Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love

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FAITH-INSPIRED PRAXIS OF LOVE

by

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The motivations of people of faith in the helping field are often misunderstood. In social work, while there has been a growing interest in making space for integrating the clients’ spirituality and practice (Canda & Furman, 2010; Hodge, 2013), the role of the practitioners’ faith in practice has not received much attention. To this effect, there is a lack of conceptual framework that describes their aspirations in helping and caring and what such practice looks like in everyday reality.

This dissertation presents a two-part study each culminating in two different developments. First, in light of a missing conceptual framework, I conducted a content analysis of the work of Jane Addams, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jean Vanier, and Mary Jo Leddy. These five notable leaders in Christian wisdom tradition and public initiatives integrated their faith with practice, each working in different ways for the common good. I systematically reviewed and analyzed their work and abstracted key concepts and themes important to understanding their aspirations and practice. The culmination was the conceptual framework of faith-inspired praxis of love.

To refine the framework, I engaged in a multiple-site case study at three contemporary sites involving The Working Centre, Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto, and Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto. The second part of the study presents the site reports and an updated framework based on the new insights gained through field work. The dissertation concludes with a discussion of guiding processes and key elements of the framework and its relevance for social work.
Acknowledgements

This dissertation became possible because of the immense support and encouragement of many people.

These reflections are part of a longer wisdom tradition passed on to me. My indebtedness to those who have pondered the calling of their faith to love will be evident in Appendix A. I stand on the shoulders of Jane Addams, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jean Vanier, Mary Jo Leddy, and other doers whose lives have been inspirational to who I am and my practice.

I thank Dr. Gary Cameron, Wilfrid Laurier University, who provided guidance as my thesis supervisor. His thought-provoking questions and gentle challenges have nudged me to be where I am today. Together with Drs. Michael Woodford, Anne-Marie Walsh, and Jim Vanderwoerd, they have provided the space and encouragement for me to reflect and write.

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I am also indebted to colleagues and students at George Brown College; the conversations we exchanged have provided me with valuable source of reflection that are sprinkled over this dissertation.

To my family, thank you for believing in me even when I doubted. Stephen, my husband, you have been by my side to remind me the power of love.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Religion, faith, and spirituality have been increasingly receiving more attention in social sciences as sources of human wellbeing and positive emotions (Canda, & Furman, 2009; Graham, Coholic, & Groen, 2012; Koenig, 1997; Pargament, 1997; 2007). The contributions that religion makes to elevate our human capacity to care for one another are only beginning to be explored. While history is replete with examples of religiously motivated conflict, we also have ample examples of responses to religion’s call to love one another. In fact, there is growing evidence that religion can serve as a strong motivation for engaging in humanitarian efforts and related self-giving, other-regarding behaviour (Ji, Ibrahim, & Kim, 2009; Perkins, 1992).

The topic of love is no different. Despite the importance of love as a life force that binds, connects, and heals individuals, love has been ignored in much of the scientific literature. In his 1958 presidential address to the American Psychological Association, ethologist Harrow stated, “Psychologists, at least psychologists who write textbooks, not only show no interest in the origin of love or affection, but they seem to be unaware of its very existence” (Harrow, 1958, p. 673). More recently through advancements in neuroscience and brain imaging, we now have evidence which indicates that positive emotions such as compassion and love are ingrained in our limbic mammalian brain (Vaillant, 2008). Love is a core human experience, and religion can offer a safe portal through which love can be brought into conscious attention (Vaillant, 2008, 2013). However, despite the relevance and significance of religion in motivating one to love and care for others, there is no clear conceptual framework that explains the role of faith in supporting individuals to serve others.

This gap in the research literature leaves several important questions unanswered: how can faith-inspired loving practice be conceptualized? How is this type of practice applied in
everyday reality? What are some examples of such type of practice being carried out today? And what can we learn from those examples? The proposed study seeks to address these questions and spark further research and discussion.

In the absence of a conceptual framework being available in the literature, I conducted a content analysis of the writings of five individuals for whom faith was a key motivator for their life’s work and whose work was influenced by a desire to practice other-regarding love. These were Jane Addams, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jean Vanier, and Mary Jo Leddy, and I refer to these as “doers” for their emphasis on actively engaging in living out the spiritual wisdoms of love their faith taught (Chapter Two). These doers were individuals whose lives revolved around the notions that faith can inform one’s actions and that love can be a way of life. They were counter-cultural social innovators who sought to make love a real way of life even when doing so meant risking their lives. The doers were not perfect, nor were they super-humans; it is precisely the fact that they were ordinary beings that raises curiosity about their understanding and practice of love. Key traits of the doers are discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

The content analysis of the five doers’ work resulted in the development of the original faith-inspired praxis of love framework (Chapter Three). The framework’s foundational concepts are faith, love, and praxis. The combination of faith and love is what leads to praxis. Based on the writings of the five doers, I abstracted six key elements that demonstrate the manners in which the doers enacted the faith-inspired praxis of love: in God and with people, whole relationships, community, hospitality, nonviolence, and change-making. To be identified as a key, it is not necessary for the element to be found across all of the doers’ work. Certain elements such as nonviolence are not equally identified as significant across the five identified
doers, but were included on the basis that they are fundamental to a few doers (i.e., Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King, Jr.). Each initiative adopted by the doers is considered important and unique in their own right and each has different considerations that are relevant to the respective historical and social contexts. What is considered important is not whether an element is found across the doers and all sources of data, but whether its inclusion accommodates the breadth of concepts crucial to a general praxis of love framework. If an element is central to understanding the praxis of love approach of one or more of these doers, it needed to be included in a praxis of love framework extrapolated from the work of these five doers.

Since the focus of the study lies in understanding helping practices inspired by faith, I extended the conceptual framework to faith-inspired praxis of love initiatives (Chapter Four). Initiatives are projects where the doers were primary motivators and through which they manifested their praxis of love. Some of the initiatives such as the Catholic Worker movement, L’Arche communities, and Romero House are still active, while others such as Hull House and King’s civil rights initiatives are not. Based on a close examination of the guiding purposes and core activities of each initiative, I abstracted key traits important to understanding praxis of love initiatives in contemporary contexts.

To refine the framework, I examined how faith-inspired praxis of love was reflected in current contemporary praxis of love initiatives. I adopted a multiple-site case study to gather data from the field, literature, and respective doers (originators) as well as practitioners at three sites: The Working Centre (Chapter Six), Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto (Chapter Seven), and Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto (Chapter Eight).

In Chapter Nine, I provide an update on faith-inspired praxis of love framework which integrates the original conceptions with new considerations following the multiple-site case
study. I conclude the dissertation with a discussion on insights I gained on praxis of love through field work as well as the framework’s relevance and implications to social work.

**Scope of the Study**

While there are examples of doers and faith-inspired praxis of love initiatives from various religious backgrounds, the scope of this study was limited to doers of a Christian orientation. Faith as a wisdom tradition informs how a person interprets the world and, in turn, can have a strong influence on a person’s life. Christianity is also the faith tradition with which I can most easily identify. Sharing a religious background with the five doers upon whom the conceptual framework is grounded, and with the case study participants in the study, I had the benefit of insights from a shared wisdom tradition.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this research was to develop the praxis of love conceptual framework and examine how faith-inspired praxis of love is reflected in current contemporary praxis of love initiatives. The questions this research addressed are:

- What can be learned about the faith-inspired praxis of love from the five doers?
- What are the key concepts of the praxis of love conceptual framework?
- How is faith-inspired praxis of love reflected in current praxis of love initiatives?
- What meaning does faith-inspired praxis of love have to those working in current initiatives?
- What variations exist in the application of faith-inspired praxis of love across the initiatives?
- What general insights and lessons about faith-inspired praxis of love can be gained from current initiatives?
• Why do the people engage in faith-inspired praxis of love? What is their motivation for doing so?

Research Objectives

The study had the following objectives:

• to refine the faith-inspired praxis of love conceptual framework;
• to explore the relevance of faith-inspired praxis of love to current initiatives;
• to describe how faith-inspired praxis of love is applied in current initiatives;
• to highlight relevant differences across initiatives;
• to identify guiding principles from the initiatives; and
• to discuss the implications of faith-inspired praxis of love.

Significance of the Research

This study is relevant to people of faith, especially those with a Christian orientation. By focusing on doers who are living out their faith in the everyday world, the study contributes to the enhancement and expansion of praxis of love among those who wish to actively live out their faith in the everyday world. Those wishing to start a new praxis of love initiative may find that the study can provide insights into how to do this type of work and the challenging realities of such initiatives. Those already engaged in praxis of love initiatives in their respective domains may find that the ideas and approaches described in the study can provide a source of inspiration in their own contexts.

This study is also relevant to people who do not subscribe to a particular faith as it allows them to consider how faith is lived out in actual social innovations. There is a tendency in the literature to present faith, religion, and/or spirituality abstractly, rather than as visible and concrete aspects of everyday actions. By reporting on the current praxis of love initiatives and
the people working in the various sites, the study highlights the strengths and challenges of engaging in faith-inspired work in the contemporary world. It also supports considerations of how to bridge the differences between faith-based and secular helping and caring initiatives. Secular individuals who wish to connect with people of faith engaging in praxis of love will find that this study helps them understand the motivations people of faith. Given that the topic of faith-inspired praxis of love has not been researched, the current study also makes a significant contribution to the social sciences and religious literature in general.

**My Motivations**

My writing is motivated by the desire to emulate the praxis of the doers that were included in the development of the broad conceptual framework. However imperfect they were, I look to these five doers as beacons of hope in times of darkness. They have inspired me to love in ways that are bold and courageous, and their strong presence in my life influenced my decision to consider social work as a profession. But although their influence on me served as a frequent source of inspiration, the realities I faced in the classroom when pursuing an education in social work were disheartening. I often felt as though I needed to set aside my spirituality and faith; perspectives informed by those notions were not welcomed. Voicing these perspectives made me feel as though I was somehow foreign and backwards in my way of thinking.

Once I left the classroom and began practicing, however, I observed that spirituality and faith were very much alive in many lives. And yet, I lacked a lens through which I could relate to these people as a helping professional. Although I wished to be supportive of their faith and spirituality, I felt that having been trained as a social worker, I was not equipped to do so. Discomforted, I pretended that faith and spirituality were not relevant to helping practice.
However, this approach contributed to my growing dissatisfaction. My approach lacked authenticity, and at times, my humanity.

During these times of dissatisfaction, I again turned to the five doers as sources of inspiration. I asked myself, “What would Jean Vanier do if he were in my situation?” or “How would Jane Addams respond to Mr. Kim’s situation?” Viewing my own situation through the eyes of the doers helped me understand people’s situations in ways that established professional helping frameworks did not. Although the five doers selected for the development of this conceptual framework did not identify themselves as social workers, I believe that they have much to offer to someone struggling to reconcile everyday practice with faith, religion, and spirituality.

When I started teaching social work students, I had students of faith—Christians and beyond—approach me about having similar experiences. They often felt that despite the important role faith played in their lives, social work did not create a safe environment for them; they could not bring this aspect of their identity into the classroom. They discussed their desire to be more authentic practitioners while still being ethical professionals. The fact that these students were having similar experiences to my own led me to create a framework that would reconcile these two aspects of our identities rather than separate them.
Chapter Two: The Doers

This chapter provides a rationale for how I selected the five doers whose work provided the basis of the faith-inspired praxis of love conceptual framework. Following the description of the selection criteria, it provides a brief biographical sketch of their upbringing and their accomplishments. The chapter ends with an explanation of the procedures I undertook to systematically review and analyze the work of the doers.

As indicated previously, doers can be found across different religions. Even within Christianity, there are many individuals who would be considered exemplary doers. The criteria were important as they provided a parameter for the purpose of developing the conceptual framework.

Selection Criteria

Given the large pool of exemplary doers to choose from, I set parameters to select a few of the doers to be considered for closer consideration. In order to be included, it was important that a doer:

- had/has a Christian faith orientation and considered/considers faith an important aspect of his/her life;
- lived/lives and wrote/writes in a 19th, 20th, or 21st century North American context;
- was/is a prolific writer, hence, provides rich data source for content analysis;
- was/is an originator of a social/community initiative; and
- is well-recognized as a public figure or a leader beyond the immediate Christian circle.
The above parameters were useful in narrowing down to the five doers that fit the selection criteria. These five are Jane Addams, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jean Vanier, and Mary Jo Leddy.

**Summary of Biography**

In this chapter, I provide a brief biography of the five doers. In their biography, I highlight key life events that led to the development of their respective initiatives and I also discuss their spiritual formation; that is, the process of integrating their faith with their life.

**Jane Addams (1860-1935)**

Addams was born into a prominent Quaker family in Cedarville, Illinois, in the aftermath of the American Civil War. Her father, John Addams, was a successful businessman and a well-known political figure. He served as an Illinois State Senator (1855-1870) and was a strong supporter of Abraham Lincoln throughout his political career. Jane Addams recounts in her biography that she was very close to her father and had a high regard for him (1910/2008). She was raised with a strong ethical sense that foreshadowed the moral leadership that she would later exhibit. Although John Addams had a traditional understanding of gender roles, unlike his contemporaries he supported his daughter attending college. Jane Addams went to Rockford Female Seminary, and she thrived in her academic life.

After graduation, she deliberated at length how to put her education to use given the limited career options available to women at the time. Most importantly, she wanted to “do good” in the world. Although born into a Christian family and educated in a seminary, she was highly critical of Christianity devoid of good works. While researching different methods of helping, she learned about Toynbee Hall, a successful pioneer settlement house in which educated men lived and worked side by side with their neighbours in an impoverished part of
London, England. The example provided by the Toynbee Hall helped crystallize Addams ideas about social reform. After visiting Toynbee hall, Addams and her college friend, Ellen Gates Starr, returned to Chicago, inspired to start a settlement house of their own. In 1889, they rented a property in a poverty-stricken neighbourhood in Chicago. The property was named “Hull House” after its original owner, Charles Hull. Addams was 24 years old.

With Addams’ strong leadership and her ideal of the settlement as a “place for enthusiasms” where the social classes engaged one another in acts of “mutual interpretation,” Hull House accomplished many “firsts” (Elshtain, 2002, p. xxi). For example, it was the first settlement house in United States with men and women residents; it offered the first citizenship preparation classes in the United States; and Hull House initiated investigations that led to creation of first model tenement code (Elshtain, 2002). Through Hull House’s highly personal approach to solving social problems, Addams aimed to create citizens, not manage clients.

In 1915, Addams was elected the first President of the International Committee of Women for Permanent Peace, which later developed into a global non-profit organization called the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. Addams’ progressive vision for and commitment to a democratic society was recognized worldwide. In 1931, she became the first American woman to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. She lived the last 45 years of her life at Hull House.

_Dorothy Day (1897-1980)_

Day was born in Brooklyn, New York, to John Day and Grace Day. Her father was a newspaper reporter whose career meant many moves for the family. Although Day’s parents were of protestant background and facilitated her baptism and confirmation in the Episcopal Church at age 12, they did not emphasize the importance of faith while growing up. In 1906, the
family moved to Chicago, and Day later attended the University of Illinois in Urbana, where she developed strong interests in pressing social issues such as poverty, organized labour, and war. Fascinated by the radical social, cultural, and political ideas that were prominent in New York City, Day dropped out of university in 1916 and moved to New York City, where she soon launched her career as a journalist for the *New York Call*, an influential socialist daily newspaper at the time. Over the next decade, she was romantically involved with several men, including Foster Batterham, with whom she had a daughter, Tamar Teresa, born on March 3, 1927. The birth of Tamar instilled in Day a deep gratitude and appreciation for the beauty of life. This proved to be a pivotal point in her spiritual journey. Despite Batterham’s strong rejection of her faith, she decided to have Tamar and herself baptized into the Catholic Church nine months after her daughter’s birth. Her decision to enter the Church marked a dramatic conversion from a bohemian, worldly lifestyle to total commitment to her faith, to the poor, and to love.

Day’s growing commitment to her faith led her to end her relationship with Foster, who could not appreciate her new commitment to her faith. Soon thereafter, Day met Peter Maurin, a French Christian philosopher who introduced Day to the social tradition of the Catholic Church and strongly influenced her philosophy of helping. Maurin was also the one who encouraged her to implement her faith in her profession as a writer and journalist to create social change. Day took Maurin’s challenge to heart and decided to embark on a lifelong effort to live up to them. In the depth of the Great Depression, on May 1, 1933, Maurin and Day launched *The Catholic Worker*, a monthly newspaper aiming to advance Catholic teaching of social justice, with a modest start of 2,500 copies. Day was 36 years old at the time. Within four months, the number of copies sold rose to 25,000. By the end of the year, circulation was up to 100,000 copies, and
by 1936 *The Catholic Worker* was a nationally circulated newspaper reaching 150,000 readers (Cornell, n.d. para. 8).

The co-founders sought to reflect the message of the newspaper in their lives and, naturally, converted part of their newspaper office into a House of Hospitality that belonged to *The Catholic Worker*, a social, religious, cultural, and political movement that grew out of the newspaper. At the Hospitality House, volunteer Catholic Workers offered food and shelter to those struck by poverty during the Great Depression. They often lived in great discomfort because of voluntary poverty, sometimes in houses without central heating or even indoor plumbing. Day sought to live alongside them, as she considered voluntary poverty an act of love. For example, she wrote an article in *Integrity* magazine entitled “The Catholic Worker”:

> We hope that those who come to us, as well as those who read the paper, will be led to examine their consciences on their work—whether or not [it] contributes to the evil of the world, to wars—and then to have the courage and resolution to embrace voluntary poverty and give up their jobs, lower their standard of living, and raise their standard of thinking and loving (as cited in Zwick & Zwick, 1999, p. 24).

Today, there are approximately 240 Catholic Worker communities around the globe that “remain committed to nonviolence, voluntary poverty, prayer, and hospitality for the homeless, exiled, hungry, and forsaken. Catholic Workers continue to protest injustice, war, racism, and violence of all forms” (Catholic Worker Movement, n.d.-a, para. 2).

After a lifetime of solidarity with the impoverished, Day died in 1980 at Maryhouse, a House of Hospitality for women. She spent the last 50 years of her life leading the Catholic Worker movement across the United States. In 1998, she was nominated for canonization by
Cardinal John O’Connor, and in March of 2000, the Vatican began the process of considering Day for sainthood (Parachin, 2012).

**Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968)**

Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King, Jr. was the middle child of Alberta Williams King and Michael King, Sr, the senior pastor at the Ebenezer Baptist Church in Georgia, Alabama (Burrow, 2014). While he grew up in economic security and religious traditionalism, life in Georgia exposed him to the various forms of discrimination against African Americans, such as poverty, segregation, and racially motivated lynching and killing. A precocious student from his early days, he entered Morehouse College in Atlanta at the age of 15 in 1944. Four years later, he graduated with a sociology degree and continued his academic pursuits at the Crozer Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania. While pursuing his PhD at Boston University, he met Coretta Scott, his wife, and they married in 1953.

Soon after his graduation, King became a pastor at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, and a member of the executive committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the leading national organization advocating for African American civil rights. On the night that Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give up her bus seat to a white man, the head of the local NAACP chapter, E. D. Nixon, met with King and other local civil rights leaders to organize a city-wide bus boycott. King was elected to lead the boycott, and for 382 days, Montgomery’s African-American community refused to ride the bus. On December 21, 1956, the Supreme Court of the United States declared unconstitutional the laws requiring segregation on buses. This was considered the first major victory achieved through nonviolent resistance in North American context.
Excited by their victory, African-American civil rights leaders recognized the need for a national organization to help coordinate their efforts. In January 1957, King, Ralph Abernathy, and 60 ministers and civil rights activists founded the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) to harness the organizing power of Black churches and conduct nonviolent protests to promote civil rights reform. Although today we remember King as a national “hero” who has made a significant contribution to the advancement of America’s civil rights movement, he was often misunderstood by his contemporaries. In the last decade of Jim Crow segregation, disenfranchisement, and lynchings (1863-1965), King and his fellow Black preachers were often targets of opposition and violence by people who deemed their dream to be too threatening or too idealistic. Lack of support was found even among King’s contemporary preachers. While liberal preachers derided King and his Black preacher colleagues for delaying social progress by presiding over separate Black congregations and denominations, conservative preachers accused them of threatening the American economic and social well-being in the period after World War Two by spreading communism and liberal ideologies (Washington, 1991). For example, Jerry Falwell, a conservative evangelical preacher, stated, “I must personally say that I do question the sincerity and non-violent intentions of some civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mr. James Farmer, and others, who are known to have left-wing associations.” (Young, 1982, p. 310)

Despite the frequent accusations, King led the SCLC for 11 years until his death. During his tenure, he and the SCLC led a massive protest in Birmingham, Alabama, that caught the global attention. In 1964, at the age of 35, Martin Luther King, Jr. became the youngest man to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. King and his colleagues at the SCLC never stopped promoting social justice. They continued to form national coalitions beyond the African American
community in their efforts to fight for the human rights of the marginalized; they fought on behalf of and together with poor Americans of all races. They also took a firm pacifist stance in the wake of the Vietnam War. As the outspoken, public face of the movement, taking a strong stance against America’s involvement in the Vietnam War and American militarism exposed King to severe criticism by his contemporaries.

On the evening of April 4, 1968, King was assassinated while standing on the balcony of his motel room in Memphis, Tennessee. He was to lead a protest march in sympathy with striking garbage workers. Today, King is recognized not only as the symbolic leader of the African American community, but also as a world figure that stood for social justice. In honour of his contribution to social justice, the United States celebrates Martin Luther King, Jr. Day on the third Monday of January as a federal holiday.

Although King is still widely praised for his contributions to America’s civil rights movement, David Garrow, a historian and King biographer, recently reported King’s accounts of sexual misconduct based on FBI archives. The allegations include King’s extramarital affairs with dozens of women, participation in orgies, enthusiastic witness to a rape, and solicitation of prostitutes (Garrow, 2019). However, several experts and scholars have expressed reservations about Garrow casting FBI sources as fact (Schuessler, 2019; Ransby, 2019).

