to day basis and shifts the discourse of old to be more progressive for the diversity the world is beginning to encounter. Jesus also emphasizes the humility of service once more, and how only true and genuine service can lead to the utmost reward.

Synthesizing all of these themes the broad theological framework presents, it is important to notice the gradual amalgamation of initial bits of revelation found throughout the Hebrew Bible into new concepts presented by Jesus and his apostles throughout the New Testament. These ideas of love, faith, and charity for all will become central tenants of the emerging Christian division, and foundations for Catholic Social Teaching. Evolutionarily, the once memorized Hebrew Bible transforms cognitively into secularized definitions of how to serve and live equally in American society leading back to the beginning of this investigation.

Revelation from God is only able to remain active in the souls of God's people if the initial commandment is understood for all it is worth. When Jesus combines teachings to modernize the people's understandings, there are still strong, quoted correlations back to where it all began. Only when the words used to mandate why one must perform acts, or serve others is connected to the utmost purpose of loving, serving, and revering God, can they bear any lasting impact. People's internal responsibility and obligation to God must be accepted, understood, and cherished; otherwise the teachings they hear will go in one side and out the other before being implanted into their core.

## Section 2: Case Studies

### A Brief History of Congregation Beth Ahabah

By the late 1700s, the Jewish population in Richmond, Virginia was over 100. “In 1789, a group of Jews established Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalome,” the predecessor to Congregation Beth Ahabah, the first Jewish congregation in Richmond, and the sixth and westernmost Jewish congregation in America.<sup>51</sup> At the dedication of the Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalome Synagogue, the following statement laid the foundation for the congregations to come: “Ye are commanded to seek the peace of the City...hold charity and justice to be essential...parts of your faith.”<sup>52</sup> Despite many years of cooperation and communal growth, the ever increasing number of Jews leaving Europe and immigrating to America desired a community that was more accustomed to their recently forming Reform practices. The Reform movement developed as a bold response to the increasing political centralization of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries in Europe.<sup>53</sup> Undermining the societal structure, which supported traditional Jewish life, in combination with the emancipation of the European Jews gave way to a flood of autonomy which slowly shifted practices from Orthodox traditions to the now recognized movement of Reform Judaism.<sup>54</sup> Congregation Beth Ahabah was founded in 1841 to bring a more familiar form of worship service and more comfortable set of religious bounds to the growing population, the result of a

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<sup>51</sup> Congregation Beth Ahabah, "Our History." Last modified 2006. Accessed February 9, 2014. <http://www.bethahabah.org/index.htm>.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> The Gale Group. Jewish Virtual Library, "Reform Judaism." Last modified 2008. Accessed April 2, 2014. [https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud\\_0002\\_0017\\_0\\_16561.html](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0017_0_16561.html).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

“modern German splintering.”<sup>55</sup> Congregation Beth Ahabah, meaning “House of Love” is a Reform Jewish congregation, officially joining the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the umbrella organization of Reform Judaism, in 1875.<sup>56</sup>

Beth Ahabah offers a variety of programs for all ages within the community, and is “dedicated to participating in a variety of community service programs.”<sup>57</sup> Organizations and societies formed from the congregation’s inception due to the sense of autonomy and importance instilled in all of the members. Arising in 1849, thanks to the inspiration from Rabbi Maximilian J. Michelbacher, was the Ladies Hebrew Association. With the encouragement of Rabbi Michelbacher, the organization supported:

Jewish women, [for whom] charity was more than a nice gesture. They considered it their duty as Jewish women to help the unfortunate. The obligation of Jews to take care of the less fortunate has been a theme used for charitable solicitations then and [now].<sup>58</sup>

The Ladies Hebrew Association, modeled after a similar German association, “Frauenverein,” strived to serve the community by caring for the poor and sick with direct *Tzedakah* (righteousness/almsgiving) and *gemilut chasidim* (loving kindness).<sup>59</sup> The organization encouraged women to go out into the trenches and help those in need throughout the community, no act was too small, no cause too little. The formation of such a hands-on women’s organization kept up with the “golden age of volunteerism” blossoming in Richmond with figures such as Maggie Walker, an African American women’s advocate and civil action leader who tended to

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<sup>55</sup> Like A Giant Oak: A History of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Association and Jewish Family Services of Richmond, Virginia, 1849-1999. Richmond: Beth Ahabah, 1999, 10.

<sup>56</sup> Congregation Beth Ahabah, “Our History.” Last modified 2006. Accessed February 9, 2014. <http://www.bethahabah.org/index.htm>.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., “Our Mission.”

<sup>58</sup> Like A Giant Oak: A History of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Association and Jewish Family Services of Richmond, Virginia, 1849-1999. Richmond: Beth Ahabah, 1999, 5.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 6-7.



the sick and aged.<sup>60</sup> With the congregation's internal advancements and existence in such a progressive city, Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalome formally became a part of Congregation Beth Ahabah in 1898, unifying the Jewish community within city. The 1904 constructed synagogue on Franklin Street in Richmond's ever-increasing congregation remains active today.<sup>61</sup>

The current senior rabbi, Martin P. Beifield Jr., leads the congregation with many examples of social service commitment through his participation on "the Board of the Jewish Family Service, and RISC (Richmonders Involved in Seeking Change), an interfaith and interracial organization working for social justice."<sup>62</sup> Assisting Rabbi Beifield, Rabbi Gallop leads the congregation's teenagers, 20's and 30's groups, and social justice organizations within the community.<sup>63</sup> Blood Drives, Jewish Family Services, and CARITAS (an inter-faith organization which serves the poor and needy throughout all of the Richmond area) are just a few of the many programs which Beth Ahabah sustains within the Richmond community.<sup>64</sup>

### A Brief History of St. James Catholic Church

Established in 1873 by Bishop James Gibbons of the Diocese of Richmond, St. James Catholic Church functioned as a "mission" parish for the diocese, serving as a location for Mass for Catholics in the Falls Church, Virginia area. It was not until 1892 that St. James achieved

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 38. and National Park Services, "Maggie Walker." Last modified March 4, 2014. Accessed April 2, 2014. <http://www.nps.gov/mawa/historyculture/index.htm>. Maggie Walker was the first African American woman to establish a bank, and always worked to pool resources, sharing them with those around in need.

<sup>61</sup> Congregation Beth Ahabah, "Our History." Last modified 2006. Accessed February 9, 2014. <http://www.bethahabah.org/index.htm>.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., "Temple Staff."

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., "Social Action." Beth Ahabah teams with the Red Cross for semi-annual blood drives, Jewish Family Services is a nonprofit, health and human service agency dedicated to helping people achieve their full potential regardless of age, race, religion, or circumstances, and CARITAS stands for Congregations Across Richmond Involved To Assure Shelter which works towards the sheltering of the homeless of Richmond.

formal status as a parish, under Reverend Edward Tierney, the first pastor.<sup>65</sup> Beginning with a congregation of about 325 parishioners (parishioners are those who formally register with the church), St. James, as of the 2013 parish directory count, now serves over 7073 parishioners and is a part of the Diocese of Arlington.<sup>66</sup>

From the initial construction of the building, to the dedication of members and employees, St. James possesses a solid foundation of social justice. “Through the beneficence of Mrs. Thomas Fortune Ryan,” and design from “A.O. Von Hurbelis, a noted architect and a parishioner,” the church building was erected in 1902, and is still in use today.<sup>67</sup> The financial donations as well as the giving of time and construction/architectural wisdom enabled St. James to upgrade from their small chapel to the large church that can be seen on Park Avenue today. The congregation continued to grow, and once again “the generosity of Mrs. Thomas Fortune Ryan” allowed for the building of St. James Catholic School, which in 1905 filled with students.<sup>68</sup>

Father Amadeus Joseph Van Ingelgem succeeded Father Tierney and began a legacy of service to the Falls Church community. Initiating countless committees and programs Father Van Ingelgem’s own faithful actions inspired his parishioners to follow in suit. “Father Van was a true father to his flock, visiting the homes of all his parishioners at least once a year. Monies sent to him by his well-to-do family [...] went for some parish project or to parishioners in need.”<sup>69</sup> Leading the parish from 1910-1931, Father Van Ingelgem’s “philosophy was that one’s life

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<sup>65</sup> Anne Goodson, *A Brief History of St. James Catholic Church Falls Church, VA: With Emphasis on Its Connection with the Community*, (Falls Church: St. James Catholic Church, 1999), 1.

<sup>66</sup> Emily Anderson, (Coordinator of Youth Ministry at St. James Catholic Church and WorkCamp Program Director 2013), interview by Lindsey Neimo, Record, August 20, 2013.

<sup>67</sup> Anne Goodson, *A Brief History of St. James Catholic Church Falls Church, VA: With Emphasis on Its Connection with the Community*, (Falls Church: St. James Catholic Church, 1999), 2-3.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 5.

should be devoted to the service of others, [...] his whole life exemplified that philosophy.”<sup>70</sup>

Pastoral leadership which exudes social service through all aspects of life gives cause to the strong social justice organizations which developed and continue to this day in the City of Falls Church.

The arrival of Father Heller to St. James in Falls Church in June of 1953 ignited the congregation with a passion to revitalize social justice organizations for the local community and make sustainable plans for future Falls Church citizens. Coming from a background working with Catholic Charities and the National Catholic Community Service USO Clubs, Father Heller was beloved by many parishioners and well respected in the larger community for his ecumenical spirit.<sup>71</sup> Organizations such as the Christopher House, the Falls Church Community Service Council and the Meals-on-Wheels program established in response to Father Heller’s exemplary leadership focusing on needs of the parish and larger community.<sup>72</sup> Throughout the years, members of the St. James congregation continue to gain positive reputations for serving the whole Falls Church community through participation in local councils, political offices, and social service committees and organizations.<sup>73</sup>

### Determining God’s Will

The Hebrew Bible and New Testament are covenants, outlining the roles and responsibilities of the relationship established between God and God’s people. When analyzing

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>72</sup> Anne Goodson, *A Brief History of St. James Catholic Church Falls Church, VA: With Emphasis on Its Connection with the Community*, (Falls Church: St. James Catholic Church, 1999), 11-13. The Christopher House, dispenses used clothing and household items to the needy, the Falls Church Community Service Council works in conjunction with parish and city for the betterment of all members of the community utilizing all resources available, and the Meals-on-Wheels program brings balanced meals to those in need within the community on a weekly basis.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

the commandments found in the Hebrew Bible, there are many things God asks of God's people, and many instructions given concerning operations of daily life. The New Testament captures the teachings of Jesus, who highlights and reinforces what Christians now come to understand as the most prominent feature underlying God's commands, love. The shifting vernacular from the Hebrew Bible's list of action commands (do's and do not's) to the New Testament creedal teachings' of faith, hope, and love illuminate the core point of departure which can be seen between the modern day dialogue of the Reform Jewish and Roman Catholic teachings.

June of 1976 marks the centennial of Reform Judaism, inspiring the Central Conference of American Rabbis to speak about the "spiritual state" of Reform Judaism which highlights areas such as obligations to religious practice, survival and service, as well as hope: the Jewish obligation.<sup>74</sup> In these summations of the Reform movement as a whole, the rabbis touch on the social justice responsibilities of Reform Jews. Beyond the aforementioned verses in the Hebrew Bible, the Central Conference of American Rabbis highlight that "Judaism emphasizes action rather than creed as the primary expression of religious life," for action is "the means by which [Reform Jewish people should] strive to achieve universal justice and peace," and that "the Jew's ethical responsibilities, personal and social, are enjoined by God."<sup>75</sup> God charges God's people with over six hundred instructions, which combine to form the properly balanced structure for individual existence, and thereby society as a whole:

A universal concern for humanity unaccompanied by a devotion to our particular people is self-destructive; a passion for our people without involvement in humankind contradicts what the prophets have meant to us. Judaism calls us simultaneously to universal and particular obligations.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective*, (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1976), 3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

God's will is outlined to the most minute detail in the five books of the Torah, and exemplified, through stories of success and failure in the lives of kings, prophets and common people. God does not command belief alone, but in the understanding of the wholeness of God's creation, and the duty humanity possesses in relation to maintaining that creation.

