A SUTHERLAND INSTITUTE
POLICY PUBLICATION

What Good Does Religion Do?

Social Benefits of Religion, Volume 1

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A NEW BIRTH OF FREEDOM

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What Good Does Religion Do?

Social Benefits of Religion, Volume 1

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Series Introduction

Religious freedom has become an issue of great national concern. At one time, there was strong consensus that this foremost constitutional right deserved protection, but now there seems to be a more critical construction of religious practice, going so far as to construe religious freedom as a "license to discriminate."

This entirely unfair characterization may have gained currency because while religious affiliation is still common, it is declining, and this may mean that a larger proportion of Americans do not understand, or even sympathize with, the religious beliefs and practices of their fellow citizens.

The Framers of the First Amendment treated religious freedom as an intrinsic good when they protected its practice, but the assumptions on which they acted are not guaranteed to be as widely shared today. For an increasing number of people, other priorities seem to be in conflict. This suggests that those who recognize the importance of continuing protection of religious practice, even when it is unfamiliar or unpopular, may need to make the case for that priority to others.

One resource in doing so is the large body of anecdotal and empirical evidence of contributions made by religious belief, people of faith, and religious organizations. Although these benefits are experienced by adherents of religious belief, they redound to the good of society more generally. In fact, people who have no particular religious affiliation or may even be hostile to the beliefs of others still benefit from the religious motivations and actions of those who are guided by faith in their lives.

Policymakers, in particular, can benefit from understanding the unique social benefits of religious belief and practice. The valuable social and economic contributions of religion-based organizations can easily be undermined by regulatory burdens. Often well-intended, laws that regulate religious social service programs or religious businesses can force these organizations to take resources that would otherwise go toward helping vulnerable children or creating jobs that support families, and instead use them to fill out paperwork or pay for lawsuits. That outcome is good for no one.

In the conviction that a better understanding of the social benefits of religion can promote a pluralistic approach to protecting religious freedom and other rights, Sutherland Institute has been publishing articles on the broad benefits of religious belief and practice since 2020. This series includes edited versions of these earlier articles arranged in three thematic publications: (1) social services, (2) education, and (3) the roots of liberty.

The treatment of the social benefits of religion in this publication is not comprehensive, and Sutherland will continue to research and write about this topic including in more academic fora, but perhaps this paper can contribute to a broader understanding of some of the major themes, understanding that it is just the beginning of a vast and critical project.

Publication Introduction

For many people, terms like religion or faith conjure up images of ceremonial worship, but for believers, religious faith is likely to be understood not only as a vital aspect of personal identity but also of social responsibility. In fact, those who are not affiliated with a church are more likely to interact with religious organizations and people of faith not through worship services, but through social services. This publication catalogs some important examples of how religious groups and those who belong to them provide important services not only to their own adherents but to their neighbors.

The examples discussed in this publication are the provision of emergency relief (including pandemic response, assistance to the homeless and refugees, and a local example), charitable giving, social services (particularly for the elderly, prisoners, vulnerable children, families in need, and the un- and underemployed), and medical care.

Emergency Relief

Churches and faith-based nonprofits are often some of the first to step up in a time of crisis. Much like doctors, police officers, firefighters and other first responders, people and organizations motivated by their religious beliefs are often looking to help resolve difficult situations that the rest of us simply want to get away from.

The *Deseret News* published an inspiring case study involving a volcanic eruption and subsequent tsunami in Tonga. The story highlights how faith helped Tongans cope with the disaster and its aftermath.[1]

Empirical data also demonstrates how helpful religious groups can be in providing disaster relief: "Nearly 75 percent of organizations helping the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) rebuild communities are faith-based groups."[2]

COVID Response

At the time of the COVID pandemic, many churches and religious organizations stepped in to help meet emergency needs. For example, Taoist nunneries and temples in China have made large donations of money and medical equipment to help those seeking to limit the spread of the pandemic in that country.[3] In Utah, Park City Christian Center served nearly 900 people with continuing food needs. Catholic Community Services of Utah provided food and shelter to homeless Utahns, despite the fact that some in these groups are likely at higher risk for infection from the coronavirus.[4]

These were only a few examples of countless instances of religious organizations and people of faith making special efforts to provide assistance – beyond what would be expected – to respond to the pandemic. Other examples included:

- Islamic Relief USA allocated $1.9 million to local mosques engaged in "food, hygiene and financial assistance."[5]
- A Presbyterian congregation in Sacramento organized younger parishioners to deliver groceries to older members, help them get to medical appointments, and make weekly calls to those who are lonely.[6]
- Muslim youth at the University of South Carolina organized an effort to provide food for people in need in Greenville.[7]
- Catholic nuns in Myanmar have sewn masks for the poor and protective suits for health workers.[8]
- The evangelical charity Samaritan's Purse set up a field hospital in Central Park in New York City to help with the overflow of patients from a nearby hospital.[9]

In fact, the 2020 coronavirus aid bill included important provisions that reflect the importance of religious and other private charitable endeavors at times of great need.[10] Howard Husock of the Manhattan Institute outlined the relevant proposals:

> The key provisions would extend a tax benefit for charitable giving to all taxpayers, not just the few relatively affluent households that itemize their deductions.
>
> The numbers could be significant. Draft legislation allows for a $300 deduction for all taxpayers. A proposed amendment, backed by an impressive range of senators, including Oklahoma Republican James Lankford and Minnesota Democrat Amy Klobuchar, would make an expanded charitable deduction of $4,000 for single taxpayers and $8,000 for married couples available even to those who don't otherwise itemize.