Jean Vanier (1928-2019)

Vanier is the son of the 19th Governor General of Canada, Major-General Georges Vanier, and Pauline Vanier. Since his childhood, Jean Vanier was exposed to his parents’ deep Catholic faith and care for the people. In 1992, the recognition of the couple’s love for humanity led to their nomination for beatification in the Roman Catholic Church.
Jean Vanier entered the Royal Navy at Dartmouth Naval College, UK, in 1942, and after eight years of service, he resigned from his naval commission to pursue spiritual and theological studies. He obtained his doctorate in 1962 from the Institut Catholique in Paris, France. A year later, he was invited by Dominican Father Thomas Philippe to join him on a visit to several psychiatric hospitals in France, where many men and women with intellectual disability were “warehoused” (L’Arche Canada, 2014a). He was appalled by the desolate conditions and the loneliness of the individuals living in the institution, and deeply touched and shaken when a man he met asked him simply, “Will you be my friend?” (L’Arche UK, n.d., para. 1)

In 1964, after briefly lecturing in philosophy at St. Michael’s College, University of Toronto, Vanier, deeply affected by his experience the prior year, moved to France and invited Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux—two men from an institution—to live with him in a small house in Trosly-Breuil, a village north of Paris. He was 36 years old at the time.

Vanier passed away in May 2019 in the original L’Arche community he helped found 55 years ago. Vanier is the recipient of the Order of Canada (1986) and the Templeton Prize (2015) which is awarded to individuals who have “made an exceptional contribution to affirming life’s spiritual dimension, whether through insight, discovery, or practical works” (Templeton Prize, n.d.). He is also the author of over 30 books including Community and Growth (1979), Becoming Human (1998), and Befriending the Stranger (2005).

In February 2020, L’Arche International released the findings of an independent investigation reporting the “manipulative sexual relationships” Vanier had with women over the course of 35 years, between 1970 and 2005 (p. 5). The report also establishes that he enabled and shared sexual partners and “mystical” sexual practices with Father Thomas Philippe, by now a
censured Dominican priest and serial sexual abuser who was a strong inspiration for L’Arche (Brown, 2020).

**Mary Jo Leddy (1949-)**

Leddy’s parents met while working at St. Michael’s Hospital, Toronto, just before World War Two. Her father was a resident surgeon, and her mother was a nurse. Shortly after their marriage, they were separated due to their respective medical responsibilities in Europe during the war, but they managed to return to Canada and reunite. They give birth to Mary Jo Leddy at St. Michael’s Hospital in 1949. Reflecting on her early family life, Leddy notes that a “sense of meaning and purpose infused our family life as we grew up” (Leddy, 1993, p. 4).

Leddy received her PhD in philosophy from the University of Toronto with a thesis titled, *The Event of the Holocaust and the Philosophical Reflections of Hannah Arendt*. In 1975, she launched the *Catholic New Times* (1976-2006), an independent national Catholic newspaper whose objective was to advance the Church’s teachings on matters of social justice and report events ignored by the official church paper.

In 1991, Leddy began working as a night manager at Romero House, a refugee shelter, run by the Congregation of Christian Brothers. In an interview with the Kolbe Times, she recounts that her first encounter with Romero House was accidental. She was on the board of the *Catholic New Times*, and the person the board wanted to hire as the editor was a night manager at Romero House. The manager needed to find a replacement before she could start her new job. Leddy agreed to take the job for a month until the Brothers could find a permanent replacement. It did not take long for her to fall in love with the remarkable people she encountered at Romero House. When she found out that the Brothers were planning to close the House due to financial and operational difficulties, Leddy and her friends decided to save it. They redefined the
relationship between the worker and the refugees and started a new chapter in the history of the House.

In 1996, she was awarded the Order of Canada in recognition of her work at Romero House. Leddy has been Romero House’s director and a resident of 27 years since joining the community in 1991. For Leddy and the interns who live at Romero House, “welcoming strangers, [and] becoming neighbours, [is] a way of life.” (Romero House, n.d.-a, para. 5).

Earlier in life she had joined the Roman Catholic Sisters of Our Lady of Sion and was a member of the community for 30 years. Although she is no longer part of an order, she remains a strong Catholic voice speaking on social justice. Leddy continues to write and speak about welcoming newcomers and refugees. She is currently an Adjunct Professor at Regis College, University of Toronto, and the author of nine books, including *Radical Gratitude* (Leddy, 2002), *The Other Face of God: When the Stranger Calls Us Home* (Leddy, 2011), and *Why Are We Here? A Meditation on Canada* (Leddy, 2019).

Table 1

*Diverse Characteristics of the Doers Selected in the Framework*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Jane Addams</th>
<th>Dorothy Day</th>
<th>Martin Luther King, Jr.</th>
<th>Jean Vanier</th>
<th>Mary Jo Leddy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus of Praxis</td>
<td>Settlement movement and women’s suffrage movement</td>
<td>Catholic Worker movement</td>
<td>Civil rights movement</td>
<td>Making a community that welcomed people with intellectual disability</td>
<td>Welcoming refugees</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The five doers who influenced the development of the proposed study were exemplary figures who demonstrate a Christian faith-inspired praxis of love. Doers were selected from various time periods from the inception of social work in North America to the present day. The selected individuals also reflect diversity in the focus of their praxis, vocations, and faith denominations (see Table 1). Some doers, such as Day, King, and Vanier, were more public in their display of faith, while others, namely Addams and Leddy, expressed their faith more privately. But each of the doers, at their core, was driven by a commitment to live out their faith and their love for humanity.

**Analysis of the Doers’ Work**

To develop the conceptual framework, I adapted a content analysis method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kondracki & Wellman, 2002; Mayring, 2000; Schreier, 2012) that included systematically engaging with the writings of the doers to identify, extract, and analyze key themes found across their work. Conventional content analysis is generally used with a study design whose aim is to describe a phenomenon. This type of design is appropriate when existing theory or research literature on a phenomenon is limited (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Content
analysis was considered a good fit in the absence of an existing faith-inspired praxis of love framework.

The sense making process using content analysis can vary depending on the type of data one is using (Schreier, 2012). For this study, I relied on qualifying data provided in the text to capture the underlying meanings. Books authored by the doers, edited collections of their writings and speeches, and collections of newspaper and magazine editorials found on the internet and in print served as primary sources of data. Close attention was paid to building a comprehensive list of the doers’ writings. When autobiographies were lacking, I supplemented by seeking biographies written by experts. For a complete list of sources, refer to Appendix A.

Once the reading list was developed, I read all the data once to obtain a sense of the whole. Then, I reread the data again to capture major themes across the doers’ work while making notes of the exact words and phrases from the text. I avoided using preconceived categories (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002), instead allowing the themes and names for themes to flow from the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Major life events, such as the receipt of the Nobel Peace Prize for Addams and King, and historical events, such as World War Two, had to be considered in order to have a contextual understanding of the doers’ thinking and activities. As I read through the data, I made notes of my first impressions, thoughts, and initial, and these notes later provided a source of interpretive data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). I immersed myself in the data to allow new insights to emerge (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002); this process is also described as inductive category development (Mayring, 2000). I continued to engage with the data until no new themes emerged. The themes were sorted into categories of foundational concepts and operational elements based on how different themes were related. These materials were synthesized to develop the preliminary conceptual framework. After a period of reflection, I read the primary and secondary
sources again, as well as my notes, to further develop the relevant concepts and operational elements. I continued to journal and read until the conceptual framework was solidified.

A drawback of this method was the limited availability of source material. While the doers were prolific writers and left personal accounts of their lives in journals, autobiographies, and correspondences with close friends and family, not everything survived. This shortcoming was compensated for by supplementing these primary sources with secondary sources whenever an idea needed further clarification. Secondary sources included biographies, websites, newspaper articles, movies, and documentaries about the doers. These secondary sources provided a useful description of the doers’ struggles and actions within their respective historical backdrops. Also, referring to a diverse collection of secondary sources effectively countered my own insider’s bias.

Another challenge to this type of analysis is failing to develop a complete understanding of the context, thus failing to identify key categories and reporting findings that do not accurately represent the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This challenge is also known as credibility or internal validity, and can be managed through peer debriefing, prolonged engagement with the data, and persistent observation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In order to increase credibility, I discussed my integrated arguments with experts familiar with the works of the doers and sought their feedback on the preliminary conceptual framework. This followed an iterative process. For example, there were numerous times I had to revisit the doers’ works to verify that feedback I received accurately represented the doers’ ideas. When the feedback was incongruent with the data, the doers’ words and actions were given precedence in guiding the development of the framework.
A third limitation of this method was that, ideally in content analysis, the categories that I developed should later be checked by an independent coder to see if the categories can be replicated. This ensures that the categories have truly emerged from the data and that they have not been arbitrarily classified. However, since the development of the conceptual framework was completed as part of my comprehensive work, I was not able to locate external resources to act as the second coder. Instead, this weakness was mitigated through a close reading of the secondary sources that described, analyzed, and discussed the doers’ work.

**Key Traits of a Doer**

In reviewing the data, I looked for similarities across the doers to capture the core characteristics. I developed a list of similarities that emerged from the initial outline and eventually abstracted six key traits important to understanding who a doer is. The following are the key characteristics identified in this fashion:

- A doer has a sense of calling to be involved with a group of people and/or with a place and carries a deep sense of responsibility for the growth and wellbeing of the group and/or place.
- A doer is concerned with living out her/his faith and wisdom tradition in everyday reality.
- A doer strives to love and care for individuals irrespective of their backgrounds.
- A doer makes a life-time commitment to relationships, places, and cause.
- A doer is the primary motivator or originator of an initiative.
- A doer works with others to mobilize resources, develop innovative solutions, and change existing systems, structures, and policies.
The five doers included in the content analysis lived in different times and faced a unique set of challenges in their respective contexts. As outlined in their biographies, they came from different backgrounds that shaped their faith and sense of mission and led them to the development of their initiatives. It is also important to note that doers are not perfect. They are human beings who tried to engage in praxis of love. Despite variations among them, their attempt to translate their faith into practice in public settings sets them apart as doers.
Chapter Three: Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love

This chapter presents the faith-inspired praxis of love conceptual framework. Following an overview of the framework, I provide a description of the foundational concepts and the operational elements of the framework. I also integrate my own sense-making and draw on relevant literature to further clarify and expand the concepts and elements.

Overview of the Framework

Faith-inspired praxis of love is a conceptual framework developed to understand the way of life demonstrated by the five doers. Figure 1 is an illustration of the framework. The top part consists of the concepts that form the foundation of the framework while the bottom part represents how the foundational concepts are carried out in the world.
The three concepts serve as the framework’s foundational building blocks: faith, love, and praxis. These concepts answer the question of what the faith-inspired praxis of love is. Faith provided the doers with a sense of purpose and meaning, and, simultaneously, a deep sense of responsibility for how they lived their lives. The doers viewed people as bound to one another, and they felt a sense of responsibility to love others as they would love themselves. Because of their faith, they also strived to align themselves with the highest of human ideals that their faith
taught. Praxis is the process through which faith, coupled with a love for humanity, brought the doers out into the world. Praxis led them to engage with those around them in ways that changed relationships, communities, and societies for the better. In this conceptual framework, faith is meaningless without love and praxis, and praxis without faith and love is just practice. What gives praxis its meaning is the expression of faith through love towards others and the manner in which that praxis is carried out in the world.

The second part of the framework shows how these three concepts are operationalized in the world. It answers the question of how the faith-inspired praxis of love manifests in everyday living. The doers were determined to live out the love that their faith inspired. Love for the doers was more than a concept or a feeling. It was a way of life that required commitment. It involved a genuine concern for the growth and wellbeing of others. The following six operational elements illustrate how the doers engaged in praxis: in God and with people, whole relationships, community, hospitality, nonviolence, and change-making.

It is worthwhile noting that for an operational element to be identified, it is not necessary to find it across all of the doers’ work. Certain elements are not found across all five doers but are core to one or a few of the doers’ praxis. For example, nonviolence was a key to understanding the praxis of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dorothy Day, while community is important to Jean Vanier and Mary Jo Leddy. Each element of praxis in the framework is considered important and independent of the other elements. Each element is defined to be mutually exclusive of the other elements in the framework. Multiple elements were reflected in the initiatives of every doer. Together the elements offer a broad range of general description of the faith-inspired praxis of love drawn from the lives of the five doers.
The element of in God and with people means that, to the doers, being spiritually connected with God was the same as being with people. They did not seek out a life of seclusion to worship God as part of a religious order but chose instead to be with people in their everyday lives. They viewed being in God and being with people as two sides of the same coin: love.

They also lived out love by nurturing whole relationships with the people around them. They were able to engage in whole relationships because they aspired to live undivided lives. For the doers, there was little separation between professional and personal, public and private, or secular and divine. They considered the distinctions between the different dimensions of life to be arbitrary, and they felt that those distinctions fractured the integrity that came from being oneself. Just as the doers desired to be whole individuals, they strived to view others the same way, rejecting labels such as “the refugee,” “the poor,” or “the client” which present people in single dimensions.

The doers nurtured whole relationships within the context of their communities. They received and provided support in their communities. Some joined existing communities, while others built new ones. Once they were part of a community, they remained committed to their membership. These communities emphasized whole relationships between members; the doers espoused principles of reciprocity and sharing in their daily lives to create an inclusive place for all.

One common characteristic of these communities was an ethos of inclusivity. The members of these communities practiced hospitality towards those that were considered different. Vosloo (2006) stated that “[h]ospitality is the welcoming of others in their otherness” (as cited in Walton, 2012, p. 229). The doers reached out to those that were unwelcome in other
social settings, sharing their lives, and recognized that everyone benefited from such relationships.

Attempts to welcome others were often met with hostility resulting from the fear of the unknown, but the doers did not return that hostility. Rather, they practiced nonviolence, which meant not only an absence of overt violence, but also a commitment to try to refrain from harbouring harmful thoughts directed towards the “enemy.” If peace was the ultimate goal, rather than victory, the means of achieving that goal needed to be peaceful as well.

In all of these different kinds of praxis, the five doers were committed to actively participating in the realities of the world as presented to them. Some people welcomed the new approaches the doers introduced, while others, especially those in power, opposed them. Despite the numerous challenges the doers faced in their lives, including for some, frequent incarcerations, violent threats and assaults, they maintained their commitment to love. However, they continued to push for change in attitudes and actions. Change-making in the face of opposition illustrates the doers’ dedication to initiatives.

**Foundational Concepts**

*Faith*

The doers’ understanding of Christianity was integral in the sense that it involved the interior and exterior as well as individual and collective dimensions of religion and spirituality. See Table 2 for an illustration of the Integral Model of Christianity adapted from Ken Wilber’s *Integral Spirituality: A Startling New Role for Religion in the Modern and Postmodern World* (2006).
Table 2

*Integral Model of Christianity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interior</th>
<th>Exterior</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subjective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Objective</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>personal values and meanings, emotions, perceptions, personal relationship with God, spiritual</td>
<td>measurable and observable actions, rituals, said prayers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intersubjective</strong></td>
<td><strong>Interobjective</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared values and meanings, codes and language, community life,</td>
<td>church institution, rules and laws, religious clothing, religious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The subjective realm of Christianity is the more personal experience of spirituality, which may involve an inner transformation or spiritual transcendence. The objective realm of Christianity involves the overt religious practices performed in private, for example, praying the rosary alone or daily mediation using the Holy Scriptures. The interobjective realm involves the collective practices in the life of the church expressed through formalized rules, laws, teachings, and celebrations. For example, participation in the Holy Communion during Sunday mass is an activity that is done collectively with other fellow believers according to the teachings passed down within the Catholic Church. Lastly, the intersubjective realm is the meanings, values, and identity shared between the believers. For instance, identifying oneself as a Catholic can also be associated with espousing a set of values including a pro-life stance on the issue of abortion.

The doers did not prioritize the inner experiences from the outer, nor did they consider individual experiences of spirituality superior to collective practices. Christianity, to the doers,
involved both the private and public dimensions of faith that involved a process of inner spiritual transformation as well as an active participation in the life of the religious institution. In this dissertation, I adopt the term “faith” as an integration of the four facets of Christianity.

Faith is an important concept for understanding the framework for three reasons. Firstly, faith provided the doers with a sense of meaning and purpose in life, despite the challenges they faced. Their lives had transcendental meaning beyond the here and now. Even if standing up for controversial issues led their popularity to plummet at times, and fighting for social justice meant enduring hardships, their struggles had meaning that went beyond their immediate circumstances. The following excerpt from Day’s journal describes the daily struggles she regularly experienced in her involvement with the Catholic Worker movement and how her spirituality sustained her during those moments. She wrote:

Yesterday was so desperately hard. I [had] to come down here [to Staten Island] last night… to hold myself together. Cannot sleep. Nerves and fatigue. [I feel like] an empty cistern. I must rest here quietly spending hours in the chapel—beyond a sound of human voices. (Forest, 2011, p. 219)

Similarly, King (1963/1986a) wrote about the sustaining power of faith that gives a spirit strength and sustenance to carry on in life. He stated,

A positive religious faith does not offer an illusion that we shall be exempt from pain and suffering, nor does it imbue us with the idea that life is a drama of unalloyed comfort and untroubled ease. Rather, it instills us with the inner equilibrium needed to face strains, burdens, and fears that inevitably come, and assures us that the universe is trustworthy and that God is concerned…. Religion endows us with the conviction that we are not alone in this vast, uncertain universe. Beneath and above the shifting sands of time, the
uncertainties that darken our days, and the vicissitudes that cloud our nights is a wise and loving God…. Any man who finds this cosmic sustenance can walk the highways of life without the fatigue of pessimism and the weight of morbid fears. (p. 515-516)

In addition to the day-to-day challenges that comes with leading, the doers took risks to stand up for what they believed. Publicly taking a pacifist stance meant when patriotic pro-war rhetoric was popular, Addams and Day had to endure severe backlash from long-time supporters. This backlash came in the form of public ridicule, reduced donations, and, ultimately, alienation. Fighting for justice eventually cost King his life. However, these challenges did not stop the doers from continuing their praxis of love. The doers were motivated by their faith to follow the path of love no matter the cost. They demonstrated a capacity for unfaltering commitment to the people they were called to love. As Nietzsche (1888) famously said, if we have our own why in life, people can bear almost any how (para. 12). In this sense, faith was the “why” that sustained the doers.

Secondly, faith served as the foundation for self-transcendence, which was derived from the belief that life was a gift, and therefore, as recipients of that gift, the doers had a sense of responsibility to share the goodness that they had received. They felt obligated to care for the wellbeing of others. For example, Leddy (2015) states that gratitude starts with the “awareness that we are inhabitants of a world that we have not manufactured” (p. 274). She continues, “gratitude is the most foundational religious attitude… and the consequent sense of responsibility is the sure religious foundation of a common good” (Leddy, 2015, p. 275). Individuals who recognize the immensity of the gift freely received have a responsibility to pay forward—not grudgingly, but with gratitude.
While faith was a deeply personal commitment, the doers also understood it as a collective experience. Faith was not only a means to self-actualization; it was a summoning to a life of sharing that is lived alongside brothers and sisters. Reflecting on her conversion experience soon after the birth of her daughter, Tamar, Dorothy Day (1952/1997) wrote,

I had heard many say that they wanted to worship God in their own way and did not need a Church in which to praise Him, nor a body of people with whom to associate themselves. But I did not agree to this. My whole experience as a radical, my whole makeup, led me to want to associate with others, with the masses, in loving and praising God. (p. 79)

The doers were intimately aware of the challenges in their communities, and many of the doers became, as a result of the shared experience, pioneers of public initiatives and social reform. For example, Addams was the co-founder of Hull House and a leader in the women’s suffrage movement. In 1931, she also became the first American female to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. But these accomplishments were a by-product of her lifelong devotion to the members of the Hull House community and her neighbours. During Addams’ Nobel Peace Prize award ceremony, Halvdan Koht (1931), a member of the Nobel Committee, highlighted Addams’ focus on relationships:

Twice in my life… I have had the pleasure of visiting the institution where she has been carrying on her lifework. In the poorest districts of Chicago, among Polish, Italian, Mexican, and other immigrants, she has established and maintained the vast social organization centered in Hull House. Here young and old alike, in fact all who ask, receive a helping hand whether they wish to educate themselves or to find work. When you meet Miss Addams here - be it in meeting room, workroom, or dining room - you
immediately become poignantly aware that she has built a *home* and in it is a *mother* to one and all. She is not one to talk much, but her quiet, great-hearted personality inspires confidence and creates an atmosphere of goodwill which instinctively brings out the best in everyone. (para. 11)

Thirdly, faith offered a body of wisdom and tradition that provided the doers with a sense of what was good, just, and beautiful in the world. It allowed them to join or create a counter-culture by determining a concrete set of ideals. They believed that all humans reflected the image of God, and, hence, humanity was interconnected beyond man-made categories of race, political positions, or nationhood. They perceived human life as a sacred gift which no one had the right to claim otherwise. In Vanier’s words,

> [A]ll humans are sacred, whatever their culture, race, or religion, whatever their capacities or incapacities and whatever their weaknesses or strengths may be. Each of us has an instrument to bring to the vast orchestra of humanity, and each of us needs to become all that we might be. (Vanier, 2008, p. 14)

Similarly, faith provided King with a conviction that all human beings are made equal and it is right and just to fight for this ideal. In his well-known speech, delivered at the March on Washington, D. C. for Civil Rights in 1963, he described the vision:

> So I say to you, my friends, that even though we must face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream. I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood…. I have a dream my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by content of their character…. And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village
and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God’s children—black [sic] men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants—will be able to join hands and to sign in the words of the old Negro spiritual, “Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last.” (King, 1963/1986, p. 219-220)

King’s American dream was sustained by the vision that his faith provided—the belief that human beings were created in the image and likeness of God, and this is the source of human dignity and the reason why each and every person was beautiful and precious (Burrow, 2014). Biblical imageries and Christian values were deeply embedded in his writings and provided the strategic framework King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) adopted during the civil rights movement (Burrow, 2014). In response to his popularity in American mainstream media, King stated, “They seem to forget that before I was a civil rights leader, I answered a call, and when God speaks, who can but prophesy” (King, 1998, p. 337).

Faith, therefore, not only provided the doers with a sense of purpose in life and a responsibility to others; it also instilled in them a vision for a better human condition that kept them pushing for change.

