



Interfaith

AN ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

INTERFAITH



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Foreword

Several years ago, when Nic Retsinas, director of Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies, became chair of the board of directors of Habitat for Humanity International, he initiated a process to explore greater interfaith involvement with our ministry. Interviews with a number of faith leaders confirmed the notion that the three largest monotheistic religions—Islam, Judaism and Christianity—as well as other faith groups, had in common strong theological calls to care for the poor. Each group has also held long traditions of providing shelter as a means of helping families move out of poverty.

A daylong forum in December 2006 at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University served to strengthen this desire to reach out to people of all faiths. The forum was framed by Katherine Marshall (longtime World Bank leader, now senior fellow at the Berkley Center) in the context of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals and eliminating poverty. Habitat for Humanity focused on the importance of decent housing for all as a core strategy in meeting the goals.

Discussion of the theologies of poverty and shelter held by the monotheistic religions was led by Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; Ambassador Akbar Ahmed, head of Islamic Studies at American University; and Jim Wallis, founder and CEO of Sojourners.

The concluding long-range vision was for the world to see and experience these three religions (and others) working and advocating together in all parts of the world to end poverty, with decent shelter for all as a core issue. The short-range goals included attempts to organize interfaith groups in communities worldwide to focus on adequate shelter in efforts to end poverty. Habitat for Humanity assumed a leadership role to challenge its entities worldwide to develop interfaith communities.

It became apparent that a practical “interfaith toolkit” would be vital. A survey was designed and distributed to all Habitat entities that could be identified as having interfaith experiences. This toolkit has been developed as a result of information gleaned from the surveys and many other helpful sources. It is gratifying how many

interfaith Habitat experiences have happened and are happening in all parts of the world—most often as “Abraham” and “Reconciliation” builds. In addition, some interfaith communities have worked to raise funds for Habitat, to build the Habitat brand and to organize community development and prayer groups.

I hope that this toolkit will encourage local interfaith groups not only to continue and expand such activities but also to become ongoing strong advocates. If decent housing is going to be viewed as a necessity in the world, the will of the world must change. Many of us believe that the knowledge is available and resources are ample to meet housing needs worldwide. What is missing is the desire to make it happen. This toolkit is designed to encourage local community interfaith groups to advocate governments, religious groups, nongovernmental agencies, corporations, labor groups, foundations and individuals to develop the will to make changes and to seek to end poverty by providing adequate shelter for all people.

Our whole Habitat mission to eliminate substandard housing is in response to our Christian faith in which God calls us to care for those who are in need. I am grateful that others are clearly called in their faith roots to the same goals. We live our faiths, not compromise them, by joining together to provide decent housing for all. And we do it for the sake of the world God created and loves!

My fervent desire is that this toolkit will be helpful as you develop permanent, ongoing interfaith communities. As leaders in that effort, please communicate your experiences in ways we can share across the world. Let's continue to develop tools and share them far and wide as we move closer to providing decent shelter for all and see a brighter vision of a world without poverty!

Blessings,



Jonathan T.M. Reckford
Chief Executive Officer
Habitat for Humanity International

“It is through
service to our fellow
beings that we gain an
understanding of
the Lord.”

—*Guru Granth Sahib, p. 26*



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Why an interfaith advocacy toolkit?

The 2006 Interfaith Forum (see Foreword) unanimously affirmed that the monotheistic faiths (and other faiths) have theological calls to end poverty in the world and believe that decent housing for all is primary for that goal. In the forum, there was a commitment to form interfaith groups in communities worldwide toward implementing God's call.

Subsequent experience revealed the need for practical help toward forming community interfaith groups. Thus this Habitat for Humanity endeavor to develop an interfaith toolkit.

Analyzing experiences from various sources, Habitat developed eight steps for forming interfaith groups to advocate for decent shelter for all as a means of overcoming poverty:

1. Recruiting participants for an interfaith group.
2. Holding an exploratory meeting.
3. Developing understanding, respect and trust.
4. Understanding decent housing as a core issue.
5. Organizing an interfaith Habitat build.
6. Reflecting, linking action to the larger reality.
7. Understanding advocacy and identifying needs.
8. Making a faithful commitment to end poverty housing.

It became clear that the eight steps divide into three parts:

I. Developing an interfaith community

Identifying and recruiting participants, gathering an interfaith group, developing understanding of one another's beliefs, establishing trust and respect as imperatives for fulfilling our mission together.

II. Expressing faith in action

Experience points to the importance of not only meeting and talking, but also doing our mission together. The near-unanimous experience to date is that this is best accomplished by an interfaith Habitat house build, renovation or major repair project.

III. Committing to ongoing advocacy

Since its founding in 1976, Habitat has built, rehabilitated, repaired or improved more than 400,000 houses worldwide, providing simple, decent and affordable shelter for more than 2 million people. Habitat is aiming toward serving 100,000 families per year by 2013. To achieve this, the will of society must be changed toward overcoming substandard housing. Thus, a long-range, ongoing goal of interfaith communities is to advocate in significant ways. The third part of the toolkit is designed to aid interfaith groups in this effort, with the understanding that not all the steps will be achieved in neat, “one step at a time” order.

How to use this book

This toolkit is composed of three parts. The first part describes how to form an interfaith group. The second part describes how the group can “put faith in action” through a Habitat build and other Habitat-related activities. The last part describes how interfaith groups can become advocates against housing poverty.

The Habitat experience and advice

Throughout the margins of this toolkit, you will find stories, quotes and advice from Habitat’s experience. Stories and quotes are in the yellow sections, and advice is in green.

Warnings

The red sections are warnings. They include common mistakes and misunderstandings, along with tricky situations interfaith groups have encountered.

Resource section

At the end of each part is a section labeled “Resources.” It provides links and tools to information, websites, people, activities, etc., that complement the information from each phase.



“That gift which is made to the needy at the right place and at the right time, without aspiring for any return but as one’s duty of care for every being, is the most auspicious gift of all.”

—*Bhagavad Gita 17.20*

“I think each person has a different reason for being involved. However, I think we can all agree that we need to build an understanding between each other and accept one another. There is so much violence and war going on between religions. In order for that to stop, we need to understand one another and work toward a common goal. I think one great benefit for our interfaith movement at HFH is that we provide people interested in building interfaith relations an opportunity to really work toward a common goal. Rather than just talking about how we should all get along, we provide a volunteer opportunity for good.”

