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Developing a Religious Diversity Profile of San Antonio

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Executive Summary

Valuing diversity in the context of city governance requires active inclusion of faith-based communities in three particular ways: representation, substantive collaboration and decision-making. Faith communities impact all sectors of our city and are often the most active vehicles for civic involvement. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the array of religious communities, their interactions with one another, and their engagements with city government.

This study explores the situation of religious diversity in San Antonio. In total, we have conducted 30 in-person interviews with local faith leaders and have received survey responses from 102 stakeholders. These stakeholders are comprised of advocates from various backgrounds, faith communities, and non-profit organizations. The researchers are grateful for the financial support of the Mellon Summer Undergraduate Research Fellowship from Trinity University that made this study possible.

The Faith-Based Organism

San Antonio's religious landscape is composed of hundreds of disparate communities that overlap in several de-facto and de-jure interfaith coalition groups. We have found that a great degree of faith-based cooperation, dialogue and mutual understanding already exists among the religious groups of San Antonio. Several community members expressed their belief that San Antonio is a welcoming community for minority religious groups. Many say that cooperation among different faiths is productive and empowering. Specifically, the city's large Latinx population is an aspect of the city that several stakeholders believe creates cultural awareness. However, when those surveyed responded to the question "How welcoming is San Antonio of Religious Diversity?" on a scale of 1-10, Muslims recorded the lowest average response. We have also found that the relationships among these groups are often divided in ways that mirror socio-political divisions in San Antonio. The depth of organizations working to achieve similar goals is astounding, but such groups do not always take advantage of opportunities to collaborate, lack the resources and support to make substantive change, and are often fragmented along lines of bias, policy and communication.

Pressing Concerns for Diversity and Inclusion

According to leaders of local religious communities, the most pressing concerns for diversity and inclusion revolve primarily around education and public awareness. Upon reviewing the results of our qualitative data, we believe there is a gap between the ideas of how inclusion can be advanced and the actions required to make these goals a reality. We have distilled two major recurring themes that intersect with San Antonio's religious landscape and represent areas for city government to focus its efforts.

Anti-Muslim Sentiment: The emergent phenomenon of Anti-Muslim sentiment poses a threat to the inclusion of Muslims and people perceived to be Muslim in San Antonio.

- Unwillingness to collaborate as a result of fear
- Insecurity in the Mosque during Ramadan
- Post-9/11 perception of seclusion

The LGBTQ Communities: Deeply-held prejudices, legal and institutional barriers and tenuous experiences in faith-based spaces hinder the inclusion of LGBTQ communities.

- Division between institutional cooperation and interpersonal progress
- City-wide debates in which the languages of faith and secularism are opposed
- Unclear public signals from government officials

Suggestions for Effective Engagement

Bridge the Gap Between Reflection and Action

- Recognize different goals and methods to create effective collaboration
- Help to operationalize inclusion
- Acknowledge utility of different approaches taken by faith-based leaders and government officials

Facilitate Linkages among Communities

- Encourage common projects and synergies between community organizations
- Construct feedback mechanisms with faith communities to ensure inclusion
- Act on connections to actively combat institutional discrimination in the city

Host Public Events

- Remain cognizant of methods of engagement and respect for traditions
- Organize a city-wide interfaith Iftar with the Muslim community
- Promote collaborative efforts to local media outlets

Organize Educational Programming

- Become a norm entrepreneur for diversity and inclusion
- Make efforts to increase religious literacy in schools and the city at large
- Partner with faith-based organizations

Facilitate Communication

- Increase public visibility and promote positive narratives about religious diversity
- Resolve historically frustrating communication problems between communities
- Coordinate a common events calendar and website for volunteers