As Husock explains, "Both are crucial additions to the tax code and recognize that, when America is in crisis, civil society steps in to provide assistance, whether to those who need food deliveries but are not Amazon Prime members or those who need basic shelter. Meals on Wheels, local churches, synagogues, and mosques are all aspects of America's civil society.[11]

As Boyd Matheson explained in the *Deseret News* at the time:

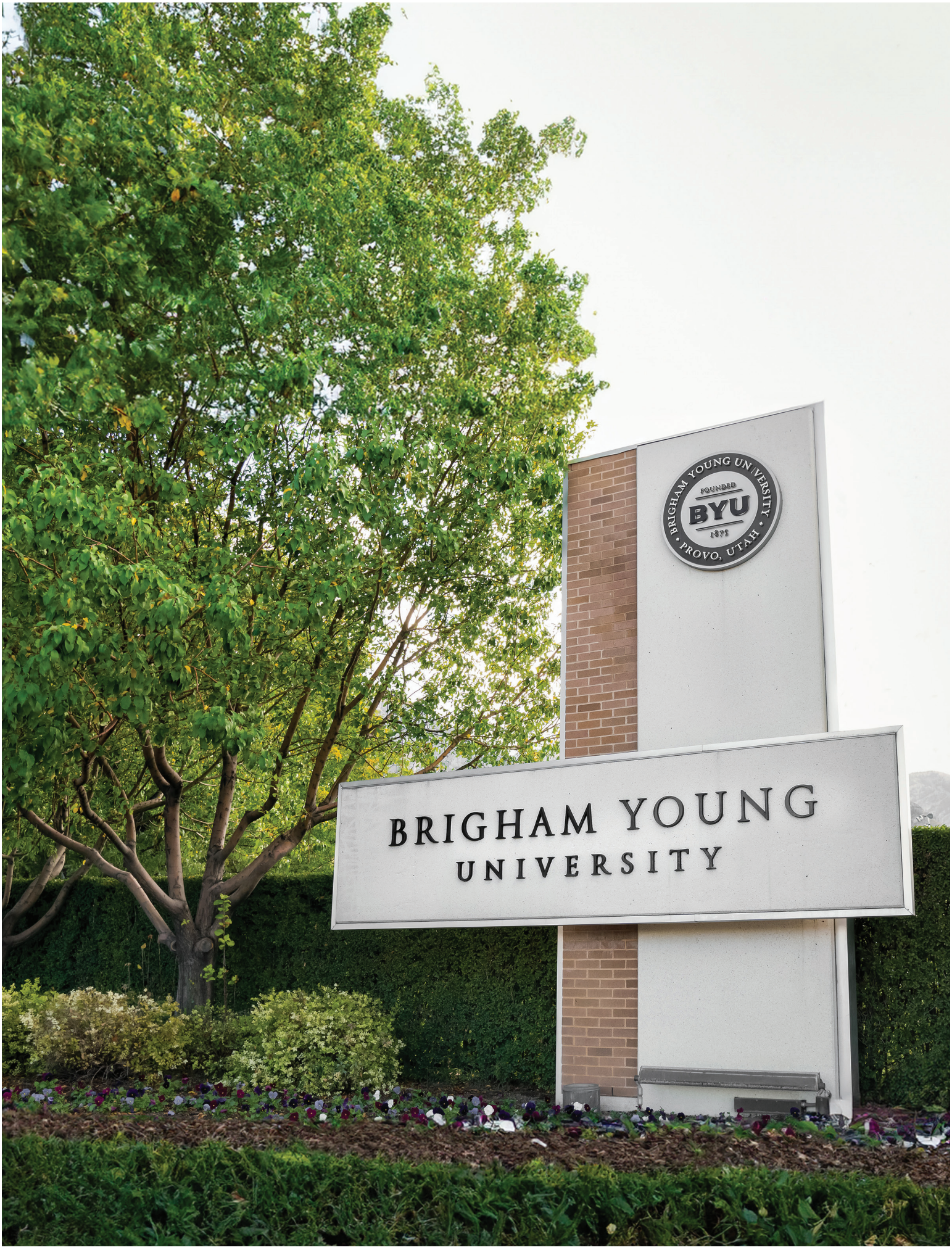
> Government is going to be overrun with demand for social services in the days ahead. Where will those in need turn? They would usually look to civil society, but, sadly, the coronavirus has also propelled nonprofits, religious, civic and volunteer organizations into unstable and uncharted territory. If the virus cripples charitable giving and decimates nonprofits, it would blow a gaping hole in our already shredded social fabric. It could undermine forever the foundational character of our country.[12]

It made good sense to provide incentives for charitable giving so that religious and other organizations at the forefront of pandemic relief would be able to get the support critical to their work. For all of the monetary resources at their disposal, government agencies and officials simply did not have the nimbleness or the relationships to quickly get relief to those in need in a time of crisis. That's where churches and faith-based nonprofits provided an irreplaceable service within our social safety net.

One Utah example provides a striking footnote to this discussion.

Just a few days after the pandemic response began, a small-business-loan program from the federal government's response to COVID-19 ran entirely out of money. It turned out that the loans were going not just to troubled small businesses, but also to large companies with other sources of funds available who still kept the money.[13]

By contrast, in May 2020, Utah County's largest employer announced it would not accept federal assistance – assistance of more than $32 million that it had not applied for but that had been earmarked for it nonetheless. That employer was Brigham Young University. In total, BYU and the other colleges in the Church Education System of


BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY
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The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints – BYU-Idaho, BYU-Hawaii and LDS Business College (soon to be Ensign College) – were willing to forgo over $54 million in funding. The schools informed the U.S. Department of Education of their decision "so the money can be used at schools in greater need of aid." Private funds assisted the students at these church schools.[14]

Homelessness

Robert is a formerly homeless man who lives in Dallas. During his time on the streets, he used and sold drugs, but he has now experienced a religious conversion and is focused on helping others now going through what he once did. He credits OurCalling, a religious charity in Dallas County, with providing him the help he needed to turn things around. He contrasted their help with that of other charities that only provide financial assistance. OurCalling is more impactful, he believes, because of its religious approach.[15]

OurCalling was in the news in 2021 because a city council decision threatened to limit its ability to conduct its ministry in emergency conditions.[16] OurCalling is a church and not a shelter, but in severe weather, after shelters and other accommodations are full, it remains open full time so people are not sent out into dangerous conditions. The city council decided that temporary shelters cannot operate in the portion of downtown Dallas in which OurCalling is located. As the attorneys representing the ministry explained in a letter to the city, this implicates the religious freedom of the church:

> OurCalling's religious beliefs require it to keep its doors open as a last resort during emergencies. Its faith does not allow it to close its doors during emergency circumstances (such as freezing weather) and send the people it serves out into the cold to risk frostbite, hypothermia, or even death while bidding them to "go in peace; keep warm and well fed." [James 2:15-17 NIV][17]

This situation highlights the crucial work of religious nonprofits in helping homeless people. As OurCalling noted in its letter: "During the historic February 2021 snowstorm, OurCalling staffed the Kay Bailey Hutchison Convention Center, providing shelter to over 1000 people." Thankfully, the impasse with the city ended, and OurCalling continues its work.