—Sarah Botzek, Rochester Area Habitat (Minnesota)

PART I DEVELOPING AN INTERFAITH COMMUNITY

STEP 1: GATHERING AN INTERFAITH GROUP

The first step in creating an interfaith advocacy approach is to bring together the participants. These are the people who will put their faith into action by helping to provide shelter and transform the systems that contribute to poverty housing and homelessness. The dedication, support and respect of these participants for one another and for the work they do will make the interfaith group both effective and sustainable. Therefore, the group must be made available and open to any person who is interested. No one should be discouraged from joining or volunteering with a Habitat interfaith group. Part of the strength of interfaith is the sensitivity, acceptance and respect participants foster for their differences. Understanding and appreciating differences between people, whether religious, ethnic, cultural or economic, makes the interfaith group authentic.

Before beginning recruitment, it is important to identify faith communities in the area. Are there significant differences in the number of members of these faith groups? Is there any history of cooperative interaction or group conflict between faith communities? Are stereotypes of certain religions prevalent in the region? It is important to answer these questions in order to reinforce awareness of the structural realities of the region. These questions provide the context for the basic principle that individuals of different faiths—rather than faith groups—are recruited to form a Habitat interfaith group.

How does an interfaith advocacy group come together? The first step is to develop a list of possible individual participants. Generally, it will be easy to identify some faith leaders in the area. Working through different faith groups in the community may help you identify the faith leaders. Personal contact

A COMMON MISTAKE

What is considered interfaith?

Interfaith does not mean different sects, denominations or branches of the same religion. Interfaith is considered two or more different faiths or religions, e.g., Judaism and Christianity.

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

To build a relationship between other religions and Habitat for Humanity, we met with people individually to provide them with information about Habitat and our interfaith build. These individual meetings proved fairly successful because we got to know people on a personal basis. We have done a lot of presentations about Habitat and the interfaith build idea to many different faith communities. We have attended worship services and events, especially of the non-Christian faiths. Overall, I would say these attempts have been successful except in the case of one religion.

We have tried to go out of our way to make the non-Christian faiths feel welcomed and accepted. It takes time to build these relationships. In our area, the Buddhists are fairly new in the city. Many of the practicing Buddhists are immigrants from other parts of the world, and they have a difficult time trusting Christians. We really went out of our way to make them feel welcomed and accepted, but at this time, it is too soon for them to be closely involved with an interfaith build.

—Rochester Area Habitat (Minnesota)

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

Sending personal invitations to a variety of faith groups seems to work best.

—Susan Burgess-Parrish,
Habitat of Anderson County (Tennessee)

We made several “cold” phone calls, sent e-mails and networked through contacts that churches had established.

—Brendalyn Shird,
Greater Des Moines Habitat (Iowa)

It really is, in my opinion, a snowball effect. The more people involved, the more want to join in the activities. I use the media to get whatever, whenever and however I can.

—M.G. Meyerling,
Habitat of Greater Jonesboro (Arkansas)

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

During the multifaith meetings, a different member of the group would share at the dedication of each meeting. Some would do a song while others might do traditional prayer representing their faith. Everyone loved it! It was a very interesting way to bring people together and appreciate different faiths. We also asked for volunteers to host the meetings at their place of worship. This gave everyone a glimpse into the physical space of one's religion. Most found it fascinating.

—*Habitat of Omaha, Nebraska*

Our final group comprised one to two representatives from each participating congregation and house of worship. We held monthly meetings for about 10 months before and during the build, which provided ample interaction and thus relationship building among members. We had five interfaith services at the different congregations, allowing members and volunteers to meet and learn about the others' faiths.

—*Habitat Kansas City, Missouri*

ADVICE

Existing interfaith groups

There has been some success in approaching existing interfaith groups to determine whether there is interest in partnering with Habitat and advocating for housing poverty issues. But starting a completely new group has the advantage of not having prior policies, goals or history from the group to consider.

For advice on working with existing interfaith groups, contact Habitat of East King County (Washington).

with such leaders by the Habitat affiliate usually will identify other lay people and leaders from each faith community who might be interested in a new interfaith advocacy group. It is important that the list of possible participants, as much as possible, include people from all faiths in the community. Habitat interfaith survey statistics show that the contributions of dedicated faith leaders are integral to the success of gathering an interfaith community.

STEP 2: AN EXPLORATORY MEETING

An exploratory meeting hosted by the Habitat affiliate is the next step. The identified faith leaders are important, both for their attendance, if possible, and for their influence on others to attend. Usually, a key Habitat affiliate leader facilitates the first meeting. Experience shows that, to the extent possible, at least the major faiths should have nearly equal numbers of participants. Recruitment for the interfaith group should aim for a variety of skills and perspectives. All potential participants should understand that the work of the interfaith group involves a commitment to dialogue and understanding faith as well as construction, advocacy and other poverty-eradication efforts. The interfaith group will thrive on equitable and comfortable diversity and should strive to maintain a healthy, heterogeneous mix of participants and leaders. Once the core leadership and interested participants who are committed to an interfaith advocacy group are identified, the focus can turn to developing relationships, building trust and determining goals and plans.

What are possible ways to create a community based on understanding and respecting one another's beliefs? A thoughtful process for building group unity is vital. The key Habitat leader forming an interfaith group might invite a leader from each faith group that will be involved to plan an exploratory meeting. (It is important that the Habitat leader who convenes the meeting be there as the "Habitat housing person," not as the representative of the Christian faith. There should be a separate representative of the Christian faith.) This planning team might discuss some basic principles for the entire interfaith process. The team might consider printing and distributing some of the concepts and principles to stimulate a discussion as the interfaith group meets.

Such principles might include:

- The will to understand one another without trying to compare or compete.
- A safe space for sharing and listening to one another.
- An environment that fosters open communication.
- The willingness to explore, understand and accept—not bypass—differences.
- Understanding that we are not there to change one another's faith.
- The desire to accept and validate one another's perspectives.

The planning team might devise a tentative agenda for an exploratory meeting, which might include:

- An initial process to meet and begin to know each other.
- A short presentation of reasons for gathering, including consensus about common commitments of faiths regarding poverty, housing, etc.
- An introduction to Habitat for Humanity, including background in this interfaith process (see Foreword), a brief history of Habitat, hopes for the group (coming to a sense of community, building with a family, continuing in advocacy (see previous section “Why an interfaith advocacy toolkit?”)).
- A discussion of concepts and principles from the planning team.
- An agreement for the time and place for the next meeting to begin to move on with Step 3: Developing Understanding, Respect and Trust.