**Love**

Love is the second foundational concept in the conceptual framework. Love lay at the heart of the doers’ praxis. Loving was a choice and a lifelong commitment. It required concrete action and continuous dedication in daily life—it called upon one to go on loving, even when that love was not returned, or when circumstances made it difficult to do so. Day, Vanier, and King referred to this type of love as agape. In King’s (1957/1986) words:
Agape is understanding, creative, redemptive good will for all men. Biblical theologians would say it is the love of God working in the minds of men. It is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. And when you come to love on this level you begin to love men not because they are likeable, not because they do things that attract us, but because God loves them and here we love the person who does the evil deed while hating the deed that the person does. It is the type of love that stands at the center of the [nonviolent] movement and we are trying to carry on in the Southland—agape. (p. 13)

However, loving involves more than doing things for other people. As Vanier (2001) wrote:

To love someone is to show to them their beauty, their worth and their importance; it is to understand them, understand their cries and their body language; it is to rejoice in their presence, spend time in their company and communicate with them. To love is to live a heart-to-heart relationship with another, giving to and receiving from each other. (p. 19)

Loving, then, fundamentally involves accepting others for who they are, just as they are. Toward the end of Day’s life, she was interviewed by William Miller who wrote her autobiography, she spoke of love as the foundation of all, and especially of the Catholic Worker:

Love makes all things easy. When one loves, there is at that time a correlation between the spiritual and the material. Even the flesh is energized; the human spirit is made strong. All sacrifice, all suffering is easy for the sake of love…. This is the foundation stone of the Catholic Worker movement. It is on this that we build. (Miller, 1982, p. 326)

The care towards all men and women is also illustrated in Day’s (1946) editorial published in *The Catholic Worker*: 
We continue in our fourteenth year of feeding our brother and clothing him and
sheltering him and the more we do it the more we realize that the most important thing
is to love…. We repeat, there is nothing that we can do but love, and dear God–please
enlarge our hearts to love each other, to love our neighbor, to love our enemy as well as
our friend. (para. 1)

Defining the concept of love academically, and especially agape love, is a rather
charding task. Theologian Paul Tillich (1951) described this challenge: “I have given no
definition of love. This is impossible, because there is no higher principle by which it could be
defined. It is life itself in its actual unity” (p. 160). Despite the vastness of the concept, I find
Pitirim Sorokin’s (1954) five empirical dimensions of love an especially useful heuristic device
for understanding the type of love that the doers pursued. The first dimension, intensity, ranges
from low to high. Low-intensity love would be teaching or preaching about love without acting,
and high-intensity love would constitute demonstrating one’s greatest qualities to others. The
doers’ love was high intensity, as they were devoted to sharing their lives with those they loved.
Addams, Day, Vanier, and Leddy lived with the people they cared about, committing themselves
to nurturing the relationships.

The second dimension of love, extensity, ranges from the love of oneself to the love of
all mankind, all living creatures, and the whole universe. The doers did not only love a particular
group of people but were open to loving all types of people. Addams made Hull House
accessible to all her neighbours, who were predominantly newcomers, and Leddy continues to
welcome refugees from around the world to Romero House. The doers’ love also extended to
those who were in opposition to them. In The Trumpet of Conscience, a book based on King’s
(1967/2010) CBC Massey Lectures, he wrote:
Do to us what you will and we will still love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws and abide by the unjust system, because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good, and so throw us in jail and we will still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. Send your hooded-perpetrators of violence into our communities at the midnight hour and drag us out on some wayside road and leave us half-dead as you beat us, and we will still love you. (p. 76-77)

The third dimension of love is duration. Duration can range from the shortest possible moment, to years, to an entire lifespan of an individual or of a group. The five doers had a lifelong commitment to their causes. Addams lived at Hull House for the last 45 years of her life, and Day was a Catholic Worker for the last 50 years of her life. Vanier has been living at the Trosly-Breuil L’Arche community since 1964, and Leddy will be celebrating the 30th anniversary of her tenure at Romero House in 2021.

The fourth dimension, purity, ranges from love motivated by a utilitarian or hedonistic purpose to love motivated by love itself, love that exists for the sake of the other. Although the doers received worldwide recognition for their work, given the extent of personal sacrifices that they had to make, one can assume that they were not motivated by fame or money. In fact, Addams had a comfortable upbringing, but she had to endure opposition from her family in order to continue the work as the leader of Hull House.

The fifth and final dimension of Sorokin’s (1954) framework of love is adequacy. When the objective consequences of one’s actions are in accordance with one’s subjective goals, one’s love is considered to be adequate. Inadequate love is unwise or misled, whereas adequate love is wise, informed, and edifying. For example, a parent’s indiscriminate love towards a child,
including loving that child’s misbehaviour would be inadequate as it might have the unintended result of spoiling the child, whereas the appropriate love of a parent can further the healthy development of a child. The doers sought to love in a manner that was adequate to the situations and people implicated.

**Praxis**

Praxis, broadly defined, is theory plus action (Birden, 2009). The concept of praxis in the social sciences is not new; it has, in fact, undergone much reconceptualization over the years. The word dates back to the sixteenth century Medieval Latin term, “praxis,” meaning “deed and action” (“Praxis”, 2014). Marx (1845) used it to refer to a sociological analysis that leads to practical changes in the lives of the oppressed class (Birden, 2009). Influenced by Marx’s ideas about using praxis as a tool for systemic change, Paulo Freire sought to support the liberation of conscience among individuals living in abject poverty. He believed that a deep awareness of the social reality that shapes their lives would eventually lead them to a life of praxis, that is, a life of reflection and action directed at changing the structures of their living conditions (Freire, 1970).

In summary, what Marx and Freire agree on is the importance of the continuous process of doing and reflecting. Drawing from this insight, this dissertation also adopts the concept of praxis to refer to faith in loving action. In the context of the faith-inspired praxis of love framework, the role faith and love play in praxis is much more significant. What gives praxis meaning is the centrality of love in guiding the actions.

In the following quotation, King (1958) described the importance of praxis in religion:

> [A]ny religion which professes to be concerned about the souls of men and is not concerned about the social and economic conditions that scar the soul, is a spiritually moribund religion only waiting for the day to be buried. (p. 91)
In *Strength to Love*, King (1963) reaffirmed his belief that “the gospel at its best deals with the whole man, not only his soul but also his body, not only his spiritual well-being but also his material well-being” (p. 150). Such a strong interest for an individual’s spiritual and material well-being was in line with King’s belief that faith was something to be lived out and actioned in everyday reality. To King, being a spiritual leader for his people not only meant preaching on Sundays at church, but also dealing with their day-to-day experiences of oppression at their workplaces, on the bus, and in the shops. Similarly, Addams (1910/2008) also believed that faith and action were directly connected. She stated:

That Christianity has to be revealed and embodied in the line of social progress is a corollary to the simple proposition, that man’s action is found in his social relationships in the way in which he connects with his fellows; that his motives for action are the zeal and affection with which he regards his fellows. (p. 85)

Both King and Addams understood that faith or action without love was futile. Likewise, Day believed that it was not enough to only write or speak about labour rights. In addition to writing for *The Catholic Worker*, Peter Maurin and Day opened up Houses of Hospitality where individuals that were unemployed during the 1930s Great Depression could come and enjoy company, shelter, and a hot meal. Maurin and Day (1933), the two founding editors of *The Catholic Worker*, outlined the paper’s purpose in the inaugural issue of May 1933:

For those who are sitting on park benches in the warm spring sunlight.

For those who are huddling in shelters trying to escape the rain.

For those who are walking the streets in the all but futile search for work.

For those who think that there is no hope for the future, no recognition of their plight – this little paper is addressed.
It is printed to call their attention to the fact that the Catholic Church has a social program – to let them know that there are men of God who are working not only for their spiritual, but for their material welfare. (para. 2-6)

Maurin and Day believed that it was important to live a life of integrity whereby the consequences of their actions corresponded with their intent to love those they sought to assist. However, Day rejected the notion of charity work or the type of acting for others out of religious duty. She explained in her words:

I felt that charity was a word to choke over. Who wanted charity? And it was not just human pride but a strong sense of man’s dignity and worth, and what was due to him in justice, that made me resent rather than feel proud of so mighty a sum of catholic institutions. It seemed all too often that the charities were hardly better than government agencies, heavy with bureaucracy and lacking a human touch. How I longed to make a synthesis reconciling body and soul, this world and the next. (Forest, 2011, p. 85)

In another journal entry, she provided examples of faith in action:

It is no use turning people away to an agency…. It is you yourself who must perform the works of mercy. Often you can only give the price of a meal, or a bed [in a cheap hotel]. Often you can only hope that [the money given] will be spent for that. Often you can literally take off a garment, if it be only a scarf, to warm some shivering person. But we must act personally, at a personal sacrifice… to combat the growing tendency to let the State take the job which our Lord Himself gave us to do. (Forest, 2011, p. 124)

In the above quotation, one can sense that Day’s understanding of praxis of love was much more profound than the classic model of religious charity; she was concerned for the welfare of the whole person and had a deep desire for mutual relationship with them. Faith in
action did not mean doing *for* others, nor doing *for* the self as a form of spiritual actualization; it meant being in a mutual relationship and healing together.

Likewise, Leddy also expresses her rejection of religious charity and highlights that praxis of love must be different from professional service that is removed from the everyday experience of those in suffering:

There are many courses and articles on ministry in the church, and they are important. However, they also tend to rely heavily on a professional model of training and competence. The minister can become the consultant, the facilitator, the organizer, the counselor. These can be valuable forms of service, but if they are removed from the cry of suffering people, they can miss the point and purpose of it all. (Leddy, 2011, p. 132)

The doers engaged in faith-inspired praxis of love. This meant mobilizing protests, writing for the newspaper, or cooking for individuals who cannot. Each was called to engage in praxis in diverse ways, but the common thread found in their work is their commitment to love. The call to love their community members and neighbours was much more than a job, charity, or a professional service. To the doers, praxis was a life-long commitment and a way of life.

**Operational Elements**

The previous section presented a summary of the literature and the doers’ views about the framework’s foundational concepts, namely faith, love, and praxis. The current section explores how the doers lived these concepts out in the world. The doers demonstrated the faith-inspired praxis of love through six broad operational elements: In God and with people, whole relationships, community, hospitality, nonviolence, and change-making.
In God and With People

According to the doers, being in God and being with people are not disparate ways of being. It is the meshing of the two states that leads to the praxis of love. Being in God is experienced as an indwelling presence. The doers experienced God as love, and being in the presence of God, in turn, provided them with a source of love that flowed outwards into their relationships with others. Being in God, then, made it possible for the doers to love anyone and everyone. For example, Vanier (2015) states the following:

We cannot do this on our own. We must discover some strength, must look to some fundamental source of love. And here, I am speaking of course of God. As John reveals in his first letter: Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love…. No[one] has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (p. 82-83)

The doers experienced being in God by contemplating, meditating, praying, reflecting on the Holy Scriptures, singing hymns, and participating in communal worship. Day, King, Vanier, and Leddy wrote that it was important for them to engage in these daily devotional practices. They considered these devotions to be as important as eating is for sustenance. Without drawing on love, or God as the source of love, on a daily basis, they would lack the necessary energy to carry out the praxis of love.

However, being in God was not limited to these religious devotions. The doers strove to be in God all the time and everywhere. For them, it was more a matter of the heart and a state of being than a prescriptive practice or ritual. For example, Day (1940) explained how she experienced God’s presence in her everyday life:
We must practice the presence of God. He said that when two or three are gathered together, there He is in the midst of them. He is with us in our kitchens, at our tables, on our breadlines, with our visitors, on our farms ... When we have spiritual reading at meals, when we have the rosary at night, when we have study groups, forums, when we go out to distribute literature at meetings, or sell it on the street corners, Christ is there with us. (para. 9-10)

Seeing God reflected in fellow brothers and sisters is also a message that resonates in Leddy’s thinking. In an interview with Halton Presbytery, a group uniting local churches belonging to the United Churches of Canada in the Halton region, she said, “If someone asked me if I have seen the face of God... , I would reply ‘yes’ to that question,” and added, “almost always” (Halton Presbytery, 2013, para. 11). For Leddy, God is everywhere and in everyone. Similarly, Vanier also believed that God is present in the heart of every human. He said, “There God is present, hidden in wounded humanity, hidden in the pain of our own hearts” (Vanier, 2012, p. 46).

The doers did not distinguish between being in God and being with people. Being with people meant opening up to others and enjoying the relationships one has with them. In this sense, although some of the doers had a religious vocation, the separation between the divine and the worldly—between the spiritual and the material—was less important to them. The doers did not seek God only among religious people, nor did they limit their experience of God to a holy place.

King wrote that it is only in loving others, including those who hurt us, that one could experience the depth of God’s love. He stated, “We must love our enemies, because only by loving them can we know God and experience the beauty of his Holiness” (King, 1963, p. 50). He
considered loving his neighbours to be the same as loving God. It can be said that God is to people what an artist is to their art; one cannot love the artist without caring for the works they created. King did not separate his love for God from his love for the people around him, even those who were considered “enemies,” for his enemies too were the creations of God and his brothers and sisters.

Being in God and being with people, then, are two sides of the same coin. In this sense, the key to understanding this element is the word “and.” As the doers engaged closely with those around them, they simultaneously sought refuge in God from the brokenness they saw in their own humanity and all around them. The doers wrote about how being in God sustained them, as it was the source of their love, meaning, and purpose in times of turmoil. Likewise, being with people was their calling; it was how love, meaning, and purpose were made manifest.

**Whole Relationships**

The second element of the framework is whole relationships. For the doers, having whole relationships involved actively engaging with others with an open heart, encountering them in their humanity, as they are, with all their beauty and woundedness, and letting the self be touched in the process. An individual is not an aggregation of characteristics, but a unique and undefinable being known through an ongoing relationship, here and now. The term “whole” in this element derives from Vanier’s understanding of the importance of relating to another person in their “wholeness,” that is, as entire being in the way they are. In his own words, Vanier (2015) explains:

We cannot live in reality until we are free of embedded judgments… so that we can accept our neighbors as they are, not seeking to change them or to become the same, but celebrating together our differences and our humanity…. And so reality is about truth. It
is about the wholeness of what is seen, heard, touched, smelled, and felt…. It is about taking in everything around us and being open to another’s point of view, another’s experience. (p. 14)

The doers considered divisions between people to be illusions brought about by differences in race, societal roles, qualifications, or group associations. According to them, divisions only exist in our minds when we consider difference as “otherness.” They regarded all human beings as equal and born with inherent dignity because they reflect the image and likeness of God. King (1963/1986) explained that

[s]o long as the Negro is treated as a means to an end, so long as he is seen as anything less than a person of sacred worth, the image of God is abused in him and consequently and proportionately lost by those who inflict the abuse. (p. 119)

King associated the denial of the whole person as the denial of him or her as a being created after the image of God. He understood the civil rights movement as not only a change in social reform, but more fundamentally, as a transformation in how Black people are to be recognized fully in their “sacredness of human personality” (King,1963/1986, p. 119). Also, because he believed that all individuals were connected in the brotherhood and sisterhood of humanity, the act of hurting the “other” also damages the oppressor’s sacredness.

Addams established Hull House in a poor neighbourhood in Chicago so that she could participate in their struggles. She shared her life openly with her neighbours, who reciprocated with their friendship. Through the relationships she formed with them, she gained intimate knowledge of their situations. This knowledge informed the various causes she took up throughout her life. To Addams, the people she worked with were her friends and neighbours, rather than clients to whom she provided services. This attitude of mutuality was demonstrated in
her advocacy work for people who were unemployed. At a symposium, *What Shall We Do for Our Unemployed*, she criticized middle-class Americans who preached to the unemployed the American virtues of hard work and thrift. Instead, she proposed that the middle class consult the unemployed about the various charity benefits being doled out to them:

> They are men; they have practical ideas; they would be glad to do their share to remove this trouble of which they are the chief victims. We ought to come together and regard it as a common trouble, and we should consider not what we shall do with the unemployed, but what do we and the unemployed get together that we may all as brothers grow out into a wider and better citizenship that we have ever had. (Hovde, 1989, p. 78)

Leddy also exhibits this ethos of mutuality in her relationships with the residents of Romero House. She states that it is wrong to refer to people as simply “the poor.” Instead, Leddy (2011) has come to see the residents as “persons who were, at this time in their lives, in economic distress. Their immense complexity and the particular story of their lives could not be reduced to a social problem called poverty, to a category of concern or contempt” (p. 19). Sharing whole relationships with the residents gave Leddy a direct understanding of their life struggles that went beyond labels, stereotypes, and preconceived biases. “The poor” was a label that ignored the nuanced realities, unique qualities, and strengths of the residents. Lacking resources was only one, albeit significant, aspect in the totality of their fuller and richer sense of selfhood. By participating intimately in the lives of the residents, she came to understand that it was not right to define a person by a single dimension, as this robbed them of their full humanity. It also failed to situate the person in his or her social, economic, political, environmental context.
When one no longer sees the other through the filter of a label, one can start to encounter their whole being. As an example, Vanier recounts the famous genesis story of the L’Arche community involving Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux. Vanier first met Raphael and Philippe, two men living with intellectual disability, at a crowded psychiatric institution. When Vanier learned of their suffering, borne out of alienation and loneliness, he invited them to come and live with him at his home. To Vanier, Raphael and Philippe were not simply patients with intellectual disability. He sought to encounter their whole beings and to see beyond their immediate situation. Vanier did not assume the role of the capable helper, instead, the three shared responsibilities according to each person’s ability.

Vanier states that it was through whole relationships with members of the L’Arche community that he came to see his own brokenness and limitations. He states that, in the early days of L’Arche, he felt compelled to help others. However, he soon realized that much of this need to do things for others was driven by his own need to exercise control. He was failing to see the other person as a whole human being, viewing him or her, rather, as someone who needed help. Through his relationships with the members of his community, he learned the value of doing things with others. Vanier (2005) writes:

Sometimes those of us who have more power, more money, more time or more knowledge bend down to those who have less power, less knowledge or less wealth; there is a movement from the ‘superior’ to the ‘inferior’. When people are generous, they are in control. You can imagine someone in the street falling down and you going to help that person to get up. Then something happens. As you listen to that person you become friends. Perhaps you discover that he or she is living in squalor and has little money. You are not just being generous, you are entering into a relationship, which will change your
life. You are no longer in control. You have become vulnerable; you have come to love that person. You have listened to her story. You have been touched by that incredible, beautiful person who has lived something incredibly difficult. You are no longer in control, you are no longer just the generous one, you have become vulnerable. You have become a friend. (p. 12)

Vanier (1995) wrote that it was through the whole relationships with those around him that he learned it was impossible to “grow in love and compassion unless, in all truth, we recognize who we are and accept our own radical poverty. The poor person is not just in others, but also within us.” (p. 72) According to Vanier, a whole relationship is an encounter that involves two individuals whose hearts are open towards each other.

Like Vanier, Leddy also points out the necessity to let go of the self in whole relationships. She refers to the psychological and spiritual self-centredness as the “imperial self” and states:

An imperial spirituality will tend to assume that my attitude to other people is shaped by my needs and desires, by my generosity or self-interest. I care for others because I am a caring person. I help others because I am a generous person, because I come from a generous family or I have grown up in a generous community… It all depends on me. (Leddy, 2011, p. 46)

Leddy suggests that the first step towards challenging the imperial attitude is to recognize and admit that such self-centredness is ingrained in human nature. One needs to see the self “as a participant rather than as a master and captain of the universe” (Leddy, 2011, p. 70). This in turn requires one to see the self as a friend and fellow sojourner in life rather than an expert helper who can fix other people’s problems through techniques, programs, and services.
The whole relationships that the doers cultivated involved an openness to give and receive. Unlike providing a professional service or helping someone in need—an action that is one directional, done by the professional for the client—whole relationships require mutuality and involve two hearts. Vanier observes, "[t]o be present to the other, to listen to and regard him or her with respect and attention, allows us to receive in our turn. This is a communion of hearts, a reciprocal gift, freely given." (Vanier, 2013, p. 33) Whole relationships let go of the very thought that one can do good for another, a thought that, in fact, enables one to maintain control in the relationship. Instead, loving involves sharing whole relationships with people who are willing to let each other see their own beauty and limitations and to enjoy the reciprocity of friendship.

Community

The doers were committed to building communities and living a community-centred life. The doers understood community as the bedrock of life involving fellowship among a group of people who shared common interests and goals. The communities that the doers sought to build were localized, whether in a house, place, street, or neighbourhood. This localization allowed people to come to know one another well. Also, for people to enjoy their lives together in concrete and real ways, life in these communities required a sustained commitment to one another. Communities differ from work groups, wherein people gather to complete a particular task in a time-sensitive manner. Instead, the doers strived to build communities that emphasized the relationships between their members.

The communities the doers created involved people of diverse backgrounds who used their capacities and skills to contribute to the common good. Even those with severe cognitive or physical limitations have unique gifts and qualities that can enrich a community. In this type of
relationship, the distinction between the helper and the helped becomes less important than the value of sharing.

For example, at L’Arche, every member, regardless of physical and intellectual ability, is considered equally important and valuable. Each brings unique skills and abilities to the group and is encouraged to share those skills with the rest of the community. In L’Arche communities, the assistants’ primary role is not to help the people with intellectual disability by doing things for them but, rather, to be their friend. The primary emphasis is on creating an atmosphere in which everyone shares what they can, according to their respective abilities, and cooperates to create a place of belonging.

The doers lived near or with the people they cared for. In 1889, Addams and her friend Ellen Gates Starr moved into Hull House, a dilapidated mansion in an industrial area of Chicago (Addams, 1910/2008). Addams brought her family possessions, including paintings and books, to the house to recreate the same sort of cultivated home environment that she had grown up in. She opened the house up to her neighbours, who were predominantly recently arrived immigrants, to share everything that the house had to offer. In that house, the rich and the poor—the long-time resident and the immigrant—lived together in cooperation. The differences between members became the community’s strength and served as the fuel for their diverse social projects.

In reflecting upon what creates a community-friendly ecosystem, Leddy (2011) highlights the importance of the engaged neighbourhood in which the Romero House community is situated:

As we began to reflect on our experiences, we realized that the neighborhood itself was becoming the most important resource in helping settle people who had been so harshly
uprooted. Without planning it, we had grown into a model of welcoming refugees that was quite different from the usual agency model in which refugees were served by social workers and counselors. We did not have employment counselors; we had good neighbors with connections. We did not have translators; we had good neighbors who spoke languages other than English. We did not have child-care workers; we had good neighbors with kids. We did not have settlement workers; we had good neighbors who liked to cook and who enjoyed having company.

All of this was possible because the refugees were living in an ordinary neighborhood in which they came face to face with people who called this place home. We realized that, in spite of the best of intentions, many social policies keep the newcomers from meeting ordinary citizens. Taxpayers pay money to the government that in turn pays social workers to help ‘them.’ In the process ‘the taxpayers’ and the ‘the clients’ never meet each other, never see each other face to face. People such as refugees are placed in shelters that are usually removed from residential areas. The distance between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ the ghettos of poverty and the gated communities, becomes a vast indifference and can become a dangerous divide in times of social stress. Refugees remain ‘issues’ or ‘problems’ rather than people with names and faces. (p. 82)

A community can thrive when members of the community and the surrounding neighbours come to meet, know, and care for one another. This mutual interest is embedded in a shared affection for the place that people have come to occupy together.