A news story from 2017 describes a Baylor University study of 11 U.S. cities, which found that "[r]eligious organizations provide more than half the emergency shelter beds for homeless people in major cities across the country." The story noted:

> Researchers also estimated there was a three-year total of $119 million in taxpayer savings connected to faith-based organizations that provided transitional housing programs in those cities, which provide longer lengths of stay and include mentoring and rehabilitation. "Certainly there is a value to providing emergency shelter beds in terms of everything from the downtown business community to health concerns," said report co-author William Wubbenhorst. "But the real value is the degree to which organizations bring about transformation in individuals."

The study only looked at "groups such as the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities and rescue missions and not houses of worship, some of which also provide shelter for the homeless."[18] So the impact of religious organizations on alleviating homelessness could be even greater.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness says that "[f]aith-based organizations serve as the backbone of the emergency shelter system in this country." In fact, they believe "significantly fewer households experiencing homelessness would be served and more would remain in crisis without faith-based organizations, and homelessness cannot be ended without their efforts."[19]

The alliance notes that in addition to providing shelters, religious charities also help with permanent housing, provide critical funding, and recruit volunteers. As an example, earlier this year, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints donated $3.3 million to help with homeless initiatives in the state of Utah.[20]

OurCalling illustrates the scope of services that religious charities can provide. When the ministry becomes aware of an encampment of homeless people or an individual on the streets, it seeks out those in need to make a connection. At its facility, OurCalling offers "worship services, Bible studies, substance abuse recovery programs, peer group meetings for men and women, one-on-one mentorship and ministry, laundry services, showers, clothing, and meals."[21] It also publishes a small directory of services that individuals can share when they meet someone who is homeless.[22]

As Robert's experience, noted above, makes clear, religious charities provide more than tangible resources. As OurCalling describes itself:

> We are a team of volunteers motivated by the love of Christ to search in every corner of the city for the lost and needy and offer them true friendship and meaningful support. We build long-term relationships with friends on the street, guiding them to a relationship with Jesus Christ that will help them to realize their worth and inspire them to invest in their lives.[23]

This unique motivation and inclusion of individual transformation in their work differentiates religious charities from the important work done by government agencies and secular charities.

Refugee Assistance

Another example of emergency relief offered because of religious motivation involves the overwhelming challenge of the plight of refugees. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees reports that 84 million people worldwide have been forcibly displaced. Many are still within their countries, but more than 26 million are refugees who have left.

Religious motivation to help refugees is deep and durable and prompts actions that governments are unlikely to take, at least without great expense to taxpayers. A United Nations report notes:

> Religious people and communities of many different faith traditions have a long history of aid for those in need, including those fleeing war, poverty or persecution. Religious orders and monasteries of various traditions offered places

> of safety and aid to the poor, and from the 19th century onwards religiously based charities of many different faith backgrounds have become involved in humanitarian assistance of various kinds.

The reports explains that this assistance transcends denominational boundaries: "Given the nature of current conflicts, many of the refugees are Muslim but most of the faith organisations involved in their resettlement are either Christian or Jewish."[24]

A sociologist at Michigan State notes that religious groups have historically provided important advocacy for refugees. "Starting in the late 19th century, and during the Holocaust, faith communities appealed to the U.S. government to welcome Jews seeking safety from persecution. They also advocated for allowing Armenians, who were murdered en masse by leaders of the Ottoman Empire, to immigrate to America."[25]

As refugees and other immigrants come to the United States from Afghanistan, as with other crises, faith groups have helped them with temporary housing, food, transportation, clothing, healthcare, etc.[26]

Religious groups have also facilitated "refugees' long-term integration, years after their initial arrival." A study from the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service highlighted the value of all this assistance. It "found that the State Department funded only 39 percent of the actual cost of resettling a refugee, while private giving covered the remaining 61 percent."[27]

The recent refugee crisis in Ukraine is a good case study.

For 800 years, the Dominican monastery in Krakow, Poland, has been the home of dedicated Catholic friars who pray and minister in the community. In 2022, the priory (a type of monastery) began hosting Ukrainian refugees – more than 100 stayed there in the early period of the war. Among these guests was a Muslim family; another were a newborn and mother. A profile in *Aleteia* explains:

> "Right now we have a little, little child staying with us," recounts [Andrzej] Mońka [a seminarian at the priory]. "Today this baby is eighteen days old. You can imagine what this mother is feeling. It's difficult for a mother to give birth normally. Think of suffering postpartum depression, while trying to escape the war. Lacking sleep, going from place to place, not being able to stay at home, and doing all this without your husband." Fortunately one of the guests currently staying with the Dominicans is a doctor. The other Ukrainian families support this mother too.[28]

Other Catholic organizations in Poland have provided similar assistance: "3,064 people, including 1,362 children fleeing war in Ukraine, have found shelter in men's religious houses in Poland. Additionally, 999 people, including 374 children, are being hosted in the parishes they run. Nearly 14,000 people have received meals served by men's religious communities."[29]

The Jewish Foundation of Greater Washington, D.C., has collected more than $1 million to administer in humanitarian assistance like food and clothing on the borders of Ukraine. They have "assisted 1,000 Jewish Ukrainian refugees, including 100 orphans."[30]

Formed in 1993, Muslim Hands "packaged food, clothing, blankets and other essential items for families which should last a month" and is distributing them in Poland to refugees.[31]