The New Testament follows the pattern of the Hebrew Bible, utilizing the life of Jesus the Christ, who is believed to have fulfilled the messianic promise, as the prime illustration for how to live as God commanded. The doctrine of Catholic Social Teaching is "founded on the life and words of Jesus Christ; it emerges from the truth of what God has revealed to" God's people, and "is a central and essential element of [the Catholic] faith, [...] built on a commitment to the poor."<sup>77</sup> Catholic social teaching is comprised of seven themes revolving around social justice issues: life and dignity of the human person; call to family; community and participation; rights and responsibilities; option for the poor and vulnerable; dignity of work; rights of workers, solidarity, and the care for God's creation. Each of these themes outlines a framework in which believers must operate to best rectify the unjust situations which consume society. The purpose of the doctrine is to give "wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society."<sup>78</sup> The life of Jesus serves as the core example for perfected Catholic action. Jesus' followers, especially the original apostles Peter and Paul, continue on this path, demonstrating to the best of their abilities the proper ways to live following Jesus. These apostles as well as some early church fathers admit to their own faults and failures, using each as a lesson for future generations to improve upon.

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<sup>77</sup> United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, "Catholic Social Teaching." Last modified 2014. Accessed August 9, 2013. <http://usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/index.cfm>.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

*Importance of Involvement to Produce Action*

The Reform Jewish movement emerged believing that the Jewish “tradition should interact with modern culture” and therefore become more participatory for all congregants; women have full rights to practice, “obligation begins with the informed will of every individual,” and universalism is a part of Jewish duty.<sup>79</sup> Each of these teachings expands the possibilities for involvement and understanding, thereby increasing the likelihood of congregants becoming active in the requirements given by God instead of passively absorbing the commandments. It can be seen that:

Early Reform Jews, newly admitted to general society [...] spoke of Jewish purpose in terms of Jewry’s service to humanity [...] conscious of the virtues of pluralism and the values of particularism. The Jewish people in its unique way of life validates its own worthwhile working towards the fulfillment of its messianic expectations.<sup>80</sup>

Understanding the plurality of God’s people and embracing that fact as a part of practical culture sheds great light onto the conduct with which modern Reform Judaism expects its followers to uphold; involvement in communal workings of social justice becomes an unspoken, yet understood mandate. This understanding coupled with the acknowledgement of differences in the lifestyle dictated in the commandments for God’s people and the end goal of the messianic promise, develops the motivating drive for a just society.

In the 1960s, the Catholic Church went through a modernization of its own known as Vatican II, where vernacular, customs, and practices were reexamined and altered to better fit the modern era. For the first time, Mass could be said in the language of a locality instead of Latin, lay people could participate in the Mass itself as ministers of the Holy Eucharist and altar servers, and rituals became more participatory for the congregation as a whole. It is important to

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<sup>79</sup> *Reform Judaism: A Centenary Perspective*, (New York: Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1976), 1.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

note that no doctrines were altered or added, simply updated for better comprehension and application in the modern world.<sup>81</sup> This shift provided an opportunity for participation like never before, encouraging all members of the congregation to become a more integral part of the rites and rituals of the church. St. James began the transition in early 1977, adapting to the new modernized vernacular of the Mass and increasing lay involvement in services as Eucharistic Ministers.<sup>82</sup>

Growing participation due to the reduction of a language barrier between the congregants and their services permitted an increase in the understanding of the central theological sacraments which form the foundation of the Catholic Church, thereby allowing for a stronger connectivity between the lessons on Sundays and their applications in daily life. The empowerment of the lay people and the ways in which the church now reaches out to its members through personal connections greatly influences the lasting commitment to social justice efforts; exemplary action becomes a tangible reality. Jesus no longer represents an unattainable perfection, but instead a realistic end goal which all Catholics believe all people can one day attain.

### *Defining Community*

The term community can be understood as “a social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests” and “perceived or perceiving itself as distinct

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<sup>81</sup> United States Catholic Conference of Bishops, "Vatican II and the Ecumenical Movement." Last modified 2012. Accessed April 2, 2014. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/ecumenical-and-interreligious/vatican-ii-and-the-ecumenical-movement.cfm>.

<sup>82</sup> Anne Goodson, *A Brief History of St. James Catholic Church Falls Church, VA: With Emphasis on Its Connection with the Community*, (Falls Church: St. James Catholic Church, 1999), 13.

in larger society.”<sup>83</sup> From this point forward, community will be defined as either a religious group or a group that resides with the same locale (further defined as city, county, diocese, state, and nation). Congregations Beth Ahabah and St. James are both active participants in their local communities as mentioned before, and are also well established internal religious communities. These institutions have each established organizations which serve the poor and needy of the local community and lasted decades.

One of Beth Ahabah’s greatest effects on the Richmond community began when Rabbi Maximillian Michelbacher inspired female congregants to start the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Association (LHBA) in 1849 “to help those less fortunate.”<sup>84</sup> This organization evolved through the decades tending to civil war soldiers, caring in home for the elderly, orphaned, and sick, sponsoring the immigrations of Jews fleeing Nazi Germany, and eventually becoming Jewish Family Services. In the 1960s, LHBA opened their organization to men, hired their first official social worker and brushed up their charter transforming into the organization now recognized as Jewish Family Services (JFS) whose mission is to “help people meet life’s challenges” by helping “residents of the greater Richmond area [...] realize their capacities for independence.”<sup>85</sup> This program began over 150 years ago as a group of women catering to those in need within the congregation, and has expanded to cover assistance for residents in the larger Richmond community. LHBA, now recognized as JFS, opened hospitals in homes during the war, provided assistance to troubled youth and today continues tending to the needs of the poor, sick, and elderly within the community.

Growth within the service organizations parallels the transformation and expansion of the term community over the years for each congregation. The Hebrew Bible dictates God’s call for

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<sup>83</sup> *Dictionary.com*, s.v. “Community,” accessed February 11, 2014, <http://dictionary.reference.com/>.

<sup>84</sup> Jewish Family Services, “About Us.” Accessed February 9, 2014. <http://jfsrichmond.org/about-us/>.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*



service to those within the Jewish community, and over the centuries this message transforms into an overarching command to serve any and all people in need. Emphasis remains on the need to maintain the internal religious community; focus on the external secular community becomes quite important as well, as seen in Beth Ahabah's Social Action ("social service") description:

In keeping with Reform Judaism's long tradition of *Tikkun Olam* (Repairing the World), Beth Ahabah is involved with a wide variety of social action projects to improve the community in which we live. Congregational participation in community welfare activities has been a cornerstone of Beth Ahabah through the years. The mission of the Council for Social Justice is to provide on-going opportunities for congregants to participate in social action activities that serve the Richmond Jewish and general community.<sup>86</sup>

The description of the social service work within Beth Ahabah shows the importance of giving back and serving the community at large through the principle of *tikkun olam*, while at the same time maintaining the significance behind sustaining the Jewish population through internal social service activities. One community is not greater than the other from this definition, but there is a reminder that the Jewish community's needs are also of great importance to fulfilling God's commands, and protecting God's people.

Father Heller, a pastor of St. James Catholic Church, with a background involving participation in Catholic Charities, St. Mary's Infant Home, and the National Catholic Community Service USO Club, moved parishioners with his ecumenical spirit to go out into the community and make a difference through service.<sup>87</sup> In 1969, parishioner Al Meagher "helped organize the Falls Church Community Service Council," to serve the greater Falls Church area.<sup>88</sup>

The Falls Church Community Service Council [...] is a coalition of churches and human service organizations in the greater Falls Church area [whose] purpose [...] is to provide needed human services to poor and disadvantaged individuals and

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<sup>86</sup> Congregation Beth Ahabah, "Social Action." Last modified 2006. Accessed February 11, 2014. <http://www.bethahabah.org/index.htm>.

<sup>87</sup> Anne Goodson, *A Brief History of St. James Catholic Church Falls Church, VA: With Emphasis on Its Connection with the Community*, (Falls Church: St. James Catholic Church, 1999), 10.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

families in the Falls Church community. The assistance primarily is for short term and emergency needs with the overall mission of helping individuals and families achieve self-sufficiency, an improved quality of life and avoid homelessness.<sup>89</sup>

Following a path similar to Beth Ahabah's congregation, it was the Women of St. James who "worked with the council to develop the city's Meals-on-Wheels program" which is still in existence.<sup>90</sup> The Meals-on-Wheels program is a thriving social service activity which spans across the nation bringing "meals to the homebound or those unable to prepare or arrange food for themselves."<sup>91</sup> St. James is an integral part of the progress of the city of Falls Church and their social service movements. It is through the time and involvement of St. James congregants who follow the examples of fellow parishioners, clergy, and saints, that social service efforts remain a substantial priority for the St. James community and their role in the greater Falls Church area.

The level of congregational involvement increases as the decades go on, for obvious reasons such as population increase, but what draws interest for this research is the type of involvement which emerges over the decades. In the next section, interviews from members of both Beth Ahabah and St. James, as well as members of the Diocese of Arlington will help give way to the modern day and religious factors that lead people to perform acts of social justice. Mitzvah Day and WorkCamp, the two social service events with social justice motivators will also be analyzed for their respective parts in shifting participants from mindless volunteers to passionate advocates.

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<sup>89</sup> Falls Church Community Service Council, Inc, "Mission and Purpose." Last modified 2014. Accessed February 11, 2014. <http://www.fcswe care.org/>.

<sup>90</sup> Anne Goodson, *A Brief History of St. James Catholic Church Falls Church, VA: With Emphasis on Its Connection with the Community*, (Falls Church: St. James Catholic Church, 1999), 12.

<sup>91</sup> Falls Church Community Service Council, Inc, "Programs." Last modified 2014. Accessed February 11, 2014. <http://www.fcswe care.org/>.

### Section 3: WorkCamp

The Diocese of Arlington's WorkCamp history begins in the summer of 1989 with a twofold mission: "to provide the teens of our parish with an intense conversion experience through service, community, and prayer [and] to serve our fellow Virginians by making their homes warmer, safer, and drier."<sup>92</sup> Inspired by non-denominational Work Camps throughout the country, and God's word explicated in the doctrine of Catholic social teaching, a few youth workers recognized the need to bring such a program closer to home.<sup>93</sup> Sleeping in high schools, building wheelchair ramps, and creating a tight-knit, faith-centered community, the Office of Youth Ministry in the Diocese of Arlington achieves its goal of increasing youth participation in their faith summer after summer growing the WorkCamp program from 50 to over 1000 participants in 2013. With the program increasing dramatically over the past 24 years, WorkCamp's structure provides an opportunity to interpret one form of modern social justice and social action teaching efforts within the Catholic Church.