From this first meeting, it is important that everyone understand that the principles for the interfaith group will be active listening without judgment; honest sharing of faith beliefs; desire to understand each other; respect that no one shares more than he or she wishes to share; willingness to share as equals; welcoming clarifying questions (e.g., “Did I understand you correctly?”); understanding that there will be no debate, no attempts to proselytize, no negative judgments, no arguing tenets of others’ beliefs; and the like.

STEP 3: DEVELOPING UNDERSTANDING, RESPECT AND TRUST

Through dialogue, the common interests and shared values of varied faiths and backgrounds will emerge. One of the values that many religions have in common is the call to service. Many passages in religious texts relate to social justice and helping the poor, and many religious institutions put these concepts into practice. Christianity, Islam and Judaism have a specific focus on poverty and shelter. This is an important subject to consider as a group.

Participants will want to examine together their own beliefs on service, the testimonials that various religions provide on shelter and poverty, and their personal relationship with the religious commitment to charity. Consideration of these issues will open the door to common goals and provide inspiration for action. When broaching the subject of religious guidance on poverty and shelter, be aware that the purpose is to communicate these concepts in ways that will make participants feel both challenged and inspired. The reality of poverty housing and homelessness is great enough to be overwhelming, and it must be tempered with the potential for significant change. Faith should uplift and encourage by providing a basis of support and justification for effort.

As the interfaith group unites around common religious values for decent shelter to serve the poor, emphasis should be made for acting out the faith, not just talking about it. At this juncture, the Habitat mission and program should be offered to the group as a way to respond together to God’s call in each faith.

ADVICE

Write your own interfaith manual

Inviting your steering committee to write its own manual on the faiths involved is a great experience to share as you begin.

Have the group come up with questions about the faiths. Then assign individuals—they could be clergy but don’t have to be—to write responses. These manuals can then be distributed to all faith partners and used in preparation of having members of those faiths on site. The manuals can be used in religious education, small groups, with youth groups, etc.

Contact Habitat of the Chesapeake (Maryland) to see its manual.

RESOURCES

History of Habitat and its homeownership model:

Reckford, Jonathan T.M. *Creating a Habitat for Humanity: No Hands but Yours*

Rubel, David. *If I Had a Hammer: Building Homes and Hope with Habitat for Humanity.*

How to invite an interfaith group to think about a common purpose:

Isaacs, William. *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together.*

Books on Christianity and the Christian approach to poverty and charity:

Chafer, Lewis Sperry. *Major Bible Themes.*

Haugen, Gary. *Good News About Injustice.*

Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity.*

Little, Paul. *Know Why You Believe.*

Ryrie, Charles. *A Survey of Bible Doctrine.*

Stearns, Rich. *The Hole in Our Gospel.*

Books on Islam and the Islamic approach to poverty and charity:

Hanbali, Qayyim and Ghazali. *The Purification of the Soul.*

Bonner, Ener and Singer. *Poverty and Charity in Middle Eastern Contexts.*

Senturk, Omer Faruk. *A Comprehensive Guide to Zakat: Charity in Islam.*

Yahya, Harun. *Learning from the Qur'an.*

Clark, Janine. *Islam, Charity, and Activism.*

Books on Judaism and the Jewish approach to poverty and charity:

Dorff, Elliot. *To Do the Right and the Good: A Jewish Approach to Modern Social Ethics.*

Steinberg, Milton. *Basic Judaism.*

Telushkin, Joseph. *The Book of Jewish Values: A Day-by-Day Guide to Ethical Living.*

Kushner, Harold. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People.*

Loewenberg, Frank. *From Charity to Social Justice.*

www.beliefnet.com

[Online Qu'ran: al-quran.info](http://Online%20Qu%27ran%3A%20al-quran.info)

PART II FAITH IN ACTION

STEP 4: UNDERSTANDING DECENT HOUSING AS A CORE ISSUE

Each faith's call to care about the poor challenges followers to act on their faith. Realizing how the three monotheistic faiths (and many others) have long traditions of providing shelter as a key to caring about the poor provides the context for the interfaith group to discuss why decent housing is vital.

Admittedly, there are many legitimate issues to face if poverty is to be eliminated: health, education, economic development, sanitation, sustainability and others. Even superficial analysis makes clear that, at the end of the day, if a person does not have a decent home to go to, the other legitimate issues toward eliminating poverty are undermined.

Research continues to confirm the importance of decent shelter in relation to overcoming other poverty issues. Realizing that housing is a core faith issue in overcoming poverty provides context for Habitat leaders to share the Habitat story, challenges and opportunities to be obedient in responding to the calls of one's faith.

My.Habitat, available to Habitat affiliates, provides a wealth of source material online, including suggested books, articles, statistics, reports and manuals. Go to my2.habitat.org/kc/faith-engagement.

It is hoped that a fruitful discussion will result in enthusiasm for the interfaith group to sponsor and start an interfaith Habitat build, renovation or major repair, and that the group will become involved with Habitat for Humanity partner families.

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

We have two coalitions...consisting of synagogues, Protestant congregations and Catholic churches that build one home annually with HFHMD. The representatives from each congregation have grown to know and respect each other over the years. This has ultimately contributed to their success in building homes. The groups work together to raise money through various events—golf tournaments, pumpkin patches, soup dinners, etc.—and donor solicitations, create publicity efforts within their congregations, and coordinate volunteers to build the home.

—Amanda Nelson, *Habitat of Metro Denver (Colorado)*

We share a meal on Thursday nights and take care to make sure it is kosher. We also make sure all activity is over by the Sabbath.

—Jeri Parris Perkins, *Darlington County Habitat (South Carolina)*

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

The initial "exploration meeting" was spiritual and philosophical, and our "ground blessing" event was highly attended. We developed an Interfaith Resource Booklet to give away to volunteers at the site. It contained information about each faith group who wished to submit. I can't say we all understood each other, but everyone wanted to work together. The goal was simple: to build a house.

—Jan Lower, *Habitat of Winchester-Frederick County (Virginia)*

Our steering committee looked at all the names of other affiliates before choosing a name they liked. This became an ownership issue, and they all felt they had contributed. Then we commissioned a local university graphics design class to design our logo. We had 54 to choose from! Now we have our own logo for shirts, books, materials, signs.