A religious freedom advocate who is arguing for a significant role for religious charities in providing aid to Ukrainian refugees notes:

> Ukrainian churches are already on the front lines responding to the immediate needs of people within the country, and congregations around the world are funneling support to churches and organizations in Ukraine. Christian humanitarian aid organization Samaritan's Purse is also sending aid and deploying five field hospitals. Other organizations are sending resources and staff to assist Ukrainian refugees who have fled to Poland.[32]

In England, the government allows individuals and organizations to sponsor refugees arriving in the country. *Christianity Today* reports: "Over 500 churches have pledged to support Ukrainian refugees coming to the UK under the government's new humanitarian sponsorship route."[33]

As the *Deseret News* reported in 2022, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints "has also donated $4 million to the World Food Program and the U.N. agency to assist tens of thousands of both Ukrainian refugees and those who remain in the war-torn nation." In Europe, the church established a

> Partner Branch System, [which] has helped the church to support its congregations near the Ukraine border and more efficiently provide humanitarian aid there. The system partners 19 German, Swiss and Austrian stakes (groups of congregations in a geographical area) with 24 congregations of the countries in the Europe Area that share a border with Ukraine.[34]

The article notes many other examples, most in Europe.

Religious groups and people of faith are often hesitant to talk about the service they provide because motives matter, and they do not want to draw attention to those efforts out of a selfish motive. Given the complexity of needs in refugee situations (housing, income, language barriers, social connection, education, healthcare, etc.) and the depth of organization needed to meet them, these efforts must be shared between governments and community organizations. Churches voluntarily bear an outsize portion of this burden, and without them many refugee needs may simply remain unmet.

Utah Flooding

Perhaps the best-known examples of religious assistance in emergency situations are responses to natural disasters. So, to end this chapter, here is a classic story from Utah.

Forty-one years ago, Utah experienced severe flooding. To control the rising water, some streets, including State Street in Salt Lake City, were turned into "aqueducts to control the problems caused by the rising water. Makeshift vehicle and pedestrian bridges were constructed to allow people to commute to work or wherever they needed to go with as minimal impact as possible."[35]

The floods of 1983 required massive relief efforts to keep floodwaters under some control and to minimize damage. To get help, government leaders turned to churches. A 1983 *Time* magazine story related some anecdotes, including this one:

> One night last week a Forest Service employee stationed in Coldwater Canyon, high above the town of North Ogden, Utah, heard trees snapping and boulders rolling. One hundred residents fled for shelter to a [stake center of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints] moments before a river of mud slithered into three houses. North Ogden Mayor Don Colvin, who is also a ... Church officer, informed another church official of the crisis. In less than an hour 200 ... volunteers had arrived to reinforce the banks of Coldwater Creek. By 3 a.m., 5,000 sandbags were in place. Says Colvin: "People were out here all night, filling those bags like crazy. We have a fire department, but if we hadn't had those volunteers, we'd have been in deep trouble."[36]

The story quotes then-Utah Gov. Scott Matheson as saying the church "has the best grapevine in the world. One phone call to the church triggered the quickest network of activity I've ever seen. When you push the button, people come out in droves."

A KSL retrospective on the flooding suggested that more than the flood damage, people remembered "how the community rallied together."[37]

Photo: J. Willard Marriott Digital Library, University of Utah, https://collections.lib.utah.edu/ark:/87278/s6dvve2k

Charitable Giving

Government expenditures are well-known and get lots of attention. But there is another critical source of social support that usually goes unremarked – charitable giving.

Arthur Brooks, former president of the American Enterprise Institute, gives some excellent insights into this sector of our social economy.

First of all, it is significant. Estimates put "the percentage of American households that make monetary contributions each year at 70 to 80 percent, and the average American household contributes more than $1,000 annually."

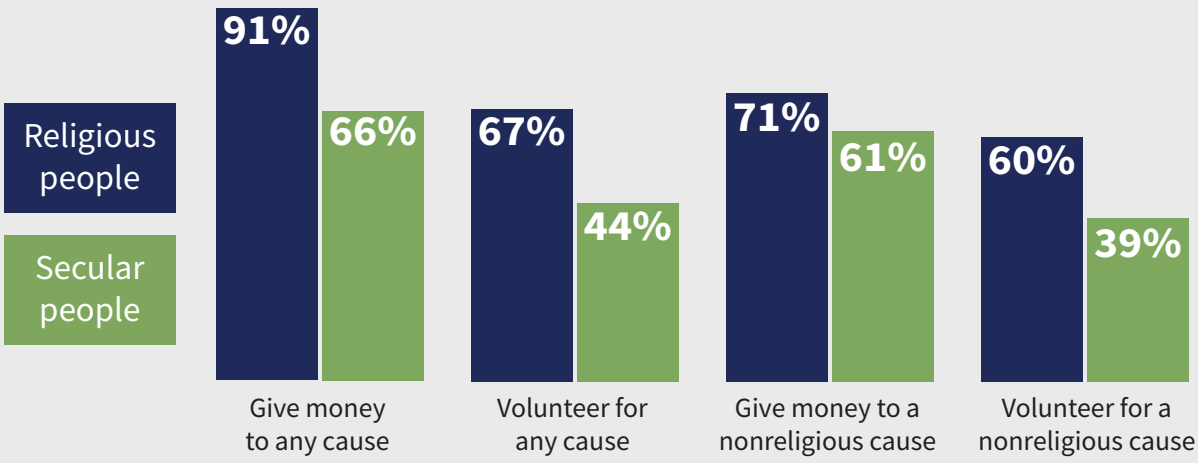
Second, it is not primarily motivated by a potential tax break, since "most Americans (particularly middle- and lower-income citizens) don't even claim the deductions to which they are entitled."

Third, financial giving is usually coupled with other, informal generosity. Brooks notes a survey that showed "that monetary donors are nearly three times as likely as non-donors to give money informally to friends and strangers." For example, they are more likely to "donate blood … to give food or money to a homeless person, or to give up their seat to someone on a bus."

