



# Interfaith

STRETCHING FURTHER FOR IMPACT  
NORTH AMERICA EDITION



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## FOREWORD

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

*—Deuteronomy, Chapter 15:11*

Several years ago, when Nic Retsinas, then director of Harvard University’s Joint Center for Housing Studies, became chair of the board of directors of Habitat for Humanity International, he and I agreed that we wanted to promote greater interfaith involvement with our ministry. We asked Tom Jones from our staff to guide us as we explored this process.

A daylong forum in December 2006 at the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University strengthened this desire to reach out to people of all faiths. The forum was framed in the context of the U.N. Millennium Development Goals for eliminating poverty. Habitat for Humanity focused on the importance of decent housing for all as a core strategy in meeting the goals.

Interviews with a number of different faith leaders confirmed the notion that the three largest monotheistic religions—Islam, Judaism and Christianity—and 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.

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 Habitat to help the world 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 local communities worldwide to focus on adequate shelter in efforts to end poverty.

As Habitat encouraged its entities to develop interfaith communities, it became apparent that a practical resource offering specific guidance would be vital. We designed a survey and distributed it globally to all Habitat entities that could be identified as having interfaith experiences. This tool kit was developed as a result of that survey and many other helpful sources.

A generous grant from the Argosy Foundation provided funding for a one- year pilot program to test the tool kit with Habitat affiliates in six areas (Atlanta, Georgia; Kent County, Michigan; New York City, New York; Denver, Colorado; Seattle, Washington; and Los Angeles, California.) The results of the pilot project are included in this revised and updated tool kit.

I hope this resource will provide helpful tools to encourage local interfaith groups to expand and become ongoing 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 tool kit is designed to encourage local community interfaith groups to become sustainable parts of Habitat structures; to advocate that governments, religious groups, nongovernmental agencies, corporations, labor groups, foundations and individuals develop the will to make changes; and to seek to end poverty by providing adequate shelter for all people.

Responding to God's call to care for those in need inspired Habitat for Humanity's mission vision of "a world where everyone has a decent place to live." We believe that we can best follow the example of Jesus by reaching out to those in need of adequate and affordable shelter. I am grateful that other faiths are clearly called to the same acts of compassion. 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 tool kit 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 to share with others as we move closer to a world without poverty!

Blessings,



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

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“May I become at all times, both now and forever, a protector for those without protection, ... a sanctuary for those in danger, ... a place of refuge for those who lack shelter, and a servant to all in need.”

—*Shantideva's prayer, p. 26*



## WHY AN INTERFAITH ADVOCACY TOOLKIT?

The 2006 Interfaith Forum unanimously affirmed the call to end poverty that is shared by the world's religions, along with the conviction that decent housing for all is critical to achieving that goal. The result was a commitment to mobilizing interfaith groups around the world in answer to God's call. This interfaith tool kit is an effort to provide practical guidance in interfaith collaboration that furthers Habitat for Humanity's mission.

This is an *interfaith* effort because it involves two or more distinct religions doing mission work together and acknowledges, rather than ignores, the real differences between them. It values mutual understanding in pursuit of shared goals.

Drawing from best practices, our experiences, and interfaith scholarship, Habitat has developed six steps for bringing people of diverse religions together to build homes, communities and hope:



### A COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

#### What interfaith cooperation is not:

Interfaith does not mean different denominations or branches of the same religion, such as Protestant and Catholic. Habitat's *ecumenical* work brings various Christian groups together. *Interfaith* involves two or more different religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, etc. Though used less frequently, *multifaith* is another term used to describe similar work.

### STRETCHING FURTHER

"Massive need forces us to reach higher and stretch further."

—Jonathan T. M. Reckford,  
CEO, HFHI, in "Why We Build: Christian  
Foundations of Habitat," from Habitat's 2013  
Affiliate Conference

### REACHING OUT

"Dear God, cause us to reach out, to reconnect, to focus, not on *differences*, but on what we have *in common* with others, toward playing a role in making Your uniting love work throughout the world."

—Tom Jones,  
from "Power Behind the Hammer: Habitat for  
Humanity's Senior Leadership Team at Prayer"

### THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

"For our affiliate, involvement in the Interfaith Pilot Project created partnerships with new faith groups and rejuvenated relationships with other faith partners, including a board member's Catholic congregation."

—Mary Martin,  
Habitat for Humanity Seattle-King County

1. Recruiting participants for an Interfaith Council.
2. Holding an exploratory meeting.
3. Organizing an Interfaith Council.
4. Identifying possible ways to put faith into action.
5. Reflecting how faiths can work together for greater impact.
6. Making interfaith work sustainable.

It has become clear that these six steps divide naturally into three parts:

#### Part I. Developing an interfaith community

The first part of this tool kit describes how to identify and recruit interfaith participants, gather an Interfaith Council, foster mutual understanding, and establish trust and respect as the foundation for fulfilling our cooperative mission.

#### Part II. Expressing faith in action

In service to the mission, the Interfaith Council must go well beyond dialogue to putting faith into action. Accordingly, the second part of the tool kit describes how interfaith leaders can put faith in action through:

- A Habitat build.
- Advocacy for affordable housing.
- Neighborhood Revitalization Initiatives.
- ReStores.
- Resource development.
- Global Village trips.
- Community events focusing on poverty awareness.
- Habitat youth organizations.
- Disaster response.
- Communications and the media.
- Organizing to change hearts and minds.
- Volunteerism.
- Other Habitat-related activities.

Furthermore, regular planned reflection is vital as a part of the action plans.

#### Part III. Committing to faiths working together for sustained impact

The third part of the tool kit is designed to aid affiliates and other entities to organize their governance for sustained mission together. We live in a



diversely religious North America that has come to reflect the varied religious populations around our world. Our long-term desire is to see Habitat for Humanity become a world leader in bringing people of diverse religions together to overcome poverty, with housing as a core issue.

### The Interfaith Pilot Project 2012–13

Beginning in July 2012, six affiliates participated in an interfaith pilot project using a previous draft of this tool kit. However, interfaith experiences in Habitat's work began well before 2012. Throughout the margins of this tool kit, you will find stories, quotes and advice from affiliates, national organizations and other Habitat entities, who for years now have been involving people of diversely religious backgrounds in Habitat's mission.

Funded by a generous grant from the Argosy Foundation, this pilot project was designed to test the interfaith tool kit, observe challenges to interfaith sustainability and replication, and formulate recommendations for meeting those challenges and involving more affiliates in ongoing interfaith missions. Over 13 months, the six pilot affiliates recruited Interfaith Council members from their communities, built homes with interfaith volunteers, and mobilized their communities to advocate for affordable housing.

This revision of the tool kit reflects the findings of the Argosy Interfaith Pilot Project.

## How to use this book

This tool kit is organized into three parts:

- Developing an interfaith community.
- Expressing faith in action.
- Committing to sustainability.

### Lessons learned and warnings

Throughout the margins of this tool kit, you will find stories, quotes and advice from Habitat's interfaith involvements. Stories and quotes are in the orange sections, and advice is in green. The red sections are warnings. They include common mistakes, misunderstandings, and tricky situations interfaith groups have encountered.

### Resource section

At the end of each part is a section labeled "Resources." It provides links to information, websites, people, activities, etc., that may be useful.