—Jayna Powell, *Habitat of the Chesapeake (Maryland)*

STEP 5: PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE: BUILDING AN INTERFAITH HABITAT HOUSE

To do God's work together, Habitat for Humanity affiliated organizations have done, and are doing, Habitat interfaith builds. Often, in the United States, these are called House of Abraham Builds, Unity Builds, Reconciliation Builds and other names. When the established interfaith group decides to do an interfaith build, renovation or major repair, it is important that Habitat form a steering committee to plan and guide the entire process. The steering committee should be composed of key Habitat leaders and chosen representatives of each participating religious faith. It should be clear that the interfaith steering committee has ultimate accountability to the local Habitat board for the build. The interfaith build steering committee should be formed and meet soon after the decision is made to do a faith-in-action build.

Agenda items for an interfaith steering committee might include:

- Understanding of the Habitat build process, including family selection, land acquisition, funding, building process, sweat equity, use of volunteers, etc. This information should be provided by the Habitat representative on the steering committee. The Habitat affiliate or entity should clearly define recommendations and decisions that are the responsibility of the interfaith steering committee.
- Identification of factors unique to an interfaith build. Habitat experiences to date indicate the following are helpful, if not necessary:
 - > Make a policy that volunteers from at least two of the participating faiths will be involved in every build day.
 - > Have devotions at each event led by a different faith leader in rotation, or make co-leaders from different faiths responsible.
 - > Plan build days and other meetings or events to respect participating faiths' holy days, days of rest, worship schedules and prayer practices. For example:

Worship services

- Judaism: Friday night (Shabbat, "day of rest," observed from Friday evening until Saturday evening).
- Christianity: Most on Sunday, although some Saturday morning, some Wednesday evenings, some Saturday afternoons, etc.
- Islam: Prayers observed midday Friday.

Individual prayers

- Judaism: Some observe the practice of praying three times a day.
- Islam: Many recognize the practice of praying five times a day.
- Most faiths practice blessings before meals. (Prayers should be sensitive to avoid being "religion-specific"—not mentioning references to Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, "died on a cross," etc.)
- Avoid using religion-specific words such as "church." Exchange it for "congregation." Change your Church Relations Committee to Faith Relations. Have a faith breakfast rather than a prayer breakfast.

A COMMON PROBLEM**Losing interest**

The spark began among churches devoted to interfaith cooperation and dialogue. They invited others to participate, as did Habitat. Early on we had strong Muslim interest and even some financial donations, but when the leader of this effort moved, that interest waned. Not wanting to lose momentum, we came up with a strategy to reach out to each potential participant and keep them interested and involved.

—Brendalyn Shird, Greater Des Moines Habitat (Iowa)

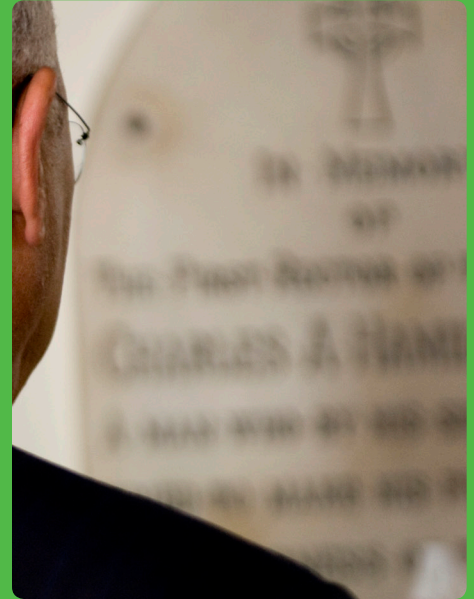
ADVICE**Be sensitive**

Individuals place varying levels of stress on their faith's requirements regarding dietary laws, prayer, etc. Feel free to ask, rather than assume, what their requirements and observations might be and how you can accommodate them. This would be true of Holy Days as well as diet. Talk with your partners about their holy days and whether they can work on them. We adjusted our Muslim workdays for some when Ramadan was in August because it was too hot to work without water. We have groups bring snacks or lunches to the site, and all food brought to the interfaith sites is kosher. Our Christian partners have loved learning about how to be kosher.

—Jayna Powell, Habitat of the Chesapeake (Maryland)

Ask good questions

Curiosity is natural. Just be sure to phrase your questions in an open-ended and nonjudgmental way. Merely rethinking the wording of the question (and inherent assumptions within) may make it easier to get at the heart of the matter without implying criticism or judgment.



“Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.”

—James 2:17

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

We decided early on that we wanted to start from our similarities and then move to our differences. Thus, we spent six months writing a book of basic beliefs. Once we understood our common call to reach out to the poor and our common beginnings, we were free to begin to find out about our differences. But the level of questions being asked on site depended entirely upon who was there to “lead” the discussion. So, we came up with “pocket questions.” We brainstormed basic questions about each faith and some general questions that anyone could answer, and laminated them onto small pieces of paper that fit in your pocket. Everyone grabs one in the morning and asks co-workers throughout the day or over lunch. The conversations are very lively! We are happy to share pocket questions.

—Jayna Powell, *Habitat of the Chesapeake (Maryland)*

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

From the onset, our goal was to create an environment where diverse congregations could work alongside one another without giving up a single bit of their theology. To that end, we created a build schedule that didn’t include Saturdays as it is the Sabbath for our Jewish brothers. The Islamic group had to be excused at noon on Fridays to say their prayers. The Christian folks had Mass at the work site on Sunday build days. Our construction staff rotated to cover the Sunday workdays, which were just a few on the whole schedule. This worked very well for us.

—Geofrey Kigenyi, *Habitat Kansas City (Missouri)*

Habitat of East King County (Washington) used the Muslim prayer practices to its advantage. Those practices became great excuses for long work breaks so that Muslim workers could both pray and take a break with the group.

ADVICE

Reflection

Incorporate regular reflection in the build and advocacy experience for added depth and connection to faith and Habitat’s mission.

Potential questions that may assist in opening the floor for reflection and sharing:

- How did it go today?
- How did we fulfill our religion’s call to address poverty?
- What has changed about the way you experience your own faith because of this work?
- What or who could be added to the work effort to improve it?
- What is something you are glad you saw or experienced about someone else’s faith?
- What is an area of discomfort for you regarding the problem of poverty and shelter?