Fourth, charitable giving helps not only with individual needs but may help the economy itself. Research suggests that "$1 given privately would increase GDP by about $15."

Another insight from Brooks is that religious people are more likely to be generous than those who rarely attend church or don't affiliate with a religion.

Who is more giving of time and money: religious or secular people?



Source: 2000 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, Roper Center for Public Opinion Research

Brooks explains that "religious people gave nearly four times more dollars per year, on average, than secularists ($2,210 versus $642). They also volunteered more than twice as often (12 times per year, versus 5.8 times)." This difference can't be explained entirely by other differences. Brooks asks us to "imagine two people who are identical in income, education, age, race, and marital status," but one of them attends church weekly and the other does not attend. "Knowing this, we can predict that the churchgoer will be 21 percentage points more likely to make a charitable gift of money during the year than the nonchurchgoer, and will also be 26 points more likely to volunteer."

This is not just giving to churches. "The value of the average religious household's gifts to nonreligious charities was 14 percent higher than that of the average secular household, even after correcting for income differences."

Charitable giving, particularly religiously motivated giving, was an important part of pandemic recovery. We don't have to share faith commitments, or have any religious affiliation at all, to be grateful for that.

As Brooks concludes: "Charitable giving should be seen not just as a nice detail about American life, and even less as a mere tax deduction. It should be seen as a national priority."[38]

Social Services

In 2021, Elder Ronald A. Rasband, a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, published an opinion piece about religious freedom, pointing out: "Religious groups regularly fill the gaps between government and people, where many individuals fall through the cracks of social safety nets."[39]

Faith-based organizations make significant economic contributions and provide crucial social services in America, especially for low-income children and vulnerable individuals. A 2016 study estimated that the value of religion's contribution to the United States is $1.2 trillion per year, including $438 billion from religiously connected businesses and $303 billion in education, health care and charitable services.[40]

Among the religious contributions helping vulnerable people are 78,000 mental health programs, 120,000 programs for the unemployed, 26,000 programs to help people with HIV/AIDS, and 25,000 programs that seek to reduce pollution and improve the environment. Further, in a study of social services that were provided by religious congregations in Philadelphia, Ram Cnaan and Stephanie Boddie found that the "primary beneficiaries" of religious social services were children, who were served by 49.2% of all such programs.[41]

Care for the Elderly

A well-known example is a religious community of nuns called the Little Sisters of the Poor. This order is known for its involvement in a significant U.S. Supreme Court decision.[42] The founder of the Little Sisters was Saint Jeanne Jugan (1792-1879) who was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2009.[43] The Sisters' ministry is to a group too often overlooked – the elderly poor.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the increased vulnerability of the elderly. They aren't at risk just

for illness, particularly those who are experiencing poverty and those who are in need of long-term care. These individuals need financial assistance, to be sure, but also have emotional and mental health needs that are just as important. They require caring and emotional support, a sense of belonging and of not being an unwanted burden or an anonymous recipient of help.

The Institute for Social and Policy Studies at Yale notes:

> The median annual cost of a nursing home is over $87,000. This expense, which can persist for several years, is largely paid out of pocket by the elderly and their families until they are left with no savings. For most Americans, it is only at that point – impoverishment – that any form of social insurance kicks in. Social Security and Medicare largely ended elderly poverty but catastrophic long-term care needs still push many into poverty.[44]

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that, on average, 70% of those turning 65 today will need some kind of long-term care and 20% of them will need it for more than 5 years.[45]

Government safety nets can only do so much. They provide for emergency and short-term needs but often struggle to respond to chronic or long-term needs. Additionally, while government programs can offer financial aid, they cannot provide the lasting personal connection that fills requirements of emotional and mental health.

That type of care is most likely to come from family, but that creates additional challenges. Death or divorce may mean that a spouse is not there to care for someone with long-term needs. Even a present spouse may have their own health challenges that make providing care difficult. Falling birth rates over past decades have meant that there may be fewer family members to offer care.

In these circumstances, the charitable sector – especially religious nonprofits – fills an essential gap. This is where the Little Sisters of the Poor come in.

The mission of the Little Sisters of the Poor is "to offer the neediest elderly of every race and religion a home where they will be welcomed as Christ, cared for as family and accompanied with dignity until God calls them to himself."[46]

A profile of the Little Sisters in *The Atlantic* notes, "Small facilities run by religious orders, including the Little Sisters' network of more than two dozen homes in the U.S., … fill a major vulnerability in the U.S. health-care system, taking on a significant number of poor patients on Medicare or Medicaid." Referencing the pandemic, the author says, "In many ways, the Little Sisters were founded for a moment like this: The nuns take a special vow of hospitality, promising to accompany the elderly as they move toward death."[47]

The Little Sisters are an inspiring example of what the good people of faith do through public expressions of their religion.[48] Motivated by religious purpose, love, and a sense of accountability to God, they provide care that really could not be provided in the same way by anyone else.

Support for Prisoners

Separated from her four children while in prison in the 1990s, Deborah Daniels feared especially for her daughter, who seemed to be headed down a dangerous path. With few options for exercising an influence, she turned to a Christian ministry. This allowed her to select gifts for her children to be delivered at Christmastime and helped to make a crucial connection – her children would be offered year-round care from a sponsoring church. After her release in 1997, Daniels went to work for this same ministry.[49]

Prisoners are surely among the most – or perhaps the most – marginalized population in society. What other adult group in America today is typically denied by law the right to vote?

Religious outreach includes what some would automatically think of – providing religious materials or pastoral counseling. This obviously includes ministries that provide religious materials or pastoral counseling, but the range of services provided by religious prison ministries or other faith-based organizations is much broader.