### INTERFAITH PILOT PROJECT 2012-13

#### HFHI Management Team:

Sue Henderson (U.S. affiliates), Jose Quinonez (advocacy), Mary Ellen Taylor (learning and organizational development), John Snook (government relations), Tom Jones (chair, Office of the CEO), Jonathan Good (faith engagement)

#### Habitat National Interfaith Advisory Group:

Michael Livingston (National Council of Churches), Doug Murrell (HFHI Faith Engagement), Josh Protas (Jewish Council for Public Affairs), Sayyid Syeed (Islamic Society of North America)

#### The Interfaith Pilot Project Team:

HFH Atlanta—Andrew Johnson

HFH Greater Los Angeles—Chris Untiet

HFH of Metro Denver—Margaret Bell and Andrew Castillo (AmeriCorps VISTA)

HFH New York City—Matt Dunbar and Andrew Wilkes

HFH of Seattle/King County—Shauna Metschke, Mary Martin, and Kevin Hunter

HFH Kent County—Mark Ogland-Hand

Project Support—Jessica Cheman (AmeriCorps VISTA)

World Faiths Development Dialogue at Georgetown University—Michael Bodakowski and Claudia Zambra

Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University—Lauren Whitehead

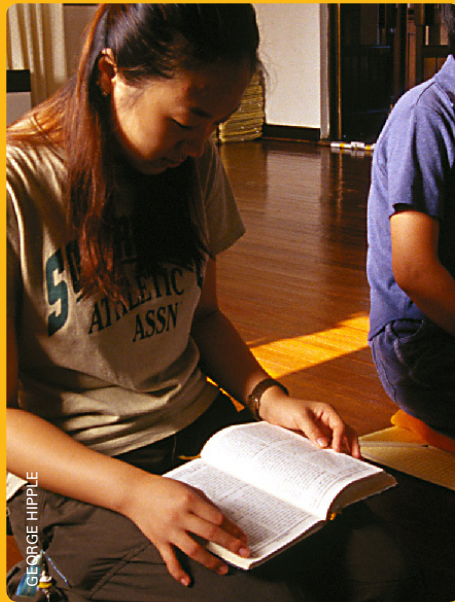
Harvard Divinity School—Grant Wadley

### THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

"If the Interfaith Tool Kit can work in Kent County, it should be able to work in most midsize cities."

—Mark Ogland-Hand,  
*Habitat for Humanity Kent County (Michigan)*

Many of the pilot affiliates stressed that flexibility in the order of executing the first six steps of interfaith cooperation allowed them to employ their human and financial assets most efficiently.



“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*

## PART I: DEVELOPING AN INTERFAITH COMMUNITY

### STEP 1: GATHERING AN INTERFAITH COMMUNITY

The first step in getting faiths working together is to bring together the participants. These are the lay leaders and clergy 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 initiative both effective and sustainable. Part of the strength of interfaith work is the sensitivity, acceptance and respect participants foster. Understanding and appreciating differences between people, whether religious, ethnic, cultural or economic, is crucial for authentic interfaith collaboration.

Before beginning recruitment, it is important to identify faith communities in the area. Is there a history of cooperative interaction or conflict among these communities? Are stereotypes of certain religions prevalent in the region? Familiarize yourself with the history of your community's religious diversity, and of present realities.

Next, develop a wish list of participants. If this proves difficult, there may be community organizations that are already facilitating interfaith dialogue or cooperation in your area. Capitalize on these groups of interfaith leaders already in place, building on existing structures, programs and initiatives. Interfaith organizations can help you identify faith leaders, and most will be happy to help. As you are able, attend and volunteer for cultural events and service projects organized by interfaith groups and local congregations. By investing in relationships with key individuals in these organizations, you might be able to identify clergy and laypeople from the faith communities who are favorable toward interfaith collaboration. Attempt to develop a relationship with a single contact person at each of the prospective faith partners and create a presence in community interfaith circles.

### THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

"One thing that our affiliate wants to do is reflect the city that we're working in. To have as many of the faiths represented as possible is one way to do that. The interfaith initiative ties in with our mission so strongly that I think it will always be a part of our work."

—Andrew Johnson,  
Atlanta Habitat for Humanity (Georgia)

"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."

—Sarah Botzek,  
Rochester Area Habitat (Minnesota)

"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 emails and networked through contacts that churches had established."

—Brendalyn Shird,  
Greater Des Moines Habitat (Iowa)

### ADVICE

Consistent with Habitat's mission of building communities and hope, the initial emphasis in interfaith cooperation should be on relationships rather than on a future interfaith builds or advocacy for housing policies. From the experience of several affiliates, most of those who contributed to interfaith cooperation have done so because of a personal connection with a Habitat staff member or another volunteer.

### ADVICE

The Interfaith Youth Core has found that "involving congregational leaders" from various age groups and levels of influence "is crucial to building a sustainable relationship with a community," and holding meetings at their place of worship "indicates a desire on our part to get to know them in the context of their religious lives."

—Eboo Patel and Mariah Neuroth,  
"The Interfaith Youth Core: Building Chicago as a Model Interfaith Youth City"

## THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

"We asked volunteers to host the (interfaith) meetings at their places of worship. This gave everyone a glimpse into the physical space (of the different religions). Most found it fascinating."

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

"The intentionality of getting senior clergy buy-in from whatever faith tradition we were aiming for was really critical, and we were able to succeed and feel great about that."

—Margaret Bell,  
*Habitat of Metro Denver (Colorado)*

"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)

In developing sustained relationships with religious leaders and their congregations, do not underestimate the importance of face-to-face meetings. In spite of dazzling technology, old-fashioned face-to-face meetings build more trust than conference calls, and research shows that face-to-face meetings are strongly related to future attendance for discussion or action. Whatever motivations to combat poverty and substandard housing that volunteers and religious leaders might have, the value of interpersonal relationships to the participants should not be underestimated.

## STEP 2: AN EXPLORATORY MEETING

The next step is an exploratory meeting hosted by the Habitat affiliate. The Habitat interfaith organizer (a staff member or volunteer) might invite a leader from each religious tradition to help plan the exploratory meeting. A separate, non-Habitat representative of the Christian faith should be recruited. Throughout the interfaith dialogue, it is important that Habitat leaders be present as Habitat housing contacts, not as the designated representative of the Christian faith. Letting another Christian assume that responsibility does not diminish Habitat's Christian identity. Rather, it allows the Christian faith to be equally represented at the table and lets Habitat leaders focus on the roles of organizers, mediators and housing experts. And just as Habitat's Christian identity is not diminished by working with other faiths, so other faiths remain true to their own teachings and mission while working with Habitat.

The planning team might establish some principles for the entire interfaith process. These principles could include commitments to:

- A safe space for sharing and listening to one another as equals.
- A willingness to understand one another without trying to compete or debate the truth of others' beliefs.
- A willingness to explore, understand and accept—rather than ignore—differences.
- An environment that offers the freedom to express beliefs without a requirement to express them.
- An openness to clarification (e.g., "Could you say more about that?" or "If I understand correctly, you said...").
- A focus on ending poverty housing, not making converts (proselytizing).