To promote diversity, Addams adopted the principles of cooperation and consensus-building when making decisions at Hull House. For example, even though Addams was the co-founder of Hull House, she gave the residents the ability to make their own decisions by voting
on what they believed would be best for it (Knight, 2005). At the weekly Residents’ Meetings, residents voted on which projects to undertake and on how labour should be divided around the house. Each resident took up tasks and projects that they were interested in and capable of completing. By making the practices of cooperation and consensus-building the norm, Addams put in place mechanisms that let every member have a voice, and therefore let differences of opinion flourish into innovative ideas.

However, life in a community does not come free of challenges. In fact, difference can become a source of division. As relationships become more intimate, differences between community members become more noticeable, and the potential for friction increases. Intimacy can “help us discover walls of fear and hatred that we never [would have known] existed” had we remained isolated from the complexities of community life (Vanier, 2015, p. 136). Like a garden, a community “must be tended regularly and by many people. There are seeds to be sown, little plants to water. And yes, every day there are weeds to be pulled, small problems to be solved before they overwhelm what is good.” (Leddy, 2011, p. 80) Community, then, becomes a place where one can respectfully discover the differences between, and therefore the uniqueness of individuals. In their communities, the doers consciously sought to create a culture in which differences were the ingredients that made the community creative and dynamic. Individual differences are not to be overlooked or minimized, but to be understood, respected, and expressed. The doers’ communities were neither culturally homogeneous nor completely heterogeneous; they sought a balance between diversity and centering the community on a common goal.

Ultimately, in King’s vision of a “beloved community” involved the integration of those who were adversaries as sisters and brothers. In an article following the announcement of a
favourable U.S. Supreme Court Decision desegregating the seats on Montgomery’s busses in 1956, he stated, “the end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community” (King, 1957, p. 120). King saw the civil rights of African Americans not as an end goal, but rather a process based on love that would eventually lead to the forging of a new relationship between Black and white Americans. At the core of this redemptive process was love as he explained, “While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community” (King, 1963/2012, para. 21).

**Hospitality**

Hospitality is the welcoming of those who are different and unfamiliar into a shared space. To welcome is to open oneself up to change. Leddy writes that Romero House’s commitment to nurturing a welcoming community is carried out through the mutual respect towards one another’s religions. Although the staff’s hospitality is inspired by their Christian commitment, an important policy at Romero House is for staff and interns not to engage in converting the residents. They recognize that many of the refugees have had to flee their countries due to religious persecution. According to Leddy (2011), to try to convert these people when they are seeking asylum is to recreate the cycle of hostility. Instead, the Romero House staff and interns emphasize hospitality through acts of generosity, openness, and acceptance. Hospitality is also practiced at Romero House by celebrating various religious feasts together, such as the Hindu Diwali, the Norooz celebration of the New Year, and the Eid.

Although hospitality could be practiced at an individual level, Leddy and Day point out that the praxis of hospitality can involve a neighbourhood and even a nation. Reflecting on her experience at Romero House, Leddy credits the surrounding neighbours for contributing to creating a welcoming environment for the new members of Romero House. She describes:
Through the street party and many other gatherings, the neighbors came to recognize the Romero residents and learned their names. As they conversed together, the neighbors began to realize the immense talent and gifts that the refugees had brought. The refugees were no longer treated as a “social problem” but as a neighborhood asset. The neighbors began to find the first jobs for the refugees, the crucial first step in gaining the “experience” that would launch them into long-term jobs. Some of the neighbours were able to offer some translation services for the newcomers. Other neighbors helped get the refugee kids enrolled in various sports activities. Most important, there were neighbors who invited the refugees for a meal. Such an invitation accomplished far more than any official settlement program could do. The refugees felt welcomed as human beings, recognized as persons, each with a name and a face. They felt they could live in this place, could make a home, and find peace. I always waited for them to come home from such meals, to hear about every detail and to delight in the transformation that such a simple invitation had made. (Leddy, 2011, p. 80-81)

Romero House served as an impetus for broader change in the attitudes of the neighbours by providing a role model of an inclusive community. Through a process of social osmosis, the neighbourhood joined Romero House in welcoming the new members to the Romero House community and the neighbourhood. By getting to know the refugees through the street parties and other social gatherings, the refugees became more than the “clients” for whom Romero House was responsible. Rather, the neighbours opened up to the refugees as friends to welcome them into their lives, and by doing so, creating a new culture of hospitality in the neighbourhood.

This type of hospitality requires intentionally nurturing a culture of openness towards others who are not like us, and hence, may stir up emotions of discomfort. Leddy further adds
that many of us in North America are living in a time when walls are being erected and borders fortified. The spiritual challenge, she notes, is in not making an “enemy” out of the stranger. We tend to view those who are like us as “good” and not like us as “evil.” She notes,

The promise that the newcomer and the stranger offer is not usually recognized in our culture. More often than not they are treated as at least a problem and usually as a threat, a danger. Generally speaking, this is not because we are mean and prejudiced people, but it does indicate the kind of social attitudes that we have interiorized, attitudes that flourish as culture begins to enter a process of decline. The need for enemies becomes greater as the social vision that holds an empire together begins to wane. The enemy becomes the glue that holds a society together. During the long Cold War period, America gradually became more defined by what it was against than whom or what it was for. It defined itself by being against communism more than by being for democracy. When this great enemy fell, there was a new need for enemies, and a small succession of enemies filled the bill for a while. However, with the shocking event of 9/11 a new and great and all-pervasive enemy emerged: the terrorist. We divided the world into friends who are like us and enemies who are not like us. The stranger became the enemy.

(Leddy, 2011, pp. 54-55)

She warns that the line that divides good and evil is not “out there,” rather, it is “in here” running through the heart of each one of us as. Welcoming strangers involves throwing off the centre as the “imperial self” to embrace the disorientation that being summoned as a friend by a stranger implies. Such spirit of openness, Day, noted, requires spiritual discipline and commitment. She wrote:
Everyone involved understood that hospitality required not just practical help but extending a real welcome, spiritual hospitality. It is indeed very hard to extend such hospitality to everyone that comes in. It is so much easier to throw people the clothes, food or what not that they need, and so hard to sit down with them and listen patiently.

There are so many people dropping in that some days I do not sit down to the typewriter once—the work gets far behind and I have to remind myself that all those little frittering things which take up one’s time are quite as important, many times more so in the sight of God, than answering letters or keeping files up to date. (Forest, 2011, pp. 131-132)

When we welcome others into our lives, we think we are helping them, but the doers say that is the wrong way around. The other helps us see who we are, and in turn, both become stronger through the relationship. According to Leddy, the act of welcoming others is what keeps our social fabric vibrant and diverse. She states:

The newcomer, the stranger, brings a new insight into the world that we take for granted. Those of us who live in North America tend to think that where we live is reality and how we live is normal. It is not that we are morally or spiritually obtuse. It is simply a fact that it is very difficult to “see” our own culture. Like fish in the water, we do not know the culture in which we live and move and have our being. Gugan, Yuri, and Deequa had enabled me to see my own context through another set of eyes. I saw that I was living in the Center of the World. (Leddy, 2011, p. 39)

In another text, Leddy (2006) explains how her neighbours have assisted her to see her own culture. Reflecting on the lessons she learned through the refugees who have become her community members, she writes:
These strangers, these outsiders, are the eyes of my eyes, the ears of my ears. They have come to this continent seeking refuge, trusting in what is best in our culture, trusting in the respect for human rights that we have promised to uphold. But they have also come here because of the shadow side of America, the north and the west. Their countries have been torn apart by cold war conflicts that have persisted in new forms as the armies of the East and West packed their bags and went home. They come from places where tribal conflicts have been fuelled by the craving of the West for things like oil, like diamonds. These strangers know that we are better than we think and worse than we know. (Leddy, 2006, p. 137)

Nonviolence

Nonviolence for the doers was both personal as well as a national and global necessity. Addams, Day, and King, served as leaders of conscience in their respective peace movements and voiced opinions that were not popular at the time. Nonviolence starts, first and foremost, in the heart and mind of the individual as a commitment not to harm but to love those who are in opposition to oneself. King noted that when battling racist discrimination, one must aim to “win [the enemy’s] friendship and understanding” (King, 1958/1986, p. 18). According to the doers, transforming one’s enemy into one’s friend is possible when one recognizes the brotherhood and sisterhood of all humanity. The true enemy is the belief that divides us—not the person holding that belief. For example, in an era when communism was commonly considered evil in America, Day urged people not to hate the communists, but rather to consider them as brothers. She wrote:

We feel that the police need to be reminded that it is not Communists they are fighting, but Communism. Bishop Landries has said that ‘every creature is a kind of sacrament, a
visible sign that contains a fragment of the idea of God.’ Communists, inasmuch as they are creatures of God, are our brothers. (Day, 2010, p. 96)

Similarly, Vanier considers nonviolence to be not simply the absence of violence, but rather more akin to a “tenderness” of the heart. It is a radical call to love the “enemies,” as brothers and sisters. Similarly, King (1968/2010) stated that the “dark and demonic” roots of evil behaviour “will be removed only as men are possessed by the invisible, inner law which etches on their hearts the conviction that all men are brothers and that love is mankind’s most potent weapon for personal and social transformation” (p. 124). He regarded nonviolent resistance as the ultimate expression of this love, which has the power to reconcile former enemies in a way that violent action never could. King was acutely aware that the battle that he and his colleagues at the SCLC were trying to fight could not be defined by who or what they were against. Instead, it involved defining the Black Americans and poor Americans by who and what they were for. The battle was for reconciliation and peace, and not simply against white supremacists or those in power.

Nonviolence also includes resisting forms of systemic injustice, such as racism, poverty, and global militarism. The doers strived for peace that was marked not by an absence of hostility or war, but, instead, by forgiveness, reconciliation, and unity. They argued that if we are to have peace in the world, we must go about achieving that peace using peaceful means. One cannot, after all, achieve good ends through evil means. King (1958/1986) wrote on the subject:

Hate begets hate; violence begets violence; toughness begets a greater toughness. We must meet the forces of hate with the power of love; we must meet physical force with soul force. Our aim must never be to defeat or humiliate the white man, but to win his friendship and understanding. (p. 17)
Consistent with the framework’s other elements, nonviolence is an example of praxis that is both spiritual and action-oriented. The doers believed nonviolent activism to be the only means to peaceful reconciliation in the long-term. They engaged in nonviolence even when doing so meant being vulnerable and not being able to protect oneself. Addams, Day, and King adopted various methods of nonviolence, such as staging sit-ins, pressuring politicians through the organization of mass demonstrations and marches, forming coalitions with like-minded people and organizations to engage in public campaigns, boycotting businesses and corporations that engaged in discriminatory practices, organizing peace vigils and summits, distributing their ideas through writing and public speaking engagements, and educating others about the need for change and about nonviolence as a pathway to lasting peace. Peaceful, unarmed nonviolent resistance persisted even when those that opposed to their message calling for justice, responded with mob attacks, beatings, burning of property, lynching, and even killings. Responding to opposition and hate with love was the doers’ preferred method of promoting peace, and nonviolence was how they enacted this praxis of love.

*Change-Making*

Faith provided them with solid criteria for attempting to distinguish right from wrong and imagining an alternative to the brokenness of humanity and the systemic injustice that they observed. Faith served as a moral compass, and it provided an ideal for human relationships, communities, and societies. The doers had a sense of historical consciousness whereby they understood life as not being just about them. They lived with a sense of purpose, and this purpose, in turn, gave them the confidence to act in the world and to face its harsh realities. Driven by a need for change, each, in her or his own way, resisted existing systems.
The doers were not ignorant of the challenges that they would face as a result of their attempts to create new communities, organizations, and movements. They dealt with these challenges strategically by gathering and mobilizing people, pooling political and material resources to make their plans a reality, and continuously setting pathways forward, despite frequent attacks, criticisms, and opposition. The doers navigated this tough reality while balancing the need to fight with the need to do so in a manner that was consistent with their faith.

The doers understood power and its intricate methods of operating in the world. They saw how power was used to create and destroy, to unite and divide. Being aware of this, even though they were often at the centre of power in the movements and communities that they helped to create, they strove to use the power they held to make positive change, to empower, to embolden.

The doers adopted various methods to make change. Although writing and public speaking were popular methods for getting their message across, they also employed various public action approaches to create systemic change. For example, as a pragmatist, Addams was willing to collaborate closely with the government to help improve the social conditions that some of the Hull House community members faced. Addams’ (1909/1972) book, *The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets*, is based on the insights she gained while working with other Hull House residents to create the first juvenile court in the United States. Prior to the introduction of the first juvenile court, minors were often tried as adults with adult penalties. Having closely observed the systemic barriers that such youth faced, Addams worked within the system to create a court built around the idea of rehabilitating youths entangled in the criminal system. Bringing about this change required Addams and the residents of Hull House lobby the government and form strategic relationships with public agencies, politicians, and businessmen to gain support.
for their cause (Hamington, 2007). Working with those in power required Addams to speak their language and understand their perspective, while not conforming to their points of view.

Day’s method of change-making was different from Addams’ pragmatist approach, but the emphasis was still on using power to influence while refusing to be seduced by that power. Day’s recipe for change was to resist civil authority from the outside. She and her colleagues participated in public protests and, when necessary, spent time in jail. Day also refused to vote or pay taxes to make a point that she did not want to support the state (Hamington, 2007). The Catholic Worker movement and Houses of Hospitality did not receive any government funding, and the Catholic Worker still does not seek charity status to this day, an act that is symbolic of their commitment to fight from outside of the system (Deines, 2008). Day (1949/1983) described her approach to change-making as follows:

What we would like to do is change the world—make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And to a certain extent, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, of the poor, of the destitute—the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor, in other words—we can to a certain extent change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world. We can throw our pebble in the pond and be confident that its ever-widening circle will reach around the world. (p. 98)

Day openly criticized the government for America’s military expansions during World War Two, the Cold War, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War. At a time when anti-war opinions were not popular, Day challenged the government by writing about her pacifist stance in *The Catholic Worker* newspaper and pleading with her readers to oppose war on grounds of conscience. She strongly held that any form of violence against humanity could not be justified.
King challenged the institutional practices of segregation that were the norm in the South at the time. In order to realize his dream of racial integration, he worked closely with the SCLC, an organization with the mandate to coordinate the action of local protest groups throughout the South (King Encyclopedia, n.d., para. 1). The organization appointed King as its first leader in 1957. The SCLC provided a platform for Black leaders in the South to act with greater unity and coordination and to promote the principles of nonviolence. King and SCLC were financed primarily by local churches with predominantly African American congregation members, liberal unions and their supporters, and individual donors (Ling & Duffy, 2012). Remaining faithful to their ideals, they organized mass protest campaigns and voter registration drives all over the South. The organization also played a major role in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, where King delivered his *I Have a Dream* speech. Despite their remarkable accomplishments, King and SCLC faced criticism from other Black civil rights advocates for being too moderate in their approach and too naïve in their willingness to involve white people in the movement. Regarding the disagreements among fellow Black advocates, King (1968/2010) wrote:

I decided that I would plead patiently with my brothers to remain true to the time-honoured principles of our movement. I began to plead for nonviolence…. The answer was only to be found in persistent trying, perpetual experimentation, persevering togetherness…. I could not in good conscience agree to continue my personal involvement and that of SCLC in the march if it were not publicly affirmed that it was based on nonviolence and the participation of both black [sic] and white…. [we] agreed that we could unite around these principles as far as the march was concerned. The next
morning, we had a joint press conference affirming that the march was nonviolent and that whites were welcomed. (p. 26-29)

While the doers took different approaches, they each managed to accomplish their core mission of changing their realities. Some managed to change the establishment from the inside, while others preferred to work from outside the system. But the doers all shared this commitment to change reality with innovative solutions to social problems. Making change is not easy, but they managed to do so by use and leveraging power, while still acting in ways that were consistent with their faith.

The changes they sought came at great cost. The fact that Addams spoke out against World War One caused donations towards Hull House to plummet and garnered her severe criticism in the media at the height of her popularity (Knight, 2005). The fact that Day wrote in support of conscientious objectors and against conscription while partaking in demonstrations resulted in significant cuts to The Catholic Worker subscriptions, resulting in the closure of half of the Catholic Worker communities and a flood of hate mail (Day, 2010; 2011; Miller, 1982). She was also arrested and jailed several times for protesting. The FBI placed her name on a special list of dangerous radicals, and the head of FBI at the time, J. Edgar Hoover, gave instructions that in case of national emergency, Day was to be detained immediately (Roberts, 1984). The fact that King took a stand for civil rights and peace, eventually cost him his life. To the doers, love was not just a sentiment, nor was it simply a theological concept; it was a lifelong commitment to participate in the world by building new, organized programs, institutions and political movements.

This chapter presented the conceptual framework of faith-inspired praxis of love by illustrating how its concepts and key elements were lived out in the world by the five doers. The
conceptual framework detailed how faith served as a source of inspiration that influenced the way the doers went about engaging in and living out the praxis of love. The conceptual framework presented in this chapter is important in the context of the dissertation as the purpose of the research is to examine how the framework is reflected in contemporary praxis of love initiatives. As I will present in later chapters, being grounded in the five doers’ work, the framework provides a guiding conceptual structure when engaging with doers who are less well-known, yet engaged in praxis of love initiatives.
Chapter Four: Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love Initiatives

While Chapter Three summarized what the conceptual framework is (i.e., faith, love, praxis) and how it is lived out in everyday reality (i.e., in God with people, whole relationships, community, hospitality, nonviolence, and change-making), this chapter provides a summary of the doer initiatives and key defining traits of such initiatives that can be abstracted from their work. Since the purpose of the research is to examine how faith-inspired praxis of love is reflected in current initiatives, it is important to have criteria for selecting current initiatives where praxis of love is lived out.

The faith-inspired praxis of love initiatives upon which this discussion is grounded are sets of organized activities in which the doers (i.e., Jane Addams, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jean Vanier, and Mary Jo Leddy) were the primary motivators. These initiatives provided platforms through which the doers could articulate their praxis. The initiatives were a way of life for the doers. For example, Addams, Day, King, and Vanier remained actively engaged in Hull House, Catholic Worker Movement, SCLC, and L’Arche respectively, until their final days. Similarly, Leddy continues to live and participate in the life of Romero House community.

Descriptive Summaries of the Five Doers’ Initiatives

Hull House (1889 - 2012)

Hull House was co-founded by Jane Addams and her college friend, Ellen Gates Starr, in 1889 in Near West Side in Chicago, an industrial district heavily concentrated with recent European immigrants known for its poor living conditions. The mandate of Hull House was to improve the social conditions for local community members through innovative social programs and by advocating for public policy reforms. More specifically, Hull House aimed at increasing
civic engagement; instituting and maintaining educational and philanthropic enterprises; and investigating and improving the conditions in the industrial districts of Chicago. Hull House was one of the first settlement houses in the United States and its success in adopting innovative approaches to solving social problems played an important role in popularizing its unique approach of merging social classes and its dedication to local service across the country. At its peak, the Hull House Association had more than 50 programs and served approximately 60,000 people, including both families and individual community members (Thayer, 2012). Around 1910, after being in effect for two decades, the settlement movement as a whole grew to include more than 400 houses throughout the nation (Hamington, 2007). Most of this was made possible by the support of private donors.

In an article outlining the motives of settlement house workers, Addams wrote that residence, research, and reform were “the three R’s” of the settlement house movement (Addams, 1892). The house provided short- and long-term residences to individuals interested in developing solutions to social problems. With Addams at the center, Hull House was the meeting house for local trade unions and the residence for notable social reformers such as Sophonisba Breckinridge, Florence Kellye, Julia Lathrop, and Frances Perkins. Addams (1892) further elaborated on the aims of the settlement:

[Residents of Hull House] must be content to live quietly side by side with their neighbors [sic], until they grow into a sense of relationship and mutual interests…. They are bound to see the needs of their neighborhood [sic] as a whole, to furnish data for legislation, and to use their influence to secure it. In short, residents are pledged to devote themselves to the duties of good citizenship and to the arousing of the social energies which too largely lie dormant in every neighborhood given over to industrialism. (para. 15)
In addition to providing a place of fellowship and residence to social reformers, Hull House offered a myriad of activities to its neighbours. It provided educational opportunities through the operation of a public library, cooking and sewing lessons for girls, bookbindery classes, free lectures on issues relevant to the neighbourhood, and English and citizenship classes for recent immigrants. The house also provided social gatherings for working mothers to enjoy fellowship while providing a day nursery for their dependents. Addams and Starr moved their family possessions, including paintings, books, and heirloom silver, into Hull House and opened its doors to the neighbours for art exhibitions, theatre, music performance, poetry reading, and cultural celebrations. These were indeed innovative approaches in the early days of Hull House when the contrast between progress and poverty was glaringly obvious. The activities at the house were aimed at dispelling the popular myth that poor people should be isolated in separate sections of a city, and instead, in celebrating citizenship and civic life (Elshtain, 2001). Hull House sought to provide the dispossessed the same sort of refined and cultivated home environment that the co-founders had the privilege of knowing, and to create a network of family and neighbourly bonds (Brooks, 2017). The goal was to convene rich and poor, immigrants and non-immigrants to live and work together and to come to understand one another.

And under the pressure of experience, Hull House and its residents continued to expand the mandate of the initiative to include the advancement of the labour movement and the women’s suffrage movement. With their expanded mandate, research and reform became one of their core activities. Hull House conducted careful studies relevant to the Near West Side; research topics included the causes of poverty, the deplorable working conditions of its neighbours, the youth criminal justice system, and the lack of infrastructure such as clean water and garbage collection.
Despite Hull House’s countless successes in its 123 years of operation, the Jane Addams Hull House Association finally announced bankruptcy. The main factors attributed to its demise were identified as the over reliance on government funding and its inability to remain relevant to the changing needs of Chicago (Ford & Thayer, 2012). Today, the original Hull House building remains open to the public as a museum, a part of the College of Architecture and the Arts at the University of Illinois at Chicago (Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, n.d.).

**The Catholic Worker Movement (1933 - )**

The Catholic Worker movement started with *The Catholic Worker* newspaper aimed at articulating the Catholic social teaching in the wake of the Great Depression. Its founding editors, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, sought to make the ideas expressed in the paper a way of life by establishing the Houses of Hospitality whereby volunteer Catholic Workers could create communities in order “to live in accordance with the justice and charity of Jesus Christ.” (Catholic Worker Movement, n.d.-b).