Introduction

Diversity is the presence of people that are different from one another with regard to their internal dimensions (e.g. race and religion), external dimensions (e.g. education and veteran status) and/or organizational dimensions (e.g. department or industry).¹ The United States is incredibly diverse, yet it is not enough to simply acknowledge its diversity. Groups or gatherings that have a diversity of participants are not necessarily inclusive of those participants. Valuing diversity involves recognizing and appreciating the significance of differences while representing diverse identities in efforts that facilitate equity and inclusion. Therefore, inclusion requires the proactive cultivation of a sense of belonging that can drive authentic participation from historically excluded individuals and groups.²

While we can define the terms “diversity” and “inclusion” theoretically, we recognize that the terms only acquire meaning through the specific ways that they are deployed and experienced. For this reason, the definitions are only as relevant as the policies and practices they help to create. Valuing diversity in the context of City governance requires active inclusion in three particular ways: representation, substantive collaboration and decision making. Our aim in this report is to explore the status of San Antonio’s diversity and inclusion with regard to local faith communities and to identify current challenges and opportunities for the City.

Faith communities impact all sectors of our City and are often the most active vehicles for civic involvement. Therefore, it is imperative to understand the array of religious communities, their interactions with one another, and their engagements with City government. For the City of San Antonio, cultivating relationships with faith-based leaders and organizations will facilitate the inclusion of all perspectives in its work. These relationships have the potential to help identify, address, and even prevent bias-related incidents (e.g., workplace discrimination and hate-based violence) by informing the architecture of anti-dis-

Valuing diversity in city governance requires active inclusion through substantive collaboration.

crimination laws to better reflect the direct and indirect ways that various minority groups experience oppression.³ Stronger relationships with local religious leaders and communities will also help the City to uphold its non-discrimination ordinance and inform its efforts to proactively end institutional discrimination within government organizations and local communities.

Little data exists about San Antonio’s religious landscape. In order to gather information on religious diversity and inclusion in our local area, we conducted ethnographic interviews with faith-based leaders across the City. This method allowed us to build relationships and trust with many different communities in San Antonio.

We began our research by developing a list of key stakeholders within San Antonio’s religious communities and began to expand in two ways: we asked the people we interviewed to suggest additional contacts from within their networks, and we approached leaders at local interfaith gatherings to solicit their input. In total, we have conducted 30 in-person interviews and have received survey responses from 102 people. These stakeholders are comprised of advocates from various backgrounds, faith communities, and non-profit organizations. We are grateful for the financial support of the Mellon Initiative in the Arts & Humanities from Trinity University that made this study possible.

San Antonio’s Faith Landscape

San Antonio’s faith landscape is composed of hundreds of disparate communities that overlap in several interfaith coalition organizations. Community members largely expressed feelings that San Antonio is a welcoming environment for minority religious groups. Many said that cooperation among different faiths is productive and empowering. Specifically, the City’s large Latinx⁴ population is one factor that several stakeholders believe creates cultural awareness. Mustafa Safek, a chaplain at the Raindrop Turkish House agreed with this sentiment: “I see the fabric of San Antonio that is made mostly out of the Hispanic community, which already in

a sense helps everyone in the City to be more aware of another culture. It's great that the City has that, and it's easier for cities like San Antonio to include us—twenty or thirty thousand Muslims or Turks.” All members of the Muslim and Jewish communities that were interviewed agreed with Safek's comments. However, when those surveyed responded to the question “How welcoming is San Antonio of Religious Diversity?” on a scale of 1-10, Muslims had the lowest average response.