To the extent possible, try to organize an exploratory meeting that reflects the religious and racial diversity of your community. Interfaith organizations in your area are likely to have information on the faith composition of your community. If you cannot estimate the percentages of each religious tradition, try to have equal representation from the largest three religious groups



in your area. Encourage the faith leaders you have identified to recruit others from their congregations, both male and female, to attend in order to establish an interfaith meeting that is representative of the community. This will pay dividends down the road, as you might find that congregation members who are interested in organizing an interfaith build are not the same people who want to sit on the Interfaith Council.

A tentative agenda for an exploratory meeting might include:

- An icebreaker activity that encourages attendees to meet and begin getting to know each other.
- A short presentation of reasons for gathering, including the common commitments of the represented religions to serving the poor (see example questions below).
- An introduction to Habitat for Humanity, including the background of this interfaith initiative (see the foreword), a brief history of Habitat, and goals for faiths working together to build homes, communities and hope (see page 6, “Why an interfaith tool kit?”).
- A discussion of the principles agreed to by the planning team.
- Assembling the Interfaith Council and subcommittees (see paragraphs below).
- An agreement on next steps, including the time and place for the next meeting.

Questions such as the following will help frame interfaith discussions for the exploratory meeting and also for meetings of the Interfaith Council and subcommittees:

- What experiences have brought you to this dialogue table?
- How does your religion encourage service to the poor?
- Who are the role models in your tradition who exemplify service to the poor?
- Who has been influential on the faith journey that led you to this table?
- What from your scriptures informs your views on poverty?

Consider forming an Interfaith Council. Some specifics for this are found in Part III (page 43 ). Recruitment for the Interfaith Council should aim for a variety of skills, perspectives and religious traditions. All interested parties should understand that the work of the Interfaith Council involves a commitment to dialogue and mutual understanding as well as to construction, advocacy and other efforts to eliminate poverty. It is not necessary that all council members be clergy, but it is important that the recruitment list include people

## A COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

### Habitat for Humanity's nonproselytizing policy

In the context of interfaith cooperation, Habitat's nonproselytizing policy means that Habitat will neither seek nor require conversion to the Christian faith as a condition of benefiting, partnering or becoming involved in our ministry. It is important to remember that proselytizing is not the same as talking about faith. It is still perfectly acceptable to talk about one's religious faith on the build site. But it's important that these conversations be done with sensitivity and with no appearance of coercion. For more information, please refer to the “Non-Proselytizing Policy” on [My.Habitat.org](http://My.Habitat.org).

## ADVICE

### Working with 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. Partnering with an existing group may ease the process of assembling an Interfaith Council but will also mean adapting to the existing group's policies, goals and history.

At the exploratory meetings for interfaith cooperation, we suggest having a diverse group of volunteers operating the sign-in table, as this encourages meaningful interfaith interactions.

## THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

“Finding people of the faith (laypersons) that are willing to play that leadership role is just as important as finding a faith leader.”

—Andrew Johnson,  
Atlanta Habitat

from all faiths represented in the community, as much as possible. Once the core leadership and interfaith supporters are identified, the focus can turn to developing relationships, building trust, and determining goals and plans.

No one who will support the interfaith mission should be discouraged from contributing to the interfaith initiative. In addition to the Interfaith Council, we recommend establishing diverse subcommittees of three to five members who will report their discussions and efforts to the council. It is important that there be ongoing discussion of shelter and poverty from the different religious perspectives. Studies of community organizing efforts have shown that this improves volunteer retention over time (see page 37).

A deliberate and thoughtful process for encouraging unity in diversity is vital.

### STEP 3: BUILDING AN INTERFAITH COUNCIL UPON UNDERSTANDING, RESPECT AND A COMMON CAUSE

Within a month after the exploratory meeting, the members of the Interfaith Council and the affiliate interfaith manager should meet to discuss the call to end poverty in each religion represented, with housing as a core issue, and to plan activities for working together. The hope is that a fruitful discussion will result in enthusiasm for the Interfaith Council to organize a Habitat build, advocacy activity, or the activity that puts faith into action.

Dialogue around the issues of poverty and shelter will reveal common goals and provide inspiration for action. All religions agree that much is wrong with the world. How is the lack of adequate housing an expression of that problem? Caring for the poor is a common theme in most religious texts. Encourage the newly formed council to spend some time examining sacred texts from their traditions that focus on shelter and concern for the poor.

Research continues to confirm the importance of decent shelter to overcoming poverty. Of course, there are many interrelated issues to be solved if poverty is to be eliminated, including health, education, economic development, sanitation, etc. At the end of the day, however, the lack of decent shelter undermines the resolution of these other problems. My.Habitat, available to Habitat affiliates, provides a wealth of resources on the importance of shelter, including suggested books, articles, statistics, reports and manuals. Go to [my.habitat.org/kc/faith-engagement](http://my.habitat.org/kc/faith-engagement).

Successful interfaith collaboration creates a story of inclusion, of unity in diversity. In partnering with other faiths, effective interfaith leaders model an enthusiasm for mutual understanding as they offer their faith partners an opportunity to put faith into action. The shared values that emerge from efforts to understand the various faiths and cultures will build mutual respect and trust. In telling a story of inclusion, the interfaith organizer should frame the end of poverty housing as a vision that will require partnerships across the community's diverse religious congregations.

#### THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

"Our Interfaith Council was very successful in planning interfaith events."

—Matt Dunbar,  
Habitat New York City

"The relationships that were built and the understanding of different faiths were richer this year than it has been in the past because the committee was empowered to make more decisions. It turned out to be a lot better."

—Andrew Johnson,  
Atlanta Habitat



As the Interfaith Council unites around decent shelter for the poor as a common goal, emphasis should be made on faith in action that goes beyond dialogue. These meetings are opportunities to brainstorm ideas for recruitment, retention and congregational engagement and to identify resources available to meet shared objectives. The Habitat mission and program offer the assembled religious leaders an opportunity to involve their constituents in a cooperative demonstration of compassion for the poor.

## 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"

Fuller, Millard. "The Theology of the Hammer"

Fuller, Millard. "The Excitement is Building"

### **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"

Corbett, Steve and Brian Fikkert. "When Helping Hurts"

Donaldson, Dave. "The Compassion Revolution"

Haugen, Gary. "Good News About Injustice"

Lewis, C.S. "Mere Christianity"

Little, Paul. "Know Why You Believe"

Lupton, Robert. "Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help"

McLaren, Brian. "Why did Jesus, Moses, the Buddha, and Muhammad Cross the Road?"

Ryrie, Charles. "A Survey of Bible Doctrine"

Sachs, Jeffrey. "The End of Poverty"

Stearns, Richard. "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"

Shah-Kazemi, Reza, ed. "My Mercy Encompasses All: The Koran's Teachings on Compassion, Peace and Love"

### **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"

### **Other resources**

[www.beliefnet.com](http://www.beliefnet.com)

Online Qur'an: <http://al-quran.info>

Harvard Pluralism Project:  
[www.pluralism.org/resources/](http://www.pluralism.org/resources/)



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

—James 2:17

## PART II: FAITH IN ACTION

Getting faiths working together can take a variety of forms. It is important to work with faith partners where they are, not where we would like them to be—to create opportunities for people to serve from their areas of strength. Our interfaith experience thus far is that some faith partners desire to build, others want to advocate for affordable housing, some want to raise awareness, and still others focus on developing interfaith resources. Other opportunities for interfaith collaboration include the Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative, ReStores, Global Village trips, disaster response, volunteerism, learning experiences, media/communications, etc. The success of faiths working together should not be measured only in buildings.