Personalism is an important principle in considering the Catholic Worker movement. Murray (1990), a sociologist who conducted participant observation in a number of Catholic Worker communities, identified five ways that Catholic Workers in Houses of Hospitality embody personalism:

- Catholic Workers place the inherent dignity and worth of the individual as more important than any other consideration, for example, welfare policies. Considerations such as eligibility requirements would not be given priority over an individual’s need.
- Workers consider the guests as being fellow travellers in life; they do not put emphasis on the distinction between the two. Hence, labels and diagnostic terms are not adopted.
• There are few written rules in the house about how the work is to be done other than those required to ensure safety. The worker’s responsibility is determined by here or his sense of personal responsibility to the evolving needs of the community.

• There are no written records of communication between workers and guests. Conversation and dialogue are considered to be dynamic and relational.

• Social change and social activism are assumed as a personal responsibility.

Putting these into action, each community autonomously yet cooperatively assesses its own needs in light of the members’ strengths and limitations, decides just how it will live out works of mercy, builds its own network of local supporters, discerns how it can practice the Worker tradition of living in voluntary poverty, and starts its own newsletter or newspaper. Because there is a strong emphasis on making a personal commitment to sacrificial giving without seeking government support, there are no paid staff, and there are few formal distinctions between workers and guests (Deines, 2008). All commonly share bedrooms, bathrooms, and select their clothes from the same stock of donated items (Murray, 1990).

Because of the emphasis to attend to the local community’s needs, there is wide variability among worker communities. For example, some focus their activities on providing hospitality for women and children experiencing homelessness, while others emphasize supporting immigrants and refugees. Despite the differences across the communities, there are a number of core activities across the Catholic Worker communities. They include the publication of a paper or a newsletter that articulates the philosophy of the Catholic Worker community and translates the grass-roots experience to social justice activism. Communities also actively engage in picketing, vigils, and acts of civil disobedience on issues affecting the local community. They provide practical help to those in need by offering shelter, food, and clothing. Today, there are
five Catholic Worker communities in Canada and over 200 autonomous communities across the world that together make up the Catholic Worker movement.

**Southern Christian Leadership Conference (1957 - )**

Following the success of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, King together with his colleagues including Bayard Rustin, Ella Baker, Fred Shuttlesworth, Joseph Lowery, and Ralph Abernathy, invited about 60 ministers and leaders to Ebenezer Church in Atlanta where Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr. and King himself served as the pastors. What transpired from this initial meeting was the establishment of the SCLC in 1957, an African-American civil rights organization to end legalized racial segregation and discrimination in United States. In order to fulfill its mandate, the SCLC’s core activities included mobilizing leaders and providing leadership training through its Citizenship Schools to teach about democracy and civil rights; strategizing and organizing nonviolent public boycotts, sit-ins, protests, marches, and picketing; mobilizing voter registration; and giving public speeches and interviews to raise public awareness about the issues concerning Black Americans.

Today, the SCLC continues to provide training on the method of “Kingian nonviolence” and further the International Poor People’s Campaign. The Poor People's Campaign, or Poor People's March on Washington, was a 1968 effort to gain economic justice for poor people in the United States. King was the undisputed leader until his assassination on April 4, 1968 and the campaign leadership passed Ralph Abernathy. King and the SCLC shifted their focus to poverty issues after observing that gains in civil rights had not improved the material conditions of life for many African Americans. At an SCLC retreat, King stated, “We have moved from the era of civil rights to an era of human rights.” (as cited in Wright, 2007, p. 151). The Poor People's Campaign was a multiracial effort—including African-Americans, Asian-Americans, Mexican-
Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Native Americans—aimed at alleviating poverty regardless of race. Today, the initiative has also embraced the cause for resisting the involvement of children in sex trafficking. The Justice for Girls campaign offers seminars, workshops, public forums, roundtable discussions to advance the cause (SCLC, n.d.).

*L’Arche (1964 - )*

Jean Vanier opened the door to the first L’Arche community in Trosly-Breuil in 1964 together with Raphael Simi and Philippe Seux. He named the house L’Arche (French for “ark” and “arch”) to symbolize both Noah’s Ark, a boat representing a safe haven for a community of people with and without intellectual disability, and an arch or bridge connecting heaven and earth.

Community living for people with disabilities was still a novel idea when Vanier invited the two institutionalized young men to come live with him at L’Arche. The inclusive community model provided by L’Arche soon spread internationally including to Canada. Historically, Canadian society’s treatment of people with intellectual disabilities can be captured by the common terminologies that were used to describe them, including “imbeciles,” “idiots,” “feebleminded,” “morons,” or “retarded.” This language illustrates that people with intellectual disabilities were considered “abnormal”; consequently, it was acceptable to treat them differently. It was commonly assumed that it was impossible for individuals with an intellectual disability to live independent and meaningful lives. This assumption was accompanied with a belief that they needed to be protected and “fixed” in an environment managed by professionals such as hospitals and mental asylums. Other less humanitarian reasons for institutionalization included the belief that people with intellectual disability needed to be isolated from the society at large to protect the general population (L’Arche Canada, 2014b).
The movement to de-institutionalization started to gain momentum in 1960s in Canada when the justice of putting people in institutions was being questioned. The first Canadian L’Arche community was established in Richmond Hill, Ontario, in 1969. L’Arche is one part, albeit a pioneering part, in a much larger social movement for change in the way people with intellectual disabilities were seen and treated (L’Arche Canada, 2014a). L’Arche is similar to other group homes, yet different and unique in the sense that those who assist the residents, like Vanier himself, live with them in the same house and together they aspire to form a community of belonging, a family of friends.

In Vanier’s (2012) *The Heart of L’Arche: A Spirituality for Every Day*, the mission statement of L’Arche is stated as follows:

To make known the gifts of people with intellectual disabilities, revealed through mutually transforming relationships; foster an environment in community that responds to the changing needs of our members, whilst being faithful to the core values of our founding story; and engage in our diverse cultures, working together towards a more human society (p. 88).

In order to achieve this mandate, the core activities of L’Arche involve development of long-term, mutual, interdependent relationships; maintenance of a stable, life-giving home environment that shares in all activities of daily living such as eating meals doing household chores according to one’s abilities; training and ongoing formation of those who provide assistance to community members with disabilities; and cooperation with outside professional care providers.

Though rooted in Christian spirituality, some L’Arche communities are interfaith. In India, for example, the communities welcome Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, and encourage
that each resident grow in their own religious tradition (Vanier, 2012). Today, there are 29
L’Arche communities across Canada (L’Arche Canada, n.d.-a) and 149 in 37 countries that are
organized under the umbrella of L’Arche International (L’Arche International, n.d.). In Canada,
each L’Arche community is incorporated provincially as a not-for-profit organization with its
own Board of Directors making governance decisions. Each is approved and partially funded by
provincial ministries of social services and subsidized by the L’Arche Canada Foundation, the
fundraising wing of L’Arche Canada which is the overarching association that connects L’Arche
communities across Canada (L’Arche Canada, n.d.-b).

**Romero House (1991 - )**

Romero House had two births—the first was by the Congregation of Christian Brothers
and the second by Mary Jo Leddy in 1991. When Leddy and her friends stepped in to save the
refugee shelter from closure, they decided to abandon the House’s “shelter/social work kind of
model,” in favour of “a different way of being with people” (Kolbe Times, 2016, para. 5). In
1993, the initiative was newly registered with the Canada Revenue Agency as the “Toronto
Refugee Community Non-Profit Homes and Services.”

The purpose of Romero House is welcoming refugees and walking “with them for a little
while, so they can eventually walk on their own two feet” (Romero House, n.d.-a, para. 3).
Nestled in the West Bend neighbourhood of Toronto, Romero House operates four homes and
ten apartments for refugee families. In order to accomplish its stated purpose, the House provides
temporary housing/shelter to refugees seeking asylum; most families stay for one year after their
arrival, in which time they are accompanied in navigating the refugee determination process and
establishing their lives in Canada. Supporting refugees with settlement involves supporting
families to transition from their refugee status to citizens through various programs such as Kids’
Club, Women’s Group and summer camp; walk-in services for refugees seeking support in accessing Legal Aid, food banks, finding lawyers, obtaining clothing and furniture, and receiving social assistance. Organizing neighbourhood events such as street parties that enable the residents and the neighbours of Romero House to connect is also another core activity important to achieving the House’s mandate.

While Leddy remains the founder and a resident of Romero House, the House runs with the commitment of a handful of interns who commit four months to two years of their life towards serving refugees. The interns are live-in supports for refugees who accompany the refugees through the complex refugee determination process and carry out administrative tasks such as putting together the newsletter, running the Kids’ Club or Women’s Group. Most importantly, Romero House, with the support of the interns, strives to build community in an intentional way through praying together daily, sharing meals and cleaning tasks, celebrating holidays, and enjoying each other’s presence whenever possible. The interns receive a nominal stipend of $200/month for first year and $500/month for second year interns (Romero House, n.d.-b).

According to the Charities Directorate of the Canada Revenue Agency, in 2020, government funding made up a total of 40 per cent of the total revenue ($309,765) and donations accounted for 41 per cent or $314,898 (Canada Revenue Agency, 2020).

Analysis of Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love Initiatives

To identify the key traits of praxis of love initiatives, I followed a similar procedure used to develop the conceptual framework of faith-inspired praxis of love. Because the initial development of the conceptual framework involved an adaptation of the content analysis method (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Kondracki & Wellman, 2002; Mayring, 2000; Schreier, 2012) that
included systematically engaging with the writings of the doers, I was aware of which sources to focus on in order to obtain the information necessary. In addition to reviewing the doers’ key writings, I also studied the notes that I had created during the initial content analysis. Following an outline of core activities involved in each of the initiatives, I examined the list by looking for similarities across the initiatives to capture the core and recurrent traits. I developed a list of similarities that emerged from the initial outline and abstracted six key traits important to identifying praxis of love initiatives.

To be identified a core activity, it is not necessary for the activity to be found across all of the doers’ work. Certain activities such as picketing and provision of social services are not found across the five identified doers, but are core to a doer’s or a select few of the doers’ initiatives (i.e., Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King, Jr. for the former and Jane Addams for the latter). Each initiative adopted by the doers is considered important and unique and each has different considerations that were relevant to the respective historical and social contexts. What was considered important was not whether an activity is found across all five praxis of love initiatives, but rather, whether the core activities account for the breadth of diverse activities crucial to identifying praxis of love initiatives.

**Key Traits of Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love Initiatives**

Based on the summary of initiatives, I abstracted six key traits important to identifying praxis of love initiatives:

- Considers faith as the key motivation for why one engages in the initiative. The initiative is a way to live out the praxis of love in everyday reality.

- Emphasizes the renewing, bonding, and recovery of human relationships within a domain (e.g., group of people, community, or society) and across domains.
• Considers diversity in gender/sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, class, citizenship status, skill-sets/strengths, and religion/faith/spirituality as a source of human strength.

• Promotes new ideas, approaches, and systems to meet the changing needs of a particular domain.

• Is collaborative in its approach in that humans work together to create, promote, and maintain change in a particular domain or across domains.

• Organizes the resources available within a particular domain to draw out its potential to support everyone’s flourishing.

The above key traits were used to identify and select the contemporary sites included in the multiple-site case study.
Chapter Five: Research Methodology

To develop an integrative research framework that would guide the gathering of data, I adopted the multiple-site case study design. Multiple case study design aims to examine an issue in question and to enhance the ability to theorize about some larger collection of cases (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). This design allows the researcher to analyze within each case setting and across settings (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This approach aligned with the research objectives, as there are specific issues in question (i.e., how faith-inspired praxis of love is conceptualized, experienced, and applied), as well as the desire to theorize about the broader implications of the framework for other faith-inspired praxis initiatives.

In this multiple-site case study, the unit of analysis was the faith-inspired praxis of love at each initiative or site. This implies that the focus of the study lied on how the framework is conceptualized, experienced, and put into practice at the multiple-sites. The initiatives considered for this study were Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto (hereafter, “Sanctuary”), The Working Centre, and Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto (hereafter, “MCC Toronto”).

It is important to note that the unit of analysis was not the initiative. The initiatives provided the context within which to explore the framework, but the study was not a case study of Sanctuary, The Working Centre, or MCC Toronto. This implies that the study was not about describing or evaluating the initiatives as organizations or communities. Rather, the study focused on how praxis of love is conceptualized, experienced, and put into practice at the three sites, and what the general struggles and lessons were in doing this type of work.

Multiple-Site Case Study

Case study research procedures are considered front-end loaded as the researcher walks into the sites with a clear set of questions that need to be answered. Data collection efforts are
strategically aimed at addressing the pre-meditated topics listed in the standardized protocol (Yin, 2003; 2014). Such front-end loaded approach allows the research to increase comparability across sites.

A multiple-site case study approach was appropriate for the current study for several reasons. First, I have prior experience with some of the sites chosen. I am also familiar with the conceptual framework of faith-inspired praxis of love based on my academic work to date and I was able to identify it as it emerged at the initiatives. My knowledge about the sites derived from having read a few of the publications authored by its founders, participating in a few of their activities, and hearing reviews about them from my own social network. Starting the study with foundational knowledge and a clear idea of what I am looking for was ideal for a case study approach because what I am seeking to learn was listed in the standardized protocol which helped me identify the phenomena of interest as it emerged in the initiatives (Yin, 2003; 2014).

Second, given the nature of the research topic, I required flexibility around the most effective way to gather the information using adaptable and local field procedures at each site. The intent of the data collection in case study according to Yin (2014) is to “collect data from people and institutions in their everyday situations, not within the controlled confines of a laboratory” (p. 88). Case studies are not limited to a singular qualitative method of collecting information, such as interviews, focus groups or participant observation. Rather, case studies can draw from multiple sources of data (e.g., observations, interviews, and existing documents), which allow me to collect quality data in settings that require locally flexible approaches. Yin (2014) claims multiple sources of evidence converge on one another, which in turn strengthens the trustworthiness of the study and makes for a more convincing conclusion than if the study only relied on one source of evidence.
The third rationale for why a multiple-site case study was appropriate is that case study research is grounded in multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, existing documents), the approach is richly descriptive (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Evidence gathered from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, robust, and instrumental than a single-site case study, especially as it relates to conceptual framework and theory building (Herriott & Firestone, 1983; Yin, 2003). The ability to collect and process evidence from multiple sources is a major strength of case study data collection (Yin, 2003). As with most methods dependent upon qualitative data, case studies are strong in providing rich descriptions of the phenomena of interest and in generating insights into the nature of the observed patterns that have relevance beyond a single setting (Randell, Wilson, & Woodward, 2011).

**Study Schema for the Multiple-Site Case Study**

Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the multiple-site case study procedures adopted in this research. The study method was adapted from Yin’s case study model (Yin, 2003) and the schema was used by Jackson (2011) in a published doctoral dissertation. The cross-case conclusions were not written up in a separate report, but rather, will be presented in the final chapter of this dissertation.
Case Selection

In a multiple-site case study, it is important that the cases selected for study be thoughtfully considered so that the study either “predicts similar results (a literal replication) or … predicts contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)” (Yin, 2003, p. 47). This study chose three sites that would provide contrasting results in a manner that highlights the six praxis dimensions identified in the conceptual framework.
The screening process involved starting with a list of potential initiatives that I created while developing the conceptual framework. I also reached out to key informants in my social network that understood what a faith-inspired praxis of love initiative was. This included a few of my thesis committee members. They provided a list of potential initiatives that I could consider for the case study. To determine the suggested initiatives’ suitability for this study, I reviewed their websites, read literature, and documents available to the public. I queried individuals knowledgeable about each potential site, read available material about the initiatives, and visited the sites in person when necessary. The screening process involved considering how well a site met the six key traits of a praxis of faith initiative described in the previous chapter (pp. 81-82). Also, an initiative with a considerable size of operation and scale of activities was deemed ideal. For example, even if a site met the description of an initiative, if it only employed one person and had been established for less than one year, it was considered not appropriate as it would lack the amount of data and necessary depth of a good case study. The initiative’s size of operation needed to be over $100,000 in annual expenses and have been established for at least five years to be considered suitable for investigation.

Through the screening process, I narrowed down the list to four potential sites. To further determine their suitability, I met with the organization’s representative (hereafter, “representative”) who were also the highest-possible authority. These conversations involved hearing a description of the initiative directly from the representatives, and an opportunity for me to explain the research. I described the six key traits of a praxis of love initiative and asked for feedback on how they view their own initiative fitting or not fitting the criteria. The representatives had an opportunity to ask questions related to the thesis and express preliminary interest in participating.
Multiple-site case study design follows replication logic rather than sampling logic, that is, the sample size is not relevant because the number of replications is dependent upon the certainty expected from those studies (Yin, 2003). The three sites presented in this dissertation are considered to have the best fit for this multiple-site case study. In addition to meeting the criteria for praxis of love initiative, it is important that they demonstrate a range of variability across the six elements of praxis of love to ensure that the praxis manifested through the initiatives resonates with the breadth of the doers’ praxis. The variability among the three initiatives promises a rich source of data that will strengthen the conceptual framework.

Table 3 further highlights the diversity found across the three initiatives. While all of them have Christian roots, they are influenced by different faith traditions and draw from multiple philosophical influences. All of the sites have been established for more than 30 years and have gained a significant amount of experience in engaging in praxis. The three sites have a different size of operations as indicated by their revenue and expenses as well as organizational capacity in terms of number of full-time and part-time employees working at the sites. They each have a range of praxis focus areas (e.g., Sanctuary focuses on building whole relationships; The Working Centre emphasizes community; and MCC Toronto works towards change-making) which also translates into different program and activities offered at the initiatives.
# FAITH-INSPIRED PRAXIS OF LOVE

## Table 3

### Comparing Sites’ Relative Cross-Site Compatibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sanctuary</th>
<th>The Working Centre</th>
<th>MCC Toronto</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Faith tradition</strong></td>
<td>Evangelical</td>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philosophical influences</strong></td>
<td>- Rev. Greg Paul</td>
<td>- Kenneth Westhues, Wendell Berry, Ivan Illich, Christopher Lasch, Jane Addams, Moses Coady, EF Schumacher, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin</td>
<td>- Rev. Brent Hawkes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Year established</strong></td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>1982</td>
<td>1974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational capacity</strong></td>
<td>- Full-time employees: 21</td>
<td>- Full-time employees: 83</td>
<td>- Full-time employees: 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Part-time employees: 5</td>
<td>- Part-time employees: 133</td>
<td>- Part-time employees: 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Main programs and activities (as reported on latest T3010)</strong></td>
<td>- Drop in centre, Provide meals, counseling services, clothes, etc. to those in need, Provide religious services, Provide health services and education to street people, Help the public gain awareness and understanding of inner city needs</td>
<td>- Job Search Resource Centre (includes supports for New Canadians, un- and underemployed), St. John’s kitchen (includes breakfast, lunch, market, Psychiatric, At- Home and Street Outreach), Community Tools (includes bike shop, computer recycling, Job Cafe, Worth a Second Look Furniture Housewares), Access to Technology (includes public access to computers, comp training), Affordable Housing, Waterloo School for Local Democracy</td>
<td>- Religious Services, Spiritual Counselling, Peer Support Group, Youth Programs, Adult Spiritual Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Revenue and Expenses (as reported latest on T3010 available on Canada Revenue Agency)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Revenue</th>
<th>Revenue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Receipted donations $1,169,739.00 (50.55%)</td>
<td>- Receipted donations $842,703.00 (10.21%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Non-receipted donations $2,140.00 (0.09%)</td>
<td>- Non-receipted donations $118,404.00 (1.44%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gifts from other registered charities $496,914.00 (21.48%)</td>
<td>- Gifts from other registered charities $626,719.00 (7.60%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Government funding $181,000.00 (7.82%)</td>
<td>- Government funding $3,931,069.00 (47.64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- All other revenue $464,082.00 (20.06%)</td>
<td>- All other revenue $2,732,091.00 (33.11%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Total revenue: $2,313,875.00</td>
<td>- Total revenue: $8,250,986.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expenses</th>
<th>Expenses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Charitable programs $2,401,890.00 (97.23%)</td>
<td>- Charitable programs $7,361,569.00 (98.05%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Management and administration $68,535.00 (2.77%)</td>
<td>- Management and administration $73,226.00 (0.98%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Fundraising $0.00 (0.00%)</td>
<td>- Fundraising $73,435.00 (0.98%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Gifts to other registered charities and qualified donees $0.00 (0.00%)</td>
<td>- Political activities $0.00 (0.00%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Other $0.00 (0.00%)</td>
<td>- Gifts to other registered charities and qualified donees $52,476.00 (3.64%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Total expenses: $2,470,425.00</td>
<td>- Total expenses: $7,508,230.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Revenue**
- Receipted donations $1,427,806.00 (60.62%)
- Non-receipted donations $137,934.00 (5.86%)
- Gifts from other registered charities $631,238.00 (26.80%)
- Government funding $36,670.00 (1.56%)
- All other revenue $121,697.00 (5.17%)
- Total revenue: $2,355,345.00

**Expenses**
- Charitable programs $825,958.00 (57.35%)
- Management and administration $383,253.00 (26.61%)
- Fundraising $178,510.00 (12.39%)
- Political activities $0.00 (0.00%)
- Gifts to other registered charities and qualified donees $52,476.00 (3.64%)
- Total expenses: $1,440,197.00
The following section explains why each initiative was selected as an ideal context within which to explore the praxis of love. In addition, their history, mission, and key activities are briefly summarized. A more detailed description of each of the initiatives will follow in subsequent chapters.

The Working Centre

The Working Centre (www.theworkingcentre.org) was selected because of its resemblance to Catholic Worker and Hull House. Established in 1982 as a response to the rising unemployment rate in Kitchener, it is now a network of practical supports for individuals who are unemployed, underemployed, temporarily employed, and homeless. Begun from scratch by a visionary husband and wife couple, Joe and Stephanie Mancini, it is widely recognized for its innovative projects focused on giving people access to tools that create their own work. Grounded in the Catholic social teaching, the Catholic Worker example has played a significant influence on the development of The Working Centre. The Working Centre also draws its inspiration from a diverse body of literature and ideas including those of Jane Addams, Wendell Berry, Ivan Illich, Christopher Lasch, Moses Coady, and EF Schumacher. In this sense, The Working Centre is similar to how Hull House served as a site of dynamic social experiment for new ideas to take root and bear fruit.

The Working Centre is in the downtown core of Kitchener, Ontario. Today, its projects are organized into six areas: (1) the Job Search Resource Centre, (2) St. John’s Kitchen, (3) Community Tools, (4) Access to Technology, (5) Integrated Supportive Housing, and (6) the Waterloo School for Community Development (Mancini & Mancini, 2015).
Sanctuary

Sanctuary (www.sanctuarytoronto.ca) was selected because of its emphasis on relationships among community members. The community resembles Romero House and L’Arche in the sense that the focus lies on the relationships among community members.