The Interfaith Organism

An interfaith dialogue group met three consecutive Thursdays inside the Rock House on the campus of the Oblate School of Theology. The group's first meeting was June 23, 2016. Written on the chalk board behind a circle of chairs was this question: “Given the gifts of the legacy we walk in and the gifts of the legacy we carry, how do we faithfully forward the interfaith movement in San Antonio?” Several participants in the dialogue lamented that moments of brokenness more often bring the interfaith community together to improve the community. Ann Helmke, who worked for Haven for Hope at the time of this interview and now works for the City offered a different perspective: “With everyone in that room, that's not the case. They're doing work all of the time.” However, after three meetings, the momentum faded and participation declined. Despite the fact that its branches are fragmented, the interfaith movement remains powerful and includes representatives from over thirty different organizational groups. As Mehmet Oguz, regional director of the Dialogue Institute of the Southwest, explained, “The depth of organizations working in San Antonio for the same goal is a plus for us. But what is the minus? They don't [always] work together.” Circles like these often reach a great deal of consensus on the need for joint initiatives to boost understanding between faith communities, but they are often fragmented along lines of bias, policy, and communication. The reasons for the interfaith community's fragmentation are as disparate and diverse as the community itself.

First, it is important to gain a sense of the historical roots of interfaith coalitions in San Antonio. Mike

Phillips, a member of First Unitarian Universalist Church and the Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS)/Metro Alliance explains that the current model of interfaith community organizing in San Antonio began in 1973 when Ernesto Cortés, an organizer trained by the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), formed COPS. Phillips explained that Cortés participated in the farmworkers movement, but had “grown up in San Antonio and knew how unfair it was here for a lot of folks. So, he organized a dozen Catholic parishes on the West Side and they began to advocate for single-member districts. The way the City had been run politically, was at-large elections, and a slate of candidates would be picked by the power elites—they called themselves the good government league—and they would have a token African-American and a token Hispanic, but most of the folks on the City council over a twenty-year period lived within a couple of miles of each other on the north side.” COPS later began collaborating with the Metro Alliance, itself formed by a merger of the East Side Alliance and the Metropolitan Congregational Alliance.⁵ Although the coalition has inspired a great deal of unity, it also demonstrates inherent divisions. According to Phillips, when COPS/Metro combined, several Black churches “felt they needed a unique organization for themselves for African-American voices. So a couple of the churches went with COPS/Metro, but the majority of them formed their own. For a while, they had a hired organizer and everything and tried to follow an IAF model, but now just coalesce around the MLK march—the Community of Churches for Social

Action.”

In addition to internal fragmentation, Diane Duesterhoeft, librarian at St. Mary's University and member of COPS/Metro, noted that the coalition has had difficulty incorporating non-Christian groups. According to Duesterhoeft, COPS/Metro's progressive agenda is often viewed negatively in local politics because of their methods, and “in terms of smaller non-Christian minority groups where you're already a minority, there may be feeling that these groups don't want to rock the boat and draw more attention to themselves for whatever reason. I think we can see in this day and age the perception that's portrayed in some media circles about certain non-Christian groups; I'm thinking

Interfaith circles are often fragmented upon similar lines as the city.

there's a lot of anti-Muslim sentiment." This is not the only instance where macro-political discourses impact San Antonio's local interfaith efforts. The peaceCENTER planned to participate in a women's Catholic organization conference in the fall of 2016, but were rejected because their website indicated that they had supported a Pride Shabbat. Deb Myers, a member of Dignity San Antonio, explained that the organization "denied the peaceCENTER a booth at their conference because they supported Pride. That tells me that there's still this big huge gap and I would call the peaceCENTER an interfaith group, but at the same time, a secular group." In reality, there are multiple interfaith communities in San Antonio, often divided by issue or association. Duesterhoeft provided context for policy divisions: "There are certain congregations that, when it comes to the LGBT issues, are going to be standing in solidarity, but then others can't take a stand because their institution can't take a public stand and support."



Community members gathered for an interfaith Iftar hosted by the Dialogue Institute at the Turkish Raindrop House. Photo courtesy of Mehmet Oguz.