### STEP 4: IDENTIFY WAYS TO PUT FAITHS INTO ACTION

#### A. Faiths in Action: An interfaith Habitat build

When the established interfaith community decides to do an interfaith build, renovation or major repair, it is important that the Habitat affiliate form a steering committee (distinct from the Interfaith Council) 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. (These representatives may already be members of your Interfaith Council.) 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 Faiths in Action build.

When organizing an interfaith build, the agenda items for a planning meeting could include:

1. An overview of the Habitat building process provided by Habitat's representative to the council. Topics could include family selection, land acquisition, funding, sweat equity, use of volunteers, etc.
2. Identification of factors unique to an interfaith build. Affiliate experiences to date indicate that the following are helpful:

#### THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

"In the past, we had done a devotion or prayer in the morning and one at lunch. This year they (the faith partners) wanted to add some sharing about their congregations, their faith and why they were there (to build)—a brief history of their faiths as well as the prayer parts. That turned into a really neat part of the build."

—Andrew Johnson,  
Atlanta Habitat

"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)

In the Habitat experience, Sunday is the day most likely to attract a large number of interfaith volunteers. When conducting builds on Sundays, however, be mindful of your community's noise restrictions.

- o Establishing an intention that volunteers from at least two of the participating religions be involved in every build day.
- o Inviting the faith leaders represented to begin the workday with a prayer or a brief introduction to their religious practices and beliefs. This can encourage curiosity and dialogue. The religious groups could also be invited to answer one or more of the questions listed on page 15 of Part I.
- o Planning build days, meetings and events around the holy days, days of rest, worship schedules and prayer practices of the participating faith partners. The following are examples, but the representatives of each religious group on the Interfaith Council should be helpful in identifying practices and customs for which there should be sensitivity:

*Worship, prayer services and sacred spaces:*

- ≈ While the word “church” does not apply to non-Christian places of prayer and worship, the word “congregation” is suitable to use with any faith partner.
- ≈ **Judaism:** *Shabbat*, the day of rest, is observed from sundown Friday until sundown Saturday. Many Jews meet in a *synagogue*, though Reform Jews will generally meet in a temple.
- ≈ **Islam:** Friday prayers, *salat*, are observed in the afternoon, generally at the local mosque.
- ≈ **Christianity:** Services are generally observed on Sundays. Seventh Day Adventists hold services on Saturdays. Some churches have additional services on Wednesdays or Saturdays.
- ≈ **Hinduism:** Services take place at various times throughout the week. Check with your local temple or community center.
- ≈ **Buddhism:** Services take place at various times throughout the week. Check with your local temple or community center.

*Individual prayers*

- ≈ **Judaism:** Some will pause for prayer three times per day.
- ≈ **Islam:** Many will pause for prayer five times per day.
- ≈ Many religions will say a blessing before a meal. Your affiliate might want to involve each tradition represented in blessing the meal.

*Holy days*

- ≈ **Judaism:** The “high holy days” are Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, which occur in September or October. However, there are many other holidays throughout the year.

## THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

Habitat of East King County (Washington) found it easy to accommodate the Muslim prayer practices. By structuring short breaks at intervals, the affiliate created opportunities for Muslim workers to pray and for the diverse volunteers to interact.

“We have two coalitions consisting of synagogues, Protestant congregations and Catholic churches that build one home annually with HFH MD. 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, 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 (Friday) activity is over by the Sabbath (sundown).”

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

- ≈ **Islam:** Ramadan is a monthlong commemoration of the Prophet Muhammad's receipt of the Quran. Most Muslim volunteers will fast from both food and water during the daylight hours of this month, the timing of which varies from year to year.

*Dietary restrictions:* It is important to honor the dietary laws and practices of each religious group.

- ≈ **Judaism:** Many do not eat pork or shellfish. Some eat only *kosher* (acceptable) foods and will not consume dairy and meat at the same time. Jewish partners might be happy to provide kosher foods for the workday.
  - ≈ **Islam:** Most do not eat pork or drink alcohol. Muslim partners might be happy to provide *halal* (permissible) foods for the workday.
  - ≈ **Hinduism:** May be vegetarian and avoid alcohol, onions and garlic.
  - ≈ **Buddhism:** May be vegetarian.
3. Fundraising options to sponsor the interfaith build and brainstorming of potential donors, including individuals, businesses, foundations and religious congregations.
  4. Strategies for involving participants from each of the Interfaith Council's religious traditions in action that goes beyond dialogue.

Successful interfaith activity combines respect for subgroup identities (Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, etc.) with goals for the common good (affordable housing, mutual understanding, etc.). In conducting interfaith builds, avoid placing the identity of the day's work or build group above the religious identities that are represented that day—in interfaith work, putting “the team” above the individual participants can frustrate the outcome. The trick is to emphasize the common cause while acknowledging the diversity of those who share it.

“Seeding” conversations among the diverse groups on build days is an important strategy for minimizing the risk of conflict that could jeopardize the success of your interfaith collaboration. It might be helpful to allow the various religious groups present to make a brief introduction to their practices and beliefs before the workday to pique curiosity and encourage constructive dialogue. The represented groups could also be invited to answer one or more of the questions listed in the recruitment section (on page 15 ). These questions should be provided to the faith leaders before the interfaith build so that their volunteers can prepare answers in advance. In general, the focus should be on relationships that facilitate faith in action, and participants should be encouraged to discuss how their very different traditions lead them into a shared commitment to serve the poor.<sup>1</sup>

## THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

“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!”

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

## ADVICE

### 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 the assumptions behind it) will make it easier to get at the heart of the matter without implying criticism or judgment.

<sup>1</sup> See Stephen R. Prothero, “God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World, and Why Their Differences Matter” (New York, N.Y.: HarperOne, 2010), 336.



## ADVICE

### Interfaith conversations

“Seeding” interfaith conversations in the build and advocacy experiences helps connect each faith to Habitat’s mission. Questions that might encourage constructive dialogue include:

- What scriptures and conversations came up?
- How are our religious traditions relevant to the work done?
- Has anything changed about the way you experience your own faith because of today’s work?
- Why is interfaith cooperation important to Habitat’s mission?
- Who or what could be added to this effort to improve it?

## THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

“(We) commissioned a local university graphics design class to design our logo (for interfaith cooperation). We had 54 to choose from! Now we have our own logo for shirts, books, materials and signs.”

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



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

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

## A COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

### What advocacy is and is not.

Education and awareness-raising tactics without a specific “ask” (a request for action) 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 shelter access would not constitute advocacy. But a meeting with a legislator that discusses shelter access and asks her to support a bill that would increase access to shelter *would* be advocacy.