It is important to keep in mind that the Catholic Diocese of Arlington is located in the Northern half of Virginia, founded officially in 1974, an area previously overseen by the Diocese of Richmond. Current records show that there are 68 churches with over 450,000 Catholics registered within the boundaries of the Diocese of Arlington.<sup>94</sup> WorkCamp targets residents who live within the boundaries of the Diocese of Arlington, Catholic or not, in need of some form of assistance. Working together with the local social service agencies, WorkCamp aims to provide

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<sup>92</sup> Catholic Diocese of Arlington, "Parish Preparation Manual." Last modified 2013. Accessed February 17, 2014. <http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/youth/documents/WCParishPrepManual2013.pdf>, 10.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>94</sup> Catholic Diocese of Arlington, "About Us." Last modified 2014. Accessed February 17, 2014. <https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/>. Registration in a church is open to anyone living within the districted bounds of the specific church.

necessary and efficient care addressing the needs of the residents at no cost. The program is funded by participants of WorkCamp who pay a fee to attend the weeklong trip, congregants from diocesan parishes through fundraising efforts, along with donations from companies and other sponsors.<sup>95</sup>

In less than a day, WorkCamp transforms a high school, both private and public schools alike, to create a “homebase” in which the camp can function. Turning classrooms into bedrooms, auditoriums into churches, and gymnasiums into program spaces for speakers, concerts, games, and more, the WorkCamp atmosphere begins and ends with the community shaped within the confines of homebase. Throughout the week, WorkCamp participants, called WorkCampers, engage in acts of self-denying service, sleeping on floors, working throughout the day, and standing in lines for speed showers. The transformation of the school plus the WorkCampers adaptation to the new rules necessary to live in such confines lays the foundation for an “Intentional Christian Community”:

At WorkCamp we create what scripture describes as an “Intentional Christian Community” [...] forming a group that will spend its time living the message of the Gospels, praying together, and serving together. Our faith was never meant to be a one-day-per-week experience [but] lived every day with everybody around us [...] WorkCamp may be the first time that people will experience this intense focus on their relationship with God and sharing this with others around them [...] each day Mass is celebrated. Each evening we play together and pray together. Throughout the week many talks will be presented to address a variety of areas of our faith. Particular emphasis is placed on the special presence of Christ in all those who are marginalized.<sup>96</sup>

Where religion infuses with society in this community, changes in attitudes emerge. The uniqueness of a room filled with teenagers from across the Diocese who share the same faith in name, but may differ in every aspect of practice and lifestyle, provides a diverse ground for

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<sup>95</sup> Catholic Diocese of Arlington, "Parish Preparation Manual." Last modified 2013. Accessed February 17, 2014. <http://www.arlingtondiocese.org/youth/documents/WCParishPrepManual2013.pdf>.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 24.

spiritual and communal growth as well as research. Two of the main motivators for the WorkCamp program team are conversion of heart and service to community, which leads the mainline of investigation within this case study: how does the Catholic WorkCamp program instill a sense of lasting social justice? What will instill a permanent change of heart and/or perspective so that one's life shifts to focus on, or at least incorporate more, social action and/or justice?

The typical WorkCamp week can be broken down into four segments of time. First, WorkCampers arrive on a Saturday night with their parish youth ministries, participate in an evening program with bonding games and work crew introductions, hear the theme and rules of the week, and then go to bed. Sunday is teambuilding day when each work crew (a randomized group of 4-6 high school students, plus an adult crew leader, and a volunteer contractor) work together to complete a series of bonding initiatives, master safety challenges, and learn to function as a team. Monday through Thursday, from 9:00am until 4:00pm crews are sent to a local resident's home and given a job such as roofing or wheelchair ramp construction. Throughout the day crews follow a devotional packet, answering questions targeted at the spiritual theme of the day and connecting it to the work they are performing on site. It is important to note that each day begins with Mass and closes with evening program. Friday, the last day, gathers both WorkCampers and residents together for Resident Appreciation Day, which features a special closing program filled with testimonies and experiences of WorkCampers and the residents throughout the week.

Planning and executing an event of this capacity requires an abundance of volunteers, nearly two years of planning, and a dedicated team to lead the way. The Office of Youth Ministry for the Diocese of Arlington paves the path to WorkCamp each year. Kevin Bohli, the

Director of the Office of Youth Ministry since 2001, attended his first WorkCamp in 1994 as a volunteer contractor. Working as a volunteer campus minister at Mary Washington University, Bohli attended a WorkCamp meeting, upon request from the campus priest, for ideas on how to provide a WorkCamp for the campus ministry program. Delivering a form of WorkCamp to the campus, Bohli now provides an integral part of the continued success and trajectory of the high school youth ministry program; “the corporate knowledge – to keep that ship pointed in the same direction, how it flows with the ultimate goal of WorkCamp. From my perspective as the Director of Youth Ministry, the ultimate goal of my job is bringing the youth to Christ – WorkCamp and social justice are valuable tools to make that happen.”<sup>97</sup> Bringing teenagers to the Catholic faith gives way for opportunities to cultivate the lessons on social justice and impress them in the lifestyle of youth.

Terry Simons, the WorkCamp Coordinator for the Diocese of Arlington, works predominantly to bring the overall core of WorkCamp to life each year, coordinating between county and individual residents to create and approve building plans and establish worksites with projects for each work crew. Although the physical labor (social service) is a predominant aspect of the WorkCamp week, Simons draws attention to how even in the initial phases of planning, there is much more built into the WorkCamp structure:

It goes back to an adage: Give a man a fish, feed him for a day, teach a man to fish, provide for his life. This is what WorkCamp tries to do with the overall program – it’s the reasoning behind what we do at WorkCamp, [...] working with social service agencies in the community and the county to make things easier or better or potentially even having the county look at their regulations to make lasting changes. [The work with the counties is] trying to alleviate the red tape, if you will, for the people who can’t afford to have it done otherwise.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Kevin Bohli, (Director of Youth Ministry for Diocese of Arlington), interview by Lindsey Neimo, Record, August 9, 2013.

<sup>98</sup> Terry Simons, (WorkCamp Coordinator for Diocese of Arlington), interview by Lindsey Neimo, Record, August 9, 2013.

The actions performed by the WorkCampers are social service, but the program as a whole comes into a community and works towards social justice for all of the residents. Despite the fact that many WorkCampers many not be aware of the specific processes employed to advance the justice in the area, the programming throughout the week explains the call to social justice work. The importance of the work currently being done is affirmed as presentations from worldwide organizations, testimonies from experienced speakers, and teachings of Jesus' social justice work through the gospels instructs and empowers the WorkCampers to go beyond what can be accomplished in a week and live it out for a lifetime. WorkCamp may not be the perfect algorithm for producing all socially conscious members of society, yet it does spark thought and draw connections for youth in ways never done before.

WorkCamp is a program with multi-level interaction: secular life of residents and faith-based service life of youth. Where the daily lives of residents and the WorkCamp program collide is each day on site. WorkCampers experience responding to God's call through their efforts and become aware of their own capabilities to help beyond the week. "You can drive all over Virginia and say, 'hey we did that roof, look that was a WorkCamp wheelchair ramp,' and see how thousands of people's lives have hopefully improved because of the work done."<sup>99</sup> What the youth provide their residents through their physical actions is described by residents as much more than the new roof, ramp or windows they actually received. For the residents these repairs or additions prove there is hope for the future, that the young generation does care, and that there is love in the world.

Morning Mass, daily devotionals, and evening programs emphasize the ability and reality of the spreading of the gospel through each and every labor, conversation, and smile towards the residents. The daily physical labor is a part of the larger calling towards a relationship with

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<sup>99</sup> Kevin Bohli interview.

Christ which is explained and built up in the program throughout the week. Interactions with residents and fellow WorkCampers reinforces the WorkCampers' understanding of what it means to serve, "bringing it all back to the relationship with Christ. You know on Friday, by witnessing that (closing ceremony), that it has an impact on both the resident and the team."<sup>100</sup> Friday's ceremony provides an opportunity for WorkCampers and residents to speak in front of the entire WorkCamp program about their experiences throughout the week and share the connections they have made with their faith and their community. This time of reflection and these witnesses build upon the programming modeled all week emphasizing the seamlessness between faith life and real life.

One of the most crucial aspects of the WorkCamp program are the relationships developed between the WorkCampers and their residents (whether friendly or not); it is the tangible understanding of how people live no matter what their circumstance and the exemplified humility it takes to be allowed into strangers homes to serve. Humility is a characteristic closely associated with serving others, for people can be seen as humble when they give of their time or resources, but the WorkCamp program flips this concept upside-down exposing WorkCampers to what is true humility, and that is asking for help. From the first moments of interacting with the WorkCamp staff, residents become aware of their role in the formation of WorkCampers:

During site visits we [the residents and WorkCamp staff] talk about how what [the WorkCampers are] doing is service to [the residents], but [it is what the residents] witness, of [their] life does for youth in days that surpasses what we as a diocese can do in months. Life lived out in the world in the circumstances [...] the witness of the living out of that, the whole concept of just being who you are in your circumstance and then allowing the youth to participate, and then understand that better, gives them a new perspective [allowing] youth to enter into the broader world which when they go back, they can carry with them. That [is what] has the impact in their life.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Kevin Bohli interview.

<sup>101</sup> Terry Simons interview.



Friday, or Resident Appreciation Day, is the culmination of the WorkCamp week and is repeatedly mentioned as one of the moments that ‘sticks,’ pulling on people’s heartstrings and leaving that final impression even once the week is over and the Intentional Christian Community becomes an empty high school building once more. From an observatory standpoint, Friday’s ceremony represents a bearing of testimonies, inviting everyone in the room to understand the experiences held by varying participants and residents throughout the week. This sharing turns individual experiences from the week into stories in which all present can empathize.<sup>102</sup>

Christine Najarian, the Assistant Director of Youth Ministry for the Diocese of Arlington, Program and Homebase director for several WorkCamps and WorkCamper herself throughout high school, speaks about the real purpose of WorkCamp when saying “if you’re going to [come to WorkCamp] paint a house, and then go home and be a jerk at home, don’t come [to WorkCamp] in the first place, we’re called to serve in and outside of our homes. WorkCamp shouldn’t stay at WorkCamp; it’s designed to be taken out into the world and into our homes!”<sup>103</sup> The deconstruction of the physical space for the Intentional Christian community is not at all symbolic of its end.

What is Friday’s significance? Why does that day of story sharing finally make all the messages and themes of the week click? WorkCamp fosters an environment that is supposed to grow and flourish within each community it encounters. Bohli explains the Friday phenomenon as the final “combination [of WorkCamp ...] youth and residents and how the two combining is part of an evangelical model – the youth being a witness to the residents and the residents being a

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<sup>102</sup> Further investigation into the power behind narrative occurs in the analysis of religious theory.

<sup>103</sup> Christine Najarian, (Assistant Director of Youth Ministry for Diocese of Arlington), interview by Lindsey Neimo, Record, August 9, 2013.

witness to the youth in the way that they're being capable of at that point in their lives.”<sup>104</sup> This reflective witnessing between the residents and WorkCampers provides a tangible and applicable experience which expands the societal bounds and gives an opportunity for growth in both parties.

An array of teenagers and volunteers from the St. James Youth Ministry program are annual participants in the WorkCamp program each summer. Emily Anderson, Youth Minister at St. James Catholic Church, and Program Director for WorkCamp 2013, explains how “teens already have a heart to serve, the Diocese works hard to make it more than a ‘because you’ll feel good’ atmosphere, we do it because we’re called to.”<sup>105</sup> Anderson’s youth ministry program at St. James is a social and faith formation “designed to form saints,” and make solid Catholic leaders.<sup>106</sup> Anderson explains how the key to lasting teaching of faith and its purpose in a teenager’s everyday life resides in the ability to find “creative ways [for the teens] to learn about faith and church [as well as] creative ways to interact in the world with a Catholic world view.”<sup>107</sup> Using modern music, such as Cold Play’s “Fix You,” to deconstruct comprehensible secularized concepts (such as relational love and home) and apply them to the teachings of the church, Anderson cultivates a ministry to be more than what you do on Sundays.

Beyond annual participation in WorkCamp, St. James Youth Ministry program, in conjunction with St. James’ Pontifical Mission Society, travels to Banica, Dominican Republic for service trips where the teens dig latrines, build shacks, and see the disparity of equality that lies within the third world. Anderson sets a requirement for the international trips, calling for all

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<sup>104</sup> Kevin Bohli interview.

<sup>105</sup> Emily Anderson interview.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

youth to attend a WorkCamp prior to applying for a Banica trip. When asked the reason behind this, Anderson explains:

You have to understand poverty at home before you can understand poverty abroad, an adage which says that the poorest are the happiest, is true. [Time in Banica] shows teens sides of life we take for granted. You don't realize the dignity using a bathroom gives to you. Yet, for what little they have, it's appreciated, the people of Banica sweep their dirt floor, they take pride and are dignified in every aspect of their lives no matter the condition.<sup>108</sup>

The experience in Banica is most certainly influential on the youths' worldviews, however Anderson expresses the possible disconnect in understanding. Most teenagers, especially those living in upper middle class America, in some of the richest counties in the nation, experience a tangibility disconnect where the issues of the third world are acknowledged, but do not bear as much effect on the day to day livelihood. The phenomenon of disconnect is precisely the problem I attempt to prove WorkCamp, and programs comparable to it, are designed to fix. The gradual building up process of understanding social service work as something needed everywhere by everyone leads to the larger idea that the only way to sustain the community one lives in is to fight for social justice and create societal balance. Only with this perspective can the injustice elsewhere begin to be tackled by socially just and balanced community locales, starting at home.