The nation's largest religious ministry is Prison Fellowship (PF). Founded by Chuck Colson[50] after his release from prison for Watergate-related crimes, PF provides Bible study groups and similar services in hundreds of prisons, but it also facilitates Christmas gift-giving by prisoners to their families,[51] provides resources to support successful reentry into society after incarceration,[52] and advocates for criminal justice reform on topics like driver license suspension, fines and fees for those accused of crimes, and mandatory sentencing.[53]

An entry in *The Encyclopedia of Crime and Punishment* on "Religion in Corrections" notes that religious volunteers may become increasingly important to provide resources the government can't provide: "As prisons become more crowded and job requirements becom[e] more complex, correctional officers and other staff will surely turn to religious leaders and volunteers to help them deal with the psychological stress of working in prison."[54]

Similarly, an Urban Institute report for the Department of Justice noted that with 700,000 inmates being "released each year from prisons … [r]esource-strapped policymakers and criminal justice practitioners are increasingly turning to the faith community to help meet the multiple needs of returning prisoners."[55]

In Utah, volunteers motivated by their faith record inmates reading stories to their children at home, facilitate inmate participation in community service, teach family history research, and provide mentors for prisoners transitioning to parole.[56] The director of the Tabernacle Choir at Temple Square teaches music classes himself in the Utah State Prison.[57]

In 1977, Chuck Colson said:

> In Matthew 25, Jesus says 'I was in prison, and you visited me.' He calls upon His followers to minister to those who are behind bars. In other words, we will be judged in part by the way we treat those who are in prison. The fact that a man has committed a crime, and is paying the price, does not mean that he forfeits his God-given dignity.

Without the work of faith-based ministries, those most likely to be harmed would include the most vulnerable people in society – like the children of Deborah Daniels.

Foster Care

Research suggests some important ways that religious groups and people of faith contribute to the care of children in foster care. Survey data indicate that Christians are three times as likely to consider fostering.[58] An article in the *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare* reported that foster parents "who became aware [of the need for foster parents] through churches or other religious organizations fostered for more years than did the average respondent." The article notes:

> One advantage of recruiting through churches and community organizations is that participants already are embedded in a social network that can provide additional information and support. Recruitment in this arena also facilitates an interactive process such that churches and community organizations can fulfill some of their service and support goals by aiding in the recruitment process.[59]

Another study found that "faith/church support" was one of the top three factors foster parents reported as a factor facilitating successful fostering, with nearly 82% mentioning this as important.[60]

The solicitor general of Nebraska recently noted that "a religious group in Arkansas known as The CALL is 'the source of all foster homes' in the state."[61]

A study of older foster youth found that older youth in foster care who attended church were less likely to engage in sexual behavior and use cigarettes, while religious belief was correlated with lower use of alcohol.[62] Another study made a similar finding for use of illegal drugs among white foster youth.[63] Finally, a study of African-American youth in foster care found that involvement with religious organizations "decreases the risk of delinquency."[64]

The most recent statistics from the Department of Health and Human Services indicate that more than 391,088 children were in foster care.[65] A child welfare resource notes that 15 states saw a decline in the number of foster homes in recent years.[66]

A particularly important part of the foster care system are churches and religious agencies.

These groups are motivated by their religious beliefs that they are charged by God to care for the poor and vulnerable, and many have long histories of providing these types of services. As the Becket Fund has explained: "For over 200 years religious groups have cared for children and helped them find loving homes – often well before governments got involved."[67]

In Pennsylvania, Catholic Social Services has been providing services to vulnerable families for more than 200 years. Catholic Charities of West Michigan, a religious nonprofit involved in litigation, has been providing services to families for 70 years.[68]

Foster care is a unique legal institution meant to balance the weightiest considerations. On the one

hand, children who are at risk of harm because of parental abuse or neglect need to be protected and provided for. At the same time, parents have a fundamental right to care for their children, and they should not be permanently excluded from a child's life unless their unfitness puts the child at risk.

Foster care is meant to address these realities.

The role of religious groups in the foster system is critical. They recruit foster families, provide encouragement and support to those families and in some cases even contract with the state to place children in need of foster care with families. This is a good thing for children, based on the lower rates of risky or delinquent behavior among foster children connected with religion.

"Religious organizations are really the brightest spot in what is an otherwise dismal [foster care] system," says Naomi Schaefer Riley, a fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. She has spent years researching and writing about the foster care system.

Riley notes that religious groups can powerfully impact foster care. For instance: "Rather than post a picture of a child on the nightly news, [religious groups] have engaged in a much more targeted message, going into religious congregations and telling people that there are kids in their ZIP code who need homes tonight." In fact, "foster families working with religious agencies foster an average of 2.6 years longer than those who do not." She notes: "Government is always going to play a large role in foster care. … But government has a limited number of levers it can push."[69]

Care for Families in Need

Caring for children and families in vulnerable situations is an undoubted public priority, and everyone willing to provide good-faith help is needed. Religious ministries are a critical part of that response, as illustrated by a program in Illinois, By the Hand Club for Kids.

In 2001, the Moody Church began By the Hand as a nonprofit afterschool ministry for underprivileged children in Chicago. The club offers "homework help, tutoring, language and reading literacy programs … health education and access to health services, as well as a meal program." In all of this, the club also "teach[es] and model[s] biblical truths."[70]

Beginning in 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the club quickly retooled to support online learning – distributing groceries, Chromebooks, wifi access, and meals to families to help them shift to online learning and to respond to vulnerabilities created by the pandemic and rioting.[71]

One recipient of the club's ministry was a 26-year-old father who had sole responsibility for his daughter after her mother passed away. He was furloughed from his job because of the pandemic. "But his By The Hand Club community rushed in to surround him with support, diapers, blankets, clothes, and countless other essentials."[72]

These types of ministry are an important part of our social safety net. A study of a representative sample of congregations in the United States found that 83% "reported some involvement in social or

human services, community development, or other projects and activities intended to help people outside the congregation." The authors note that "virtually all Americans (92%) who attend religious services attend a congregation that is somehow active in this way."[73]

These services addressed a wide range of needs:

> The single most common kind of helping activity involves food assistance, with more than half (52%) of all congregations—almost two-thirds (63%) of congregations active in social service—mentioning feeding the hungry among their four most important social service programs. Addressing health needs (21%), building or repairing homes (18%), and providing clothing or blankets to people (17%) also were among the more commonly mentioned activities.