Hosting a visual arts contest on an interfaith workday is one strategy for seeding discussions that is also a powerful recruitment tool. Affiliates of the global warming response organization Interfaith Power & Light have employed this strategy with tremendous success. In this model, participants are invited to create and bring artwork to the build site that expresses their own faith-based response to poverty and substandard housing. The artwork can be displayed before the interfaith build with an opportunity for the artists to explain the relationship between their faith traditions and the piece they have created. Over the course of the workday, these works of art serve as conversation starters for volunteers and seed constructive dialogue that serves mutual understanding, appreciation and informal interaction. Volunteers would have the opportunity, at their leisure, to vote for their favorite piece. A large whiteboard could also be made available during the workday for volunteers to express ideas from their faith traditions that encouraged their participation in the interfaith build, and photographs of this board could be used for an affiliate’s advocacy initiatives. Art contests have been very useful to Interfaith Power & Light in mobilizing volunteers and facilitating constructive dialogue.

### B. Faiths in Action: Advocacy

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

Advocacy means more than lobbying, because it attempts to reach all parts of society. Habitat’s advocacy efforts should not be limited 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 wellbeing of many people.

Advocacy means efforts to change minds and policies for more just results. It 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 steps include identifying an issue, setting a goal, developing a message, planning advocacy tactics, and regularly evaluating the advocacy effort.



## Organizing an advocacy planning team

If your interfaith community is divided between those who want to build and those who would rather advocate, the Interfaith Council might want to designate a second planning team to devote its time to effective advocacy that advances access to adequate, affordable housing. Naturally, this planning team should bring together representatives from Habitat with diverse representatives from the community's congregations. The planning team is tasked with establishing a process for the interfaith community to understand advocacy, creating a strategy for increasing access to shelter, and beginning to implement that strategy.

We hope that the following will be helpful as the planning team prepares an agenda and timeline for an interfaith advocacy coalition.

### Formulate a vision of what could be

Before you engage in advocacy efforts, we recommend having the interfaith coalition visualize and articulate their individual visions of change. Formulating a vision for cooperative advocacy is a crucial first step, since this vision will help focus the efforts on improvements, not just problems or difficulties. Effective advocacy plans are guided by a clear and shared vision of long-term change that will guide the strategic choices advocates need to make. A vision of change provides an aim for what people are trying to do and helps maintain motivation.

Questions that might help participants develop their vision include:

- 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 future or "world to come" does your religion cause you to strive?

Once a vision is developed for the community, the interfaith coalition must articulate what the present realities are in the community's housing sector. A firm understanding of the distance between "here" (status quo) and "ideal" will facilitate the creation of steps for action. The steps plotted between here and there will become advocacy goals.

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

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

## ADVICE

From a democratic perspective, it is important that advocates for affordable housing represent the constituents affected by policies. It would be incongruous for an advocacy coalition in Dearborn, Michigan, for example, to be composed of only Christian advocates, since Dearborn is the largest Muslim community in the United States.

## THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

"As a result of our interfaith cooperation over the past year, a volunteer with experience in advocacy has joined our efforts to advocate for just and fair housing policies."

—Mary Martin,  
Habitat Seattle-King County

"Because of our interfaith advocacy efforts, our affiliate saw an increase in the congregations involved in our work, including those who were previously uninterested."

—Matt Dunbar,  
Habitat New York City

"I remember being a part of the forum when national leaders of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths strongly affirmed that decent shelter for all is a core issue for all faiths as they work to end poverty in the world. There was unanimous agreement that Habitat for Humanity provides an important structure in which faiths can, and should, join together to build and to advocate, globally and locally, for those in need. Faiths working together, rather than just separately, provide the very best chance we all have to change the will of the world to build better communities and thus bring hope for all."

—Liz Blake,  
HFHI's senior vice president of advocacy,  
government affairs and general counsel

"Every faith has something that speaks to helping mankind. This is a common thread woven throughout the 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."

—Tracie McPherson,  
Habitat of Omaha (Nebraska)

## ADVICE

Interfaith is an asset. When the participants mirror their diverse community, they are in a better position, as both a faith-based and community organization, when advocating for affordable housing. Be sure to reference your interfaith roots when discussing your advocacy efforts and your motivations for getting involved. Your target audience might be more receptive as a result.

**ADVICE****Doubting your capacity to advocate? Don't.**

Instead of thinking about whether you can advocate, think about how much time you can devote to it. Use the government, corporations, labor unions, religious leaders, community associations, other nonprofits, individuals, nongovernmental organizations and anyone else you can in your effort. Involve as many parties as you can. Avoid jargon and acronyms. Learn to speak their language.

Find ways to view everyone as an ally. Don't look for enemies. 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 are no other ways 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.

**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.

## 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? Governments, NGOs, religious institutions, businesses, community leaders? Do we 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 we 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?

### Preparing to advocate

1. Gather many perspectives: neighbors, officials, businesses, faith communities, etc.
2. Make a "problem tree": visually graph both the causes and effects of your issue.

3. What is already being done to address poverty housing?
4. What is being done by the government? Identify the leaders and decision-makers in government, business, religious groups, foundations, etc., who determine policy and control resources.
5. Consider nontraditional sources of influence and authority: the media, key constituencies, corporations, religious groups, labor unions, etc.
6. Who has the power to do something to bring about change?

For more information, contact Habitat's Government Relations and Advocacy office at [habitat.org/gov](http://habitat.org/gov).

As the interfaith community moves to become an established advocacy coalition, 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."

With the above homework accomplished, the interfaith advocacy team 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. It is also valuable to identify those with a stake in the issue to learn what their interests are. Some actors might respond to timely media coverage, while others might give more weight to the views of their constituents. Put simply: Know your audience.

Before beginning your advocacy efforts, 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 we serve tools to make their voices heard. To be effective, skilled interfaith advocates will have clearly identified the issue and arrive at meetings with 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 doing nothing, and what realistic solutions exist in the form of public policy that can be put into legislation.

## 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 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 Republicans and Democrats from the 19th Congressional 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.

## THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

"With the help of our interfaith task force, the California Homes and Jobs Act made its way through the California Senate and is now being debated in the house. If passed, this bill would help 10,000 families across California have access to affordable housing."

—Chris Untiet,  
Habitat of Greater Los Angeles

## Helpful Partners

Jewish Council for Public Affairs:  
[jewishpublicaffairs.org](http://jewishpublicaffairs.org)

Islamic Society of North America:  
[isna.net](http://isna.net)

National Council of Churches:  
[nationalcouncilofchurches.us](http://nationalcouncilofchurches.us)

Canadian Council of Churches:  
[councilofchurches.ca](http://councilofchurches.ca)

### What do you need to develop?

Once you have identified what relationships and resources are in place and formed your goals and action plan, it should be easy to see the alliances, media materials, research, etc., that you will need to achieve those goals.

We recommend creating 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 be very informational for many audiences and potential partners.

### 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.

## Strategic advocacy plan

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, it should consider the forces, interests and risks involved. This step allows assessment of goals and tactics in relation to potential targets, allies, opponents and constituents for the defined advocacy initiative. Regular group reflection periods should be incorporated into the process. This creates space for sharing, evaluation and flexibility and, most of all, time for God to direct the group.

#### Persevering in advocacy for shelter access

Perseverance is the key to successful advocacy. The advantage of an interfaith advocacy coalition is that the group members are motivated by their faith in God. Joined by the common call to end poverty in the world and the conviction of the importance of decent shelter, interfaith coalitions that are invested in long-term change experience the joy and satisfaction of faithful obedience.