WorkCamp links all the necessary building blocks to understanding one's Catholic duty towards society together on Friday. All week long WorkCampers learn and enact Catholic social teaching, emphasizing human dignity, exercising the preferential option for the poor, and learning about ways to carry forward the work done into a lifetime of service towards others.

Bohli explains how Friday:

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<sup>108</sup> Emily Anderson interview.

Ties a bow, it shows how all that's being done has to do with Christ. Shows [the WorkCamps] examples of people living in reality, gives them the opportunity to serve with and as Christ, [...] It's a BOTH AND – it's the event young people want to come to. It's the only event we have a waiting list for, we continue to push it, grow it. From the youth ministry perspective, that's why, it's a great way to form youth in their faith. From the social justice perspective, when you're standing up there on celebration day and hearing the way it affects people's lives, there's nothing like that moment.<sup>109</sup>

The concept of neighbor in the most literal sense combined with the internationalized communal nature of service allows for the WorkCamp program to teach lessons of social justice which are applicable to WorkCampers daily lives. Concentrating the program in the Diocese of Arlington, the “start at home” model emphasizes the need in one's own backyard and provides the tools, both literally and figuratively, for the youth to know how to respond to the need which surrounds them. The click of comprehension, the shift of perception, the change of heart, just a few of many possible reactions to the WorkCamp week, each of which enables WorkCampers to take social justice components learned and carry them into their daily lives.

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<sup>109</sup> Kevin Bohli interview.

### Section 4: Mitzvah Day/Corps

Founded in 1841, the result of a “more modern German splintering,” Congregation Beth Ahabah provides opportunities for the Reform Jewish community to participate in social service activities at the national and local level.<sup>110</sup> Mitzvah Day and Mitzvah Corps are two programs involving members from Congregation Beth Ahabah of all ages. Mitzvah Day, in its 17<sup>th</sup> year, occurs every spring and continues to provide congregants the opportunity to participate in local service projects.<sup>111</sup> Mitzvah Corps is a national program which “connects Reform Jewish teenagers with immersive social action[/justice] opportunities across North America” and is a Richmond community wide day of service.<sup>112</sup>

Mitzvah Day specifically targets congregants of Beth Ahabah. The program is not limited or exclusive, but does focus on congregational outreach into the larger Richmond area. The Social Action Committee of Beth Ahabah directs most of the social justice operations within the congregation, and their mission and vision statement is “to continue to serve the Beth Ahabah and Richmond community with a depth of social action leadership and a renewed effort to involved more congregants and families in our activities.”<sup>113</sup> Mitzvah Day functions as an internally based initiative, where congregants participate with one another in the larger community for the betterment of others. To inspire and also motivate congregants throughout the years to participate Mitzvah Day, the Mitzvah Day planning team conveys messages through the monthly bulletins. Some examples of bulletin advertisements include: “a contribution to the

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<sup>110</sup> Like A Giant Oak: A History of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Association and Jewish Family Services of Richmond, Virginia 1849-1999, (Richmond: Beth Ahabah, 1999), 10.

<sup>111</sup> "Social Action Corner," Beth Ahabah Bulletin, 69, no. 11 (2002): 9.

<sup>112</sup> Union for Reform Judaism, "Mitzvah Corps." Last modified 2013. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.mitzvahcorps.org/programs/>.

<sup>113</sup> Congregation Beth Ahabah "Minutes for the Social Action Committee," Record, December 21, 1998.

community is an investment in the future. Invest some of your time and energy and participate in Social Action projects” and “As Jews, we are commanded to stand up for the widow, the poor, the orphan and the stranger. Jews have always acted on the belief that both our moral obligations and our self-interest require a [...] politics of inclusion.”<sup>114</sup> Each of these messages present a different angle or purpose, but all come back to the core ambition of giving back to the larger community through congregation-wide participation in a project such as Mitzvah Day.

The Social Action Committee willingly “work[s] as consultants to other social activist groups” explaining their continual involvement in the local Richmond community. Programs such as Meals on Wheels, Habitat for Humanity, and CARITAS (the Richmond homeless shelter which works towards permanent solutions), account for a few of the many organizations which utilize Beth Ahabah volunteers. Mitzvah Day brings together all of these programs and more into one day, creating volunteer projects and opportunities for congregants of all ages in order to expose them to the possibilities for serving the community on a more regular basis.

Due to limited research time, I have never been able to attend a Mitzvah Day, but thanks to interviewees and resources within the Beth Ahabah archives, I have been able to piece together a more comprehensive understanding of the program. Rosemary Seltzer, a Mitzvah Day Co-Chair for two years describes the potential influence of Mitzvah Day saying “if you light that spark, that interest in the community, it does last.”<sup>115</sup> The opportunities provided during Mitzvah Day are snippets of service, important none the less, but not long-lasting projects. Heather Dinkin, the Mitzvah Day Co-Chair the two years following Seltzer, explains how from her perspective “the program raises awareness, to build relationships within the community and outer organizations, it is a yearlong process, repeated every year, which makes it stick, especially

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<sup>114</sup> “Social Action Corner,” Beth Ahabah Bulletin, 69, no. 11 (2002): 9., and “Social Justice,” Beth Ahabah Bulletin, 70, no. 9 (2002): 9.

<sup>115</sup> Rosemary Seltzer, (Co-Chair of Mitzvah Day), interview by Lindsey Neimo, Record, September 26, 2013.

those involved in the planning process.”<sup>116</sup> Dinkin explains how the beginnings of youth involvement relate back to the component required before obtaining one’s *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*; “*Bar/Bat mitzvah* kids have to build in service, volunteering”.<sup>117</sup> This requirement creates an opportunity for youth in the community to branch out and learn about what it means to fulfill God’s commandments before accepting them as their own in their *Bar/Bat Mitzvah*.

As explained in a children’s book about the Hebrew alphabet and words, “*Bar/Bat Mitzvah* means son/daughter of the commandments [...] the term *mitzvah* is often used to mean any act of kindness, and Jewish children are urged to perform a *mitzvah*, like helping to feed the hungry as part of their *bar* or *bat mitzvah* preparation.”<sup>118</sup> The term *mitzvah* here is used almost synonymously with social service, an important point to note in the comprehension of Jewish vernacular. *Mitzvah* according to the dictionary means “any of the collection of 613 commandments or precepts in the Bible and additional ones of rabbinic origin that relate chiefly to the religious and moral conduct of Jews” and “any good or praiseworthy deed.”<sup>119</sup> The Union for Reform Judaism elaborates on this definition explaining how:

Of all the words in the Jewish lexicon, perhaps the most abused is the familiar *mitzvah*. First, whenever the word *mitzvah* is translated solely as a ‘good deed,’ it is diluted and devitalized. Second, it is often misused as a verb when, in fact, it is a noun. [...] *Mitzvah* is based on the three letter Hebrew root, *tzadi-vav-hei*. The verb, *tzivah*, means to ‘command, order, ordain.’ The noun, *mitzvah*, means ‘commandment, precept, duty, pious action, kind act.’ In the Jewish tradition, there are 613 mitzvot in the Torah. [...] Some *mitzvot* are moral and ethical (e.g., You shall love your neighbor as yourself).<sup>120</sup>

*Mitzvah* as a term bears the definition of a commandment, and also the instructive for what is to be done with the knowledge of the commandments. *Mitzvah Day* is entitled as such to

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<sup>116</sup> Heather Dinkin, (Co-Chair of *Mitzvah Day*), interview by Lindsey Neimo, Record, September 26, 2013.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Richard Michelson, *A is for Abraham: A Jewish Family Alphabet*, (Chelsea: Sleeping Bear Press, 2008), 4.

<sup>119</sup> Dictionary.com, s.v. “*Mitzvah*,” accessed March 10, 2014, <http://dictionary.reference.com/>.

<sup>120</sup> Samuel, Edith. NFTY, “Your Jewish Lexicon.” Last modified 1982. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.nfty.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=4220>.

promote the ease of performing good deeds/praiseworthy actions within the larger community. Seltzer and Dinkin agree that Mitzvah Day on average leaves participants feeling good about themselves, the congregation, and the community as a whole. As organizers of this event, Seltzer and Dinkin's increased involvement contributes to their positive engagement with the day's events. Dinkin explains the unity of Mitzvah Day for the community saying "we see few faces throughout the year, and this is one of the few times you see 200-300 people turn out."<sup>121</sup> The congregants leave Mitzvah Day with positive sentiments, a feel good spirit from a job well done. Russell Finer, the Executive Director of Congregation Beth Ahabah in charge of logistics and oversight for Mitzvah Day, echoes Seltzer and Dinkins sentiments explaining how "Mitzvah Day brings social justice awareness to the community; it is a day of caring. Mitzvah Day is a single day which gives us all the opportunity to serve, and it's a chance to feel great."<sup>122</sup> The feeling of doing something good is contagious and Mitzvah Day tries to cultivate that sensation in hopes that it will carry forward and inspire congregants to become more involved in the social justice issue they are passionate about.

Mitzvah Day offers a plethora of service opportunities, from crafts for kids to blood donations with the Red Cross and hair donations with the Locks of Love program. "As Jews we have a requirement to *mitzvot* in Talmud, so the community comes together for the 'feel good day.' [...] The day appeals to as many congregants as possible. Sponsors who can't come send checks, blood is donated, Locks of Love representatives come to collect hair donations for reduced price wig making; all this goes to prove that making a *mitzvah* is simple – anything and everything you can do can be done for the betterment of another person."<sup>123</sup> Such a multitude of

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<sup>121</sup> Heather Dinkin interview. and Rosemary Seltzer interview.

<sup>122</sup> Russell Finer, (Executive Director of Congregation Beth Ahabah), interview by Lindsey Neimo, Record, October 9, 2013.

<sup>123</sup> Heather Dinkin interview.



short projects once annually creates the “feel good day,” which may make deeper connections with participants of how simple contributions towards the larger community can be. Mitzvah Day exemplifies how easy it is to give, even in unique ways (such as cutting ones hair on behalf of a cancer patient), which can truly change the life of another, but also it is important to remember that it is but one day out of the entire year. Mitzvah Day may mean the world to some, and be that annual opportunity and fulfillment desired by some, but it also is constrained by the time length which may hinder the ability to have lasting bearings on others.

Rabbi Jesse Gallop, the Associate Rabbi of Congregation Beth Ahabah, oversees the education of all youth and family programs as well as the social justice initiatives. Rabbi Gallop strives to expand the awareness of social justice issues. Rabbi Gallop takes youth from the congregation to participate in Mitzvah Corps, programs and activities sponsored by the Religious Action Center (RAC) and other social justice activities in an attempt to make serving an understood necessity, and something more than just a good feeling:

I took a group of eleven teens the Mitzvah Corps program in New Orleans. [...] This teen social justice trip had us working in the 9th ward, community gardening and interacting with other volunteer programs [...] One of the groups we were connected with does a lot of support and social action awareness for its members, and brings in those in need to share their stories. [For example,] one family had eight children, and the fifteen year old had a child the same age as the family’s youngest child. Another community member was twenty three years old and HIV positive. These trips are more than just getting your hands dirty, [...] it is important to take a step outside and see that all human beings are created in the image of God, we have to get to know [people in need] as more than a statistic, that’s when it sets in.<sup>124</sup>

The Mitzvah Corps program is designed as a hands-on social justice program for Jewish high school students to better understand social justice within the context of Reform Judaism. Since its creation in the 1960’s, The Mitzvah Corps program “sensitizes teenagers to the realities and hardships of contemporary urban life, giving them a chance to make a difference and

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<sup>124</sup> Jesse Gallop, (Assistant Rabbi), interview by Lindsey Neimo, Record, February 18, 2014.

experience a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment that comes only with helping another person.”<sup>125</sup> The New Orleans program within Mitzvah Corps aims to “create lasting relationships while exploring the historic city of New Orleans and working on Gulf Coast relief,” and through this combination of relationship with and understand of the community and physical building efforts, long term comprehension of the effects of social justice can set in.<sup>126</sup> Rabbi Gallop is very passionate about social justice work around the world, and strives to impart his knowledge and enthusiasm on those he encounters. Rabbi Gallop also strives to shatter the distance placed between the problems of lower and upper classes of America. People become numbers very quickly in American society. The percent of people on welfare, homeless, unemployed and more are constantly used in political battles, on the nightly news, and throughout non-profit organizations. Rabbi Gallop points to this corruption of society and works to revert its effects by taking these percentages and turning them into people with pasts and more importantly present struggles.