In a religious freedom dispute, an Illinois Court of Appeals recognized how By the Hand Club provided these kinds of benefits out of a religious motivation:

> [T]he activities of feeding hungry children, helping struggling readers, and occasionally caring for children's medical needs are no less religious activities than leading Bible studies, chapel services, scripture memorization, and prayers. Every aspect of the afterschool program was intended to be "a way of loving kids as Jesus would" because "[w]hen Jesus walked on the Earth, he met physical needs, and spiritual needs."[74]

Employment Help

During the 2012 presidential election, President Barack Obama's campaign released an ill-fated slideshow, "The Life of Julia," that portrayed a woman who benefited throughout her life from various types of government assistance.[75] Though the advertisement was mocked and eventually removed from the campaign website, it responded to a sincere concern many have: that they will be unable to take care of themselves in a time of great need.

For most Americans, a period of unemployment is that type of crisis. Even in the best economy, many will still be looking for work, and many who are employed could use better work opportunities.

As serious as the need is, there often is help. In the spirit of Julia, imagine a composite portrait of an individual experiencing a period of unemployment.

Unemployment can be emotionally difficult, but our job seeker is surrounded by neighbors who reach out with reassurance and encouragement and even suggestions of job leads. A community charitable service provides food and other assistance when her savings are exhausted. If she needs education or training, a private school in the area offers the former and a local nonprofit the latter. She is able to meet with other job seekers to learn skills for the search and share ideas. Another charity facilitates the job search with online resources and networking opportunities.

The services in this hypothetical scenario are all based on real aid provided by churches and religious ministries.

A major study of the impact of religion on the economy noted: "Congregations … provide 120,000 programmes to help the unemployed."[76]

Some congregations and larger church groups sponsor gatherings for networking and developing job search skills.[77]

Supplementing the important work of government agencies, "church-run jobs programs often offer more one-on-one support to the unemployed than government employment programs and have the benefit of a real network that can extend through several parishes and numerous employers."[78]

Sometimes finding work requires upgrading skills, and faith-based organizations help here as well. A report from the Urban Institute studies faith-based employment assistance in a handful of large cities and described offerings like "English tutoring or other remedial education help, job search assistance, and supportive services like clothes or transportation to work."[79]

Practical efforts are supplemented with "emotional and spiritual affirmation."[80] This is a particular strength of faith-based offerings: "Unlike secular agencies, the church can help people see their true worth …, give them a new sense of purpose for their work lives, and re-energize them for the job search process."[81] A German study found that "religious attendance on a weekly basis can mitigate the psychological impact of unemployment."[82]

The scope of services provided by religious ministries is illustrated by a religious nonprofit in Florida that offers "one-on-one employment coaching and counseling, an online job board, 6 major job fairs, resume assistance, a JumpStart job skills training class series, a deep dive into workforce skills called the Central Florida Jobs Initiative (7 classes), and employment seminars in the community."[83]

These types of services are an expression of faith – providing another important illustration of the reality that religious expression is not only a crucial good in itself, but society also benefits when religious groups and people motivated by their faith can freely act to do good in the world.

Medical Care

In 1875, Ellis Shipp left her family in Utah to attend the Women's College of Pennsylvania, with the encouragement of Brigham Young, president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. As described in the *Utah History Encyclopedia*:

> Despite financial difficulties and some doubts about her ability to complete the degree, Ellis passed her first-year examinations and returned home to Utah. She returned for her second year, pregnant and without money. By taking sewing jobs and guarding the hall of cadavers at night she earned enough to cover her tuition and living expenses. Her sixth child, a daughter, was born in the spring of her second year in Philadelphia, and mother and child did not return to Utah until after her third year, when she graduated with high honors and a Doctor of Medicine degree.[84]

Dr. Shipp later founded the School for Nursing and Obstetrics in Salt Lake City and delivered more than 5,000 children.[85]

Medical care and the establishment of hospitals have long been influenced by religious institutions and individual religious motivations. A history of America's hospital system explains that the hospital was "initiated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as a welfare institution framed and motivated by the responsibilities of Christian stewardship."[86] Two researchers add: "Historically, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Jewish groups were founders of many hospitals and care facilities across the country."[87]

Catholic religious orders were particularly important. "In the nineteenth century, Catholic sisters went across the country establishing schools and hospitals. They were motivated to care for the sick, establish charitable institutions and spread their religious beliefs. Their impact on the development of the American health system was enormous."[88]

This was true in Utah as well. The first medical facility in Utah, St. Mark's Hospital, was created by the Episcopal Church in 1872.[89]

Catholic nuns – Sisters of the Holy Cross – opened a hospital in Salt Lake City in 1875. In 1882, the Relief Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints created the Deseret Hospital. Nine years later, the church opened the LDS Hospital "using funds that a dentist gave the church in his will."

The story of Primary Children's Hospital is a great illustration of the importance of religious organizations and religious motivations in establishing health care in Utah. A *Utah Historical Quarterly* article explains:

> After witnessing a crippled child's struggle on a Salt Lake City street, Louie B. Felt, the president of the Primary Association of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and her counselor, May Anderson, asked Primary Association volunteers to sponsor a children's

> department at the Groves LDS Hospital. Consequently, LDS church President Joseph F. Smith approved the Primary Association's plans to secure donations to furnish and maintain "two rooms, one for boys and one for girls, each to contain at least three cots and other necessary furnishings" at Groves LDS Hospital, and between 1911 and 1921, the Primary Association received $4,871.48 to care for forty-six children.