Established in 1985, Sanctuary began as a Christian band trying to take the message of Jesus where it usually does not get heard. Today, it is a “Christian charitable organization that works to establish and develop a holistic, inclusive and healthy community among people who have known rejection and abuse” (Charity Intelligence Canada, n.d., para. 1).

Through its drop-in and outreach programs, Sanctuary provides food, clothing, and basic health care, and addiction services. Sanctuary’s drop-in serves meals to 80 to 160 people twice a week. The Sanctuary Church, located in the same building, provides spiritual nourishing through weekly worship service and bible studies. While worship service is available to all, membership in the church is not a prerequisite to participating in other activities offered by Sanctuary.

MCC Toronto

MCC Toronto (https://www.mcctoronto.com) was selected because of its emphasis on change-making. MCC Toronto is theoretically comparable to SCLC which mobilized the southern Black churches to advocate for the civil rights of Black people in the United States.

In 1973, a group of individuals wrote to the head office of the Metropolitan Community Church in Los Angeles requesting that they send someone to Toronto to start a new church. Rev. Brent Hawkes was the second pastor who responded to that call and stayed until his recent retirement in 2018.

Today, the church is nationally recognized for being a pioneer in advocating for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people. The church has been a place
of worship that strives to give solace as well as a voice to its congregants who are sexual and gender minorities as well as their allies. In July 2017, members of the congregation voted to elect Rev. Jeff Rock as the new senior pastor following Rev. Hawkes' retirement.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

While Yin (2003) offered six common forms of data collection—“archival records, direct observations, documentation, interviews, participant observation, and physical artifacts” (p. 86)—Merriam (1998) stated that interviews followed by direct observation and documentation were the most common forms of data collection used in case studies. Yin (2003) stressed the use of as many data collection methods as possible to substantiate the study more strongly.

Prior to starting case study field work, I obtained research agreement from the Executive Directors or an equivalent person who could approve onsite research activities. See Appendix B for Research Agreement. In this study, when possible, data were collected through participant observation of the activities taking place at the sites, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. At MCC Toronto, data collection at MCC Toronto was limited to telephone interviews with key informants and document analysis on materials available to the public. The conversation with the informants centred around the activist aspects of praxis of love.

Table 4 provides an overview of the description and purpose of the participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. While I drew data from these multiple sources in a way that was flexible and appropriate to each site, the information gathered across the sites was standardized as I followed closely the case study protocol.

Participant observation allows a researcher to engage in day-to-day or routine activities to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011). When possible, I arranged multiple
visits at different times, locations, and events to the sites over a four- to six-week period for observations. These visits were focused on activities helpful to understanding praxis of love exercised at the sites. During the visits, in addition to observing activities making notes, I met the staff and program participants, visited various facilities if the initiative had multiple locations where activities took place, engaged in informal conversations, and participated in the activities when appropriate. Creswell and Creswell (2018) indicate that there are several advantages to adopting observation as a data collection method. For example, the researcher can benefit from having access to firsthand experience with participants and noticing unusual aspects during observation. Also, observation allows the researcher with ways to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, and grasp how participants communicate with each other.

The four- to six-week period spent at each site also involved conducting semi-structured interviews with key informants. The interviews followed a set of questions generated from the case study protocol. See Appendix C for the interview guide.

After obtaining a signed Research Agreement from the initiatives’ representatives, I sent out a general e-mail invitation to staff and volunteers to participate in the study. See Appendix D for details of this general e-mail script. I started the interview process with the Executive Director(s) or Managing Director(s) who were knowledgeable to speak about faith-inspired praxis. The exact composition and number of the interview participants varied from site to site. I followed a snowball sampling technique (Lee, 1993) by asking the interview participants for recommendations on who I could speak with that would be knowledgeable about the topic of faith-inspired praxis of love taking place at the site. See Appendix E for details of the invitational e-mail sent to prospective interview participants. Snowballing is considered an effective
sampling technique for researchers interested in locating participants with certain attributes or characteristics necessary in a study (Lee, 1993). Consent was obtained prior to starting individual interviews; see Appendix F for details.

Documentary and archival records were also important sources of data. I reviewed public and unofficial documents and literature relevant to understanding the praxis of love engaged at the sites. Documents such as “minutes of relevant meetings, strategy and policy documents, and secondary quantitative material on activity levels, memos and correspondence” (Pettigrew, 1990, p. 277) that fit with the study aims were considered. Other literature considered for data included program flyers, posters, and pamphlets. Published books and information available to the public such as websites were also considered. With documents analysis, the researcher has the benefit to obtain the official language and opinion of the sites on praxis of love.

For The Working Centre and Sanctuary, data were collected from three sources: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis (e.g., archives, books, articles, internal policies and by-laws).

COVID-19 pandemic restrictions were put in place around the time I was ready to start the field work at MCC Toronto. This meant that I could not safely engage with potential interview participants and conduct site observation. While I could not carry out an extensive case study at MCC Toronto, because the site offers valuable information on engaging in praxis of love at the systemic level, I decided to proceed with a modification to the methodology. For MCC Toronto, I relied heavily on existing literature to provide a description of MCC Toronto. I also interviewed a smaller group of key informants who could speak about what praxis of love means to them individually and how they engage in praxis of love. While the interviews do not provide
a comprehensive overview of praxis of love at MCC Toronto, they provide important insight from key informants.

Table 4

*Overview of the Range of Data Collection Methods*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Participant Observation</th>
<th>Semi-Structured Interviews</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Description</strong></td>
<td>- Researcher participates in day-to-day or routine activities to learn about the activities of the people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities (DeWalt &amp; DeWalt, 2002).&lt;br&gt;- Researcher records observations and subjective impressions.&lt;br&gt;- The process may involve observation, natural conversations, and spending time in the setting.</td>
<td>- Semi-structured, one-on-one, in-person interviews</td>
<td>- Review of public and unofficial documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Benefits</strong></td>
<td>- Provides the researcher with an “insider” perspective of the setting (Creswell &amp; Creswell, 2018).&lt;br&gt;- Observation is an ideal way to study behaviour, and in this case, faith-inspired praxis.&lt;br&gt;- Observation allows the researcher with ways to check for nonverbal expression of feelings, determine who interacts with whom, and grasp how participants communicate with each other (Schmuck, 1997).</td>
<td>- Interviews are ideal for exploring thoughts, attitudes, opinions, and beliefs. Interviews enable an in-depth exploration of the participants’ perception of, understanding on, and motivations for engaging in faith-inspired praxis.</td>
<td>- Researcher can obtain the official language and opinion of the organization&lt;br&gt;- Represents data to which participants have given attention (Creswell &amp; Creswell, 2018).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I analyzed the information gathered through these multiple data sources by adapting the content analysis method I used to develop the conceptual framework (Kondracki & Wellman, 2002; Mayring, 2000; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; p. 18-20). Data from each initiative was analyzed separately to allow unique themes to emerge. Collected data from multiple sources were read several times to capture major themes across the sites. The main distinction compared to the previous method was that for the multi-site case study, I had a standard protocol which was guiding the data collection and analysis procedures. The type of data that was considered relevant and appropriate depended on how well it helped to answer the questions on the protocol. Data were described and categorized through common themes identified in the protocol.

When possible, I drew from multiple sources of data including interviews, publicly available and internal documents, and field observation and notes. I looked to see if there was consistency in the messages conveyed across the data. Also, the multi-site case study process enabled me to compare and contrast the three initiatives and identify repeated patterns and themes relevant to understanding the framework of faith-inspired praxis of love.

Multiple-Site Case Study Protocol

For multiple-site case studies, the development of a detailed case study protocol to guide the research in a standardized manner at each site is highly recommended (Yin, 2003). Individual case study reports can take the form of formal written answers to a specific set of questions contained in the protocol like a comprehensive take-home exam. That is, the protocol is the standardized agenda for the researcher’s line of inquiry (Yin, 2003). However, it is important to note that even though adopted a protocol that provided a shared report structure, I drew from a range of data gathering methods that were appropriate and flexible to the local contexts.
The adoption of a protocol was important in this multiple case study because it provided a frame to compare data from each site, in turn, increasing comparability across sites. Moreover, given the overwhelming amount of data available through the multiple data gathering methods, the consistent use of a general protocol helped me focus my efforts. Figure 3 provides a table of contents of the protocol for conducting the multiple-site case study.
### A. Primary Research Question

How is faith-inspired praxis of love understood/expressed/experienced at the site?

### B. Sub-Questions (Site-Specific)

**Context:**
- What is the vision of the site?
- What are the values of the site?
- What is the mission statement of the site?
- What are the core activities/services/programs that take place at the site?

**Origins:**
- What motivated the start of this community/organization?
- What ideas inspired the work and activities of this site?
- How did the desire to put faith into action motivate the start of this site?
- What sense of interpersonal relationships were the originators trying to establish?
- What sense of community were the originators trying to build?
- What sense of injustice were the originators trying to address?

**Current Reflections:**
- What motivates the people to be involved with the site?
- What sustains the people involved with the mission of the site?
- What ideas, other than faith, inspire the work and activities of the site? How do these ideas blend together with faith?
- What type of challenges/struggles does the site encounter in engaging in praxis of love?
- What are some lessons that can be drawn about praxis of love?

**Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love:**
- How is faith understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is love understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is praxis understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘in God and with people’ understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘whole relationships’ understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘community’ understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘hospitality’ understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘nonviolence’ understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘change-making’ understood/expressed/experienced?
Individual Site Feedback

Individual site reports were presented back to the representatives at each site. Seeking feedback was important because what was initially presented to them was my interpretation of the individual sites. This was used as an opportunity to verify the reports’ fairness and completeness. Although I sought feedback from the sites and making revisions, as necessary, the intellectual ownership of the discussions remained with me. I sought approval from the representatives to share the report with the interview participants. Two sites provided approval and at one site permission is pending. At this site, the demand of COVID-19 has stalled the process (personal communication, March 17, 2021). If it was not for the pandemic, I would have conducted a summary presentation at each site, but instead, I sent a copy of their site report to individual participants at the two sites and asked for feedback by e-mail.

Multiple-Site Case Study Limitations

While the proposed multiple-site case study was considered the ideal approach for the study, several limitations should be noted. First, there was a limitation on what I could learn from three sites. However, given that this was the first investigation looking at faith-inspired praxis of love initiatives, insight gained from the sites is a significant contribution to the subject matter. Second, the amount of data available from observations, field notes, interviews, and written records can be overwhelming. To mitigate, I followed the protocol carefully in being specific as to what type of information I was seeking from each of the sites. Third, the heavy involvement of the researcher in gathering and analyzing data may raise doubts about objectivity. Combining multiple data sources and actively seeking feedback from the participants helped check my biases (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2003).
Lastly, participant anonymity is harder to guarantee in case studies involving small sample sizes. To respect the confidentiality agreement with participants (see Appendix F for Informed Consent), I removed personally identifiable information on the site reports by using parentheses. In the case of MCC Toronto where only four informants were interviewed, I adopted a gender-neutral pronoun they, them or their to protect the identity as much as possible. Whenever participants’ words were quoted or paraphrased, they were sent a copy of the section to review and confirm the accuracy of the meaning. As noted earlier, the participants at two of the sites received a copy of the site report and were invited to give written feedback.
Prologue to Individual Site Reports

The following chapters present the case study reports from The Working Centre and Sanctuary, and a site report from MCC Toronto. The first two reports are organized into four sections including a brief sketch of the sites, key activities, a description of the praxis of love taking place at the sites, and highlights of general considerations for the framework of faith-inspired praxis of love that one can learn from the sites.

Due to the changes presented by the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, I was not able to follow the protocol at MCC Toronto as closely as the previous two sites. However, because of the unique emphases on political activism and systemic change, MCC Toronto was considered an important site that needed to be included in the study. The MCC Toronto site report begins with background information about the site followed by a summary of interviews with key informants. I close the site report with highlights of considerations for praxis of love with a focus on activism.
Chapter Six: The Working Centre

Doers

The portrait of the founders, Joe and Stephanie Mancini, presented in this section is a summary of information gathered through interviews and published material. The couple grew up in middle-class families during the 1960s and 70s in Hamilton, Ontario. As Canada's largest steel producer, Hamilton was a thriving industrial city. Thanks to both of their families reaping the benefits of Hamilton’s steel factories, they grew up in an era of prosperity and optimism. Their families had Catholic roots and were actively involved in the life of the local parish.

The couple first met in grade 10 and stayed friends (Mancini & Mancini, 2015). In university, Joe invited Stephanie to join him on a trip to Tanzania to build windmills. In a region stricken by poverty, they saw village people coming together to co-operate and build small-scale sustainable technology. As foreigners, the young Mancinis were welcomed to partake in village celebrations and meals, prepared with the few resources people had. The trip was an eye opener; it taught them much about how community sustains people when they look after one another.

Another formative experience that became central to the work of The Working Centre was Joe Mancini’s work at a steel factory (Mancini & Mancini, 2015). Working as a hooker alongside other labourers, he witnessed many disengaged workers who lacked a sense of meaning and passion for their work. His sensitivity towards working conditions grew as he reflected on the purpose of human labour. While working at the factory, he reflected deeply on the ideas of E. F. Schumacher, in *Small Is Beautiful: A Study of Economics as If People Mattered* (Schumacher, 1973). He noted the stark indifference in the ways the modern economy had come to organize labour and its impact on human relationships and communities.
Joe and Stephanie Mancini are still very active in shaping today’s practice at The Working Centre. They regularly articulate the practical ethics and their ideals in the Good Work News, which helps set a consistent tone and approach to The Working Centre’s praxis. They also coauthored Transition to Common Work: Building Community at the Working Centre in 2015, an important book that explains The Working Centre’s roots and how the ideas of various philosophers such as Kenneth Westhues, Ivan Illich, Christopher Lasch, E. F. Schumacher, and Wendell Berry have been integrated into its current projects. The Mancinis have taken the ideas of these public and spiritual thinkers and operationalized them in ways that are germane to the local context of 21st century Kitchener-Waterloo. That the ideas that influenced the beginning of The Working Centre are still practiced 37 years later, owes much to the conscious effort on the co-founders’ part who try to translate philosophy into the practical ethics of The Working Centre.

Beginning

The Working Centre was born in the throes of the North American economic crisis of early 1980s. Interest rates for bank loans hovered at 21 per cent while government policies put in place to curb inflation resulted in an unemployment rate of 12 per cent (Cross & Bergevin, 2012). These economic conditions caused mass layoffs and the closure of manufacturing plants in southern Ontario. An early publication of The Working Centre newsletter noted that between March 31, 1982 and March 31, 1983, 17,079 Ontario workers lost jobs due to 177 plant closures (The Working Centre, 1985). Many of them moved production to benefit from cheaper labour elsewhere. The workers were hit hardest with these changes.

In the winter of 1982, Joe and Stephanie, married by then, and their friends, Margaret Nally and Patrice Reitzel, got together to discuss what to do about the situation. Deeply troubled
by the effects of the economic downturn on workers in the Kitchener area, they struggled with the meaning of their Christian faith in light of economic inequality, poverty, and the workers’ sense of alienation. They wanted to translate the Social Gospel ideas into creative action that met the real needs of people around them (Verberg, 1988).

The discussion led the Mancinis to apply for a $6,000 seed grant from PLURA, an ecumenical church agency promoting grassroots community projects. With the support of the grant, the couple opened the doors of The Working Centre in May 1982 at 94A Queen Street (Verberg, 1988). They also established a Board of Directors involving individuals who were unemployed, knowledgeable on the issue of unemployment, or able to provide support in governance.

From the beginning, The Working Centre’s concern was much more than helping people find jobs. The founders stated in their book,

When we started in 1982, we realized that work had been turned into a competition. Incentives, layoffs, and disappearing social income served to treat workers as merely cogs in the wheel. Consumerism, the engine of the economy, functions best when people are disconnected from community…. We were intent on creating a new community with a new direction, one that could inspire a new world view on the meaning and dignity of work that serves community. (Mancini & Mancini, 2015, pp. 9-10)

Mission, Vision, and Values

The Working Centre does not have an official “vision statement.” Indeed, The Working Centre rejects the notion of achieving or accomplishing. In the words of a former employee at the St. John’s Kitchen,
Our work very frequently is within the realm of mystery and goals have no place here. Goals speak to a success/failure framework, hierarchy and an individualistic understanding of society. Goals do not sit well with our practice of being non-judgmental or of showing unconditional love to the other. Instead of goals we prefer the practice of walking with the other, which has the possibility of giving dignity to their experience and allows us to be open to the mystery of the human spirit. (Mains, 2012, p. 3)

While The Working Centre may not have a stated vision, this does not mean they lack future-oriented aspirations of how they wish to work. Their aspirations are clearly articulated in what they call “The Six Virtues”—Serving Others, Living Simply, Rejecting Status, Work as Gift, Building Community, and Creating Community Tools. The following section provides an overview of these virtues.

The virtues espoused by The Working Centre best explain the aspirations that drive their work. The virtues “lie at the core of the centre’s activities creating the spiritual basis that generates its culture and way of doing things” (Mancini & Mancini, 2015, p. 50). Another way to understand the virtues is as context or a framework out of which one creates values. Virtues frame the values and values guide practice. The Working Centre considered the importance of virtues in shaping the culture and direction of its actions from early on. Like The Catholic Worker newspaper, which sought to articulate the Social Gospel in ways that were relevant and real in the depths of the Great Depression, the ideas and philosophies behind The Working Centre were first published in Economic Justice Newsletter as early as 1990—today, it is known as the Good Work News.

The first four of the six virtues—Serving Others, Living Simply, Rejecting Status, and Work as Gift—came from Peter Maurin, coeditor of The Catholic Worker, who tried to integrate
the Catholic faith with the ideas of personalism, a school of thought that developed in 19th century as a reaction to depersonalizing elements of Enlightenment rationalism (Williams & Bengtsson, 2018). Maurin thought that rather than look to the state, institutions or corporations to provide impersonal service, people need to take responsibility for bringing about desired change. The last two virtues—Building Community and Creating Community Tools—flow from the work of The Working Centre. The virtues are also influenced by the ideas of Dorothy Day, Ivan Illich, E. F. Schumacher, Christopher Lasch, Jane Jacobs, Jane Addams, Jean Vanier, and Thomas Berry (Mancini & Mancini, 2015). The list of influential thinkers continues to expand as The Working Centre invites and integrates new voices that speak to contemporary issues that concern our times.

What follows is a description of the virtues and a brief introduction of the influential ideas that have shaped the virtues. Because how The Working Centre puts these virtues to practice is connected to the idea of praxis of love, examples of the virtues will be discussed in more detail under Praxis.

**Serving Others** is aimed at engaging in personal action to support the common good (Mancini & Mancini, 2015). We have increasingly come to relate the word “service” to an act that is purchased or provided by so-called qualified professionals or experts. The Working Centre is sceptical of the ability of formal systems to implement the common good (Illich, 1973; Illich, 1977).

At The Working Centre, serving is a gift, something one freely gives out of care and love for the other. It relies on reciprocity and mutuality. Ken Westhues, a sociology professor and former board member of The Working Centre, describes reciprocity as “an ongoing relationship in which the parties talk and listen to one another in turn, each responding to the other so that
what actually happens is genuinely new, beyond what anybody could have decided in advance” (Westhues, 1998, para. 7). Reciprocity challenges self-centred individualism, and instead encourages what is mutually good. To understand what serves the common good, one needs to let go of what the ego wants, so that one may listen, have a dialogue, and respond.

Choosing to live with less in the age of consumerism is a real challenge that many of us struggle with daily. Living Simply is a way of life that chooses less. Depending on self- or locally produced goods and services to meet life’s basic needs is considered an act of courage and resistance; a direct affront to the ideals of the market that praises more, bigger, and faster.

The virtue of living simply draws from the spirituality of gratitude that says, “I have enough; I am enough; I am good enough” (Leddy, 2005). The Working Centre’s virtue of living simply champions a way of life that says, “We have enough; we are enough; we are good enough.” Instead of relying on big box stores that display mass-produced goods, The Working Centre prefers working with local producers. Sustainability is more important than economies of scale. It is a way of choosing to live responsibly and relationally. The virtue of living simply encourages people to restore the relationships we have with one another, and by extension, with creation. The ideas of Wendell Berry, the American farmer and poet, captures The Working Centre’s idea of living simply. He notes,

We will keep on consuming, spending, wasting and driving, as before, at any cost to anything and everybody but ourselves. This belief was always indefensible—the real names of global warming are Waste and Greed—and by now it is manifestly foolish (Berry, 2008, para. 1-2).

The virtue of living simply pushes people to resist the collective inertia present in our culture, even if that means living with inconvenience.
So much of our material world gauges the worth of an individual through the title we carry. The title becomes the status symbol of success, prestige, and power. The Working Centre’s third virtue, **Rejecting Status**, challenges the idea that status defines the worth of a person. Hierarchical structures in the way our society organizes labour undermine the inherent value of a person. Instead of creating a pyramidal system in which privilege and resources are concentrated at the top, The Working Centre seeks to create circular spaces whereby people are valued as part of a team for who they are. It rejects inequality based on skills and capabilities. At a more fundamental level, this virtue seeks to recognize that all humans are fundamentally equal, with equally important, though different, gifts to bring towards the common good.

The wisdom of Jean Vanier illuminates this notion more clearly. In a world of competition, where the strong dominate the weak, Vanier calls us to open ourselves to those we perceive as different or inferior. This, he says, is the key to true personal and societal freedom (Vanier, 1998). By inviting two men with developmental disabilities to live in his home, Vanier showed how the world can be transformed when we open our hearts to the experiences of people who have known life only at the margins.

In a similar vein, **Work as Gift** is what people offer, freely. By contrast, work as transaction relies on goods or services in exchange for money—it is alienating and impersonal. The Working Centre believes that when people work with a sense of freedom to accomplish the work together, work becomes a meaningful contribution towards the common good. E. F. Schumacher provides three characteristics of good work: (a) to provide necessary and useful goods and services, (b) to enable people to use and hone the gifts like good stewards, and (c) to do so in service to, and cooperation with, others, so as to liberate the self from inborn egocentricity (Schumacher, 1973).
In this sense, the idea of work at The Working Centre is not just a “job” or “employment.” It is more than a place people go to on Monday mornings to put food on the table. It is an act of commitment because there is personal meaning and joy in giving oneself through labour.