Continuing to educate and inspire others about the necessity to serve, Rabbi Gallop sees social justice as an integral part of the Jewish people, their origins, and therefore their way of life:

In Reform Judaism we help to show that not everybody is Christian in America, [...] God chose the Jewish people not because they were special or charming, but because they were the most down trodden; we were the slaves, and we know a society is only as strong as its weakest members, which is why the biblical teachings emphasize the orphan, the widow, and the stranger among us, it is those without a voice for themselves. This is the power to the Jewish faith.<sup>127</sup>

Judaism’s origins empower movement towards social justice work as Rabbi Gallop explains, but the ability to harness this historical energy and transform it into internal motivation,

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<sup>125</sup> Union for Reform Judaism, "Mitzvah Corps." Last modified 2013. Accessed March 10, 2014. <http://www.mitzvahcorps.org/programs/>.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Jesse Gallop interview.

inspiration and drive is the central component under investigation in this thesis. The role programs such as Mitzvah Corps play in awakening one's inner desire to understand and then act upon issues concerning social justice is the key to hopefully unlocking the manners with which a more socially aware society can be created.

Rabbi Gallop's social justice centered youth ministry activities pave the way for further investigation into the Mitzvah Corps program. Bennett Miller, rabbi of Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple (AEMT), offers an opportune connection to past Mitzvah Corps participants, leaders, and a *Tikkun Olam* based community, which hosts the Urban Mitzvah Corps (UMC) program each year. AEMT, a Reform Congregation in New Brunswick, New Jersey, "is committed to upholding Reform Jewish values that highlight the study of Torah, life-long learning, and *Tikkun Olam* (repair of the world), while embracing growth within our congregation and the Jewish community of Central New Jersey."<sup>128</sup> Rabbi Miller connected me with third generation congregant Susan Kohn, a past Mitzvah Corps participant and leader. Kohn's knowledge of the Mitzvah Corps program spans back to the late seventies/early eighties when she first participated in the New Brunswick UMC program. My Kohn interview provides in-depth insight into the evolution of the Mitzvah Corps program over the past decades due to her voluntary contributions throughout the years.<sup>129</sup>

Kohn attended UMC located in New Brunswick in the summer of 1978 as a participant and remains active with the Mitzvah Corps program through AEMT's annual UMC hosting and her own children's participation in the various Mitzvah Corps programs. UMC allows participants to attend only one time as participants; only the chair, elected at the end of the

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<sup>128</sup> Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple, "Mission/Strategic Plan." Accessed March 18, 2014. <http://www.aemt.net/about-us2/mission>.

<sup>129</sup> Susan Kohn, (Member of Temple Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple), interview by Lindsey Neimo, Record, March 17, 2014.

preceding summer returns after a year of promoting and fundraising with a co-chair. Kohn, selected after her first summer as co-chair, spent a year traveling around advertising, fundraising, and promoting UMC for the summer of 1979 although she could not return. A fluke preceding the summer of 1980 where both chair and co-chair elected could not return to camp opened the door for Kohn to attend UMC again; “they called me because they had a unique situation – two people who wanted to do the work all year and asked ‘would you be interested to go back’ – I was the first ever summer coordinator, responsible for recruiting Mitzvah Corps participants.”<sup>130</sup> Kohn’s leadership opportunity allowed for 3 years of close engagement with the program and its design.

Co-chair, Kohn’s original leadership role, exemplifies a type of life-changing impact Mitzvah Corps offers to its participants. A yearlong commitment of service which reaps no rewards, this position is not invited back the following summer, yet contributes greatly to the fundraising, advertising and promoting aspects of the UMC planning. UMC becomes more than the summer of service; it transcends through the participants who are more than willing to give their year to create the experience for future peers. Kohn believes the Mitzvah Corps program, which now operates with optional segmented sections, detracts from the original purpose of quality service. The desire to increase the quantity of participants pulls from the intentional communities which form over weeks and hit their peak of bonding and comprehension just as some sessions are coming to a close. Some years are larger than others, but numbers, as Kohn explains are not the goal in this organization constructed upon the principles of *tikkun olam* paired with physical and observable ways for teenagers to repair the world.

UMC flows with a routine similar to that of WorkCamp; Monday through Thursday, participants are at their volunteer jobs, and each night there is a speaker, whether rabbi, alum of

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<sup>130</sup> Susan Kohn interview.

the program or guest speaker who builds on the participants experiences throughout the week. Lasting two, four or six weeks depending on session choice, UMC builds in weekend trips to places such as the RAC in Washington, D.C. where UMC participants spend time learning about political concerns facing the Jewish community, and the social justice concerns corresponding to their specific volunteer work. After observation and learning from the congressmen and senators, participants lobby on Capitol Hill and experience the political side of the social justice efforts they are voluntarily striving to repair all summer long.<sup>131</sup> Rabbi Jesse emphasizes the importance of the RAC trips offered also to youth groups throughout the year, considering it the experience which brings the gravity of the situation to the teenagers.<sup>132</sup> Witnessing the highest levels of justice battles in the political realm and comparing them to the dirt digging social action work of a Mitzvah Corps week, offers participants the full spectrum of experiences to support the ideology behind *tikkun olam*. When the context expands beyond that of middle class daily life and extends into realities, both above and below daily living standards, eyes generally open and greater understanding of the larger religious purpose supporting the opportunities is achieved.

Kohn admits that the experience at the RAC alone does not solidify understanding of social justice for most despite the program's best efforts. "There's a sort of distance," challenging participants to connect the issues at hand, to the living people in need. Kohn shares a story of the showing the benefits of connecting the legislative processes with the physical labors:

My husband and I went with the kids [for the social justice RAC trip], we were the advisers for the youth group, and our own kids came too. You can talk about homelessness all the time, but there's just this distance between it on paper and in real life. One night, my husband took the kids from our group, those who wanted to go, spur of the moment, and they collected all the boxes of left over pizza from dinner, there was a lot of it, and took the kids with boxes of pizza onto the streets,

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<sup>131</sup> Susan Kohn interview.

<sup>132</sup> Rabbi Gallop interview.

and started handing the homeless people of Washington, D.C. slices of pizza – he changed it, he’s doing the social action, he’s actually doing it.<sup>133</sup>

Kohn’s story illuminates the separation between legislation and social action work, not that one does not feed or work closely with another, but on the surface the disparity between the two seems great. There are people starving as extra food is left over at an event focusing on how to help hungry people. Taking the initiative, Kohn’s husband bridges the gap for the teenagers, incorporating the temporary fix of a night of food, with the permanent life changing lessons of just legislation. Social action work is no less important or valuable to those in need, but it is only the temporary repair while social justice efforts are the solution to the greater issue at hand, and the union of these two concepts is at the core of social equality.

A comprehensive look at the differences between a permanently fixed problem (such as change in legislation for better housing rates) versus a quick bandage fix (such as a rotating homeless shelter system between churches) illuminates the reality of the situation at hand. Both actions are serving others, and doing good, but there is more to social justice than a temporary repair. The realities in which the issues exist combine to instill a sense of ownership and responsibility within teenagers which will hopefully transcend throughout the years.

Blogging done over the past summer during UMC 2013 exemplifies participants’ encounters with voluntary efforts that actually make an impact. Liora Silkes, a participant working with the Play S.A.F.E. program in New Brunswick, attended camps summer after summer, but Mitzvah Corps presented something completely new, an opportunity to learn, to give and more importantly to receive. “The differences between their *casa*, house, and mine stayed with me just as much as all the expected cute and funny things that my young campers said [...] Yes, I had made an impact on the campers, but the camp made its impact on me as

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<sup>133</sup> Susan Kohn interview.

well.”<sup>134</sup> Rabbi Gallop speaks to Silkes’ shift in perspective suggesting such realizations mark the beginning moments of conscious identification with the reality of the disparate situation at hand, as well as the larger inequalities of the world.<sup>135</sup> Silkes’ initial satisfied and joyful reactions are typical of any service project, but as the weeks working in the UMC progress, Silkes starts to see her greater impression on the world, and in return the change within herself because of it.<sup>136</sup>

UMC projects today remain similar to those used at the program’s inception. UMC participants spend the summer volunteering in special needs camps, elderly homes, day care programs, food banks, and other forms of inner city service work. UMC strives to offer volunteers a varying array of opportunities which may ignite a deeper interest. Kohn’s initial experience in UMC involved working at a Girl Scout camp with special needs children. Aware of the floundering status of this camp, Kohn stepped in with another option, the Daisy program, continuing UMC work with special needs children. For over thirty years now, UMC continues to empower young Reform Jewish youth with the initiative and tools to tackle the issues that occur in the urban locale of New Brunswick by honing in on a consistent selection of projects to foster interest, passion, and continual support throughout the Reform community.

Despite the one year rule, Mitzvah Corps structures a network of alumni who remain active in their own communities as examples for future Mitzvah Corps participants. The alumni return to give talks after a UMC workday and lead discussions with current participants concerning their experience. On July 28<sup>th</sup>, 2013 a diverse group of alumni spanning the 38 years of the program, spent an evening developing the support system for future UMC summers. One

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<sup>134</sup> Liora Silkes, "There and Back Again: A UMC Journey," August 9, 2013, <http://blogs.rj.org/nftymitzvahcorps/2013/08/09/there-and-back-again-a-umc-journey/>.

<sup>135</sup> Rabbi Gallop interview.

<sup>136</sup> Liora Silkes, "There and Back Again: A UMC Journey," August 9, 2013, <http://blogs.rj.org/nftymitzvahcorps/2013/08/09/there-and-back-again-a-umc-journey/>.

alumna, Erica Santiago, explains how she “had the opportunity to return to a community that had an everlasting impact on [her] adolescence and adulthood,” and how the participants “like [her] showed concern for the experiences of future participants and the well-being of the sites where they work daily,” which culminated in an evening more inspiring for both parties than anyone could possibly imagine.<sup>137</sup> UMC participants Alexa Maltby and Marlee Waldman share their amazement at the consistency and power of the program commenting on its impressive sustainability:

Since [Mitzvah Corps’] start in 1975, the program has gone through numerous changes, but [...] it’s clear that it’s always been the participants [...] go home completely transformed [...] the values and lessons they learned continue to be relevant to their lives, [...] These conversations inspired us, and made us reflect on how important Mitzvah Corps is, and will continue to be, in our lives. The energy that these folks got from participating in UMC has been everlasting, and is something that, [...] we have to look forward to.<sup>138</sup>

Maltby and Waldman revel in the notion of an everlasting joy, the joy that comes from service, exuded by the returning alumni. How this contagion for social justice sets in specifically is unclear, however the hope of a longer lasting drive for such work beyond the summer of structured service gives clout to Mitzvah Corps’ framework. It is more than a day, but for some even weeks are unable to make the shift in mentality towards social justice permanent. The alumni network constructs a continual Mitzvah Corps community, an inescapable network of accountability which, whether highly involved or not, ties former participants back to the summer which unified service work with *tikkun olam*.

Harnessing this concept of understanding plus action, the Mitzvah Corps program fosters a seemingly ideal combination of time, teaching, and tangible experience for participants. The

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<sup>137</sup> Erica Santiago, "<http://blogs.rj.org/nftymitzvahcorps/2013/08/01/ldor-vdor-umc-ensuring-the-future/>," August 1, 2013, <http://blogs.rj.org/nftymitzvahcorps/2013/08/09/there-and-back-again-a-umc-journey/>.

