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# Faith in Action, Adult Learning, and Immigrant Justice: Bringing Mission to Life

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## Original Research

# Faith in Action, Adult Learning, and Immigrant Justice: Bringing Mission to Life

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## Abstract

This article emerges from a collaborative research project between a religious studies professor at DePaul University and the executive director of the Chicago-based non-profit Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants (ICDI). In 2016, we forged a community partnership to explore and enhance the relationship between pedagogy, faith, and social justice. In this article, we share the results of our research on how exposure to and involvement with the work of ICDI impacts students, staff, and volunteers. Our research reveals the powerful effect that a community-engaged partnership can have not only on adult learning but also on spiritual development. Our findings suggest that faith in action may take several forms, including encounter, accompaniment, advocacy, and social justice, and that those who engage the work of ICDI may engage them in different ways. These insights will be useful for institutions, both universities and community organizations alike, in enhancing adult learning and spiritual growth.

**Keywords:** Spirituality, religion, action research, adult learning, community engagement

## Faith in Action, Adult Learning, and Immigrant Justice: Bringing Mission to Life

In 2016, the authors of this article, a professor of religious studies at DePaul University and the executive director of the Interfaith Community for Detained Immigrants (ICDI), forged a community-engaged partnership that examines how immigrant-advocacy work impacts those who engage it. Students in Tirres's religious studies class participated in three half-day ICDI-related immersion experiences and were then invited to reflect on their experience. As we have shown in our first article from this partnership, these community-engaged immersion experiences proved significant not only for student learning but also for institutional identity and mission (Tirres and Schikore, 2020). We found that for institutions like DePaul University, the largest Catholic university in the United States whose mission is centered around faith in action, this type of community-engaged learning can be a potent site for realizing mission.

We were also interested in how exposure to the work of faith-based institutions informs an individual's faith journey. Both DePaul University and ICDI are faith-based organizations, rooted in the Catholic tradition, that honor and value religious pluralism. Additionally, both put a premium on active forms of faith that do the work of social justice. Thus, rather than approach faith primarily as assent to doctrine, both DePaul and ICDI understand faith largely as transformative praxis, or faith in action. How do institutional values like these shape the faith journeys of individuals within the organization? We posed this question to ICDI staff and volunteers, who have sustained contact with the work of ICDI and who represent a variety of religious traditions. A majority of respondents reported that their work with detained immigrants indeed helps to reinforce and strengthen their faith journey. Many also suggested that ICDI's interfaith context added new dimensions to their faith experience.

As we formulated the project and reviewed the initial qualitative data that were collected through a survey, we kept returning to questions like the following: (1) What does "faith" and some of its related usages mean within the context of our community-engaged project?; (2) In particular, how does "faith in action" shape an individual's "faith journey" in the context of "interfaith advocacy" for detained immigrants?; and (3) In what ways is the concept of "faith" functioning in each of these key phrases, and how might these different aspects of faith intersect with one another?

In what follows, we make explicit some of the different ways that faith is deployed within our community-engaged project. The first section describes our respective institutional contexts and missions, which are centered around faith in action. The second section makes explicit some of the theoretical resources that inform how we think about faith in action in the context of a religious plural university, DePaul, and a multi-faith organization, ICDI. As we will show, we have found it helpful to approach faith not only in terms of formal institutional religious affiliations, but also in terms of how faith functions in helping individuals and communities to

grow. Such a focus speaks to our interest in constructive-developmental approaches to faith, such as found in the work of Parks (2010), Tisdell (2003), Fowler (1996, 1981), and Dewey (1934). As such, we are interested in how meaningful encounters with detained immigrants, which take place within a context that values religious pluralism, may lead to significant learning experiences that deepen and expand the spiritual journeys of those who engage the work of immigration advocacy. Section three shares some of the most recent data we have collected from ICDI staff and volunteers. In light of this data, we offer two conceptual frameworks that shed light on some of the different ways in which faith in action may manifest itself within this constructive-developmental process. In the final section, we summarize these findings and discuss their larger implications.

## DePaul University and ICDI: Faith-based Institutions with 'Faith in Action' Missions

Founded in 1898 in the name of St. Vincent de Paul, DePaul University in Chicago is the largest Catholic university in the United States. With over 22,000 students, DePaul remains dedicated to its core mission, which is to provide access to higher education for those who have been historically unable to pursue it, including first-generation college students, low-income students, immigrants, and/or students of color. Today, DePaul's student body is racially diverse -- 19% of students identify as Hispanic, 8% identify as African American, and 6% identify as multiracial. The school is also economically diverse -- 47% of freshmen come from households with an adjusted gross income of $100,000 or less, 32% of all freshmen receive Pell Grants, and 6% of freshmen are from families with an adjusted gross income of $20,000 or less.

DePaul University has also long been a haven for people of all faiths, including, perhaps most notably, Jewish students. As evidenced by its early promotional literature from the 1920s, "DePaul clearly declared itself open to students of all religious backgrounds, and pointed to the presence of non-Catholic students throughout the university." By the 1930s, Jewish students constituted as much as 25% of the student body at DePaul's Loop campus and as much as 40% of the student body at the law school (Rury, 1998).