**Building Community** is the fifth virtue of The Working Centre. Jane Jacobs’ idea of a forest is a good way of considering the type of community The Working Centre aspires to. She stated,

> A forest ecosystem… grows and expands because of the sun’s energy flowing through diverse and roundabout ways through zillions of organisms… Once sunlight is captured in the conduit, it’s not only converted but repeatedly reconverted, combined and recombined, cycled and recycled, as energy/matter is passed from organism to organism. (Jacobs, 2000, p. 46)

In like manner, in a thriving community, the interrelated processes of life are constantly created and re-created through the web of people. Individuals get together to bounce off ideas, share their gifts, and participate in creating energy that is more powerful than the sum of the parts. Together, they create a diverse social system where people are sustained through the relationships with each other.

Just like the immense complexity of a forest can make it seem like a chaotic space, it is important to note that a community is a place where order and disorder co-exist. The former holds the community together by providing a sense of stability and structure, while the latter is created through random human interactions. Jurgen Habermas described this dynamic in his ideas about the systems-world and life-world (Habermas, 1987). These two worlds collide and converge. On the one hand, there are the realities that come with being a non-profit organization
that requires The Working Centre to follow bureaucratic regulations. At the same time, there are 1,500 Kitchener-Waterloo residents who come to The Working Centre daily in their unique situations (The Working Centre, 2015). Both are important and neither can survive without the other. Building a thriving community, according to The Working Centre, requires a balance and integration of these two dynamic forces to feed off each other.

Creating Community Tools, the sixth virtue, is about putting productive tools into the hands of people to encourage self-sufficiency and social cooperation. The aspiration to create community tools is tightly connected to Karl Polanyi’s recognition that organization of labour has a cultural impact on workers. In The Great Transformation (Polanyi, 1944), Polanyi noted that whereas in traditional societies, labour gave people a social standing and strengthened the bond between its members, “market societies” have dis-embedded workers from their community. When removed from their places of belonging, work ceases to be a form of service to the community. Workers are obliged to follow instructions from head office often located someplace else, which further undermines the social tendencies the workers have inherited. In market societies, workers become mere tools of production resulting in dis-embedded labourers whose profit motive—or a will to survive—becomes the driving force of labour.

Drawing from his farming experience, Wendell Berry boldly proposes a vision of re-embedding citizens: an “economy in which local consumers buy as much of their food as possible from local producers, and in which local producers produce as much as they can for the local market” (1995, p. 21). Eventually, its goals are to support creative livelihood as community members make, grow, and use their tools. To this end, Ivan Illich believed that a simple tool like a shovel could help people heal their sense of alienation (Illich, 1973). People can use the shovel to self-sustain and serve their communities. According to The Working Centre, creating
community tools is about empowering people who have been objects of production, to be subjects of production (Pope John Paul II, 1981). The projects at The Working Centre, in addition to generating meaningful revenue, are aimed at fostering social solidarity and engaging workers who can care for their community.

Similar to Maurin’s work of integrating the Social Gospel with the ideas of personalism, there is a merging of faith influences and the absorption of secular philosophy at The Working Centre. The complementary, yet historically tense, relationship between Christian theology and secular ideas is not new (Murray & Rea, 2016). For example, the starting point of theology is divine revelation based on Holy Scriptures, whereas philosophy starts with human understanding of empirical data. At the same time, both are concerned with making sense of the present earthly life and in deliberating ways that are ethical and meaningful. At The Working Centre, both theological and philosophical influences play important roles in providing a moral framework, an ethical code that makes sense for Christians and non-Christians alike.

The Working Centre’s mission is to engage in a deeper reflection on the meaning of human labour and to provide a working model where that reflection is acted on. In a public speech, the founders stated, “For 30 years [The Working Centre has] experimented with a philosophy of work that reduces bureaucracy, increases hospitality, gives priority to relationships, and seeks to locate responsibility at the point where the work is accomplished” (Mancini & Mancini, 2016, p. 1). They strive to create a dynamic space whereby people engage in good work that is intrinsically meaningful and enjoyable.

The Working Centre seeks to engage in good work through a provision of real, practical supports for people who are unemployed, underemployed, temporarily employed, and homeless. At the same time, it is more than a service provider. Through various community projects, people
are encouraged to use their skills and abilities in ways that are meaningful to them and benefits the community at large. By serving others through one’s labour, The Working Centre strives to create spaces in which people come to contribute to something bigger than themselves. The following section describes the current projects at The Working Centre.

**Main Projects**

Today, The Working Centre has evolved into an integrated, dynamic community in downtown Kitchener where people can access support in housing, employment, mental health, transportation, financial literacy, income taxes, small business start-up, and more. The Working Centre’s projects are organized into six areas: (1) the Job Search Resource Centre, (2) St. John’s Kitchen, (3) Community Tools, (4) Access to Technology, (5) Integrated Supportive Housing, and (6) the Waterloo School for Community Development.

The **Job Search Resource Centre** provides support to over 3,500 community members a year with finding employment. It operates an active job postings board/website and various skills training opportunities for people to access. People have the option of working with an employment counsellor who can assist them in their job search, or they can look for work independently.

**St. John’s Kitchen** is an open community table for anyone to enjoy a free lunch. Every day, approximately 280 to 300 people have meals and get access to a range of other services located at the Kitchen including showers, laundry, Specialized Outreach Services (SOS) and the Psychiatric Outreach Project (POP), which supports people with complex needs.

The **Community Tools** are projects designed to put tools into the hands of people to support local producing and trading. People can learn or teach new skills and contribute with their labour. While the creation of a community of workers is a natural development of
Community Tools projects, the initiatives also generate revenue for The Working Centre.

Current projects include: Queen Street Commons Café, Computer Recycling, Commons Studio, Hacienda Sarria Market Garden, Recycle Cycles, Worth a Second Look, and the Green Door.

**Queen Street Commons Café** is more than a coffee shop. While the space sells affordable food and drinks, it also seeks to provide a welcoming gathering space. Staff and volunteers work together to serve the people that walk through the doors. The café is also a place that provides opportunities for music, movie nights, and open mic events. The café displays a range of books on subjects relevant to the work of The Working Centre such as sustainable living, community development, and spirituality.

**Computer Recycling** is a project where people can learn and teach each other how to refurbish donated computers. People who cannot afford traditional pathways to training with computer skills can build practical skills through hands-on experience.

The **Commons Studio** hosts a space where community members can come to share skills, knowledge, equipment and resources in filmmaking. The studio offers video production equipment rentals and access to editing technology. The studio seeks to increase access to technological tools for people who are living on a limited income.

**Recycle Cycles** is a community bicycle resource centre that supports people to maintain and repair their bicycles with the help of volunteers. They also sell reasonably priced refurbished bicycles fixed by volunteers. Volunteers as well as people using the project can learn and teach skills that benefit each other.

Community members can learn about urban farming using sustainable and environment-friendly methods at the **Hacienda Sarria Market Garden**. People can visit the market garden and enjoy the produce through the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project.
Worth A Second Look is a retail outlet that collects and sells used furniture, home electronics, books, and assorted houseware items. Staff and volunteers help in collecting, sorting, fixing, cleaning, testing, and refurbishing donated pieces.

The Green Door Clothing Store and Arts Space collects and sells gently used clothing. Community members can browse through the apparel collection displayed on the first floor and walk up to the second floor to participate in soap and candle making. People also teach and learn sewing, knitting, and crocheting in the art space.

The Integrated Supportive Housing is a type of a support provided through The Working Centre to individuals looking for safe and affordable housing in the Kitchener-Waterloo region. Currently, more than 60 residents live in a supportive housing provided by The Working Centre. In addition to immediate and intermediate housing support, Hospitality House provides a place of rest for those who are acutely ill and chronically homeless.

The Waterloo School for Community Development provides reflection and learning opportunities for anyone interested in the philosophies that inform the work of The Working Centre. Previous community education initiative topics include intentional community, economic alternatives, and ecological sustainability. The theme for 2019 was “Finding Our Place: A Year Exploring the Intricacies of Living Within Our Limits.” The Working Centre has a series of film screening, roundtable discussions, and speaking engagements to engage people through a reflection on our present ecological crisis.

Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love

Faith

Faith is operative at The Working Centre, yet in subtle ways. Many participants indicated that one of the key motivations for working at The Working Centre was the ability to work in
ways that were consistent with their faith. Several—Christians and non-Christians—noted that the virtues of The Working Centre resonated with the wisdom tradition they have inherited, or with their personal ideals.

The co-founders and Margaret Nally, one of the friends involved in the initial conversations at The Working Centre and current Spiritual Director of The Working Centre, were strongly influenced by the Catholic social teaching and they continue to practice in their faith traditions (Mancini & Mancini, 2015). However, The Working Centre draws people with different or no faith backgrounds, yet who identify strongly with the idea of serving others.

People spoke of kindness, unconditional love, wholeness, sacredness, grace, and compassion as values and ideals that guide their praxis. They stated that The Working Centre adopts the “spirit language,” rather than Christian or religious expressions. The spirit language helps describe what is universal to humans without alienating people who are not affiliated with Christianity. When asked specifically about the influence of Christian spirituality on The Working Centre, one staff stated, that spirituality “flows underneath everything. Not everyone who works here has faith. Definitely the people who come in don't necessarily have faith… God [is] almost used interchangeably with universe or love.” So while overt religious language, such as “God” or “Jesus Christ” is not adopted, spirituality is important in understanding the praxis expressed at The Working Centre.

Faith was also described as having trust in a transcendental “life energy of the world.” As pointed out in the earlier quotation, God is understood as a universal force or love energy. One staff shared a story about a time when (person) was involved with the Hacienda Sarria Market Garden project. The first six months of the project were very difficult. They did not have
volunteers, a proper irrigation and drainage system was lacking, land was clay soil, making it
dense and resistant to water movement, and nothing was growing as a result. (Person) recalled,

But I had this beautiful plan, when to plant things when we're going to harvest but I was
like, baaah… and [staff] said… ‘You just have to have faith and trust that things will
happen.’ … And then of course, people started coming, you know, it... it came.

Similar stories were shared in the interviews and the Good Work News. People talked
about noticing a consistent pattern of hoping and desiring, and in turn, a new world of
opportunities opening up before them. While the subject of faith orientation is not mentioned
explicitly, people generally accepted that there is a bigger reality that The Working Centre is a
part of, and an energy that is actively moving people towards the good of all people.

Love

Love is understood as the basis of the energy that motivates and propels the work of The
Working Centre. The wisdom of Ilia Delio, an American Franciscan Sister, was frequently
referenced when speaking about love:

Love is a consciousness of belonging to another, of being part of the whole. To love is to
be on the way toward integral wholeness, to live with an openness of mind and heart, to
encounter the other—not as stranger—but as another part of oneself. (Delio as cited in
Mancini & Mancini, 2016, p. 3)

In this sense, love is understood as the universal force that helps creation open, grow,
attract, unite, create, and make whole. It is closer to a verb than a noun or an adjective. Love
breaks people from the shell of individuality and moves them towards interdependence.
Participating in love requires a constant, conscious orientation towards the other. Love is not a
feeling, rather a conscious choice—a commitment to care for others and a way of life.
Consistent with the description of love, many people that I interviewed saw their work at The Working Centre as a vocation and a calling. It is more than a job. “People choose to work here. They don't fall into work here because our pay is not great. People make a choice to work at The Working Centre,” explained one staff member.

A staff member indicated that Jean Vanier had been instrumental to his understanding of love. According to Vanier (1998) to love someone means to reveal to them their beauty. Love sees the inherent beauty of every person’s humanity, regardless of their race, social class, or religious affiliation. However, the way beauty is understood at The Working Centre is not warm and fuzzy. There are times when people act out of malice, and loving in those moments takes on a tougher meaning. Loving is also not about turning a blind eye or sweeping someone’s fault under the rug. Love may involve naming the act for what it is, and still accepting the person for who she or he is. People referred to this type of love as “unconditional love.” One person noted,

That we love people even if their actions cause us sadness or anger in the moment, that we don't stop loving the person. We may not love their actions, we may not love the consequences of their actions. We may feel angry. But we never stop loving the person. Never give up hope. And never react in a way that is unloving.

Love, at The Working Centre, is not limited to interpersonal relationships. All creation is believed to be interrelated, and humans have a special responsibility towards the care of our common home, Earth. There is much effort at The Working Centre to raise awareness about the urgency of the environmental crisis we face in our time. Even though humans are in relationship with all of creation—air, water, soil, plants, and animals—we have inflicted great damage on the gift we share. According to The Working Centre, lying at the heart of the problem is the broken relationship humans have with each other and the ecology. Our greed for more, bigger, and faster
has got us into a ruinous cycle of overproduction and overconsumption, resulting in resource depletion, environmental degradation, and reduced ecological health. The Working Centre communicates its ongoing concerns through the Good Work News articles and engages in a series of community education initiatives to encourage a deeper reflection on environmental stewardship.

**Praxis**

The six virtues The Working Centre champions provide a rich context out of which praxis of love can flow. Because this case study was guided by the faith-inspired praxis of love framework, the following section will reflect the six praxis elements. That said, not all six elements may be found extensively at The Working Centre. While nonviolence may not be found across all three sites, for example, it may be core to one. At the same time, community and hospitality may be reflected across all the sites. Each site is considered a rich context to understand the various dimensions of praxis. Together, the three sites offer a thick description of faith-inspired praxis of love taking place in various contexts.

**In God and With People.** Throughout Christian tradition, there have been two main approaches to understanding God: *via positiva* (“positive way”) and *via negative* (“negative way”). The former refers to how we come to know God through and in everything that life offers us. God is immanent in creation—people, nature, art. The latter highlights God’s transcendental nature. God is beyond anything we see, hear, and taste, and we only come to know God when we let go of our own framework. Rather than looking at these as binary concepts, the reader can
consider them as ends of a spiritual spectrum. It is possible to understand God through both ways, and people can move back and forth between them.

*Via positiva* was predominantly the preferred approach in how people experienced God at The Working Centre. Everyday encounters with people are spiritual encounters. When asked about the meaning of working at The Working Centre, one of the staff members explained,

Like doing this work from my perspective is a spiritual practice, and so spiritual growth… comes from it…. Yeah, there's this one saint who she said, something like, "Don't say that that person challenges me, say that that person sanctifies me." … I think that on our best days, that the work that we do can be quite sacramental… in the personal relationship there's an encounter where it's not only… me and that person, but it's also the presence of God that takes place in that encounter.

To this staff member, and many others working at The Working Centre, there is no distinction between spiritual work and working in the world. God is present in the encounter that he has with people, in the mundane details of everyday reality. To serve the people coming through the door—an older worker recently let go from a factory, the new Canadian trying to learn English, the man going back and forth between prison and the psychiatric unit—is to serve God.

**Whole Relationships.** Being with people takes on a deeper meaning at St. John’s Kitchen, a space where the ravages of poverty, homelessness, and mental distress are more obvious. The staff at the Kitchen do more than working with volunteers to prepare food or assist the patrons with filling out forms. An important part of their role is having relationships with
people. A person involved with the Kitchen explained the oft quoted phrase, “walking with people”:

We're not laying out plans for people. It's like, what do you need today? Okay, yeah, let's see what we can do about that. How did that work? How did that work yesterday? Oh great! Geez, too bad, sorry. Let's try again. So it's just accepting where people are at right now, but also really looking at just who they are right now.

As indicated by the outreach worker, there is no attempt to try to fix the other person. The starting point in the relational encounter is being present and meeting them where they are, as they are. Careful listening, in this sense, is an example of praxis of love. Fighting the urge to listen to another person with an agenda to change that person is especially difficult because we like to feel good about ourselves in helping “the poor” or “the homeless.” To let go of these human inclinations requires conscious discipline. This is especially challenging for placement students, volunteers, and new staff who are starting at The Working Centre for the first time. People usually start with ideals such as “I want to help the poor.” The starting point is the “I.” This is why the onboarding process at The Working Centre involves a month of intentional “doing nothing.” A staff member described orientation as follows:

The first couple of days it's like, “Don't do anything.” Often we have people sit in the resource center… “I'm ready to go” and we are like, “Great. Now, do nothing and let go of all your expectation. Let go of any sense of performing. You have nothing to accomplish. There's no expectation.”

It is understood that only when the “I” disappears into the background, can people make space for reciprocal relationships. In this sense, the effort to liberate the self from inborn egocentricity through meaningful work is very intentional. People in reciprocal relationships
reject the notion of doing for another in favour of doing with (Westhues, 1998). Solidarity with others is more important than giving charity to people in need. The idea of “doing with” can be challenging, especially when people come to The Working Centre expecting to receive help.

To illustrate this point, a person involved with the Job Search Resource Centre shared the following. This person often meets people who expect help finding a job for them. However, the preferred response is to challenge their expectations of professional “expertise” and invite them to take an active role in their job search. For example, while supporting a woman with disability in her job search, he had the opportunity to observe her work in the kitchen. As part of the job search, he wrote an employment report commenting on her strengths and areas of improvement. However, the woman disagreed with his assessment of her skills. What resulted from this discrepancy was a joint report in which they both described their own evaluation. He explained, “I think [the report] was better because it gave both perspectives… something that's done in solidarity and I... tried not to be condescending, or to think that I had the expert, professional voice there.” Although he may have produced a report faster by writing it himself, he included her perspectives, thereby, challenging the notion that he knows better.

Although the energy of love continues to unite, connect, and make whole, there was an acknowledgment of keeping appropriate boundaries that align with the diverse spaces of The Working Centre. For example, staff members at the café do not assume the role of a “friend,” “counsellor,” “outreach worker,” or a “social worker.” The emphasis is on being as authentic as possible in whatever role they are in, while not crossing boundaries. Café staff do not walk out of the premises with patrons while on duty, nor do they sit down to engage in long conversations, while outreach workers at St. John’s Kitchen may. So, instead of “How are you?”—a rather deep question—staff at the café say, “It’s good to see you!” People may talk about how much sugar
they put in their coffee for a while, and even these light interactions, slowly over time, can become more real, stated a café staff member. Whole relationships, at The Working Centre, does not necessarily mean having deep relationships all the time, with everyone. Rather, “by constantly acting real yourself, you let the other person find that connection.”

Terms such as “clients” or “customers” are not adopted within the café and at The Working Centre at large. People are encouraged to get to know each other personally as much as possible. Someone who eats regularly at St. John’s Kitchen may get involved in preparing the meal and cleaning the dishes. He is a respected member of the community. The same person may one day experience a relapse and receive specialized support from SOS or POP. Upon recovery he may come to the Queen Street Commons Café for a cup of tea. In these various circumstances, there is an effort on the part of The Working Centre to engage with him in the moment, in his whole self, without pigeonholing him as a “client” or a “customer.”

As noted on my field notes, the distinction between who the staff, volunteers or people who use the services is not clear at The Working Centre. At St. John’s Kitchen, food is prepared by the people, for the people. Staff, volunteers, and patrons—terms that The Working Centre shies away from as much as possible in favour of “community members”—eat the food prepared in the Kitchen with everyone else.

There are no policies or procedures on how to handle challenging situations. “We allow lots of flexibility, this person in this moment calls for this, and this person over here [has] a very similar situation but… they're in a different space and here's how we're going to follow it in this moment,” explained a staff member. Each person and moment are evaluated individually. If care towards the other is made into a policy or a rule, then not only is love turned into a law, but any failure to do so, by the same token, becomes a violation of the law (Cayley, 2005). The Working
Centre is mindful to nurture flexibility and spontaneity so that love may be expressed authentically.

**Community.** The various projects at The Working Centre are like mini-communities that are “integrated and decentralized.” While each project is encouraged to make decisions as a team as much as possible (decentralized), they are supported within the infrastructure of The Working Centre through its funding, operations, and payroll (integrated). According to the founders,

The Working Centre provides an indispensable framework of philosophy, infrastructure, labour, and financing to help new projects mature… Integration with a larger entity gives small, decentralized projects meaning and direction while still retaining the freedom to create their own culture with different volunteers, different ways of service, and different use of tools. (Mancini & Mancini, 2015, p. 141)

The idea of “subsidiarity” is key to understanding The Working Centre’s approach to community work. That decisions ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest, or least centralized authority is an idea drawn from the Catholic social teaching. The best work, it is believed, is done by the people who are doing it on the frontline and who understand the nature of the job best. To illustrate how this plays out operationally, I was informed that Recycle Cycles was going through a change at the time of the interview. Several staffing changes happened in a short period of time. To deal with the situation, the staff at Recycle Cycles met with one of the coordinators, and together, they came up with a plan on how they are going to transition. Despite not being at full capacity, they cooperatively worked out the details among themselves. There was no direction or order from “top management”; the team came up with what was going to work for them and the people they serve.
In a community, people are bound to have different opinions. Intentionally including differences by giving everyone a voice is important to The Working Centre’s approach to community building. For example, at St. John’s Kitchen, sharp tensions have risen between people who are using drugs and people who are not. The former group of people were getting together in the washroom to use drugs. Meanwhile, such open drug use was upsetting the latter group by making them feel that the washrooms were no longer safe for them. The non-user group wanted the other group to be banned from accessing the Kitchen.

Faced with this challenge, The Working Centre took close to a year holding a community-wide discussion listening to people’s ideas on safe injection, shared space, and bathroom use. As the ideas around the potential renovation emerged, the outreach workers went around the tables with a sample design of the new washroom design, asking the community’s input. It was important that people felt included and listened to in having a say over their shared space. St. John’s Kitchen underwent an extensive washroom renovation to make the facility more accessible and safer, including the installation of a reverse motion sensor. The equipment alerts people when a bathroom occupant fails to move for two minutes, allowing staff to intervene when he or she has been knocked unconscious.

As demonstrated in the illustration above, there is no manager who exercises the authority on behalf of the community. The Kitchen is run as a team. This lack of hierarchical structure is found in other spaces as well. For example, one of the staff members recalled when first starting. One day, someone asked, “Can I speak to your manager?” Not knowing who the “manager” was, this person went around asking, “Who's my manager? Who should this person talk to?” The response received from colleagues was that this staff person was the manager.
Each project works as a decentralized node that is connected to other parts within the web of The Working Centre. Over time, to respond to the expanding number of projects at The Working Centre, the Common Table was introduced for the first time in 2014. This is a table for project coordinators to come together and discuss organizational issues and create a dialogue between projects (Mancini & Mancini, 2015). The coordinators travel between different projects keeping staff and volunteers updated on The Working Centre-wide changes and initiatives.