<sup>138</sup> Alexa Maltby, and Marlee Waldman, "<http://blogs.rj.org/nftymitzvahcorps/2013/08/01/ldor-vdor-umc-ensuring-the-future/>," August 1, 2013, <http://blogs.rj.org/nftymitzvahcorps/2013/08/09/there-and-back-again-a-umc-journey/>.



WorkCamp and Mitzvah Corps programs work in a similar fashion, bandaging and caring for the reparable issues at hand with social service work, while simultaneously educating and fighting for permanent solutions to the deeper social justice problems. Exposure to programs such as WorkCamp and Mitzvah Corps allows for an observance of how religion and service interplay. The comprehension of the dynamic between religion and necessity of service seems to be a key component to forming lasting activists for social justice.

## Section 5: Work and Play – Bellah’s Theory of Religion

“Religion is a system of beliefs and practices relative to the sacred that unite those who adhere to them in a moral community. [Bellah defines] the sacred as a realm of non-ordinary reality.”<sup>139</sup> Bellah believes that humans operate in a series of non-ordinary realities which emerge from an evolutionary desire to harness one’s sense of play. It is through these realities that humans have religious experiences, participate with “the sacred” and utilize symbols for their meanings to help cross the bridges of reality.

The paramount reality or the ordinary reality can best be understood as day to day life habits. The phrase “Daily Life” is used often as a way of describing the day to day routines of one’s existence. Leaving WorkCamp, participants are always given the tools on how to “keep WorkCamp alive in their daily lives,” in an attempt to maintain that alternate communal religious reality in the daily paramount existence. Daily life is focused on working in the sense of striving towards self-driven ends and operating in a standard of time and space.<sup>140</sup> Time and space become altered in realities beyond the ordinary, thus contributing to the bounds of these alternate realities. Football games are constructed on a quarterly system totaling an hour but last for typically three hours. Mitzvah Corps and WorkCamp impose new living situations (sorority homes and high schools respectively) which shift the usual way of living and eradicate the norm thereby altering the daily reality. There is a new time structure imposed for these communities as a whole as well, days follow a routine pattern that is specific to the program and not paralleled in daily life.

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<sup>139</sup> Robert Bellah, *Religion in human evolution: from the Paleolithic age to the Axial*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2011), 1.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

WorkCamp and Mitzvah Corps are activities which “tend to be viewed as ‘less real’ than the world of daily life, as fictional, and ultimately as less important than the world of the working.”<sup>141</sup> Although the religious foundational structures behind these realities would disagree and fight for the validity of the lessons taught, the daily reality does not and will not conform to such an altered standard of living. “The world of the daily life, like all the other multiple realities, is socially constructed. Each culture, each era, constructs its own world of daily life,” and in the United States, the high paced, hard work equal reward, self-advancing society, issues such as social justice are pushed to the wayside on the track of the American Dream.<sup>142</sup>

Religious reality can best be understood through Bellah’s use of the idea Being Cognition (B-cognition) a term coined by Abraham Maslow, a psychologist who characterizes the relation to the world through participation instead of manipulation. B-cognition relates the world in a series of experiential unions of subject and objects caused from a Being-motive (B-motive). B-cognition allows for “a wholeness that overcomes all partiality, [for] B-cognition is an end in itself, not a means.”<sup>143</sup> In juxtaposition to this alternate dimension, daily life exists due to Deficiency Cognition (D-Cognition), “the recognition of what is lacking and what must be made up for through striving, [...] motivated by a fundamental anxiety that propels us toward practical and pragmatic action in the world of the working [...] there is a sense of difference between subject and object, and our attitude toward objects (even human objects) is manipulative” which furthers the explanation for why social justice is not a prominent drive and motivator in everyone’s life already.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Bellah, 3.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

The purpose behind this thesis is not to point out people who fail to comply with the religious requests of social justice action, but instead to point out the broader reality in which humanity exists and observe how it is possible that social justice notions are non-existent in many people's lives. Bellah allows for an examination of alternate realities which tap in and activate senses of a higher purpose for living through play. "When we are propelled by B-motives, we relate to the world by participation, not manipulation; we experience a union of subject and object, a wholeness that overcomes all partiality."<sup>145</sup> It is with this mindset that religious people come to understand the notion of equality, and being one of God's children. By removing the supposed hierarchy of humanity, people are able to take part in human existence as a whole, to separate the societal rankings from the reality of the world and begin to understand the need and drive of social justice efforts.

The world exists with various realms of reality operating simultaneously and every once in a while cutting into one another. Intersections make way for moments of B-cognition as exemplified through the story of Maslow, the Department of Psychology chair at Brandeis who always dreaded the graduation ceremony. Maslow did not want to dress in full graduation regalia and found the entire ceremony to be a waste of time. This notion Maslow holds becomes shattered when standing in the academic procession, Maslow sees the endless line of professors and graduates expanding before and behind him "as a symbol, standing for the true university as a sacred community of learning, transcending time and space."<sup>146</sup> This particular example of insight best explains the idea of B-cognition; the departure from daily or face value reality and arrival at the greater reality which lies beyond day to day existence; participation in, not manipulation of, the world around.

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<sup>145</sup> Bellah, 5.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

For WorkCamp, this B-cognition sets in for most WorkCampers and residents during the onsite interactions. For many, this meeting is the first time two diametrically opposed social spheres have collided in a location all call home. Within many WorkCampers' daily lives, while functioning in the D-cognition, helping the poor is a notion that is aimed beyond the borders of their own backyards, towards the inner city people or those in need overseas. The combination of the WorkCampers preconceived realities of their home with the actual realities of those living next-door creates a shift in perspective which begins the transition into a deeper cognition of the reality of the WorkCamp program.

Although the Mitzvah Corps programs do not necessarily have participants working in their home areas, the amount of time invested into each volunteer assignment fosters a sense of attachment in the participants which rivals the sentiment of those who benefit from the organization. Growing this passion within the participants allows for a shift in their perspective, permitting the disparate realities to emerge. By this I mean that the commonality which bridges the differing social realities in the case of Mitzvah Corps is not common locale, but instead harbors a common purpose and passion based on involvement.

“For the world of daily life seen solely as a world of rational response to anxiety and need is a world of mechanical necessity, not radical autonomy. [B-cognition] is not something we achieve but something that happens.”<sup>147</sup> Similar to the musings of David Hume, which involve the reduction of all religion down to the product of emotions, specifically fears and anxieties, Bellah points to these motivators as the operations behind daily life functions.<sup>148</sup> The primordial level stimuli which instigate response, and drive human activity, such as hunger, thirst and comfort, all motivate a person's actions. It is only when these self-driven desires, and the

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<sup>147</sup> Bellah, 9.

<sup>148</sup> Kevin Vose. “David Hume.” Theory of Religion Class Discussion, Williamsburg, January 30, 2014.

corresponding responses to such, are overcome that one advances into a reality which lies beyond that of the ordinary reality into what Bellah argues, inspired by the work of Sigmund Freud, is a world of play.

There are two worlds Bellah brings to the focal point of consideration; the world of work and the world of play. “The world of the working as the world of the manipulation of objects in order to satisfy needs is inadequate to the understanding even of the world of working. The world of working as a world of the satisfaction of marginal utility is devoid of culturally specific subjective meaning.”<sup>149</sup> It is in this world that the daily activities take place, the things that are solely means to ends. Bellah believes despite this work-centric mentality, there is a pull towards a greater “understanding of work as practice as intrinsically meaningful and valuable, rather than as means to an end.”<sup>150</sup> This idea that there could be a greater purpose or at least potential for purpose for those who exist in the daily working world beyond self-satisfaction provides a potential explanation for self-sacrificial acts.

Going back to the root question of this thesis, what makes people do good deeds, as crude and rudimentary as it may seem, this concept is one genuinely contested, for human nature is not naturally disposed to serving outside of its internal and familial obligations. WorkCamp and Mitzvah Corps develop youths’ ability to see beyond themselves, to look at the realities that exist outside of their own and to delve into a lifestyle that lacks the comfort and luxuries of their own. These programs work in conjunction with the teachings of the Roman Catholic and Reform Jewish traditions respectively to bring about a generation that is able to grasp the B-cognition, the inspiration to labor for more than simply means to an end.

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<sup>149</sup> Bellah, 10.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

The United States is known for a high paced, work driven lifestyle. People pull themselves up by their own bootstraps even if it takes every day of their life to get where they want to be. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi describes a phenomenon commonly observable in Americans at work called “flow, a kind of optimal experience of full engagement with the world and full realization of one’s own potentialities.”<sup>151</sup> This “flow,” or in other words sense of self-worth and purpose in given situations, permits people to attain fulfillment and realize their full potentials.

Mitzvah Day and other service projects lasting for shorter time periods allow for the flow to be grasped, if only for a moment. Mitzvah Day and service projects of the like which involve brief bursts of service work give a taste to what can be described as the inner desire to release from the obligations of work and immerse into the choices of play. Successful inspired play or drive to serve others emerges more frequently in the longer explorations of service available in programs such as WorkCamp and Mitzvah Corps. People can unlock their true potentials for making their daily work purposeful and meaningful with a fuller grasp on the way to integrate the sense of play into the ordinary reality.

Religious experiences and representations of the sacred are inevitably connected; it is impossible to filter a religious representation out of an experience and vice versa. Due to this connection, Bellah devises a typology to break down the components of religious representations. Using Jean Piaget’s child’s cognitive development phases as a locative mode in which to compare religious representation, Bellah begins with the control, or “null category of unitive representation, [in which] early experiences are never lost but can be reappropriated in much more complex form later on.”<sup>152</sup> In the earliest phases of childhood development and

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<sup>151</sup> Bellah, 10.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 11.

cognition, children do not have a sense of dualism, everything is the child, and there is no distinction. Bellah jokes that this phenomenon is “narcissism without a Narcissus,” for it is a self-centric world view, but it is not intentionally selfish.<sup>153</sup>

Jean Piaget, the first psychologist to create a systematic study of childhood cognitive development, changed the face of psychological study, for “before Piaget’s work, the common assumption in psychology was that children are merely less competent thinkers than adults. Piaget show[s] that young children think in strikingly different ways compared to adults.”<sup>154</sup> “In the young child, Piaget tells us, perception is ‘egocentric,’” but what he means is that the “self and world are as yet undifferentiated parts of a whole.”<sup>155</sup> Piaget’s theories illuminate an evolutionary developmental process which Bellah uses to describe the way in which humans connect to other realities, thereby creating and strengthening religion. The purpose of utilizing developmental psychology is that these childhood experiences and modes of apprehension are more generalizable and understandable than the many varieties of religious representations. Bellah argues that religion arises and sustains from this same internal cognitive source.

Bellah begins his theory by breaking down the phases of development into successive representations: unitive, enactive, symbolic and conceptual. The unitive representation is the ideal and utmost goal; this is the idea that a person can attain total union with a higher deity. Bellah argues that the lack of distinction between one’s self and an utmost reality permits an inseparable notion of a person and a higher reality. The unitive representation I will be looking at in a less intense fashion, assuming the unification concerns the individual to the community, seeing “all equal in God’s eyes” and “everyone as a child of God.” Unitive representations strive

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<sup>153</sup> Bellah, 13.

<sup>154</sup> McLeod, Sean. Simple Psychology, "Jean Piaget." Last modified 2012. Accessed March 25, 2014. <http://www.simplypsychology.org/piaget.html>.

<sup>155</sup> Bellah, 21.



to bring about equality on the base level of human existence, and to take it a step further, human dignity. When there is no distinction between a person and the world which exists outside of that person, then that person's utmost goal will be to protect, respect, and value every aspect of the entirety of the world. The term *tikkun olam*, repairing the world, fits well within the constructs of unitive representation, for the drive to repair what is broken by someone or something else requires a sense of universal awareness and responsibility.