Holy days

- Judaism: Yom Kippur (September/October), Rosh Hoshana (also September/October)
- Islam: Ramadan (Variable timing – follows the lunar calendar)
- Christianity – Christmas (Dec. 25), Easter (March/April), Lent (40 days prior to Easter)

Any plans for food should honor dietary laws and practices of each faith. For example:

- Judaism: Many do not eat pork or shellfish, require kosher foods, and do not consume dairy when eating meat and vice versa.
- Islam: May not eat pork or drink alcohol or caffeinated drinks.
- Christianity: Some are vegetarians; some do not drink caffeine or alcohol.
- Hinduism: May be vegetarian and avoid alcohol, onions and garlic.
- Buddhism: May avoid meat.
- Fasting: Most incorporate fasting in some religious observances. For example, Muslims fast during the month of Ramadan, Jews fast at Yom Kippur, and some Christians fast during Lent.

The representatives of each religious group on the steering committee should be helpful in identifying practices and customs for which there should be sensitivity.

- Fundraising plans to sponsor the build should be made and should include identification of possible new donors: individuals, corporations, foundations, and especially the participating faith groups. In addition to money, plans should be made to secure land and other gifts-in-kind. It is important that all participating faith groups be as equal as possible in securing resources to support the build.
- The house dedication should be inclusive of all religious faiths involved. Although it is a Habitat tradition to present a Bible to the Habitat partner family, other items, literature or holy writings representative of the different faiths may be included.
- Effort needs to be made to ensure that the interfaith steering committee involves the full interfaith group in this faith-in-action project, and reaches beyond the now established interfaith group.

Faith in Action: More ways than one to increase Habitat’s capacity

Habitat’s experience shows that putting faith in action often results in interfaith experiences beyond the build, including:

- Creation of Habitat interfaith youth groups.
- Interfaith Global Village trips.

- Mosque/temple/church exchanges.
- Designation and sponsorship of a community holiday for poverty awareness.
- Regular interfaith prayer meetings.
- Trips as a group to a particular faith's place of worship to attend a service.
- Expanded interfaith fundraising for Habitat.
- Interfaith conferences.
- Creation of games to educate about each other's faith.
- Creation of a children's book of drawings about faith to raise awareness and use as a fundraiser. (Habitat of the Chesapeake is willing to share its children's book.)

STEP 6: REFLECTION: LINKING FAITH IN ACTION TO LARGER REALITIES

Although the number of interfaith Habitat builds is significant, too often the process has ended with the build. An extremely important lesson is how important it is to plan regular group reflection throughout the interfaith process. This allows the group to evaluate, to share, to grow and to deepen relationships in trust, mutual respect and appreciation. If reflection is a part of the planned process, the context is set for sharing feelings and gratitude for the experience of life together in the interfaith group and especially for the opportunity to serve through the build process. The open, reflective process provides the channel for God—through whatever channel each faith experiences God—to make real God's common call to care for the poor. Hopefully, in this context, deeper questions will be raised, such as:

- How can we go beyond building together?
- What are the facts about poverty housing in our community?
- Where do we need to share the facts?
- On the basis of our faiths, how do we become involved in serving the poor?
- What resources are available to care for the poor in our community?
- Who are the leaders we need to influence, i.e., religious leaders, leaders of local government, corporations, NGOs, influential individuals, etc.?
- How are we called to combat poverty beyond our own community, in our nation and in the world?

As the interfaith group (including its Habitat for Humanity colleagues) deepens its struggle to understand the scope of the problem of poverty housing in its own community and beyond, it will likely move toward an ongoing life as an interfaith group involved in advocacy.

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

2010 marks the 10th anniversary of the Unity Build in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. This partnership between Habitat of Forsyth County and the Presbyterian Interracial Dialogue has brought numerous Presbyterian churches together with the Jewish congregation of Temple Emmanuel and the Muslim congregation of Masjid Al-Mu'minun.

Gloria Cole (pictured below) was the first homeowner recipient of a Unity Build house, and she has achieved great success in the past 10 years. Earning a Bachelor of Science degree in child care has allowed her to open a child care center in her Habitat home, where she cares for up to 17 children a day.

Gloria has been so successful that last year she was one of three teachers to receive the Smart Start Child Care Teacher of the Year Award in Forsyth County.



—Habitat of Forsyth County (North Carolina) and the Presbyterian Interracial Dialogue

A COMMON PROBLEM

Fundraising

Each faith has a very different view of giving, and fundraising is not as easy as "put it in your budget" or "take an extra offering." Instead we held a biannual fundraising event. We also adjusted our name from Interfaith Build to Interfaith Volunteer Corps. We still do our best to raise the house sponsorship each year, but if we don't get that much the group still ... works one Sunday a month on a regular Habitat build. In this way, we have made all we do "interfaith."

—Habitat of the Chesapeake (Maryland)

RESOURCES

Peace by Piece: A Book of Abrahamic Readings (Contact Habitat of the Chesapeake for a copy.)

Peace by Piece: A Faith Resources Manual (Contact Habitat of the Chesapeake for a copy.)

Food and dietary specifications:

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcv2/bhcv2/pdf.nsf/ByPDF/Food_culture_and_religion/\\$File/Food_culture_and_religion.pdf](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcv2/bhcv2/pdf.nsf/ByPDF/Food_culture_and_religion/$File/Food_culture_and_religion.pdf)

nutrition.asetts.org.au/resources/Element-3-1-FactSheet-15.pdf

Advocacy:

Transitioning to the Bigger Picture - Build 'n' Learn presentation: This is good to use during a break on a build site to introduce the need for advocacy.

my2.habitat.org/download/g32414/Build-n-Learn-Presentation

A COMMON PROBLEM

Keeping people excited

The hardest part is to continually stay with the congregations to keep them engaged, energized and excited about the project. Lots of phone calls, meetings and engaging, hands-on activities spark interest.

—Blair Schleicher Bravo, *Morris Habitat* (New Jersey)

PART III ADVOCACY: TO CHANGE EVENTS, MINDS AND POLICIES FOR RESULTS

STEP 7: UNDERSTANDING ADVOCACY AND CREATING A STRATEGY

As the interfaith group is motivated to move beyond the Habitat build experience, it might want to name another planning team so that it can become effective in advocacy that truly changes the lives of the poor. This planning team should include the advocacy leaders of each Habitat affiliate or entity, along with representatives of each faith group involved. The team is to devise a process for the interfaith group to understand advocacy, create a strategy, and begin to implement the strategy. Perhaps the following will be helpful as the interfaith advocacy planning team prepares an agenda and timeline for the interfaith group.