The life and work of St. Vincent de Paul (1581-1660) serves as the core blueprint for the university's continued commitment to the historically underserved. Vincent de Paul was born to peasant farmers in the south of France. Like so many of his generation, he initially entered the priesthood to secure economic stability for himself and his family. As he was studying to become a priest, de Paul befriended numerous societal and church leaders, including the noble and influential Gondi family. de Paul became the family's chaplain and tutor, and he was often asked to accompany Madame de Gondi on her trips to inspect her extensive properties throughout France.

Through these trips, de Paul interacted with the rural poor, and these experiences began to reshape de Paul's sense of calling and mission. On one such trip, Madame de Gondi turned to him and asked what has become known as "The Vincentian Question," which is "What must be done?" (Holtschneider, 2001, p. 342). This question proved to be a turning point in de Paul's life. For the remainder of his life, de Paul dedicated himself to this question, focusing on how the most pressing social challenges of his day could be addressed not only through acts of charity, but also through institutional and structural change. Today, a loose and diverse worldwide network known as the Vincentian Family seeks to coordinate its efforts to collaborate for systemic change.

DePaul University's Mission Statement (2016) reflects these core commitments. As it reads, "the distinguishing marks of the university are its Catholic, Vincentian, and urban character (p. 1). It is "dedicated to teaching, research, and public service" (p. 1) and it places a high priority on "programs and instruction and learning" (p. 1). The university also makes explicit its commitment to public service, especially given its urban setting. "In meeting its public service responsibility, the university encourages faculty, staff, and students to apply specialized expertise in ways that contribute to the societal, economic, cultural and ethical quality of life in the metropolitan area and beyond. When appropriate, and mutually beneficial, DePaul develops service-learning and educational partnerships with other institutions and agencies" (p. 2).

DePaul University has long been a leader in public service initiatives. The Irwin D. Steans Center for Community-based Service Learning (CbSL) enables the integration of project-based and service-learning pedagogy. The Egan Office of Urban Education and Community Partnerships, a part of the Steans Center since 2013, directly assists community organizations with community engagement processes. Additionally, the Assets-Based Community Development (ABCD) Institute, housed within the Steans Center since 2016, provides faculty and staff with resources and tools to identify and nurture neighborhood assets. This approach helps students and faculty to respect the experience and knowledge produced in communities, rather than focusing on what is wrong or missing, or treating them merely as objects of study or research.

In the last few years, the above units, along with DePaul's Division of Mission and Ministry and the newly created university-wide Council on Community Engagement, have made important strides in thinking more intentionally about DePaul's commitment to public service. Now more than ever, much attention is being given to how the university can forge educational partnerships with other institutions and agencies in a mutually beneficial way. The Steans Center, for example, encourages cultivating community partnerships for the long-term. Similarly, the Council for Community Engagement has created a set of guiding principles for community engagement that champions an assets-based approach to community partnership that is explicitly and intentionally reciprocal. Likewise, DePaul's Division of Mission and Ministry fosters

mutually-beneficial and sustained partnerships through co-curricular programs like the DePaul Community Service Association (DCSA) and Alternative Break Service Immersions (ABSI). As cases like these illustrate, multiple units at DePaul are viewing community engagement and public service less as acts of charity "for" the underserved and more as sustained relationships "with" community partners, from whom there is much to learn.

Like DePaul University, ICDI has Catholic roots and a deep appreciation for faith in action. Its mission is to provide spiritual support and accompany people affected adversely by the immigrant detention system and to advocate for systemic change. This mission has its roots in the core values and critical concerns of the Sisters of Mercy, the religious order of ICDI Founders JoAnn Persch and Pat Murphy.

The first Sisters of Mercy arrived in the United States from Ireland in 1843 and have been ministering to and with immigrants since then. In 2005, they formalized this commitment and issued a statement that calls them to "recognize an urgent duty and challenge to stand in solidarity with immigrants seeking fullness of life." (Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, 2005).

The Sisters of Mercy (2020-a) articulate four core mission values:

- **Spirituality:** The example of Jesus leads us, the Gospel guides us and Catherine McAuley's spirit enlivens us. Ours is a life of contemplation and action, prayer and service.
- **Community:** Living in community deepens our relationship with God, strengthens us for mission, and continually inspires us in our call to serve others.
- **Service:** We see Jesus in the most marginalized people and take a vow of service to perform works of Mercy that alleviate suffering. We strive to follow Jesus' example in all that we do.
- **Social Justice and Our Critical Concerns:** We work passionately to eliminate poverty, the widespread denial of human rights, the degradation of earth, the increase in violence and racism, the continued oppression of women, the abuse of children, the mistreatment of immigrants and the lack of solidarity among people and nations.

The Sisters of Mercy's (2020-b) commitment to immigrants comes out of their deep belief in the dignity of each human person. It is also reflected in their more than 150 years of ministering to and with immigrants in hospitals, parishes, social service centers, and schools, which includes 17 colleges and universities. Mercy Sisters advocate for the safety and protection of all migrants, and for just and humane immigration reform in the United States that reunites families, provides a pathway to citizenship, protects young people, and provides for fair enforcement of the law.

ICDI's mission is rooted in the work of the Sisters of Mercy and further informed by the interfaith perspectives that come from volunteers, staff, and the people served by ICDI. The

dignity and worth of each person, the desire for justice, and the awareness that we are all connected and need to concern ourselves with the well-being of our fellow humans are some of the common values around which ICDI convenes faith-diverse people. People from more than 17 different religions and denominations participate in the work of ICDI and are able to find meaningful ways to express and exercise their faith through the work of the organization.