The phase of unitive representation lasts for about two years in a child's developmental lifespan, and once passed, it is challenging to tap into and engage the fullness of this perspective once more. Once developed, the unitive view evolves and becomes a base which is built upon and added to. People begin to draw boundary lines, distinguishing the world from themselves. Soon, people begin to claim connection only to things they feel a responsibility for or an obligation towards. An immunity or desensitization emerges in areas people distinguish as distant from their own day to day existence.

WorkCamp works specifically to demolish the economic, racial, and social disparities between WorkCampers and their residents. Everyone is treated as an equal part of the intentional Christian community, and it takes the dedication of everyone to make the alternate reality of this pseudo community come to life. Urban Mitzvah Corps forms tight knit relationships among the participants throughout the duration of their summer service. In this two to six week time period, participants bond also with those involved in their volunteer organizations. Combining the daily work efforts of the volunteers and community members in each activity, Mitzvah Corps establishes a group of people sharing the same concerns despite differing backgrounds.

The next phase in Bellah's theory, enactive representation, describes "an event in which the whole body participates along with mind and spirit," without any acknowledgement of

differing components; “the unitive event is very much enactive.”<sup>156</sup> Enactive representations appear as common gestures which connect a person to an alternate reality. Looking specifically at connections to a religious reality, gestures can be as simple as making the sign of the cross while reciting a creed, or closing one’s eyes and pausing during a prayer. To further explain this notion of enactive representation, Bellah turns to the simplest lesson of how to tie one’s shoes saying “one can be instructed verbally or by diagrams as to how to tie a knot, but one doesn’t *know how* to tie a knot until one has practiced the knot, until one’s body, one’s sensorimotor system, has *learned* the knot.”<sup>157</sup> It is in this subliminal internalization of actions and gestures that they become gateways of transcendence into other realities. Tying one’s shoe may not exactly be the path to nirvana, but yoga poses which require the same rote, internal memorization most certainly can be. It is important to take note at this juncture of the importance of internalizing the enactive to fully enter in and comprehend the unitive. Jerome Bruner in *Studies in Cognitive Growth* explains the cognitive development of young children saying “children first understand objects as extensions of their own bodies,” which Bellah deems analogous to unitive representation, and then builds upon saying these objects “are understood in terms of how [they] can be bodily manipulated,” moving the child into the enactive phase.<sup>158</sup> It is then in this enactive representation that these objects, following Piaget’s claim, become “things are lived rather than thought.”<sup>159</sup>

WorkCamp begins every morning with Mass. Daily Mass is not an obligation in Roman Catholicism, but it does allow for the sacrament of the Eucharist to be experienced throughout the week. WorkCampers wake up, attend Mass, and then get breakfast and head to the site for the

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<sup>156</sup> Bellah, 13.

<sup>157</sup> Bellah, 19.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

day.<sup>160</sup> The days end with evening prayers which bookend the day's activities with prayer and more noticeably the sign of the cross. Mass begins "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" and the congregation as a whole makes the sign of the cross blessing themselves, then following all prayers, the group says amen and makes the sign of the cross once more. The sign of the cross, as defined by the Catechism of the Catholic Church, is the placing of oneself "under the protection of the Triune God," or in other words, invoking the Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit).<sup>161</sup> This well-recognized Catholic gesture bookends each and every WorkCamp day allowing WorkCampers to enter into the religious reality of the day regardless of location. "Religion by and large has been deeply involved with the body; ritual is always significantly embodied," and becomes an enactive and unitive component in establishing the parameters of the alternate realm.<sup>162</sup> At WorkCamp, this bookend effect of gesture creates a continuous intertwining of the religious reality with the daily working reality WorkCampers experience on site, expanding the bounds of religious reality into that of the working world.

Mitzvah Corps, in a similar fashion, structures each day with a nine to five volunteer job, meal time, and then night speaker or small group session. Throughout the six weeks, participants of Mitzvah Corps are immersed in two volunteer projects, one for the first half of the program and a second for the other.<sup>163</sup> This shifting of assignments while maintaining the same daily structure provides for connectivity without a shifting into the ordinary. The learned experience lasts long enough for participants to join the religious reality with that of the working world by viewing the daily work as service, or play, but it changes midway through the program to ensure

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<sup>160</sup> Emily Anderson interview.

<sup>161</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 5th ed., 2157.

<sup>162</sup> Bellah, 20.

<sup>163</sup> Susan Kohn interview.

the volunteering does not become disassociated with the religious intentions and shifted to working life.

Symbols draw people into the reality they desire to participate in, and can be anything from a cross, to the Torah, from a repeated prayer to a hymn. Symbols combine cognitive recognition with participatory action. Bellah compares symbolic representation to the phase in children's development when there is a thing, and it stands for something, but one does not have to enter the other realm, there is just an understanding that there are these other realities. This alludes to potential reasons why social justice initiatives are not motivators in all people. Technically speaking, if Bellah's theory is to be applied, people would be consumed by a holistic understanding of the world and the equality of God's creation, they would then come to tangibly learn and comprehend their purpose among realities due to enactive representations. The notion of symbolic representation, however, explains how people are able to slip through the cracks, so to speak. If someone does not have as much applicable experience, or does not lock in the complete world view, the symbolic representation consumes the mindset and people can then separate learning from responsibility.

Programs such as WorkCamp and Mitzvah Corps strive to reconnect the symbols to their intended meaning through exposure to said symbols and applicable situations in which they are to be observed, used, and respected. WorkCamp, for example, reclaims the notion of serving one's neighbor by concentrating its efforts within the diocesan boundaries each year. As discussed in prior sections, the notion of a neighbor is something that has changed throughout the centuries, especially with living situations of cities and American development of suburbs where one has a most literal next door neighbor. Expanding for some to see neighbors as all people locally, while shrinking for others who may associate neighbor with the world in utmost

abstractness and then leave overwhelming idea behind, WorkCamp contextualizes the term neighbor through contact with people living in the diocese at the work sites and during evening programs connects the campers to organizations and issues which exist beyond diocesan limits, proving the necessity of at home service while encouraging the accessibility of service around the globe.

To begin to understand the symbols in the world around, children turn to those most closely associated to them, their parents, and in particular their mother. “In the young child the connection between language and action, [...] is a close one.”<sup>164</sup> As a child learns to speak, they start to use language in context; words, which are symbols themselves for ideas and objects into a greater and higher concept of ideas and thoughts, arguments and revelations. Entering into this communicative process or “condensed language [...] requires a world of shared experience,” typically found in relationships between mother and child. Children learn to speak from the words they hear around them each day. Mothers and fathers, or those who raise a child, are the most influential when it comes to language, the way it sounds and the meaning it holds.

Passion for anything carries through this linguistic development, for language carries meaning. While interviewing, I asked how social justice and social service functioned in the developmental lifespan of these people who are so passionate about the work they do today. It is fascinating how the vernacular carries through the action. Terry Simons says “I don’t know about social justice specifically, but social service was because of my mom always being willing and able to do whatever we could to help out our neighbors even in our parishes. If somebody was in need, we would help them with whatever sources we had, really building community in that way.”<sup>165</sup> Simons’ childhood reflects many of the interviewees’ stories; social justice was not

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<sup>164</sup> Bellah, 21.

<sup>165</sup> Terry Simons interview.

ignored or rejected, just not emphasized in the same fashion due to limited capacities of participation. Simons says the accessibility to social justice is “what’s appreciated most within WorkCamp because it does take [serving] to the next level.”<sup>166</sup> Christine Najarian describes herself as “‘that kid’ who had the transformative Catholic Campus Ministry, WorkCamp experience [...] growing up it was all about serving others because Jesus told us to do so, and recognizing how blessed we are and awareness of that blessing motivated our willingness to share our blessing by serving others.”<sup>167</sup> Najarian grew up with the understanding and openness to social action and social justice but did not come to own the totality of the terms until experiencing the power behind the discourse, and the change possible from living out the intended meanings of the terms.

Rabbi Jesse Gallop, of Congregation Beth Ahabah, learned from his “mother who ran a women’s clinic, and took [him] to pro-choice rallies from the age of eight. [His] family has always donated and volunteered from anything to everything.”<sup>168</sup> Gallop’s experiences encompass both social justice and social action ideologies presenting him with a wide-ranging view and empowered perspective from a young age. This passion continues to grow in all he does with the youth and young adults in Congregation Beth Ahabah, and with most everyone he meets. Gallop emphasizes the importance of “having a very diverse community of progressive supporters, not political activists,” who continue to fight the legislature and physically solve the problems.<sup>169</sup> Gallop strives to teach others the importance of integrating religious, social and political action to solve the justice problems of the world, a notion that developed due to maternal influences and flourishes to this day.

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Christine Najarian interview.

<sup>168</sup> Jesse Gallop interview.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

Symbols are the things which function in multiple realities. They can transport people to another reality or can ground them in one reality or another. They become confusing due to their ability to function in multiple realities simultaneously, and they can also become lost amid a world which possesses many conflicting symbols and ideas. Overwhelmed, people may choose to ignore some, highlight others, and therefore shake the effect a religious institution may have had in the first place. The narrative story is one of the most common mediums of verbal symbolization, and one that is valued in almost every kind of religion. Symbolism, especially in narrative form, is the “part and parcel,” it tells people who they are, what they are and how they relate to the world. Since the beginning phases of my research, two narrative stories remain at the forefront of my investigation: Jesus’ parable of “The Good Samaritan” and Isaac Leib Peretz’s short story “If Not Higher....” The story of the Good Samaritan follows Jesus’ discussion of the greatest commandment, or the *shema*, one of the most important unequalled verses in this thesis study.<sup>170</sup> The story goes:

A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead. A priest happened to be going down that road, but when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. Likewise a Levite came to the place, and when he saw him, he passed by on the opposite side. But a Samaritan traveler who came upon him was moved with compassion at the sight. He approached the victim, poured oil and wine over his wounds and bandaged them. Then he lifted him up on his own animal, took him to an inn and cared for him. The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with the instruction, ‘Take care of him. If you spend more than what I have given you, I shall repay you on my way back.’ Which of these three, in your opinion, was neighbor to the robbers’ victim?’ He answered, “The one who treated him with mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”<sup>171</sup>

Jesus tells this parable in response to the question on who is considered a neighbor.

Samaritans and the Jewish people were staunch enemies, so the parable goes to show that even

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<sup>170</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4 “you shall love the Lord, your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind”, and Luke 10:27 which adds onto Deuteronomy saying “...you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

<sup>171</sup> Luke 10:30-27

the least likely person one would associate with is one's neighbor. The narrative representation allows for the concept of all of humanity being considered as one's neighbor to be understood most clearly. Gospel stories, hagiographies, and testimonies are used in a similar fashion to this parable teaching religious lessons in applicable and sometimes subliminal ways.<sup>172</sup> These narratives provide opportunities for those listening to escape to a reality that is not their own and typically learn a lesson along the way.

The story of the rabbi of Nemirov in "If Not Higher..." presents a light-hearted mystery about a disappearing rabbi on a day of *Selichos* prayer and the Lithuanian Jew (Litvak) who follows the rabbi to solve the mystery. Suspicious of the rabbi's whereabouts on *Selichos*, a solemn day which calls for everyone's participation in a prayer ritual preceding the holiday *Rosh Hashanah*, the Litvak lays under the rabbi's bed throughout the night awaiting the answer to the mystery in the morning. Morning comes, the traditional call for *Selichos* sounds rousing the Jews, and the rabbi rises from bed, observes the prayer independently, gets ready for the day, and heads out the door. The rabbi picks up a hatchet and dressed in a disguising cloak heads into the forest. Splitting wood and then bundling the product in a sack, the rabbi continues through the forest arriving at a ramshackle house and knocks on the window. A scared voice from within inquires at the knocking and the rabbi responds "it's me," confounding the Litvak, for the rabbi "sound[s] for all the world like a peasant," a disguise the Litvak could not comprehend.<sup>173</sup> Once entering, the rabbi offers the sick woman the wood and then builds her a fire in the stove saying the first *Selichos* prayer, then completing the second and third. The woman, although unsure of how she will repay the stranger, is reaffirmed by the rabbi's trust and comforting words. After

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<sup>172</sup> Hagiography refers to the collected histories of the saints of the Catholic Church.