Pressing Concerns for Diversity and Inclusion

According to leaders of local religious communities, the most pressing concerns for diversity and inclusion revolve around education and public awareness. Sister Martha Ann Kirk of the University of Incarnate Word asserted that encounters with people from different faiths help create positive associations, decouple people from group identity, and allow us to focus on each person's individuality. Sister Kirk also said that if the initial points of contact facilitate a recognition of indi-

vidual identity, then sustaining such points of contact are key to ensuring that people rethink stereotypes of unfamiliar groups.⁶ Oguz explained that facilitating contact is about creating an inclusive environment: "If you don't approach the Jewish, Christian, Baha'i or Sikh community—I can meet with the Rabbis or other religious leaders, but what about the other people? Let's say dialogue and diversity is not a daily concern in their life—you have to create an environment for them—it might be a festival, a gathering, a lecture,

anything where people can come together." As an example, the Raindrop Turkish House with which Oguz is affiliated hosted Iftars with nearly thirty different religious communities during Ramadan. The events were held at houses of worship around San Antonio during June and early July 2016. Like Oguz, Shaykh Omar Husain, the religious director at the Muslim Children Education and Civic Center,

finds that acceptance is often a matter of general exposure: "I'll meet incredibly educated people who have absolutely no idea about basic beliefs. General education really serves the biggest purpose."

Issues of education and public awareness also apply to the Jewish community in San Antonio. An anonymous member of the Jewish community stated that "People [in San Antonio] have no idea what Jews are; they think we're like Christians lite. They have no idea. People here also don't recognize the degree to which Christianity is normative." Ronit Sherwin, CEO of the Jewish Federation of San Antonio, provided an example to illustrate the way that Christian normativity affects the City's atmosphere: "A cross has great religious symbolism, but to someone who grew up Christian in Texas, they don't think about it or that it could possibly make people uncomfortable."

A local rabbi attributed this to the Jewish community being an “invisible minority”—largely white, upper middle class, and visible in many parts of society despite being a religious minority. However, the general public often misunderstands the nuances of the Jewish community. The rabbi continues: “Judaism isn’t just a religion. It’s also a culture. We’re a series of ethnicities. There are so many ways for Jewish identity to be expressed.” The rabbi added that within San Antonio, “the Jewish community is also really diverse. There are a lot of Latino Jews, significant numbers of African-American and Asian Jews. It’s a very diverse religious community, and [my synagogue] is a very diverse place.”

Anti-Muslim Sentiment

In interfaith circles, where it is less likely to find bias against others, problematic scenarios still arise. Mehmet Oguz has observed several instances where other groups were afraid to meet his Turkish Muslim community: “It happened with a church. They were able to do the interfaith academy, and the pastor said let’s do it, it’s going to be really good, my congregation can learn about the Muslim community. But then she emailed me and said, unfortunately, the congregation has some fears and don’t want to get together.” Many participants in interfaith gatherings have dealt with several experiences of bias. Thus, when these biases present themselves in interfaith settings, it proves that these beliefs are very deeply ingrained in the fabric of our community. Mustafa Safek explained that such biases are often evident at interfaith gatherings in which he participates and are shaped by larger political forces. “Some people are reserved and don’t want to do much dialogue, and that’s also due to the media influence because when I speak, I speak as a Muslim. My name is Mustafa and that’s a Muslim name. So when I call, speak or sign my emails or something, that’s a Muslim speaking—regardless of my ethnicity, background knowledge, whatever—people perceive me first as Muslim.” Safek stated that the questions people ask indicate their preconceived notions and knowledge: “Sometimes, the question that we typically get: ‘why do you guys want to kill us?’” That question, in the mind

Experiences of Anti-Muslim sentiment have important lessons for interfaith dialogue.



The Sikh Dharamsal hosted a Turban tying event in Feb.2015. Photo courtesy of the Sikh Dharamsal.

of an ordinary American, may have some validity, but the way the question is asked, I think it is already biased because just watching the news media and drawing conclusions is a bad thing to do. These are the people that come to us; for those that do not, we don’t know.”

Similarly, a local leader in the Muslim community observes the emergent phenomenon of anti-Muslim sentiment and points to the threat it poses to the inclusion of Muslims in San Antonio: “Logistics are one [problem]; another is that I still feel that some of them are, especially by working with Muslims, some still feel that they don’t want to be, it’s not that they don’t want to be seen, they want to be seen, but doing something for Muslims, with Muslims specifically probably, the church won’t like it. The people that donate the money to the church may not like it.”