The mission of ICDI is carried out through various programs and interfaith ministries. ICDI volunteers provide pastoral care in four different county jails where immigrants are detained. Volunteers also visit the children's centers where unaccompanied minors are held until they can be reunified with family. Through a daily court-watch program, volunteers serve as eyes and ears in the immigration court system to identify human concerns that need attention. Through a hotline, volunteers respond daily to calls from people released and in need of food, clothing, transportation, and other help. ICDI volunteers also assist immigrant travelers passing through Chicago via a daily presence in the Greyhound bus station. Volunteers in the deportation ministry assist families who are losing a loved one to deportation and pray with the people being deported. Through various housing opportunities, ICDI provides shelter, case management, and accompaniment to people released from immigration detention with no family or friends in the United States.

A Shared Understanding of Faith: "Religion" and "the Religious" in the Context of a Community Partnership

Today, it is not uncommon to hear someone say "I am spiritual but not religious." As recent data from the Pew research center suggests, over 25% of the United States population now identifies as such (Lipka & Gecewicz, 2017). Several important recent studies examine how emerging adults navigate their spiritual journeys. Drawing on constructive-developmental research, Parks (2010) offers one of the most compelling accounts of how young adults in their twenties navigate meaning-making and questions of faith. As Parks suggests, "Faith is often linked exclusively to belief, particularly religious belief. But faith goes far beyond religious belief, narrowly understood. Faith is more adequately recognized as *the activity of seeking and discovering meaning in the most comprehensive dimensions of our experience—that is, faith* is as much a verb as a noun" (p. 10, emphasis in original). Tisdell (2003) offers another insightful account of the role of spirituality in teaching and learning. She focuses on the potential role of spirituality in teaching for cultural relevance with multicultural populations in higher and adult education. As Tisdell makes clear, "*spirituality is* not *about pushing a religious agenda*" (p.10, emphasis in original). Instead, Tisdell articulates a set of assumptions that guide thinking about spirituality, which include the following: (1) spirituality and religion are not the same, but for many people they are interrelated; (2) spirituality is an awareness and honoring of wholeness and the interconnectedness of all things through the mystery of what many refer to as the Life-force, God, higher power, higher self, cosmic energy, Buddha nature, or Great Spirit; (3) spirituality is

fundamentally about meaning making; (4) spirituality is always present (though often unacknowledged) in the learning environment; (5) spiritual development constitutes moving toward greater authenticity or to a more authentic self; (6) spirituality is about how people construct knowledge through largely unconscious and symbolic processes, often made more concrete in art forms such as music, image, symbol, and ritual, all of which are manifested culturally; and (7) spiritual experiences most often happen by surprise (p.xi).

Around the same time, Astin, et al. (2005) shared their findings of the first national longitudinal study of spiritual growth among college-age students. One of their central research questions was: "What are institutions doing that aids or inhibits students in their spiritual quest?" The research team developed five measures connected to religious qualities and five measures connected to spiritual qualities. Whereas the religious qualities largely pertain to elements connected to organized religion, the research team describes spirituality in terms of the following measures:

> [Spirituality] involves an active quest for answers to life's "big questions" (Spiritual Quest), a global worldview that transcends ethnocentrism and egocentrism (Ecumenical Worldview), a sense of caring and compassion for others (Ethic of Caring) coupled with a lifestyle that includes service to others (Charitable Involvement), and a capacity to maintain one's sense of calm and centeredness, especially in times of stress (Equanimity).

All three of these studies share a common assumption around the distinction between organized religion, on the one hand, and a more comprehensive sense of faith or spirituality, on the other. But one may ask: from where does this distinction arise? If we trace sources, it becomes clear that Parks and Tisdell are drawing heavily on constructive-developmental approaches as found in the psychological work of Erikson, Piaget, Kegan, Gilligan, and others. Fowler's (1981, 1996) groundbreaking work, which explores spirituality as a developmental process, is particularly central for both.

All of these approaches, in turn, owe a debt to the groundbreaking work of educator and philosopher John Dewey, who also made significant forays into psychology. In 1934, Dewey published *A Common Faith*, a short and provocative book about the religious dimension of human experience. His central claim, which has proven quite generative for later thinkers, is that there is a fundamental difference between traditional conceptions of "religion" and a more pragmatic understanding of "the religious." Today, we may roughly translate this distinction into the difference between "religion" and "spirituality."

Dewey's first chapter, titled "Religion Versus the Religious," elucidates the difference. Religion, Dewey explains, is often conceived of as a noun substantive (p. 9). It usually "signifies a special body of beliefs and practices having some kind of institutional organization, loose or tight" (p.