<sup>173</sup> Isaac Peretz, *If not higher ...*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 47.



this experience, the doubting Litvak walks away changed and aware of the reality of true giving and completing God's work.

This tale touches once more on who is considered a neighbor, but more explicitly the way in which one is to serve, or work for, their neighbor. The disguise worn by the rabbi goes to show the level to which the world of "play," in this case service, takes priority, but can co-exist with the obligations of the ordinary and religious realities. Entering an alternate reality in character, the rabbi becomes a peasant wanting to help another peasant, intentionally avoiding recognition as his ordinary reality role as rabbi. Another important factor of this folk tale is the rabbi's prayer. Incorporating ritual prayer into this act of service combines a practice of the ordinary reality with a teaching from the religious reality into the application of a service reality, an ideal combination. The tale explains how in humility a rabbi serves the poor, not because he is the rabbi, but because he is a human who understands the necessity of helping fellow humans. The moral is best captured in the closing lines of this short story reflecting the Litvak's reaction. The Litvak gains greater understanding of the existence of a religious reality and duty beyond that of the ordinary sees the call to service, and above all the ordinary reality reward that exceeds even the religion's promise:

And that's how the Litvak who had witnessed the whole thing came to be a devoted follower of the rabbi. After that, whenever some Hassid would tell how the rabbi of Nemirov would rise early on the solemn *Selichos* days and ascend right to heaven, the Litvak no longer challenged the story but would add quietly; "If not higher..."<sup>174</sup>

The Litvak gains an experience due to the alteration of his original perspective. The suspicion he held concerning the rabbi's whereabouts was not only quelled, but converted to admiration for the amazing work being done. Many times premonitions hold people back from becoming involved or understanding the reality of a situation at hand. A feature of narrative

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<sup>174</sup>Peretz, 47.

symbolism allows for “distinction between the inner and outer, between self and world [... people can] *identify* with what is going on in the narrative,” in a way of examining features of the ordinary world.<sup>175</sup> WorkCamp and Mitzvah Corps utilize submersion into unfamiliar situations as a way to shake out any perceptions and force participants to go back to the base of the reality before building any construct defining it. Bellah points to Emile Durkheim’s notion of collective effervescence, where the gathered participation and shared enthusiasm of the masses enhances the individual experience while forcing the individual to embark on a unified perspective.<sup>176</sup> Bellah explains that “unitive events can be, and often are collective,” which highlights the importance of the individual’s release of separation between self and world to form one large collective cohesive group.<sup>177</sup> The first full day of WorkCamp is known as Team Building Day. Team building day encourages WorkCamp crews to bond and form communities of trust for the worksite, as well as a sense of larger community to participate with the collective group during evening programs and parish prayer. WorkCamp is comprised of nearly one thousand people each year coming from parishes all over the diocese, uniting people from different high schools, jobs and familial backgrounds.<sup>178</sup> This diversity helps create the massive Intentional Christian Community, which is not divided on any lines despite the disparities. WorkCamp is comprised of:

Doing the catechesis and forming the Catholic world view. Connecting the dots for teens – how teachings relate to Christ and to the world and their own lives. Anyone can go build – but to build a community [in a week] and put together a [theological] package, it’s Catholic – they work diligently to make it all complete – Nothing in isolation, complete community, something that sustains itself, this is a community, the Christian background.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Bellah, 33.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>177</sup> Bellah, 18.

<sup>178</sup> Emily Anderson interview.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

The Intentional Christian Community functions as an alternate reality which every participant is aware of. The gift of the sacred space created by the community is discussed and cherished throughout the week, and the hope is that the lessons learned at WorkCamp will help the intentional community span out into the larger community and transform the way the ordinary functions.<sup>180</sup>

Kohn, expresses concerns on the changing format of the Mitzvah Corps program, recognizing the importance of the summer long community. The optional shortening of the participation length in the program combined with the ever increasing numbers attending threatens the unity of the Urban Mitzvah Corps (UMC) experience. Kohn explains how “it takes time to form those bonds, by three weeks everyone’s finally comfortable, then some leave and others arrive,” messing up the established relationships.<sup>181</sup> There is also a threat of cliques developing within a larger group. Kohn emphasizes the importance of a unified whole, non-segmented group. Division within the UMC program makes the programming less effective, “people learn from everyone around them, everyone’s experience is different.”<sup>182</sup> Structure is so critical to instruct communities which can function as tools in which lasting change can occur.

It is important to “get the self out of the experience,” so that “it is the objective reality, not the subjective “meaning,” that is at the forefront.”<sup>183</sup> Conceptual representation is the final, and what Bellah believes to be the functioning, representation of developed peoples. Moving people away from that personal perspective or detaching one from the beliefs and or preconceptions with which they enter a situation is a great challenge. People are comprised of the experiences and social cues in which they have lived, and altering what is ingrained in the

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<sup>180</sup> David Bristow, (Director of Youth Formation and Performance at St. Joseph Catholic Church), interview by Lindsey Neimo, Record, August 16, 2013.

<sup>181</sup> Susan Kohn interview.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Bellah, 17.

makeup of their existence is most certainly not an easy task. “Concepts are based on clear definition and accurate observation,” which require a detachment from personal perspective and opinion in order to become “concepts *of* something definite.”<sup>184</sup> Unitive events are believed by Bellah to be remedies to this sense of subjective perspective. Unitive events resort back to the oneness of existence, eradicating any form of separation between one thing and another. Unitive representation demands a separation rendering “possible a world of objects independent of subjects, a world that is ‘decontextualized.’”<sup>185</sup>

The layering of symbolic representation on top of unitive comprehension and enactive application begin to describe the way in which I believe WorkCamp and Mitzvah Corps are effective. Both experiences bring the teachings of their religions to life. I think of kinesthetic learners who need to touch and feel to really know. Although this type of learning style does not apply to everyone, there is still a thread of tangential experience that is necessary for all people as Bellah explains. Someone can know the mechanics of riding a bike, but they cannot know how to ride a bike until they start to pedal. In this same fashion, people can be educated in a religious institution, thoroughly explained the reasons for social justice work and the responsibilities required of them, but it is not until they are challenged to enact these lessons that the value sets in. The conceptual representative phase when one can see “something ‘as’ something else, or ‘in terms of’ something else, perhaps as something from an unexpectedly different realm, [...] provides the generative idea that can lead to a radically new hypothesis” or point of view on a given situation, such as social justice.<sup>186</sup> For some, this takes time; just like riding a bike, the process is different for everyone. There are those who hear the lessons in the classroom and become ignited with a sense of drive and motivation for the work that needs to be

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<sup>184</sup> Bellah, 38.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Bellah, 41.

done, just like those who can hop on the seat and pedal away without fear, but for others a classroom setting, or a day of service, or even many days may not be enough. Participating in the reality of the religious world while simultaneously infusing the requirements of that realm into the daily reality is how true effectiveness takes place.

Above all, Bellah emphasizes how the role of religion is to give purpose and meaning beyond daily life.<sup>187</sup> If people were to operate solely in the ordinary reality they would lose their minds, the lack of escape from the monotony of the day to day would drive people crazy. Alternate realities support the world of play, and religion falls in line with these realities as something humans escape to, like a television show or sporting event. The religious reality possesses fullness towards activities which are done for the sake of being done, not to gain a reward or achieve a standard. Bellah's argument falters a bit here, for many religions support a moral and ethical code which promises rewards for a better life or afterlife by abiding by the constraints. In these instances, although activities may still be done without the interior drive of "work" completion, there is a higher motive. Evolution is the narrative of educated peoples and this is the only common story shared. Bellah claims that religion comes evolutionarily speaking from our sense of play and the way the desire to live in a more prominent realm of play grows throughout the centuries.

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<sup>187</sup> Kevin Vose. "Robert Bellah." Theory of Religion Class Discussion, Williamsburg, January 30, 2014.

## **Conclusion: Building towards a better tomorrow**

Many pages ago, this query began with a simple pondering on the good natured tendencies of human beings. I believe people are innately good, and because of this I questioned the effect religion contributes to this innate quality; does religion play into social justice instincts at all? Through case studies, data and scriptural analysis, and interviews, I hoped to illuminate the situations which most commonly bring people towards a complete understanding of social justice and simultaneously inspire the teachings to be lived out.

A bit of personal background is necessary for the eventual understanding of my larger purpose behind this thesis. WorkCamp in the Diocese of Arlington triggered my drive for social justice, thus earning its centrality within this study. As previously mentioned, I was born and raised Roman Catholic, but lived it only in its place (or as Bellah would say “reality”) on Sundays. WorkCamp shifted my life course from a corporate America executive position to a non-profit social justice seeking servant to society. Due to the overwhelming impact of this program on my life, I desired to find comparable programs in other religions in hopes of finding similar patterns of influence.

Reform Judaism emerged as the best comparison for a multitude of reasons. First, I was raised in a neighborhood where my group of friends was primarily Jewish; I have attended sixteen Bar/Bat Mitzvahs and am very familiar with and interested in the religious practice. Second, Christianity and Judaism are frequently viewed on a scale as opposites, and on that scale Roman Catholicism and Reform Judaism are, from the surface some, of the farthest apart. I desire to overthrow this notion and demonstrate the intertwined histories of the religions especially in the last two millennia. Finally, Jesus, a Jewish man changes the course of history

with his teachings inspiring the eventual emergence of Christianity. Jesus, a practicing and devoted Jewish man, came to repair God's world and restore the commandments, but the resulting religious movement and then institution allows for an interesting investigation into the disparity between the intent and the result.<sup>188</sup>

Bearing all of this in mind, this thesis is designed to be a tool for future youth ministers, social justice/social action leaders, priests, rabbis, lay ministers, and truly anyone with a the desire to teach social justice at a level that will not only educate, but invigorate and inspire people to release that inner goodness. The American dream and the American way open equal opportunities for people to become satisfied, but these standards also encourage fierce competition and self-glorification which can limit the ability for those less fortunate (due to economic, social, or other standards) to actually stand a chance at advancement. All of the organizations and interviewees battle the American checklist of life; the resume building, always advancing, mentality that, when harnessed, promotes social justice work.

As said in the letter of James:

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead.<sup>189</sup>

That, albeit Christian, concept of faith and works function successfully only when united remains the core argument of my thesis. Looking at the anecdote "give a man a fish, feed him for a day, teach a man to fish, provide for his life," the difference in commitment from the giver of fish to the teacher of fishing is integral to the perpetuation of social justice. It takes little effort and resources to toss a man a fish, but to spend time educating the man, equipping him with the

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<sup>188</sup> Although the theology on *Tikkun Olam* does not emerge predominantly until centuries after the death of Jesus, the mission Jesus claims to be fulfilling fits the definition of repairing the world.

<sup>189</sup> James 2:14-17.

proper tools, and experiencing his progress and success turns a simple act of service into a lifelong shift towards justice.

The decentralization of one's own thoughts and increasing worldly-awareness allows for the recognition of societal disparity and movement towards equality and justice. American religions impart subliminal moral codes on all of American society; it matters not what one's beliefs may be. Society as a whole dictates the moral code, and even those who do not follow a religion, must participate in society which possesses many monotheistic traditions. Looking at the Declaration of Independence, American citizens know "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."<sup>190</sup> These beliefs remain the foundation of American society. The Declaration of Independence continues to be one of the defining, dare I say revolutionary, characteristics of the United States.

Social justice becomes ignited when people encounter and experience the need for it; when the storybook characters come to life, so to speak. It is in the moment when something you know *about*, becomes something you *know*. Although this is not a perfect formula for churning out a generation of social justice minded people, the combination of internal and external experience affords an opportunity for the necessary cognitive perspective shift to occur. Religious institutions examined in this study contribute to the advancement of social justice efforts through their educational efforts in conjunction with their service events which expose congregants to the world and make the lessons learned apply to their own lives. Social justice seems like a distant and utopian dream, however with an increasing amount of opportunities for comprehension of its purpose and value in the lives of fellow humans, equality is tangible.

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<sup>190</sup> Declaration of Independence, 1776.



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