Experiences and feelings of bias also hold important lessons for the aforementioned theory of interfaith dialogue dependent upon repeated contact. These dialogues must allow participants to develop a positive understanding about an individual, which requires decoupling individuals from group identities and then reversing the process by applying an understanding about the individual to their perceptions about the group. This does not always occur, as people may see their experiences as ungeneralizable exceptions. Another local rabbi provided an example of this when they remarked “I feel like [the Raindrop Turkish House] is not necessarily the mainstream Muslim community in San Antonio.

I mean, there are only a few hundred of them by their own description. And they're incredibly warm and part of their mission is hospitality and interfaith understanding. So, I love it, I think it's great. But I think there are other parts of the Muslim community that are much more private." Many members of the Muslim community make efforts to counter public perceptions of seclusion. Sakib Shaikh indicated that the reality of post-9/11 America for the Muslim community has required more visibility to counter negative narra-

tives. Shaikh noted that the change is "out of necessity. Growing up, the mosque was just a mosque for me. The idea of having to turn it into something bigger than that was born out of necessity. After 9/11 we got questions: 'Where is the Muslim community, where are the leaders, why don't you speak out?' The mosque, as an institution, has always been apolitical. It took time for us to come to terms with [the idea] that the mosque has to be more than just a mosque." While public outreach is usually well received, several groups and segments of the population still hold anti-Muslim sentiments.

Several interviewees ascribe negative feelings regarding Islam to media portrayals and the low level of public knowledge about San Antonio's Muslim community. Additionally, 27 percent of survey respondents to the question -- "Given your experiences, what are the most pressing concerns for religious inclusion in San Antonio?" -- referenced instances of Anti-Muslim sentiment specifically, while many more indicated that the acceptance of minority religious communities is a primary concern.⁷ Incidents of hate violence were also ref-

erenced frequently, with many Muslims communicating experiences of discrimination or insecurity. One member of the Muslim community gave an example: "There are threats against Muslims that Muslims themselves

don't want to acknowledge. I was at the mosque one night during Ramadan and the president of the board said 'last night, there was someone who said they are going to come to this mosque with a gun.'" Such instances have an impact on other religious communities as well. G.P. Singh, president of

the Sikh Dharamsal, noted that Anti-Muslim sentiment also affects members of the Sikh community, who are often perceived as Muslims because of their appearance. Singh explained that these biases often fuel practical concerns of physical safety, especially in public places such as the Riverwalk.

The LGBTQ Communities

Individuals identifying as LGBTQ often have tenuous experiences in interfaith spaces, despite these gatherings being otherwise inclusive. Nickie Valdez of Dignity San Antonio explains, "You don't know if someone's going to be offended by your presence, or you're going to offend somebody by what you say, or that they might make you angry from something they say." Valdez noted that the gatherings where she knows many participants in the dialogue are the most welcoming. Nevertheless, "Being LGBT and dealing with people of faith, it's always unsure," Deb Myers



The Pride Center of San Antonio hosted a vigil to honor the lives of the Orlando shooting victims in Crockett Park. Faith-based leaders, government officials and activists spoke to a large crowd. Photo courtesy of Texas Public Radio.

said. Yet despite the progress that can be made between people in small interfaith dialogues, Myers said that institutional barriers and doctrines have hindered progress on LGBTQ issues: “There’s a level where the interfaith community is working together and working to create and moving forward, but then at the higher levels, I don’t know that there’s a lot of conscious work being done. I think there’s a disconnect.”