9). In contrast, "the adjective 'religious' denotes nothing in the way of a specifiable entity, either institutional or as a system of beliefs" (p. 9). Instead, "the religious" denotes attitudes that may be taken toward every object and every proposed end or ideal" (p. 10). Thus, rather than focus on the question of what "a religion" is, Dewey urges his readers to consider how we may enact a sense of "the religious" in our everyday lives. He reminds us that, like all living creatures, we are organisms who interact with our environment. In particular cases, this interaction involves the creation of powerful ideals that may stir and re-orient us in deep-seated ways. For Dewey, such interactions need not be limited to the experiences of organized religion. If our transactions with our environment lead to a deep-seated re-orientation or "adjustment" in life, then by virtue of this effect, the experience is a religious one.[1] Dewey goes on to say that "the actual religious quality in the experience described is the effect produced, the better adjustment in life and its conditions, not the manner and cause of its production. The way in which the experience operated, its function, determines its religious value" (p. 14). Dewey thus flips the script here on our traditional conception of religious faith. Religious studies scholar Eddie Glaude, Jr. aptly describes this as Dewey's "inversion strategy" (Glaude, 2018, p. 8). Rather than assume a priori that religious institutions are automatically and necessarily the source of deep-seated and enduring changes in attitude, Dewey turns the statement around, positing that "whenever this change takes place there is definitely a religious attitude. It is not a religion that brings it about, but when it occurs, from whatever cause and by whatever means, there is a religious outlook and function" (1934, p. 17).

We find value in these insights. As mentioned earlier, an overriding question for us has been: How does first-hand experience with faith-based experiences with immigrants impact DePaul students as well as ICDI staff and volunteers? Reframed in slightly more Deweyan terms, we are asking: How do faith-based experiences (such as student immersion experiences and/or ongoing ICDI staff and volunteer advocacy) lead to deep-seated and enduring changes in attitude? Moreover, how do these changes in attitude manifest themselves in socially-engaged practice?

Faith-in-Action in the Context of Immigrant Detention: A Line of Inquiry

As the first section of this article made clear, DePaul and ICDI are faith-based entities that put a premium on faith in action. As such, they speak both to Dewey's sense of "religion" and to his more engaged and dynamic sense of "the religious." Whereas Dewey himself tends to draw a sharp distinction between these two ideas, our missions suggest another picture, wherein both exist in a mutually beneficial relation, even amidst inevitable tensions and contradictions. The missions of our respective contexts invite us to see this relationship in a more nuanced way.

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[1] For a discussion of Dewey's somewhat technical understanding of "adjustment," see Tirres (2014), p. 95-96 and Alexander (2013), p. 362-368.

That said, mission statements are only as good as the deeds and acts that actually help bring them to life. If our missions reflect our institution's most cherished ideals, what other concrete evidence can we draw on that shows that we are effectively enacting mission? What does our collaborative work with ICDI teach us about how we actualize faith in action? And how can our community partnership itself help to create meaningful mission-related learning experiences? The following section describes the methodology that we used to tackle these questions, and it shares some of our basic findings.

## Methodology

Our collaboration utilizes a framework of action research, which orients inquiry toward the enhancement of direct practice (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) and leverages research "to bring about social change" (Bogdan and Biklen 1992, p. 223; Lewin, 1946). We are interested in both of these aspects as we each strive to improve our practice as facilitators of adult learning and spiritual formation. We value the dialogical, sustained, and iterative nature of our partnership and find resonance with Greenwood and Levin's (2005) assertion that action research can be an effective way to bring together university research and teaching with community needs. Through action research, we are able to move constantly between practice and theory so that we can "address questions and issues that are significant for those who participate as co-researchers" (Reason and Bradbury, 2008, p.1).

Additionally, we are particularly interested in the meaning that students, volunteers, and staff are making of their experiences with immigration-related activities. Following a qualitative research approach, we are interested in what Eisner calls "the virtues of subjectivity" (p. 48-49). As with the parable of the blind men and the elephant, we recognize the rich benefit that can come from all the different perspectives of knowing the elephant, none of which is true or complete and all of which capture a piece of the experience.

Our collaboration emerged out of our shared work with ICDI. In 2015, I (Chris Tirres) began volunteering with the organization. About a year later, I approached Dr. Schikore to see if she might be interested in working on a shared project. We discussed what each was interested in learning and accomplishing through the partnership. I wanted to know how exposure to work of ICDI would influence my students and how I could best integrate immersion experiences into his class.

For my part, I (Melanie Schikore) wanted to better understand what it was about a person's faith that called them to the work of accompanying and walking with detained immigrants and how serving as an ICDI staff person or volunteer impacted their faith journey. Knowing more about this would help ICDI to strengthen our interfaith aspect of the organization, recruit and support

volunteers, and shape donation appeals. Both Dr. Tirres and I anticipated that we would each benefit and learn much from doing this work collaboratively.

Working collaboratively, the overarching question that guided our research was: "How does direct engagement with the issues faced by those in immigrant detention affect people?" In order to address this question, we designed two rounds of qualitative research that explored two key sub-questions: "How do immigration-related immersion experiences impact students?" and "How does working or volunteering in the field of immigrant accompaniment impact the faith journeys of staff and volunteers?"

We used two instruments for anonymized data collection: a writing prompt for students and an online survey for ICDI staff and volunteers. Students were asked to address the following prompt:

> In this class, you participated in three different immersion experiences: the ICDI Prayer Vigil, the Días de los Muertos exhibit in Pilsen, and the ICDI Courtwatch program. In roughly a page (~300 words), reflect on what was most significant for you in two of these experiences. (After briefly describing each experience, consider questions like: What was most valuable to your learning? How did the experience open up new insights or questions for you? What take home idea(s) from these experiences are most likely to stick with you over the next 15 years?)