Felt and Anderson believed children would be better served by a specific hospital and gained the support of church President Heber J. Grant to first explore and then open a facility in 1922. The hospital was officially incorporated and named the Primary Children's Hospital in 1934.[90]

The Shriner's Children's Hospital also benefits, though indirectly, from its ties to a religious organization, as it began by renting space at St. Mark's Hospital in 1925. It eventually created its own stand-alone hospital in 1951.[91]

These pioneering institutions still have an overwhelming influence in Utah health care. The Holy Cross facility was sold to a for-profit company in 1994 and is now the Salt Lake Regional Medical Center.[92] St Mark's Hospital, now part of the MountainStar Healthcare system, is still in operation.[93] In 1975, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints donated its 15 hospitals to the communities in which they were located, creating the Intermountain Healthcare nonprofit to independently administer those facilities.[94]

We don't know, of course, whether other public or private entities would have developed something like our healthcare system if religious institutions had not pioneered it. It is fair to assume, though, that the charitable motivations of people of faith provided the critical impetus for the initial developments.

Conclusion

Why does religion seem to have this influence on charitable giving and social services?

A part of the answer is that the teachings of many religions endorse care for others in need. People of faith believe they are accountable to God and thus should provide that care as a religious duty. A professor who studies philanthropy points to some examples of these teachings:

> In Judaism, the Hebrew Scriptures refer to "tzedakah," literally meaning justice. Tzedakah is considered a commandment and a moral obligation that all Jews should follow. The commitment to justice places a priority on their giving to help the poor. Beyond giving just time and money, rabbis even spoke of "gemilut chasadim," literally meaning loving-kindness, or focusing on right relationship with one another as the prerogative of religious giving. …
>
> For Muslims, giving is one of the five pillars of Islam. "Zakat" (meaning to grow in purity) is an annual payment of 2.5 percent of one's assets, considered by many as the minimum obligation of their religious giving. A majority of Muslims worldwide make their annual zakat payments as a central faith practice.
>
> Above and beyond the required zakat, many Muslims make additional gifts (referred to broadly as "sadaqa"). Interestingly, the word shares the same root as the Jewish "tzedakah," meaning justice. Muslim giving also focuses primarily on the poor.
>
> In addition to providing a sense of purpose and accountability that motivates giving, religion contributes in other unique ways to a spirit of giving.[95]

For instance, religions foster community. As people of faith join in congregations, they develop friendships and opportunities to care for each other. This fellowship promotes increased fellowship which, when combined with religious teachings encouraging generosity, stimulates a broader range of giving and service.

The late Rabbi Jonathan Sacks explained it well: "[R]eligion creates community, community creates altruism, and altruism turns us away from self and toward the common good … and good neighborliness."[96]

While organized religion gets a bad rap in some circles, it provides distinct advantages for facilitating the provision of service and care for those in need. People of faith, motivated by the altruism they learn in their congregations and the encouragement they receive from the teachings of their faith, can easily join to magnify their efforts in caring for others. An individual who could do little alone to respond to the plight of prisoners or refugees, when combining their efforts with many others, can make an enormous difference.

The teaching, community-building and facilitation of charitable giving and other acts of mercy and kindness are crucial ways that religion bolsters the public good.

Those who do not share a particular faith often find it difficult to understand why believers believe as they do. People of faith believe they are accountable to God and to one another for what they do. That motivation may seem strange and incomprehensible to those who do not share the faith; they may even dislike what believers are motivated to do or to teach.

In these types of examples, however, we can begin to understand one of the reasons why the framers of the Constitution might have singled out religious practice for protection. The deep motivations of religious faith are different from motivations of interest. When we protect religious liberty, we are protecting unique motivations and encouraging the religiously motivated sacrifices that many people in society – especially vulnerable populations – depend upon when times are difficult. Whether we agree with the underlying beliefs or not, it is good for all of us that many of our fellow citizens are motivated by a higher cause.

Policy Recommendations

Given the remarkable benefits to society from the social services provided by religious organizations and people of faith, there are some things that states can do to acknowledge and foster this crucial assistance.

First, governments can formally acknowledge and recognize the contributions religious organizations and people of faith make to the public good. It is common for governments to designate certain days to commemorate or express appreciation for contributions of individuals and groups – or even concepts, like constitutionalism. It would be appropriate for governments to do this for religious social service providers. It is a simple way to express appreciation and also draw attention to a social benefit not typically discussed.

Second, some of the key contributions of religious social services described in this report are those that relate to providing healthcare and promoting healthy behaviors. In the United States, healthcare is highly regulated, so there have been instances where religious organizations or people of faith believed government regulations threatened their ability to provide services in a way consistent with their faith commitments.

Currently, the typical conflicts arise when governments adopt rules prohibiting discrimination in providing services, then interpret those rules as requiring providers to do things that a particular religion prohibits. Prime examples are requiring employers to pay for abortion coverage in insurance or compelling healthcare providers to perform abortions or refer individuals to abortion providers. More recently, some religious hospitals have objected to providing procedures related to gender transition, such as performing hysterectomies that are not strictly related to addressing a medical need.

The federal government and some states have enacted provisions to protect the ability of people of faith to provide healthcare services without being required to act contrary to their faith in the context of abortion. Such laws should be universal. In addition, states should enact laws that allow medical professionals to decline providing some services for reasons of conscience, while, of course, protecting every individual's ability to access lifesaving care.

Third, religious organizations should be allowed to determine who will represent them as they carry out their missions. The nature of religious social services is that they are motivated by religious purposes – the provider feels accountable to God for their actions, including acts of charity. That sense of accountability pervades their work and impels them to resist sending messages at odds with their faith, whether directly or indirectly through the conduct and messages of their employees.

This desire to serve can also occasionally come into conflict with laws meant to protect employees from being discriminated against because of their religion or sexual orientation or marital status, etc.

Discrimination laws typically include provisions meant to lessen this conflict by exempting churches from having to hire someone of another faith or who disagrees with the church's messages. That protection is not uniformly extended to religious organizations that are not formally churches but which are generally operated according to religious principles. This latter group of religious organizations should also be allowed to make decisions about who will represent them as leaders and employees.

States sometimes penalize organizations that serve or employ people of another faith by treating them as "insufficiently religious" to qualify for free exercise protections. The willingness to work with people of other faiths does not mean that a religious social service provider is not truly religious. In fact, working with and serving people of other faiths is typically a religious duty that these organizations are seeking to fulfill. That reality, too, should be reflected in the law.

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