The LGBTQ communities and issues of faith also converge in City-wide activism. The most notable example is the public response to the 2013 Non-Discrimination Ordinance. When this issue was taken up during multiple City council meetings, faith groups on both sides of the debate were vocal. Deb Myers described the atmosphere: “The ones who were against were very loudly speaking their faith, saying that they loved [the LGBTQ communities] and that’s why they came to speak against us. Of course, the people speaking for us end up using a more secular language because they wanted to say this is a right, a protection under the law regardless of a person’s religion. They should be protected by the law. There’s that nuance, but the reality is that we as a larger community encouraged leaders of faith and congregations to come forward and speak on our behalf because the language that was going to be used against us was going to be language of faith.”

The division between the languages of faith and secularism was visible at San Antonio’s vigil to honor the lives of the victims in the 2016 Orlando shooting. Marsha Warren, LGBT liaison to Mayor Ivy Taylor, explained that the tragedy was “a significant emotional event that should change hearts and minds, and is changing some people’s minds about our community. Instead of some people saying, ‘let’s segregate them here and this person in this box,’ it’s saying that we are all human beings, because allies died. Hate knows no color, no gender, no sexuality.” In moments of tragedy, however, there is often a failure to recognize these shared sentiments as opportunities to improve society. Before the vigil in honor of the Orlando shooting, Warren noted that it is important for the words of our leaders to acknowledge the struggles of the LGBTQ community. “This is a chance to really see [Mayor Taylor] in our community doing something—she’s praying for those people in Orlando, not only the straight community in Orlando, but the people who

died. She realizes that any loss of life is a loss of life.” However, Myers believed that this message was unclear: “She didn’t directly pray for the victims. LGBT was not mentioned at all, and so she stayed right on that fence. She didn’t commit herself one way or another. Can we call that graceful? Maybe. I don’t know. In this kind of a situation, being graceful is not what’s called for. When people are in pain, people are suffering, people are hurting, you need to show that compassion. The way to do that is to be on their side, have empathy.”

Engagement Suggestions

Bridging the Gap Between Reflection and Action

Several faith-based leaders noted that government officials and faith leaders often operate within different frameworks. As Ann Helmke explained, “civic politicians are more action oriented, and may not spend as much time building relationships. The faith community spends more time with relational politics, and aren’t as attuned to the civic actions. They’re missing each other; they need each other.” This dynamic between reflection and action is evident in spaces where faith leaders and government officials meet. People become frustrated at times when specific mechanisms to act do not exist. However, when there is an unequal focus on action, Helmke said, “that’s where people burn out and can’t get to their deeper meaning.”

At this particular time in San Antonio, the willingness for collective action exists, but many feel that the opportunity is not being seized. This contributes to a sentiment that is prevalent in the City and expressed well by a leader in the local Muslim community: “Being in San Antonio and working in interfaith for so long, I think it’s about time the community take another step and go above just sitting and meeting and every time just saying, ‘let’s get to know each other, let’s get to know each other.’ We already know each other. That’s the point I raised there. I said, let’s move on, let’s get to the other level.” Valuing diversity can assist in bridging reflection and action by demonstrating that

A division between the language of faith and secular was visible.

each voice in a constituency is highly valued. This will allow for more inclusive settings in which local leaders feel empowered to collaborate with local government.

Developing Linkages

The City's future programming should build an informal coalition with faith-based stakeholders. As Mehmet Oguz noted, "There is a need for common projects. All of us have a willingness to do good things for the community, but we always need someone to lead the group." Rather than convening a formal commission, the City should encourage synergies with stakeholders by hosting public events, providing training to government officials, coordinating educational resources to schools, facilitating communication between communities and serving as a more vocal advocate of underrepresented religious communities. Helmke claimed that there are numerous opportunities to "engage that wisdom, connect it with the education, and the enthusiasm and energy of the next generation. You put that together intentionally. A lot could happen rather quickly. They're savvy and strategic, people who know how to tap funding. It's all there, it's just [a matter of] uniting it and not being afraid of it civically and in the faith community."