The online survey for ICDI staff and volunteers consisted of 14 questions that were designed to explore the relationship between their faith and the work of ICDI (see Appendix). For the purposes of this article, Question 10 is of particular relevance: "How, if at all, have your experiences with immigrants and ICDI informed or impacted your faith journey?

Tables 1 and 2 show the participation rates and self-identified faith traditions.

***Table 1***. Participation Rates among DePaul Students and ICDI Staff and Volunteers
Participation

| Students | Staff | Volunteers |
|---|---|---|
| 21/27 (78%) | 3/7 (43%) | 55/300 (18%) |

*Table 2.* ICDI staff and volunteer self-identified faith tradition

| | |
|---|---|
| Catholic | 24 |
| Jewish | 8 |
| Lutheran (ELCA) | 4 |
| Unitarian Universalist | 3 |
| Episcopalian | 3 |
| Protestant | 2 |
| United Church of Christ | 2 |
| Kindness | 2 |
| Church of Christ | 1 |
| Muslim | 1 |
| Jewish agnostic | 1 |
| Buddhist | 1 |
| Sikh | 1 |
| Mennonite | 1 |
| American Baptist | 1 |
| Progressive Presbyterian | 1 |
| Christian | 1 |
| Interfaith | 1 |
| Spiritual | 1 |
| No answer | 1 |

## Data Analysis

Because we were at an early stage in this research and without a pre-determined understanding of what we were looking for, we wanted the themes to emerge from the data. Additionally, we wanted to see if there were shared themes while also respecting the unique themes of each data set and of each individual. We are interested in meeting each student or volunteer where they are so that we can support and enhance their learning. Using a "a general method of [constant] comparative analysis" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. vii) over the course of our iterative action research, we will generate theory from the data, elaborating and modifying theories as we learn more.

We recruited an undergraduate assistant to help code the student data, and we enlisted another professor (who also volunteers with ICDI), to help code the ICDI staff and volunteer data. For each data set we employed generative coding. We used a combination of deductive and inductive approaches (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and drew on grounded theory as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998). Our process of open coding consisted of identifying concepts, phrases, key words, and quotations in order to categorize responses. After doing so individually, we met to share and discuss our notes in order to achieve inter-coder agreement.

## Limitations

We acknowledge several methodological limitations to our study. First, because we anonymized all data, we could not follow up with particular students or ICDI volunteers/staff to probe further any responses which were unclear or incomplete. Second, we currently only have two sources of data. In the future, we anticipate collecting data through additional means including in-depth interviews, observations, field notes, classroom notes, and other artifacts. Third, the data sets were not entirely comparable because we asked different questions. Whereas students were asked to reflect broadly on what proved most significant for their learning, ICDI staff and volunteers were asked to focus more narrowly on how their work with ICDI impacted their faith journey. Lastly, due to small sample size we analyzed the volunteer and staff data as one set but are aware that looking at the staff and volunteer data separately may provide additional insights given that staff have many more hours of engagement.

## Findings

These above limitations notwithstanding, our data analysis reveals a variety of ways in which the work of ICDI impacts students, volunteers, and staff and offers insight into our ongoing conversation about faith, faith journeys, and pedagogy.

*Student Data.* As we discuss in our first co-authored publication (Tirres & Schikore, 2020), five themes emerged from the student data:

> 1) Most students reported a <u>change in perspective</u> through the immersion experiences.
> 2) A majority of students reported that the immersion activities provoked <u>psycho-emotional responses</u>.
> 3) Many students expressed awareness of their own <u>social location</u>.
> 4) A majority of students conveyed a <u>desire to make a change in the world</u>.
> 5) Several students connected their immersion experiences to the <u>current political situation</u>.

We analyzed these five themes in light of Clingerman and Locklin's (2016) "CLEA" model of civically engaged learning. Briefly, this model identifies four capacities that are engendered through civically engaged learning: the power to entertain intellectual <u>c</u>omplexity (C), the ability to recognize one's social <u>l</u>ocation (L), the capacity to be <u>e</u>mpathetically accountable (E), and the impetus to move toward motivated <u>a</u>ction (A).

Although we did not specifically ask students to reflect on how their experience of immigration-related work intersected with their own faith journeys, it is worth noting that a number of responses referenced matters of faith.

| References to faith | "I thought it was so powerful for a group of people from different faiths and cultures to come together to fight for one cause and bring comfort to the families and immigrations through the power of prayer."<br><br>"What was most significant to me from the immersion experience at the ICDI Prayer Vigil was that people of different religions organized and came together to show their solidarity with those being processed for deportation and their families at the Broadview Detention Center." |
|---|---|
| References to interfaith | "The prayer vigil opened my eyes to how other religions besides Catholicism have an impact on Latinos. This is because we attended the interfaith section. I had known that Mexico has a notable Jewish population, having provided refuge to Jewish people escaping persecution during World War II. Also, I knew that my neighbor who is Mexican is Jewish, but it never really clicked to me just how much more important Judaism can be for Latinos until the rabbi said the prayer in Hebrew."<br><br>"I will continue the rituals of interfaith prayers and altars for my loved ones and our struggles, and I will pass these rituals on to my children." |

In references to faith, students acknowledged the presence of both formal religious traditions (i.e. "a group of people from different faiths," "people of different religions") as well as more active expressions of faith (i.e. "com[ing] together to fight for one cause," "bring[ing] comfort" to others through the practice of prayer," "[coming] together to show their solidarity."