Formulate a vision of what could be.

Developing a vision at the start of any advocacy work is very important, since it will help focus on a positive change, not just possible problems or difficulties. This process encourages people to think about a perfect organization, policies and world, whether this is a general vision for one state or a more specific one for a city or town. A vision of change provides an aim for what people are trying to do and helps maintain motivation.

Effective advocacy plans are guided by a clear vision of long-term change. A shared vision can guide the strategic choices advocates need to make. Before embarking on an advocacy mission, it's good to have interfaith group participants visualize and articulate their individual visions of change.

Theological sources or even a Habitat affiliate mission statement can provide inspiration for a vision of change. Group vision sharing is also an essential step in determining a group goal. Begin by having participants express their

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

Every faith has something that speaks to helping mankind. This is a common thread weaved throughout most religions. Most people want to be part of the solution once they see the problem. As the faith relations director, it's my job to show them the problem and how they can be part of the solution.

—Tracey McPherson, *Habitat of Omaha (Nebraska)*

ADVICE

Interfaith is an asset. An interfaith group has a unique position when advocating against poverty housing as both a faith-based and community group. Be sure to link to your interfaith roots when discussing your advocacy efforts and your motivation for getting involved. Many will be more receptive as a result.

Questions to help participants:

- What would your ideal community look like?
- What would you like your neighborhood or community to look like in five years?
- What kind of world would you like your children to live in?
- Toward what kind of world does your faith cause you to strive?



KIM MACDONALD



STEFFAN HACKER

“Whoever saves a life of one human being, it would be as if he saved the life of all mankind.”

—*Qur'an, Chapter 5, Verse 32*

visions to each other through drawing, writing or explanation. Take time to share these personal visions of change with the rest of the interfaith group to see what you have in common. From this orientation, the group can discuss repetitive themes or the elements that garner the most group support. Shared values will lead the way to the development of a group vision and an initiative around which advocacy goals to pursue.

Once a vision is developed for the community, the interfaith group must articulate what the present realities are. A firm understanding of actual progress and ideal progress will enable the creation of steps for action. Steps will plot how to get from here to there; these steps become advocacy goals.

Examine the facts about poverty housing in your community, along with what is being done to address poverty housing.

- Causes: Failed policies and practices? Environmental or cultural factors?
- Effects: Do these causes affect the families we serve? Which groups do they affect and how? How do they affect Habitat's ability to address housing poverty?

Understanding the issue

- A. What is the problem? Is it serious? Is it urgent?
- B. What are the effects of the problem? How does the problem affect the families we serve? Does it have a great effect on certain groups? If so, whom and how? Do you have enough information?
- C. What are the causes of the problem? What is the role of the policies and practices of the national government? What is the role of Habitat and other groups? What contribution is made by cultural and environmental factors? Are the families we serve able to participate in decision-making?
- D. What do we think needs to be done? What are our proposals? What are their advantages and disadvantages? Can we defend our position? Are our proposals realistic? How will we measure success? Do we have a clear plan about how change will come about?
- E. Who has the power to do something to bring about change? Government, NGOs, religious institutions, businesses, community leaders? Do you have access to them? Are they open to discussion? Do they agree they have responsibility for change? Are they able to do something?
- F. Who is trying to address the situation at the moment? Can we work with them? Is their activity effective? What may need to change? Are there people who are not yet addressing the issue but could be persuaded to help us?
- G. What risks are there in getting involved in advocacy? What have we done to reduce the risks? What are the risks if we do not try to address the issue using advocacy work? What assumptions have we made about the causes and effects of the problem, about those in power, and about our own abilities?
- H. What methods can you use? Are we confident in using them? Have they worked before? Are there alternatives? Do we have the skills and resources to use them well?

A COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

Advocacy is just another term for lobbying.

Advocacy encompasses more than just lobbying. Advocacy attempts to reach all parts of society. Advocacy often involves raising public awareness through education campaigns that tie directly to specific actions or "asks." Advocacy efforts can take many forms and look very different, but all advocacy initiatives have common steps. These initiatives include identifying a main issue, setting a goal, developing a message and planning advocacy tactics, and ongoing evaluation with the advocacy effort.

A COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

What constitutes advocacy?

Education or awareness-raising tactics that do not include a specific "ask" do not qualify as advocacy. Lobbying for political candidates or parties is not advocacy either. Neither informing the public about Habitat nor fundraising for Habitat projects counts as advocacy. However, these activities may be undertaken as part of a larger advocacy initiative that does include a specific "ask." So a meeting with a legislator solely to discuss the issue of homelessness would not constitute advocacy. But a meeting with a legislator that discusses homelessness and asks her to support a bill that would affect homelessness would be considered advocacy.

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

Habitat South Dakota used action alerts to get affiliates to write letters to local legislators and members of governmental committees in an effort to express Habitat South Dakota's support of lending legislation that would require mandatory training for licensed lenders. In addition to providing testimony to the House and Senate, the action alerts were extremely successful in helping Habitat South Dakota get a waiver for nonprofits so Habitat affiliates would not be harmed by the legislation's requirements.

Habitat of Ohio engaged in a successful advocacy campaign to get payday lending reform passed through the state Legislature in 2008. This campaign included testimony to the state Senate Finance Committee and mobilizing online advocates to urge their representative to support the legislation.

Habitat for Humanity York County (Pennsylvania) organized an event in which congressional Republicans and Democrats from the 19th District had the opportunity to help build Habitat homes with partner families and discuss the issue of affordable housing with Habitat York County. "Unity Build 2008" fostered strong ties between Habitat York County and congressional members and garnered a significant amount of attention from the media.



EZRA WILLSTEIN

- Gather many perspectives: Neighbors, officials, businesses, etc.
- Make a “problem tree”: This allows you to visually graph both the causes and effects of your issue.
- What is already being done to address housing poverty?
- What is being done by the government?
 - > Nationally
 - The Government Relations and Advocacy section of habitat.org can provide insight.
 - Monitor proposed federal legislation through Thomas, thomas.loc.gov.
 - > Locally
 - Search your state and local governments' websites.
 - What is being done by Habitat and other nongovernmental organizations, individuals and stakeholders?

Identify the leaders and decision-makers in government, business, religious groups, foundations, etc., who determine policy and control resources.