Public Events

San Antonio's City government must be more aware, intentional, and sensitive about fostering inclusion in public events for faith-based communities. This can be achieved in practice by revising the ways in which public events approach religious diversity. The specific modalities used to engage community members will determine an event's success or failure. Common rituals are important, but they may do more harm than good if they are not inclusive. Civic leaders should carefully plan how people are able to participate. At a smaller interfaith dialogue in June, people spoke after being called on by someone they knew. But this method has practical limitations because the same people usually talk and few new attendees participate. Susan Ives, a member of the peaceCENTER, has found that "the process of invitation is meant to be more inclusive, and it usually works that way—it usually keeps [talk-

ative] people from dominating the conversation. But I think in this instance, it almost had the opposite effect."

In the same way that the process of invitation at the smaller gathering failed to garner enough representation from new group members, a similar process also failed to achieve inclusion at Mayor Ivy Taylor's Second Annual Interfaith Gathering. A local leader in the Muslim community reflected, "We were not invited [to the Second Annual Interfaith Gathering]. This is it. They know who I am, they know what [CAIR] is—the most active organization in San Antonio. They avoid us. They invite only people that they think will be, I don't know what. If they really are serious about getting closer to the leadership of this Muslim community,



Mayor Ivy Taylor hosted her Second Annual Interfaith Gathering with faith-based leaders from across San Antonio. Photo courtesy of Fox San Antonio.

they should invite the leaders of the Muslim community." The breakfast event was also held during Ramadan, the holiest month of the Islamic calendar in which Muslims fast during the day. Despite this, Pastor Keely Petty seemed unaware when she introduced the panel on digital literacy: "Y'all done [sic] ate good, you done had your coffee, your orange juice, you can at least put your hands together whatever faith you are." Even if all other dates were impossible, the event's organizers should show more sensitivity to the Muslim community's traditions. Reaching out to the Muslim community in such a way is an important part of building good relations. To continue building good faith, the City can help organize and/or send representatives to an annual City-wide Iftar where City and faith leaders alike can show solidarity with Muslim communities and learn about

their traditions. This occurs in Houston, where the Mayor took the opportunity to speak about inter-religious solidarity on the morning after the Orlando shootings.⁸

Events like these may allow positive stories in the community to be showcased by media outlets and broaden the public's understanding of religious diversity and unity. As Mustafa Safek explained, "Media comes when horrible stuff happens, but I think that the [City] can contact the media when the good stuff happens too." Sakib Shaikh added that this will help faith communities to communicate their message more clearly and with increased legitimacy: "The best platform we can get is legitimacy from the government and the loudspeaker from the media. If they can be inviting to us and let us speak when we need to say something as opposed to being reactionary, that would be the best tool to fight ignorance."

Furthermore, the City can also organize a festival to celebrate the diversity of faith traditions in San Antonio. This can serve as a method to increase the community's sense of cohesion and facilitate inter-religious contact. Such an event would provide networking opportunities and also demonstrate the City government's commitment to engaging with and supporting its constituents. Furthermore, the City could organize a City-wide book club with selections that explore different facets of San Antonio's identities.

Educational Programming

The City has an opportunity to be a vocal norm entrepreneur by utilizing non-discrimination laws and public outreach in the form of education to institutionalize attitudes and policies that further inclusion. As Marsha Warren explained, "Education is the biggest part. It's getting out there and explaining to people what [diversity] really means. Most people, when they hear diversity, they think the most obvious things; they don't think of the things that are underneath there." This can be achieved most readily by working with interfaith leaders to educate students in public schools about different meanings of diversity. The City can offer to partner with organizations already undertaking educational initiatives, such as the Jewish Federation's Holocaust Museum and sessions on human trafficking sponsored by the San Antonio Community of Congregations. A member of the

Jewish community expressed concern about prayer in public schools, and the fact that "it's acceptable to have Christmas stuff in public schools in the state of Texas. This has made my kids really uncomfortable. It's not just my kids—my son's best friend is Sikh. It's not just Jews, it's everybody. And I think we do Christian students a disservice when we don't educate them about religious diversity. There needs to be a greater push for diversity and inclusion in schools, in public education."