In references to interfaith, this element of the prayer vigil enabled the student to see how other faith traditions work toward social justice and a student expressed how the interfaith aspect of the prayer vigil will inform future actions

*ICDI Staff and Volunteer data.*
In our initial coding of the ICDI staff and volunteer data, two prominent themes emerged. Respondents reported that the work of ICDI: (1) strengthened their faith. Respondents also reported that their involvement with ICDI helped them to appreciate their work with ICDI as a form of (2) faith in action.

| Strengthened their faith | "My interaction has only made my faith stronger"<br><br>"It strengthens my belief that we are all one human family and it is incumbent upon each of us to work for the betterment of the world for each other's sake." |
|---|---|
| Faith in action | "It helps me see my faith in action. Working with immigrants deepens my understanding of what it means to love my neighbor and work for social justice."<br><br>"Felt it was time to stop sitting on the sidelines. There were great needs all around me and needed some way to give back. Finding ICDI was a great blessing. It allowed close involvement with a community in ways I could have never accomplished on my own, and felt greatly strengthened by people I was meeting in ICDI." |

We continued to discuss the coding and made connections between the student data and the ICDI data. We realized that there were certain parallels between the two data sets in terms of cognitive and spiritual development among adult learners. The CLEA model, which we utilized to better understand how immersion experiences were impacting students, shed light on the fact that civically engaged activities helped students to grow not only in terms of intellectual complexity (C), but also in terms of their becoming more aware of their own social location (L), their empathetic accountability (E), and their expressed desire to engage in some form of motivated action (A). As we re-visited the ICDI staff and volunteer data, we noted that there was a

somewhat homologous learning process at play. We thus revisited this data set in terms of (1) how individuals internalize meaning from their own faith journey; (2) how a dialogic process of engaging immigrants impacts one's spiritual development; and (3) the ways in which these experiences may open up onto questions of social justice. In short, we saw a pattern that moved more or less from the "I" to the "we" to the "should" of spiritual discernment. This pattern shares certain affinities with Kegan's (1994) five order of consciousness which move from an egocentric "me" perspective to an ethnocentric "us" perspective to a world-centric "all of us" perspective (Kegan, 1994 and Kegan and Wilbur, 2013). Since we specifically asked ICDI volunteers and staff questions related to faith, we have rich data referencing different aspects of faith as it relates to these ideas.

Respondents expressed various ways in which they were personally impacted by their work with ICDI. Such responses connote a certain inward focus that highlight how some individuals assess their own spiritual development.

| Personal impact | "My own need for prayer and meditation has grown." |
| | "It opened my eyes" |
| | "It gave me an opportunity to share my faith." |
| | "I feel joy" |
| | "I enjoy being able to 'be there' for the detainees" |
| | "I have been renewed." |

At the same time, many respondents also noted that their spiritual growth is closely tied to a dialogical and intersubjective encounter with detained immigrants. For many, spiritual growth takes place through learning from immigrants and accompanying them on their journey. These statements underscore the dialogic nature of providing spiritual care and how being in a sustained relationship impacts one's faith journey.

| Learning from immigrants and accompaniment | "These people challenge and inspire me to have a deeper, healthier spiritual life myself." "I am continually challenged to examine the core of my beliefs by the unadorned faith of those we meet in jail." |

Additionally, ICDI volunteers and staff noted that their work with ICDI had inspired them to live lives of faith in action and to work toward social justice. Several answers indicated that this was something respondents had moved towards.

| Inspired to faith in action/social justice | "ICDI has given me the opportunity to live out my faith commitment to social justice on an ongoing basis, at least weekly, and sometimes daily." |
|---|---|
| | "I am getting braver about speaking out to advocate for those seeking asylum" |
| | "I feel more committed than ever to be involved in the pursuit of justice for immigrants." |

## Discussion

From the data we can see that ICDI-related activities impact DePaul students and ICDI staff and volunteers in significant ways. Given our action research framework, we are interested in further understanding and supporting significant learning experiences and spiritual development in our respective contexts. Accordingly, we have begun thinking about our two sets of data as representative of a continuum of spiritual development. The framework that we have developed can be described in terms of encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy, which may then open up onto larger questions of social justice. This framework could be represented as the following:

Encounter        Accompaniment             Advocacy      (Social Justice)
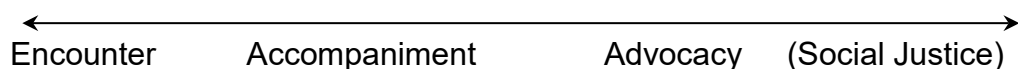
Through various encounters with detained immigrants and their families, both DePaul students and ICDI staff and volunteers learn firsthand about the lived realities that immigrants face. They learn directly about their histories, their legal struggles, and their sense of hope and faith. Participants feel the plight of the immigrant in palpable ways. Through various modes of accompaniment, such as listening, praying, laughing, crying, witnessing, and being present, participants both give and receive. They witness firsthand the tremendous hope, resiliency, and faith that many detained immigrants carry with them, even in the bleakest of situations. In so doing, they learn how to walk with immigrants at various stages of the process. Through sustained forms of accompaniment, some participants are compelled to advocate for detained

immigrants and their families. This may take the form of writing letters or assisting family members of someone who is detained. All of these forms of faith in action, encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy, can bolster in significant ways the faith journey of participants, and, in many cases, they can further shape one's commitment to social justice. Without a doubt, praxis-centered missions also significantly inform the process.