The members of your interfaith community may have experience and expertise in community organizing or advocacy that can help fill gaps in your own experience and maintain your advocacy momentum. During the Interfaith Pilot Project, a Baha'i member of Habitat of Greater Los Angeles' interfaith council contributed his extensive advocacy experience to the affiliate's advocacy efforts. As a result, the affiliate successfully extended a land grant that will allow 10 future Habitat homes to be built in the Los Angeles area.

Developing an integrated advocacy program takes time. Basic public awareness and education on housing issues might be an appropriate place to start (rather than a lobbying campaign). If your affiliate already has an established advocacy department, engaging interfaith partners in this work can deepen your current initiatives. Our experience has been that interfaith engagement is effective in building new partnerships that further Habitat's mission.

In an advocacy partnership, focusing on the strengths of each faith partner, rather than their regular participation in all areas of Faiths in Action, is more likely to encourage sustainable collaboration without burdening the relationship. It should also be made clear that partnering with Habitat means an opportunity to take part in a common cause for charity and justice; it does not mean compromising one's religious identity.

#### C. Faiths in Action: Neighborhood Revitalization Initiatives

"Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative affiliates serve more families by responding to community aspirations with an expanded array of products, services and *partnerships*, empowering residents to revive their neighborhoods and enhance the quality of life." (from HFHI's NRI Mission Statement, emphasis added.)

Habitat affiliates seek to intentionally build new coalitions of stakeholders to develop communities. NRI has greatly enhanced this intention. An Interfaith Council is also uniquely positioned to serve this purpose. Forming a council

#### THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

Habitat for Humanity New York City established a designated advocacy department in 2005. The department annually produces an advocacy covenant outlining the affiliate's public policy agenda at the city, state and federal level. This covenant is formed in collaboration with all of the affiliate's stakeholders. It defines the scope of the affiliate's legislative agenda for the year with substantial input from various faith partners. Habitat NYC's 2013 covenant highlights the affiliate's national interests in, for example, the AmeriCorps program, and also its local interest in making affordable housing a priority in the city's mayoral election.



## ADVICE

Habitat ReStore locations provide a wonderful opportunity to create awareness of Habitat's interfaith initiatives. "Many visitors to Habitat's ReStores are largely unfamiliar with Habitat's programs and its mission. Taking advantage of walls and empty spaces in ReStores to inform visitors about Habitat's organizing work with diverse faith partners has the opportunity to bring ever more people to our ministry. Make brochures available for interested visitors to share with their own faith community and see your mission grow."

—Dan Bush,  
Habitat of Greater Lowell (Massachusetts)

## THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

### Fundraising

"Because of the interfaith program that we built up during the pilot year, our interfaith partners at HFH GLA recently began the process to raise \$150,000 to build our first interfaith house over the next year. We were not even bringing in \$10,000 in interfaith contributions before this initiative began, so to see that level of commitment take off so quickly is truly a blessing."

—Chris Untiet,  
Habitat of Greater Los Angeles

"We're starting to see financial support from individuals and organizations that have not donated to Habitat before, and starting to receive emails from interfaith collaborators, asking, 'What's next for the project?'"

—Andrew Castillo,  
AmeriCorps VISTA, Habitat of Metro Denver

## A COMMON MISUNDERSTANDING

"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)

has the added benefit of demonstrating to interfaith partners that Habitat is willing to listen and collaborate with community leaders, no matter their faith (or lack thereof). Additionally, the Interfaith Council will be well-positioned to determine what role it can most effectively play in an affiliate's NRI programs after they are launched.

### D. Faiths in Action: ReStores

In addition to allowing affiliates the opportunity to share Habitat's mission vision with a broader audience (see sidebar example), Habitat ReStores offer affiliates the added advantage of serving a wider, more diverse clientele—many of whom might not otherwise have reason to interact with Habitat's more traditional activities of home building, renovation and reconstruction. Interfaith initiatives can provide ReStores with a larger, more diverse workforce. Furthermore, by providing opportunities for people of all faiths to stretch their personal budgets a little further, Habitat affiliates give powerful witness to the value of good stewardship of God's creation (by avoiding waste of valuable resources), which is central to many of the world's faiths.

### E. Faiths in Action: Resource development—money and gifts in kind

Interfaith collaboration expands our reach to untapped alliances and resources. The Interfaith Council can work to get commitments of congregations to include Habitat's interfaith mission in their annual budgets. Sincere engagement with a diverse community will help programs to be more sustainable and will attract the skills and support of a wider range of talented individuals. It will open doors to additional donors, volunteers and capacity. These new partnerships will help Habitat do more to eliminate poverty housing, do it faster, and have a greater impact on communities.

### F. Faiths in action: Interfaith Global Village trips

Few experiences are more powerful and potentially life-changing than traveling to another part of the world on a Habitat Global Village trip. Global Village trips are short-term house-building trips designed to give participants the opportunity to observe and contribute to Habitat's work firsthand. GV participants learn about poverty housing, development challenges, and Habitat's mission to eliminate poverty housing and homelessness worldwide. GV team members give of themselves as they work alongside homeowners and local volunteers of all backgrounds, races and religions. Taking part in an intentionally multifaith GV trip has the potential to build solid, enduring relationships that will serve participants' home community in powerful ways upon their return. Additionally, when interfaith GV participants take part in Habitat's global work and witness how Habitat expresses its mission in global terms, Habitat entities gain a unique opportunity to be seen with more legitimacy in our U.S. interfaith engagement, especially in those U.S. communities with large immigrant populations.



### G. Faiths in Action: Community events around poverty awareness

There are numerous examples of community events that have been organized to raise awareness not just of Habitat's mission and vision, but also more generally of the critical issues of poverty specific to a community. Take the time to be intentional about inviting, engaging and involving leaders and members of diverse faith groups in the planning, execution and evaluation of such events. Not only will the events themselves be richer in their diversity, but the impact in the community is likely to be more far-reaching and long-lasting, as well.

### H. Faiths in Action: Creation of Habitat youth organizations

Perhaps no demographic is more open to interfaith collaboration than young people. Many teens and young adults today want to be involved with a congregation that is building bridges between faith traditions through interfaith collaboration. This enthusiasm is matched by the interest of many faith partners in improving the attendance at their religious services, especially in the youth and young adult demographics. What better way to tap into this inherent desire than to seek ways of engaging youths and young adults via the creation of Habitat youth organizations?

Many affiliates have existing groups of young professionals who are looking for high-touch, high-impact ways to spend time with each other and get to know other young people in their communities. An interfaith Habitat youth or young adult organization is sure to add spark and energy to any affiliate that is willing to invest the necessary time and expertise to help launch this effort.

### I. Faiths in Action: Disaster response

Habitat has steadily gained a well-deserved reputation as a global leader in disaster response. With our wide geographic presence, Habitat has the ability to respond quickly after a disaster. Because of the nature of our mission, Habitat also has the ability to be a long-term presence in a community that has been devastated by disaster. Although the opportunities for interfaith engagement and collaboration will vary based on the nature of a disaster, these unfortunate incidents offer powerful ways for members of different faiths to demonstrate a shared concern for those victims at times when they are most vulnerable and most in need of care and compassion.