- Consider other nontraditional sources of influence and authority: the media, key constituencies, corporations, religious groups, labor unions, etc.
 - > Include and identify those opposed to your initiatives, as they can have a significant impact on your efforts.
- Who has the power to do something to bring about change?
 - > Government, NGOs, religious institutions, businesses, community leaders?
 - > Do you have access to them? Are they open to discussion?

Understand advocacy, and commit to it as an interfaith group.

What is advocacy?

Habitat defines advocacy as “changing systems, policies and attitudes to achieve decent housing for all.” Put another way, Habitat for Humanity’s advocacy is working to influence public opinion and decision-makers in all sectors to adopt policies and practices and transform systems that lead to the creation and preservation of housing for all, toward the goal of ending poverty worldwide. These sectors would include, but not be limited to, governments, individuals, religious communities, corporations and international financial institutions (HFHI, Advocacy Task Force Report, 2005).

Habitat for Humanity International’s advocacy efforts should not be seen as restricted to those policymakers who work for the government. Policymakers who work for the private sector may wield enormous influence over poor communities. Advocacy is used to influence the choices and actions of those who make laws and regulations, along with those who distribute resources and make other decisions that affect the well-being of many people.

As the interfaith group moves to become an established advocacy group, it is hoped that the power of God will be felt toward the goal of addressing specific needs. Thus, again, comes the need to move beyond “talking about” and on to “advocating for.”

STEP 8: A FAITHFUL COMMITMENT TO ADVOCACY

With the above homework accomplished, the interfaith advocacy group can make a critical decision with regard to whether the issue is one of local impact only, or one with greater impact on a national level. If it is the latter, supporting a national strategy advanced by Habitat for Humanity may be the most efficient way of succeeding. Should the advocacy effort target legislation or regulations? Should it target others besides government, such as corporations, religious institutions, universities? Is it possible to research what has or has not worked in the past? If so, blending this information into the blueprint will be of value.

First, the group must decide whom to target. It is recommended that advocates seek decision-makers with power in key positions or a special interest or history with the issue, and evaluate whether mutual contacts exist that would allow for a special connection with the actor. It is also valuable to research those who are relevant to the issue to learn what makes them tick. Some may respond to timely media coverage, while others may give more weight to views shared by constituents. Simply put: Know the audience.

Before acting, create a clear and compelling message that can be repeated often in all communication and education efforts. Consistency is key.

When considering a timeline and action plan, thought should be given to creating action opportunities that involve and empower staff members, grassroots supporters and homeowners. Hands-on advocacy training gives the families served tools to make their voices heard.

To be effective, the good interfaith advocate needs to have clearly identified the issue and should have at his or her fingertips the accompanying analysis of why the unresolved challenge is a problem, whom it hurts, what the social and economic costs are of either doing something or not doing anything, and what realistic solutions exist in the form of public policy that can be reduced to legislation.

Clearly define what you want to focus on improving, reforming, etc.

- Consider changes in laws and regulations that would help address poverty housing and Habitat’s ability to help.
- Consider partnering with others’ efforts to eliminate poverty housing. A legislature or another nonprofit might already be trying to address the issue.
- Consider helping HFHI’s national and international goals, which might already effectively address the concerns in your community.

ADVICE

Doubting your capacity to advocate? Don’t.

Instead of thinking about whether you can, think about how much time you can donate to it.

Don’t look for enemies. Find ways to view everyone as an ally. Choose real progress and results over confrontation. Nine times out of 10, you will get far better results meeting with elected officials face-to-face rather than picketing against them. Confrontations often turn potential allies against your cause. Remember, enemies today on one issue can be allies tomorrow on another issue. Save confrontational tactics for a last resort, only when there is no other way to get the attention of the officials you are targeting. Negative “name-and-shame” tactics are a strong way to get attention, but they can also drive away supporters.

Involve as many parties as you can. Use the government, corporations, labor unions, religious leaders, community associations, other nonprofits, individuals, nongovernmental organizations and anyone else you can in your effort.

Avoid jargon and acronyms. Speak to them in their language.

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

Habitat for Humanity NW Metro Atlanta (Georgia) worked extensively with Cobb County officials to ensure that zoning restrictions would not affect the proposed Habitat community in Mableton. By educating officials, bringing them to work sites, and providing concrete examples of what Habitat communities and homes looked like, they were able to achieve buy-in from county officials.

—Habitat NW Metro Atlanta

On sustainability

Just ask them for their continued support. We have an annual faith build each year now, and they all help with funding in some way.

—Kris Durham, Crystal Coast Habitat (North Carolina)

Have a Habitat representative keep contact among various groups.

—Larry Ramey, Tazewell County Habitat (Virginia)

ADVICE

Stakeholders are more likely to respond when they know many people are involved.

THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

Our Jewish partners are very active in speaking with legislators about giving us vacant lots to build. We have come to appreciate that ALL our partners of all faiths have much to bring to the Habitat table!

—*Habitat of the Chesapeake (Maryland)*

Determine ways to address the issue.

- What methods can you use? What has been successful before? Are there alternatives? Do you have the skills and resources to use them well?
- Think about how to bring the right people together. Create concrete steps.
- Set both long-term and short-term goals.
- Consider that there are both content goals (e.g., policy change) and process goals (e.g., building community among participants).
- Try to think beyond monetary changes and include practical policy changes.

It takes a village.

- Be sure to discuss that you are an interfaith group. It will show that you respect diversity and want to include others.
- Create an action plan that is developed and supported by many people in the community, not just a few leaders.
- Diversity helps. Invite and encourage people from disadvantaged groups to participate in your public policy work. Multiple perspectives will strengthen the process and the outcomes.
- Research groups or coalitions of nonprofits that align with your issue, and find out how you can join them.
- Include the community:
 - > Conduct community outreach or informal surveys door-to-door to ensure that all residents know about your initiative and have an opportunity to give input.
 - > Be sure to include Habitat partner families and enable them to become decision-makers both in this process and in the global initiatives.
 - > Encourage residents to have an active voice and participate in addressing their community's issues.
 - > Determine problems and other areas of concern that are important to community residents. Ask a lot of questions in order to draw out the issues.

What do we need to develop?

Since you've already identified what relationships and resources are in place, after identifying your goals and action plan, it should be easy to see what you need to develop (alliances, media materials, research, etc.) in order to achieve those goals.

Prepare.

Create a half-page information sheet about your local Habitat affiliate and your interfaith advocacy group. Include your mission, work and advocacy agenda. Your packet will serve as a helpful informational tool for many audiences.