It is instructive to note that this journey of encounter → accompaniment → advocacy → social justice is present in both the student data and the ICDI staff and volunteer data, though to different degrees. For example, the half-day immersion experiences can be seen as clear examples of encounter. Because these experiences are not ongoing, accompaniment and advocacy are less pronounced in the student data. That said, there are certainly at least some gestures in these general directions, as when students reflect on what it was like to observe immigration court, which can be seen as a form of accompaniment, and when students express a desire to make a change in the world, which can be seen as an early form of advocacy and engagement with social justice. That said, more clear-cut examples of encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy can be seen in the ICDI staff and volunteer data, owing to the fact that participants partake in the work of ICDI in an ongoing and sustained way.

Having acknowledged a certain parallel between the two sets of data in terms of a developmental continuum, it is equally important to note that this process is not as simple, linear, or unidirectional as a continuum suggests. Factors such as previous life experience, faith origin, and proximity to directly impacted people can influence where one is and how one moves on the continuum. For example, if someone comes out of a religious tradition that is focused somewhat narrowly on charity, then a commitment to social justice may not be part of one's spiritual trajectory. Likewise, if one is already intimately familiar with lived realities of undocumented immigration or immigrant detention, then acts of encounter and accompaniment are likely to be less pronounced in the process, given that may be already implicitly presumed. Furthermore, as just noted, the extent to which one is involved in the work also affects where one might place oneself on the continuum. After all, working with immigrant populations on a regular basis is qualitatively different from participating in a limited set of immersion experiences.

To address some of the shortcomings of the continuum framework, we have imagined a quadrant that allows for a more interrelated and fluid understanding of a person's location and movement between categories:

|                |                 |
| :------------: | :-------------: |
| ENCOUNTER      | ACCOMPANIMENT   |
| ADVOCACY       | SOCIAL JUSTICE  |
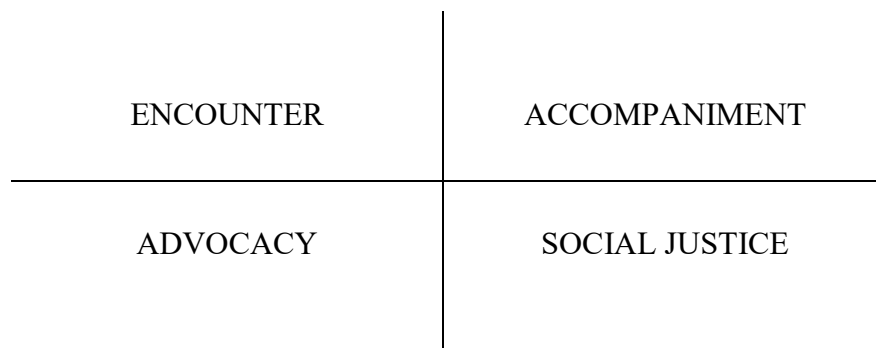
In the quadrant model (which is distinct from an overlapping Venn diagram model), one can move from any one point to another, and overlap between the quadrants is not necessarily a given. Indeed, within ICDI there have been volunteers who came to the work good-hearted and with a passion for direct advocacy but fairly naive of the actual issues facing immigrants. Nevertheless, over time and through various forms of encounter and accompaniment, they developed a social justice mindset. Conversely, there have also been volunteers who came to the work owing primarily to a strong sense of justice. In their case, their faith journey was deepened by forms of accompaniment, such as working alongside immigrants as well as other volunteers from diverse faith traditions. As such cases illustrate, the starting points of faith in action may be vastly different among participants. The quadrant thus serves as a tool that can help locate the various entry points of participants. It might also be useful in helping to articulate how someone engages with the work at any given time.

If nothing else, both the continuum and quadrant framework help us to identify some of the concrete ways, such as encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy, in which faith in action actually manifests itself in the context of our work with detained immigrants. Based on what we have learned so far, we hope subsequently to explore questions such as the following: How can we further shape the pedagogy within our respective settings, a university classroom and a nonprofit organization, to best nurture and support the faith journeys of adult learners? How can student engagement with ICDI-related activities inform the ongoing work of ICDI staff and volunteers, and, conversely, how can experiences of ICDI volunteers and staff inform student learning and spiritual growth?

Implications

We have learned much from our collaborative action research in terms of both the process and the substance of our inquiry. As it regards to process, we acknowledge just how valuable a shared sense of mission has been for our community partnership. Both DePaul University and ICDI are grounded in faith traditions whose founding congregations put a premium on faith in

action. Today, this charism remains tangibly present in our respective institutions. In addition, we recognize that our institutions also provide crucial resources in the way of human capital (i.e. leadership, scholarly expertise, and practical know-how), material infrastructure, and historical memory. Such resources help to support in a very direct way that work of faith in action.

As regards the substance of our research, we continue to gain clarity on the various ways in which faith, spirituality, inter-faith, and religion function in the context of our community-based research project. As we have seen, faith is indeed something that runs much deeper than the question of one's particular institutional affiliation. Whereas faith may well be understood as a noun, as in a particular faith tradition, it is the adjectival or adverbial sense of the term, that is, how human experience and action function and manifest themselves in a faith-filled way that gets us closer to its core meaning.