### J. Faiths in Action: Communication/media

In many communities, interfaith groups have unique opportunities to attract both mainstream and social media attention toward changing hearts and minds. Communication opportunities allow Habitat to model respect for each religion's beliefs without compromising any. Habitat has the opportunity to lead people into respectful and cooperative relationships with one another.

## THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

"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)*

Habitat of Metro Denver successfully used social media, including Facebook and Twitter, to attract a diverse group of volunteers to their interfaith programs. Using social media also allows for real-time sharing of interfaith success stories.

### K. Faiths in Action: Changing hearts and minds

Habitat's interfaith initiative aims to include many new organizations in our base of support, accelerating progress toward decent shelter for all. Aside from new homes built, the positive interactions among members of different religions will encourage mutual trust, reduce suspicion, inspire hope, and ensure the sustainability of interfaith collaboration.

Habitat's mission involves building communities as well as homes. As North America becomes more diverse, people are increasingly finding themselves in interactions with those of different faiths. Habitat's interfaith initiative offers residents the opportunity to extend a hand to their neighbors of other faiths, inviting them to work together to rid the world of poverty housing. In building a community, Habitat intends to build *with* it and not merely *for* it. Building with a community means involving the faiths represented there and engaging with the community in all its diversity. If Habitat's work does not reflect the diversity of all communities, it will be increasingly difficult to claim that we include *all* people in building homes, communities and hope.

### L. Faiths in Action: Volunteerism

Interfaith commitments will increase the number of volunteers for all Habitat activities. An Interfaith Council and Habitat board might want to give new attention to two particular aspects of volunteerism as they pertain to interfaith activity:

#### a. Creating a recurring cycle of young adult volunteers

Engaging college and university interfaith organizations in addition to seminaries is a good strategy for regularly involving new volunteers in your interfaith collaboration. As the Interfaith Youth Core has observed, "students are driven by the desire to have an impact on the world around them, often inspired by their own religious or philosophical commitments. The campus environment offers students many opportunities to get involved in causes and clubs that give them the chance to act on their personal values to serve. Because it is on campus that students are encountering religious diversity for the first time, grappling with their own religious identity, and seeking ways to make a difference in the world, colleges and universities have a prime opportunity to encourage students to build interfaith collaboration."<sup>2</sup>

Some valuable questions:

1. What existing groups in your area are already active in interfaith dialogue toward ending poverty?
2. Which student events on campus would give your affiliate's interfaith initiative the best exposure?

<sup>2</sup>"Interfaith Cooperation and American Higher Education: Recommendations, Best Practices and Case Studies," p. 6. <http://www.ifyc.org/sites/default/files/best-practice-report.pdf>

**b. The value of interfaith dialogue for ongoing volunteerism**

Social scientists have demonstrated that long-term retention of volunteers is improved if they are involved in dialogue around an issue before acting on that issue. This research aligns with the experience of many affiliates that prebuild discussion groups, which involve participants directly in action-oriented analyses of community issues and conversations with other community leaders, facilitate faith in action.

Research also indicates that, Habitat affiliates ought to organize (or encourage faith leaders to organize) small group meetings for potential volunteers that will include dialogue on interfaith issues to encourage relationship development. These meetings should occur before and between interfaith builds and other forms of faiths working together. Since your affiliate will be busy with other programs and aspects of interfaith organizing, encourage faith or community leaders to convene these small groups.

These groups provide an opportunity to build interpersonal relationships and create a space and opportunity for interfaith dialogue that separates it from interfaith action. This separation can help safeguard productive action, since dialogue can easily turn to areas of disagreement and tensions that detract from building or advocating. Finally, small-group discussions can be ideal venues for raising public awareness of housing as a critical foundation for breaking the cycle of poverty. From our experience, this public education is an accessible first step to engaging different faith congregations in discussions of housing issues.

**M. Faiths in Action: Other opportunities**

Habitat entities can create other opportunities for faiths to work together.

For example, Habitat of Greater Los Angeles concluded the Interfaith Pilot Project by organizing an Interfaith Dinner on the eve of the National Day of Prayer. The dinner was held at a local, non-Christian faith partner's community center and was aimed at engaging new and existing faith partners and informing them about the affiliate's interfaith programs. Each member of the Interfaith Council was requested to bring eight to 10 guests of any religious tradition to the dinner. Nearly 60 people representing 18 different congregations and seven faith traditions attended the dinner. Affiliate representatives spoke about what had been accomplished over the course of the year and how others could get involved. The dinner was successful in encouraging interest among new faith partners and encouraging faith communities to make housing and shelter a priority for their congregations. As a result of the Interfaith Dinner, the South Coast Interfaith Council signed up for three build days the following summer.

### STEP 5: REFLECTION—FAITHS WORKING TOGETHER FOR IMPACT IN A DIVERSE WORLD

No matter what decisions are made during Faiths in Action, it is important that reflection be part of the process. It is extremely important to bring interfaith supporters together for regular meetings to reflect on the progress made through interfaith collaboration. Reflection meetings allow 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 about the experience of life together in an interfaith community and the opportunity to improve housing conditions there. The open, reflective process provides the channel for God—through whatever channel each faith experiences God—to make real the common call to care for the poor.

It is our hope that this process will raise further questions, such as:

- How can we go beyond building together? How else can we put our faith into action in serving the poor?
- What are the facts about poverty housing in our community? Where do we need to share the facts?
- 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 community deepens its understanding of the scope of the poverty housing problem in the area, it should be encouraged to move toward cooperative advocacy for just and fair housing policies.

#### THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

2010 marked 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'minin.

## Resources

### RESOURCES

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

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

#### **Food and dietary specifications:**

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcv2pdf.nsf/ByPDF/Food\\_culture\\_and\\_religion/\\$File/Food\\_culture\\_and\\_religion.pdf](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcv2pdf.nsf/ByPDF/Food_culture_and_religion/$File/Food_culture_and_religion.pdf)

[www.nutrition.asettts.org.au/resources/Element-3-1-FactSheet-15.pdf](http://www.nutrition.asettts.org.au/resources/Element-3-1-FactSheet-15.pdf)

### ADVOCACY RESOURCES

"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. [my.habitat.org/download/g32414/](http://my.habitat.org/download/g32414/)

#### **Habitat resources**

Advocacy Resource Center: [my.habitat.org/kc/page-detail/3eff1/](http://my.habitat.org/kc/page-detail/3eff1/)

State and Local Resource Center: [my.habitat.org/kc/page-detail/3e2ad/](http://my.habitat.org/kc/page-detail/3e2ad/)

For questions about HFHI's advocacy efforts, email [buildlouder@habitat.org](mailto:buildlouder@habitat.org).