How does an issue evolve into a strategic advocacy plan?

Once the interfaith group has determined whether a selected issue is best addressed locally, regionally or nationally, a more structured plan should be developed. To plan appropriate activities, it is necessary to first identify goals, objectives and tactics.

A *goal* is the long-term result you are seeking—the change you want to achieve through advocacy. An *objective* is a short-term target that contributes to achieving the long-term goal; objectives describe the “outcome” or result of activities. *Tactics* are specific actions, strategies or activities needed to achieve the objectives. Ideally, these tactics are multidimensional and relate to changes in policy, decision-making structures, coalition building and public awareness on the issue. Tactics are continually refined as political factors change.

Our interfaith advocacy goal: _____

Our interfaith advocacy objectives:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Our interfaith advocacy tactics:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

After the interfaith group has defined goals, objectives and tactics for an advocacy initiative, it’s a good idea to consider the forces, interests and risks. This step allows assessment of goals and tactics in relation to potential targets, allies, opponents and constituents for the defined advocacy initiative.

Regular reflection periods should be incorporated into the process. This ensures sharing, evaluation, flexibility and, most of all, times for God to continue to lead the group.

Perseverance is the key to successful advocacy. The advantage of an interfaith advocacy group is that the group members are motivated by their faith in God. A common thread of the monotheistic faiths (and many others) is the call to a lifelong commitment toward ending poverty in the world. Joined by the conviction of the importance of decent shelter for all, interfaith groups commit to the “long haul” and thereby experience the joy and satisfaction of faithful obedience. So let it be!

RESOURCES

Habitat resources (all available on My.Habitat)

Advocacy Toolkit, first edition:

(The second edition became available in fall 2010)

Page 9: *Table on what nonprofits can advocate for*

Page 14-19: *How to engage a member of Congress*

Page 21: *Fast facts on housing poverty*

Page 23-27: *State and local advocacy*

Page 51: *Lobbying advice*

Page 75-83: *Advocacy 101*

Page 85-86: *Strategy planning for advocacy campaigns*

Page 90: *Basic principles for message development*

Page 92-93: *Tips for statehouse lobbying*

Page 94-101: *Advocacy advice*

[HFHI Advocacy Task Force Report, 2005](#)

Habitat's Government Relations and Advocacy office: habitat.org/gov/default.aspx?r=r

Advocacy 101: Facilitator's guide

Advocacy 101: Training presentation

HFHI PowerPoint on housing poverty: Use Slides 19-44 as a presentation to your group

my2.habitat.org/download/90254/Advocacy-and-Communications--Chris-Clarke

Non-Habitat resources

House of Representatives: www.house.gov

U.S. Senate: www.senate.gov

Find legislation: thomas.loc.gov

How federal laws are made: thomas.loc.gov/home/lawsmade.toc.html

How federal laws are enacted: thomas.loc.gov/home/enactment/enactlawtoc.html

National Association of State Budget Officers: nasbo.org/Publications/BudgetProcessintheStates/tabid/80/Default.aspx

Find state and local representatives: www.votesmart.org/index.htm

Locate your state association of nonprofits: www.ncna.org/

Identify a national organization with related public policy goals: www.independentsector.org/

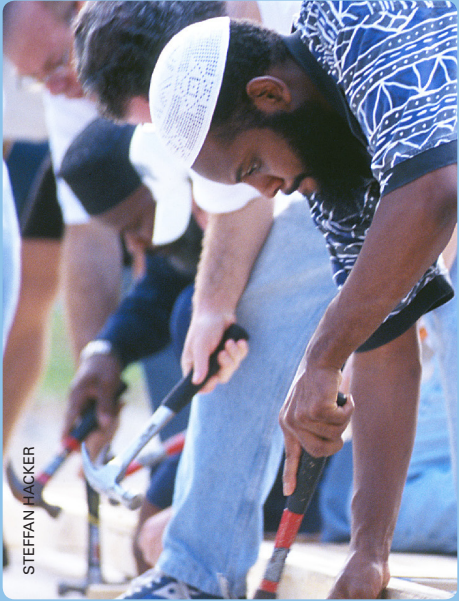
Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest: www.clpi.org/

U.S. Conference of Mayors: www.usmayors.org/

National League of Cities: www.nlc.org/

City and county governments: www.statelocalgov.net/

For questions about HFHI's advocacy efforts, e-mail buildlouder@habitat.org.



“I command you to be open-handed towards your brothers and towards the poor and needy in the land.”

—*Deuteronomy 15:11*

Conclusion

This interfaith toolkit is part of Habitat for Humanity International's ongoing commitment to helping all people of faith join together to provide decent housing for all and end poverty in the world. Ongoing advocacy by interfaith communities is crucial. In 2005, Habitat for Humanity International's board of directors unanimously approved comprehensive advocacy policies and principles. It was recognized that "Habitat needs to be a leader in global efforts to mobilize governments, churches, faith-based groups, the corporate sector, organizations and individuals to help people everywhere obtain decent, affordable shelter." (Advocacy Management Team Report and Recommendations, Oct. 25, 2005, Page 14)

In the context of the board's action, HFHI developed a key strategic initiative for advocacy. Parallel to the advocacy implementation, Habitat for Humanity International led an interfaith process that unanimously confirmed the fact that the major monotheistic religions—Islam, Judaism and Christianity—and many others are clearly called to work to end poverty in the world, and have traditions that make shelter central to that. Faiths joining together not only are more effective in responding to God's highest call to action as their mission, but also, in working together, they provide a witness to the world of God's call to serve the poor. Thus, Habitat for Humanity International is committed to interfaith advocacy efforts through which God's call is answered.

It is our hope that you find this toolkit to be a useful guide as you launch or expand your interfaith initiative, and that whatever stage you're at in the process, you will be inspired to use the power of interfaith advocacy to ultimately transform the systems, attitudes, policies and behaviors that are at the root of poverty housing.

This toolkit is a work in progress, and HFHI's Government Relations and Advocacy office, which has been tasked with implementing the HFHI board's comprehensive advocacy vision, wants to hear from you. E-mail buildlouder@habitat.org to share the ways in which it can be strengthened.

Please let us know what we can do to help you on this journey or to tell us how, through interfaith advocacy, your activities and efforts are changing lives.

Tom Jones

HFHI Interfaith Point Person

Jan. 1, 2011



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