But just as soon as we make this distinction between faith in action and institutions of faith, we must nevertheless ask: as important as it may be to differentiate the religious aspect of human experience from institutional religion, are the two mutually exclusive? Are religio and "the religious really as separate as Dewey would lead us to believe? Or, to put the matter in more contemporary terms, is being spiritual necessarily at odds with being religious? As we have found, institutional religion, at its best, can indeed help to cultivate organic expressions of human spirituality, which may extend well beyond any particular institutional affiliation.

Our study has shown that faith in action may manifest itself in a variety of forms, including encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy. These are all ways of doing faith. Furthermore, such activities may contribute to significant forms of learning and spiritual growth, which necessitate a certain level of reflection. The former president of DePaul, Dennis Holtschneider, underscores the interconnection between doing and reflecting in his description of Vincentian formation, which he identifies as a "Go-Then" philosophy:

> Vincentian formation doesn't begin with a classroom, or a book, or a lecture. The philosophy of Vincentian formation is a "GO-THEN" philosophy. Go serve them, then come back and talk about it. Go serve them, then begin to ask what works and what doesn't work. Go serve them, then begin to figure out why they (and others like them) are poor in such a wealthy society. Go serve them, then begin to ask others who serve them how they keep serving over the years. The best learning happens when it's grounded in real life and real questions. The Vincentian mission must always be deeply rooted in the lives of the poor. Start there. We don't learn the Vincentian Spirit from a book. We can only get it working with the poor (2005, p. 3).

Implied here is a form of deep learning that is at the same time a form of spiritual formation in the widest sense. One engages Vincentian learning and, by extension, Vincentian spirituality, by doing. The same can be said of ICDI. Although the faith dimension of ICDI can very well be

understood in a formal sense, i.e. as a reflection of the organization's inter-faith commitment to work with variety of religious traditions, more potent expressions of faith emerge when one looks at how participants actually encounter, accompany, and/or advocate for detained immigrants and their families. In such cases, both faith and mission are brought to life.

As we have shown, one can engage faith on a variety of levels. For some, faith is a highly personal matter of assenting to doctrine. In such a case, it is often presumed that the more one adheres to established teachings, the more faithful one becomes. For others, engaging a faith tradition may happen in more impersonal ways as an institutional fact of life, regardless of one's personal religious convictions. For example, non-religious students may attend DePaul, just as non-religious individuals may volunteer with ICDI. In these cases, although one may not engage faith as a matter of personal conviction or belief, one is still engaging with a faith-based tradition at an institutional, or formal, level.

Although the examples above vary in significant ways, they all share one thing in common: they tend to approach faith as primarily a question of institutional affiliation. As we have argued, however, faith has other possible starting points, including the praxis of social engagement. Our community partnership has yielded many valuable insights for us, but one of the most valuable has been the recognition that the two of us (Tirres at DePaul, and Schikore at ICDI) are both fundamentally committed to socially-engaged learning that creates significant learning experiences for adult learners. Furthermore, we have come to realize that socially-engaged learning may take a variety of forms, including encounter, accompaniment, and advocacy. Such forms of engagement prove to be religious through their function and effects more so than through their formal connections to religious institutions. That being said, in both of our cases, there is significant overlap between institutional religion and a more diffuse sense of the religious, making the question all the more interesting. For example, the mere fact of being within a faith-related context has implications for faith journeys, even for those without a profession of faith.

The point that we would like to stress here, however, is that for both of the adult populations with whom we work, DePaul students and ICDI staff and volunteers, the very act of engaging detained immigrants and their families may contribute significantly to one's spiritual journey. This engagement may open up a new way of doing faith. As we have seen, this journey need not be linear, and people may enter and exit)the process at various points of engagement. But in all cases, the process of engaged learning and engaged reflection can be a valuable part of one's spiritual journey. Faith-based institutions and organizations often have high aspirations for bringing their mission to life and for contributing to the spiritual formation of those under their care. They would be well served to remember that such high aspirations may very well begin to take root in the granular and pedagogical experiences of engaged learning, especially when it is connected to community outreach and social justice.

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## Appendix

ICDI Staff and Volunteer Survey Questions (online)

Q1 Do you consent [to taking this survey]?

Q2 How do you most identify your role with ICDI at present?

Q3 If you have served in another capacity within ICDI previously, what was it? Please explain.

Q4 How long have you been involved with ICDI?

Q5 In which age range do you fit?

Q6 Which ICDI program(s) have you been involved in? (You may check more than one).

Q7 Please identify your faith tradition(s).

Q8 Describe your faith journey up to this point in your life. For example, how has your faith journey changed, grown, or deepened over time? How, if at all, is your faith experience different now from earlier periods in your life?

Q9 How, if at all, has your faith journey brought you to the work of ICDI / immigration?

Q10 How, if at all, have your experiences with immigrants and ICDI informed or impacted your faith journey?

Q11 As you know, ICDI is an intentionally interfaith organization that serves people of all faiths. How, if at all, has the interfaith aspect of ICDI impacted your faith journey?

Q12 Does your faith have a public stance or statement on immigration? What is it? How does it align with your personal beliefs?

Q13 What has been most valuable to you about your experience with ICDI?

Q14 How has your involvement with ICDI opened up new insights or questions for you?