Facilitating Communication Between Communities

Communication is a longstanding challenge in the interfaith community, according to Ann Helmke. As a result, important opportunities are often missed. The aforementioned dialogue at the Oblate School of Theology on July 15, 2016 is a prime example of this problem. One woman involved with COPS/Metro mentioned a community event to be hosted by the Unitarian Universalist Church. Immediately after her statement, six other members of the group each asked different logistical questions about the event. A few of her answers were repeated to allow others to make note of the information. When inefficiencies in communication occur, the group has less time to talk about substantive issues and collaboration. Diane Duesterhoeft said that these instances frequently hinder inclusion and the ability of interlocutors to "reach out, across and outward." Further, gathering people together to facilitate communication is an even greater challenge. Duesterhoeft adds that she "often feel like the people who really need to hear the message aren't there at the table."

Endless numbers of email lists, websites, and newsletters make it difficult to share information effectively across different groups and organizations. Streamlining methods of communication would allow faith-based groups to organize in unison for common causes, present a resounding response to tragedy, and foster closer connections among individuals. Fortunately, there is a relatively simple solution: a collaborative website that allows the community to tell its story and to network with each other.

This solution has three key advantages. First, it would facilitate a common events calendar. This would

increase the potential for collaboration between congregations and organizations while bolstering the potential for media visibility. Additionally, stakeholders could invite people on their current email lists to receive email updates from the common website. This would allow each organization to maintain the integrity of its own communications while also contributing to the collective effort. Second, the site would showcase the important activities of faith-based initiatives across the City, which may inspire partnerships between organizations with similar goals. These synergies may result in larger coalitions, which may in turn increase visibility and also funding by local philanthropists. Third, the site could unify interfaith thought leaders across the City in one platform for activism.

Additional Research

Additional research should be conducted to educate members of both the City government and the community on religious diversity in San Antonio. This effort would require interviewing members of many religious communities in order to offer a comprehensive review of the City's religious diversity. Researchers should also attempt to quantify the sheer number of people participating in faith-based networks and identify the connections between them. Furthermore, these connections could bring to light the ways that macro-political forces (e.g. interest groups, national discourse) shape daily conversations in faith-based congregations and coalitions. This can investigate how campaign donations impact issues important to faith-based groups. Perhaps most importantly, additional research should explore the proxy of faith as a basis to discriminate against people of color.⁹ The results of such a study will provide an expanded picture of the ways that discrimination occurs and will add to current scholarship on indirect discrimination.¹⁰ Finally, future research should analyze specific iterations of local anti-discrimination laws and explore the ways that these laws influence citizens' experiences.

¹ Internal Dimensions and External Dimensions are adapted from Marilyn Loden and Julie Rosener, *Workforce America*; Business One Irwin, 1991.

² ICMA Taskforce on Strengthening Inclusion in the Field (September 2015); D5 Coalition, Race Forward and Annie E. Casey Foundation.

³ Iyer, D. (2015). *We Too Sing America*. New York City: The New Press.

⁴ "Latinx" is ungendered to break the masculine/feminine binary in Spanish to include non-binary people. See <http://www.pri.org/stories/2016-06-21/writer-jack-quemi-explains-meaning-latinx>.

⁵ See the COPS/Metro website: <http://www.copsmetro.com/history>.

⁶ Yildirim, Y. (2006). *A case study of contact theory: Interfaith dialogue*. Unpublished Master's thesis, The University of Texas at Austin.

⁷ For reference, six percent of respondents identified as Muslims.

⁸ See <http://abc13.com/society/houston-iftar-annual-ramadan-dinner-2016/1393318/> and <http://www.houstoniftar.org>.

⁹ See Iyer, *We Too Sing America*.

¹⁰ Eidelson, B. (2015). *Discrimination and Disrespect*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

References