#### **Non-Habitat resources**

U.S. House of Representatives: [house.gov](http://house.gov)

U.S. Senate: [senate.gov](http://senate.gov)

Find legislation: [thomas.loc.gov](http://thomas.loc.gov)

How federal laws are made: [thomas.loc.gov/home/lawsmade.toc.html](http://thomas.loc.gov/home/lawsmade.toc.html)

National Association of State Budget Officers: [nasbo.org](http://nasbo.org)

Find state and local representatives: [votesmart.org/index.htm](http://votesmart.org/index.htm)

Locate your state association of nonprofits: [ncna.org](http://ncna.org)

Identify a national organization with related public policy goals: [independentsector.org](http://independentsector.org)

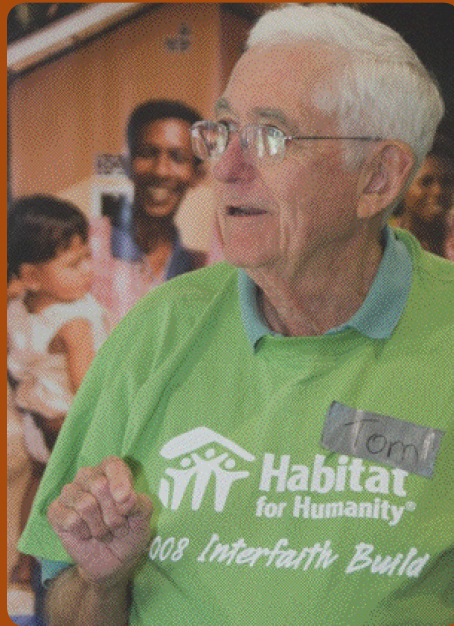
Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest: [clpi.org](http://clpi.org)

U.S. Conference of Mayors: [usmayors.org](http://usmayors.org)

National League of Cities: [nlc.org](http://nlc.org)

City and county governments: [statelocalgov.net](http://statelocalgov.net)





“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



## PART III COMMITTING TO FAITHS WORKING TOGETHER FOR SUSTAINED IMPACT

### STEP 6: MAKING INTERFAITH COLLABORATION SUSTAINABLE

The Argosy Interfaith Pilot Program helped Habitat examine and emphasize the importance of faiths working together to overcome poverty in their community, especially the need for Habitat entities to make these efforts a permanent part of their structure.

To this end, the boards of Habitat affiliates, chapters, state support organizations, and other entities are encouraged to appoint Habitat Interfaith Councils. Such councils should, as far as possible:

- Represent all the faiths in the local community that have, as roots of their faith, the call to care about the poor and the belief that housing is central to that.
- Have equal numbers of representatives (at least three) from each faith group.
- Be named to staggered three-year terms, with the opportunity to serve a second three-year term.
- Elect their own chairs.
- Have at least one Habitat board member as an official member.
- Report and be accountable to the Habitat board of directors. Reports should include recommendations for Faiths in Action hopes, plans and commitments (see Part II); ongoing achievements; and the like.
- Keep written records to share with the wider Habitat family and stakeholders via social media, news outlets and all other communication channels, always following the local Habitat board's policies and all HFHI policies for media. These records will also be for use by future interfaith councils.

### THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

"With the successes that we've had and the folks who have been touched in different ways, the connections to Habitat Metro Denver have most definitely grown what I would consider to be exponentially. Bottom line: Yes, this project is sustainable."

—Margaret Bell,  
Habitat Metro Denver

"Without opportunities for sharing meals and engaging in interfaith dialogue apart from the build days, we found it difficult to build relationships between religious groups that will continue beyond our interfaith build."

—Mary Martin,  
Habitat Seattle/King County

### A COMMON CHALLENGE

#### Maintaining excitement

"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)

### THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

#### 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)

## A COMMON CHALLENGE

### Sustaining momentum

“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

1. Maintain periodic one-on-one meetings with members of your Interfaith Council.
2. Check in periodically with the subcommittees organized by your faith partners for updates on their discussions.

## THE HABITAT EXPERIENCE

“At the Berkley Center Interfaith Forum in 2006, nationally recognized and respected Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders unanimously confirmed the hypothesis to which Habitat’s interfaith process had led: That these three religions—and others—all have strong calls to care for the poor, and all have long traditions that housing is a central issue for that to happen. In the expressed belief that more is accomplished by the faiths working together, Habitat for Humanity was strongly affirmed as the structure through which each religion can join others to do their missions together, with no compromising of each faith’s basic beliefs.”

—Mike Carscaddon,  
HFHI’s executive vice president, international

One of the important lessons of the Argosy project is that interfaith recruitment at the local level has to be incorporated at the beginning of the process to achieve the best results from faiths working together.

Habitat for Humanity’s mission statement—“Seeking to put God’s love into action, Habitat for Humanity brings people together to build homes, communities and hope”—can best be fulfilled as faiths organize to sustain their commitments to work together toward Habitat’s vision: “A world where everyone has a decent place to live.”

Our hope, expectation and prayer is that sustained collaboration and perseverance will lead to personal and community transformation as this interfaith initiative makes a lasting improvement to peoples’ lives and communities.





“Speak out for those who cannot speak, for the rights of all the destitute. Speak out, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”

—*Proverbs 31:8-9*

## CONCLUSION

This revised Habitat for Humanity Interfaith Tool Kit is another step in Habitat's ongoing commitment to provide global leadership in bringing faiths together to end poverty worldwide, with housing at the core of that mission. It is the result of a yearlong pilot project with six Habitat affiliates, made possible by a generous grant from the Argosy Foundation (see page 8 ).

The Argosy pilot project confirmed that most of the ideas in the original Habitat Interfaith Tool Kit were valid, practical and useful. A major finding is the huge importance of organizing—from the start—sustainable interfaith components in Habitat structures. Many aspects of Part II, “Faiths in Action,” are more than events with beginning and end dates (such as a Habitat build.) Faith actions that demand ongoing efforts include advocacy; resource development; transforming systems, attitudes, policies and behaviors that are at the root of poverty housing; increasing commitments to volunteerism; NRI projects; ReStore support; disaster response; interfaith Global Village trips; communication efforts, including the use of social media; and land acquisition. Thus, Part III of the tool kit has the most vital revisions.

The Argosy Interfaith Pilot Program occurred when Habitat for Humanity International's Strategic Plan for 2014-18 was being rolled out to the global Habitat family. It became apparent that faiths working together within a Habitat framework could enhance our ability to achieve these goals. For example:

1. “Build Community Impact” has increased possibilities through Habitat interfaith builds and the like.
2. “Build Sector Impact” is more possible via local community interfaith advocacy efforts across the housing sector.
3. “Build Societal Impact” has the potential for increasing volunteerism and working to change the hearts and minds of society to agree that every person ought to have a decent place to live.





4. “Build a Sustainable Organization” might provide people, money, media and other resources through faiths working together.

All Habitat entities are encouraged to consider including a sustainable inter-faith component in implementing the new strategic plan.

Faiths joining together not only have more chance to be effective in responding to God’s call to care about the poor, but also, by working together, can provide a vital witness to the world. As one response to our Christian mission, Habitat strives to be a global leader in helping religious faiths work together toward ending poverty in the world. Decent housing for all is a core issue.

This tool kit is a work in progress. Habitat individuals and local entities are urged to share experiences, suggestions and other comments. Please send these to Lynn Davis (LDavis@Habitat.org) in the office of the HFHI CEO. Comments that relate to all areas —advocacy, resource development, faith engagement, youth, volunteerism, disaster response, communications, etc.— will be forwarded to the proper persons within HFHI.

“Promote dignity and hope: We believe that no one lives in dignity until everyone can live in dignity.” That is one of Habitat’s mission principles, the reason we do what we do. As we commit ourselves to being a global leader in helping faiths work together, we see that these principles reinforce one another, and that we can put those principles into action!

Tom Jones  
Habitat for Humanity Interfaith Point Person  
July 31, 2013





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