Each community tool project (e.g., Hacienda Sarria Garden, Recycle Cycles, computer repair, Worth A Second Look, Green Door, and more) involves people with unique gifts and talents, including those who have been pushed out of the job market. Involving people of different capacity, in reality, is hard work. It goes against the norms of the profit-driven labour practices that reward those who are deemed most capable and qualified. It takes intentionality to see people’s potential and integrate them as part of the team. The point is not in getting the job done most efficiently, but in building community together.

The Maurita’s Kitchen, a space that prepares the food for Queen Street Commons Café, is a good example of how community is built in a small scale. A young man with a development disability was initially timid and only stuck to what he was comfortable with—washing the dishes. The Kitchen staff slowly introduced other activities such as peeling and cutting potatoes. They did that every day, until slowly he started to move away from the dishes to explore new activities. “And now, he got to a point where he was so comfortable, he started playing Jeopardy with us,” said the staff with a broad smile on her face.

Several staff noted that building community takes shape along two vectors: the sense of time and sense of space. Community is not something that is created in a matter of days.
St. John's Kitchen's a very closely-knit interpersonal community… I think the only way you can truly understand a group is if you spend time with them… So I think being with each other every day and being reliant on each other every day is probably one of the best ways to build community.

So in this sense, building community means riding through the highs and lows. It is being there to celebrate “a marriage, birth of a baby, getting a place, getting off probation,” while also bearing witness to the everyday struggles of life.

Every day can be a struggle. And sometimes people will… if you just happen to be standing in front of them, you may bear the brunt of their anxiety or frustration or anger. And the key is to never take it personally. It's never about me.

Building community is also about committing to the space. Through its frugal accounting, The Working Centre has managed to purchase most of the space it runs the projects out of. The commitment to the Kitchener downtown area has deepened The Working Centre’s ties to the people of Kitchener (Mancini & Mancini, 2015).

The Working Centre’s philosophy of work is another key to understanding its praxis of community building. Work is a gift, not a way to earn money or ascertain one’s position in society. There is an effort to learn what each staff/volunteer’s gifts are and to match, or even create, work that fits the person. In terms of work, the emphasis is on completing the tasks at hand, rather than sticking to the job description. After facilitating a staff meeting, the coordinator for Queen Street Commons Café works on the payroll for all The Working Centre staff. The employment counsellor works at Hacienda Sarria Garden Market twice a week. A staff works on an upcoming grant proposal after ensuring that the toilet papers are refilled. Every person I interviewed for this case study had a different description of their involvement based on their
interest, previous experience, and other circumstances that made sense for them and The Working Centre.

The Working Centre’s ideas on good work are described by the co-founders:

People should not be slaves to work, but rather work should fulfill the intrinsic goals of an individual. The essence of equality is when people are given equal opportunity to use their varied and often unconventional gifts to contribute in unique ways. (Mancini & Mancini, 2015, p. 91)

The Working Centre’s unique, unconventional salary policy is a concrete example of how the virtues, such as work as gift, serving others, living simply, rejecting status, and building community, are expressed. The flat salary policy was approved by the Board of Directors in 1990 and has been in effect ever since. Ken Westhues, Professor Emeritus at University of Waterloo and then-Board member, drafted the policy with Peter Maurin’s Better or Better Off in mind:

Everyone would be rich if nobody tried to become richer, and nobody would be poor if everybody tried to become poorest. And everybody would be what they ought to be if everybody tried to be what they want the other fellow to be. (Maurin, as cited in Westhues, 1995 p. 59)

The salary policy starts with the following statement:

The Working Centre seeks to serve the unemployed and the poor, not by patronizing them, but through alliance and identification with them. Because of this no full-time staff member receives a salary greater than the average full-time salaried worker in Canada. (The Working Centre, 2018, para. 1)
At the beginning of the fiscal year, the Board of Directors sets the Reference Salary taking into account the average full-time salary of Canadian workers. The figure is close to the national average depending on various circumstances such as funding fluctuation, internal fiscal situation, and the need to compensate staff fairly. Staff at The Working Centre may start in one of two categories, ranging between 76 to 100 per cent of the Reference Salary. The framework limits the salary of the co-founders, the most experienced workers at The Working Centre, to the Reference Salary. There are 11 salary steps in total and staff typically start at Step One or Two. The salary parameters with a modest two per cent annual increase means that people’s salary fall within a narrow range.

Generally, the staff I interviewed spoke of the salary policy in a positive light. They saw the policy as a concrete expression of their commitment to praxis of love. One staff member noted,

It’s not just rootless ideal of like, everyone-should-be-making-the-same policy. Instead it is a well-tested 20- or 30-year experiment with everyone making the same amount of money. So [The Working Centre has] learned quite concretely where it does and doesn’t work, and they're still committed to it. But their commitment is a mature commitment… I think for me, as a young person… that's been really helpful, because it means at that moment in time, where I could have become disillusioned or despairing about the possibility of living out radical love and faith commitments in real life, instead of becoming disillusioned, I've become re-illusioned…

The commitment to live out the virtues fully was palpable among the people interviewed for this study. One staff member identified sharing similar values and lifestyle with her colleagues more so than her own family. She shared:
So I just believe in what The Working Center is doing… we could sit here in isolation and [try] to reject materialistic values… Or you can do it with a whole bunch of people who are doing the same thing. So I love the people I work with. Like, it's, it's inspiring, and I don't feel like a freak among them… my family is maybe a bit more mainstream, so they don't always understand the decisions we make… so it sustains me because I work with people who also make these kinds of decisions when I think not sure everybody else was making them.

One of the staff members noted that The Working Centre is an “informal-intentional community.” On the one end of the spectrum, stronger, tighter social bonds among members may be characteristic of a formal-intentional community. Informal-intentional community, on the other hand, is still purposeful in its commitment to the guiding ethical code, but the difference is that they have a more malleable social structure. There is no commitment in terms of minimum time of service or membership criteria. Boundaries are porous, allowing people to move organically, freely coming and going.

Mohammed, a new Canadian who was initially involved with The Working Centre around receiving support with his job search, may one day find himself working as an employment counsellor assisting others faced with similar circumstances. Then, he may move on with a new job, but return to The Working Centre as a volunteer. The Working Centre is a place where million little acts of kindness are committed by people like Mohammed who feel like they belong to the community and want to contribute back.

**Hospitality.** Several people I met at The Working Centre lamented how the term “hospitality” had been coopted by the service industry and helping professions. Within our culture, hospitality is associated with hotels where people purchase an experience of welcome.
Despite the long history of hospitality in Greek, Hebrew, and Christian traditions which the west had inherited, our collective imagination fails to consider freely helping, inviting, befriending a stranger, let alone an enemy (Cayley, 2005). Driven by self-interest and profit-making, what can be a human act of kindness has been turned into an impersonal exchange, a type of a service often managed by an institution.

Hospitality at The Working Centre is understood as a radical welcoming act towards the other, especially those who may have been shut out of other spaces. Staff at The Working Centre described how this spirit of “true hospitality of just welcome[,] unconditional acceptance” was expressed from St. John’s Kitchen to the Job Search Resource Centre to Queen Street Commons Café.

A staff member described how she starts her day at work:

I walk in that door saying hello to everyone I meet. Look people in the eye. For some people it's the only time. You have to be so careful because you need to be deliberate because you may be the only human contact they have all day that's friendly and so I take that seriously as part of a hospitality of spirit.

It is an invitational “hello” with the intent of being generous through one’s presence. It is positioning of one’s spirit toward another. Like a good host who prepares her home for a guest, hospitality requires more than serving a meal. It requires the host to be attentive to the guest so that they may feel welcomed and at home. At the front desk of the Job Search Resource Centre, a busy, lively space, welcoming is a moment-by-moment act of commitment. Every person has a unique set of circumstances that command individual attention. For example, a staff member shared a story of a man who came through the Job Search Research Centre door one day:
I remember a guy coming in, and it was fall when it was cold. All he had on was hospital socks. I was at the front desk, and I watched him walk by. I thought, "What did I just see?" … He had clothes, but he didn't have any shoes on. It was cold and wet out, and I was worried about him. So I walked over to the phone. He was on the phone. And I said, "Are you okay?" He right away started saying, "Well, I'm really struggling. I just got out of jail. I can't find my shoes. I don't have any money. I have no ID. I need to get home. I can't get a hold of my girlfriend." Then you just take the time, and you listen to him. Then you say, "What can we do to help this situation?" I found a bus ticket... Sometimes we have boots or shoes sitting around, and I found a pair of shoes that fit him. Those are the kinds of things that I think of that just seeing the person as they are, and then just accepting them right where they are.

Rather than starting from a place of whether the person meets the criteria of the job centre as a potential client, there is an effort to meet people where they are. Even if that means stepping outside of what is usually offered through the centre, if getting shoes is the most important to him, that becomes the starting point.

**Nonviolence.** Although it is common to think of nonviolence as a political tactic, an idea championed by Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., even these two acknowledged that there is a spiritual dimension to nonviolence. Nonviolence was observed in the way people spoke, dealt with disruptions, and built relationship with challenging personalities. Praxis of hospitality requires patience.

In a place like Queen Street Commons Café, a public space where all types of community members walk in through the door, violence is a common occurrence. At any given moment, someone could be acting out aggressively after using drugs. Meanwhile, another person could be
having a fight with his friend in the corner. All of this is happening when people are trying to enjoy their coffee. Because the café is a public space, The Working Centre needs to balance the need to create a safe space for everybody while also considering the needs of those that are causing violent disruptions.

The commitment to not respond to “violence with violence” is a real challenge at The Working Centre.

It’s just ongoing. Every week, that same window gets smashed out, every month, the same thing… that in a normal environment would last for 30 years is broken or vandalized or destroyed and sort of having to have the patience to just continue to repair, continue to fix it and still love the person who created that damage in spite of this…

Several staff noted that it is important to see beyond the visible acts or words of violence. Praxis of love requires seeing beyond the obvious at times of distress. People in stressful situations act out in ways that express that anguish. Often, we judge people based on actions, but forget to understand the pain the person is enduring in the first place. A staff shared the story of a woman. The woman was in incredible emotional turmoil because she could not be with her two children due to her ongoing mental health challenges. It happened to be one of her children’s birthday. Overcome with a sense of alienation and distraught that she could not be with her child, she wrote all over the wall with a permanent marker about how much she loved her child. The people were shocked by this apparent act of destruction to the communal space. The outreach workers saw her writing and surrounded her. They offered to find another way for her to communicate with her son. They took her aside, comforted her, listened to her, and supported her. They eventually worked together to get her a birthday card for her child so she could express
her wishes in a productive way. Meanwhile, a team of community members quietly got down to
scrub the wall without reprimanding the woman.

And even when people cross the boundaries, banning someone, or in extreme cases
calling the police, is often the last resort at The Working Centre. Law enforcement is involved
only when people’s safety is at risk. Generally, difficult situations are dealt by asking people to
“take a break” from coming back. The break could be as short as a few days or as long as one to
two weeks. But when people come back, they are greeted again “like that never happened.” The
staff at The Working Centre try very hard not to close the door on someone indefinitely as there
is a recognition that The Working Centre space is not a mere social service agency, but a place of
belonging, a community where people can be welcome back again.

**Change-Making.** Through the various projects, the bigger social reality that The
Working Centre is trying to address is engaging in a “deeper reflection on the meaning of human
labour.” The way modern institutions have organized labour, produces dis-embedded workers—
people who are alienated from themselves, the product of their labour, and from the community
they belong to (Polanyi, 1944; Schumacher, 1973). On a structural level, each project is an
experiment to “break down the structures of hierarchical work” by creating an ecosystem that
makes possible for people to engage in good work. By teaching people how to do things for
themselves—fixing, growing, creating—passive consumers become active producers. On an
individual level, people are invited to work with and relate to one another as fellow community
members who are invested in building something meaningful together.

The Working Centre questions the fundamental belief many people in a market society
hold, that a job for all is invariably good. According to the co-founders:
For thirty years there has been a jobs-at-all-cost policy without an understanding of where this will lead us. The dream of a job for all, or what is known as full employment, is an impossibility that promotes unlimited economic growth. Government use full-employment as a way of getting elected. Politicians cater to job creation. The problem… is that our economy needs 3% GDP growth just to maintain employment. What is the environmental and social cost of the constant increase in GDP? (Mancini & Mancini, 2015, p. 165)

An uncritical drive for growth can lead people to reject limits, produce without care for the environment, and choose profit at all costs. Ivan Illich’s ideas on tools is especially pertinent in understanding The Working Centre’s approach to the question. He reminds modern people that instead of giving handouts from the state or institutionalized service from bureaucracy, it is better to give people access to tools from which they can support themselves (Illich, 1973). The side effect of a handout is people implicitly being told that they cannot do things for themselves.

Expanding on Illich’s idea, a staff described how The Working Centre strives to empower people through its projects. He noted,

I think that's important in a lot of the community tools, projects at The Working Center, it's this idea that when you come into a Recycle Cycles and you're in this kitchen, and you're learning how to prepare food or fix the bike, you are learning with others, but you're not exactly being taught. So we give people access to tools, but we don't do things for them.

The Working Centre’s answer has been to create an alternative ecosystem that is rooted in the virtues: a place where people can live simply, free of status, serving others, giving their labour as gifts, building community, using community tools. There is a sign that change-making
is having a ripple effect in the City of Kitchener, beyond The Working Centre spaces. One of the staff members shared a story about former employees of The Working Centre who were now working in different parts of the government trying to adopt The Working Centre’s virtues in their workplaces. “[T]hey’re trying very hard to change how they do their work because they want it to be more people centered and less about numbers,” she stated.

**Current Struggles**

Despite the enthusiasm with which people engage in praxis of love at The Working Centre, there are real struggles that come with the work.

**Invited into The Unknown.** Being able to say “yes” to the constant flux of here-and-now in the messiness of human interactions can be trying. When asked how she stays open, one staff member said, “Discipline is the only word I have because I love order. I have to work really hard to let disorder happen and to let the spirit move and to keep myself open.” To seek comfort is human. People are inclined to want order, so we feel a sense of comfort in matters we find familiar. Community work, in this sense, requires a constant opening up to meet the other in front.

It is one thing to stay receptive to constant change, but another to try to bring people along the movement as an organization. The Working Centre is not small in size and, thus, trying to be flexible and agile with a group of 100 plus people is challenging. Each project is an “experiment” in this sense. There are no set formulas or steps to take to achieve goals set out by, say, the Board of Directors or the co-founders. The Working Centre does not engage in strategic planning, a common management exercise in organizations to plan the future directions and make decisions on resource allocation. Each project is a way to discover creative approaches to live out the virtues. When a new community project tool launches, there is much dialoguing to
see how the experiment is going. There are no set outcome measures or deliverables. Projects are managed through conversations and day-to-day attentiveness to constant changes.

Such flexibility at the organizational level poses challenges when working with funders, the government, and related granting foundations or corporations. Large institutions tend to work out of a highly bureaucratic, standardized context. The directives then get communicated down to the grassroots level for implementation. There usually is no consideration of on-the-ground work that responds to people’s needs in a flexible way. Staff members constantly have to navigate these complex spaces. This in-betweenness, also dubbed as “liminality,” means that people are constantly “part in and part out.” It can be a struggle to be neither-nor, because humans tend to like order and clarity. But as The Working Centre has demonstrated, it can also be a wildly creative space.

**Being Vulnerable With.** People talked about loving being associated with vulnerability. That is, love can take people to places that are not pleasant and lead to feelings of “overwhelm[ing] with the amount of human loss and sadness in the human story.” The weight of the human predicament was not an abstract concept at The Working Centre but was experienced in concrete terms as people told stories about the community members that they have come to know and care for intimately. Love invited them to journey with someone in pain, and for the same reason, to share the burden of life with them.

[When you grow close to someone, you open yourself up and become more vulnerable, and that vulnerability, makes it possible for you to be hurt, like more likely that you'll be hurt by the person. So, in a way, you lose that sense of security, and for the sake of developing a relationship.
Suffering with others can evoke feelings of anger towards injustice in our world. Feelings of anger, or even rage, can be agents of transformation by galvanizing change. But, according to a staff member, people need to consciously channel the strong feelings towards attending carefully to others who actually live that reality, rather than an abstract concept such as “poverty” or “injustice”. When people fight abstract concepts, the fight remains nameless, and no one ends up taking responsibility (Arendt, 1963).

**Exhaustion.** Participants indicated that exhaustion and fatigue are common challenges at The Working Centre. The effort to constantly stay open and responsive to the people around them, in addition to the day-to-day tasks that need to get done, can be demanding. Staff talked about being mentally, physically, and emotionally exhausted at the end of a working day. One person indicated that while the work is rich, it was necessary to decrease this person’s workload to part-time and finding time to sleep more. Another participant is splitting work hours between the projects to balance the energy required to properly carry out the work. One staff member indicated that it sometimes does not feel like I am a good spouse because I do not have anything left to give at the end of a tough day at work.

**Limited resources.** Although people generally supported the intent behind the salary policy, it was noted that The Working Centre’s alternative approach to remuneration has its own challenges. The low salary can be a challenge as well for those that perhaps do not have an additional income source. One staff indicated that if “you're a young, [and] try to have a family, it's difficult to make it on our salary.” She shared about a former colleague who left The
Working Centre despite enjoying her work because of the need to earn more to support her family.

Limited financial resource is a challenge found across The Working Centre. The reality is that “the need is always greater than the resources” at hand potentially leading people to be “endemically overwhelmed.” One staff explained,

Every person who is working has a very full role and we have hired as many people as we can with the money that we have. This means that if one person isn’t pulling their weight, others feel it deeply. Sometimes that person is given grace and sometimes there is frustration… The frustration is felt because people’s actions are showing they are not as committed to the fullness of the work or the needs of the people in front of them. Our work requires us to rise to the challenges that are before us and those challenges are ever increasing and growing more complex.

The needs presenting at The Working Centre changes daily and every moment. Given the complexity of the work, it requires the full attention and commitment of the people involved. Like the human body system that works together to perform a common function, when one part is missing, the impact is felt in the rest of the system.

**Faith That Sustains.** Despite these challenges, people agreed that the work was deeply meaningful and rich. Several staff indicated that their faith sustains them to continue doing the work. Participants discussed having a sense of peace about doing this type of work. They know that they are putting their “faith in action.” One person noted, “God's presence gives me comfort and peace throughout really difficult situations, and also my faith gives me the philosophical background to actually justify the way I'm living my life.” Similarly, another staff member concurred, “[w]hat sustains me most is just my faith in knowing that I’m doing something that's
fulfilling for me, but it also makes me feel like I'm fulfilling something that God would want me to do. It makes it easier for me to have those bad days.”

The Working Centre is mindful about the spiritual well-being of people involved in this work. Staff engage in regular retreats facilitated by the Spiritual Director who supports them to address the matters of the heart. Each year, there is an overarching theme: last year, it was about the practices of kindness; this year, it is about hospitality. The retreat is meant to help staff step back from their work so they may reflect on the issues they grapple with and get back to the roots of why they do the work they do. “Sometimes [the retreat] makes us vulnerable. We might cry together as counselors but then you will see the energy and the joy”. Through the retreat, people find a place of nourishment so that they may get in touch with their own conviction and continue their work.

**Relationships That Sustain.** At the same time, participants indicated that the reciprocal nature of loving relationships gives them the strength to carry on. “I don’t think you burn out when you follow love,” stated a long-time participant when asked how it has been possible to carry on the work. Love was explained as a source of new energy that sustains their praxis.

Others indicated that their relationship with their coworkers was crucial in sustaining them through the daily challenges. Staff generally spoke highly of their colleagues and how they enjoyed working with like-minded people. Staff indicated that they can appreciate how they rely on their team to wrestle through an issue together. One person noted:

I rely on my coworkers a lot to not only to ask them for ideas, to share ideas, but also to say, "Oh, now we're struggling with this, what do you think?" So those sorts of inter-office conversations happen all the time. I go to our spiritual director who helps. I have gone to counseling before… I have a friend at The Working Center who works at a
different area and we get together, so that we're able to… process in a respectful, confidential way. Not talking about people but talking about situations. That is key.

**Future Directions**

Consistent with The Working Centre’s emphasis on staying spiritually and cognitively open, its body of literature and interviews with people did not clearly articulate the desired future directions of the organization. One staff gave an insight on this matter:

I think if we knew it wouldn't be The Working Center. Because then it would be, it would have somehow followed a formula of some kind. So if The Working Centre stays true to what it is, then it will continue to be this kind of living organism that grows and shifts and changes and responds.

The needs of the community and the social ecosystem of Kitchener-Waterloo will continue to change. The Working Centre plans to continue to change with them.

**Highlights of Considerations on Praxis of Love**

The previous section provided a description of the praxis of love taking place at The Working Centre; this section offers a general sense-making about praxis of love. Here, I address new insights gained in refining the original praxis of love framework and see what can be learned from The Working Centre that could be applied in other contexts.

Before discussing the highlights of consideration on praxis of love gained from this site, below is a commentary that I recently received (March 31, 2021) from a participant. The commentary is being included to enrich the description of The Working Centre.

**Commentary**

The participant noted:

I enjoyed your broad description of TWC culture and you captured that very well.
However, I realize how academic works end up being cited and referred to as part of
literature reviews about TWC. What is missing from my perspective is at minimum a
summary statement that recognizes the complexity of TWC, particularly that this
complexity results in deep service while maintaining a framework of the praxis of love,
despite being surrounded by high levels of bureaucracy and secularized social service
models. The complexity is in our decentralized structure and in the high level of service
that we provide to the Kitchener downtown.

The volume of work accomplished by TWC each day is outstanding but this was not
articulated well in the chapter. My sense is that we have not only developed a model that
embraces the faith/love/praxis model but we are doing that at a high level such as helping
5000 people/yr fix their bikes, or the cafe serving a daily customer count of 300 people or
the Market Garden growing 20,000 pounds of vegetables with 150 CSA members, or the
2000 items collected and sold out of the thrift store each week, or building of 80 housing
units, or the renovation and revitalization of 15 buildings in the downtown, or the 2000
people we helped through the Psychiatric Outreach Project, the 600 people a year we
support through Downtown Street Outreach, the establishment of a community dental
clinic, in the last two years buying, renovating and operating a house for the unsheltered
who are dealing with the cycle of drugs despite a neighbourhood association against the
project http://twc.jpsdesign.ca/....the serving of a daily meal at SJK for 35 years...
This is not a small point, during Covid, community organizations have carried a giant burden while serving groups left out. Models of care that truly incorporate those left out are being understood with new eyes. As communities start to look at community-based organizations, then it is important for their full scope to be understood. We have always walked with two feet - one of service and one of social analysis/ethics. One is not possible without the other.

While I understand that your focus is not on what we do, I felt this was missing. I am sure there are many academic reasons why. It just seems to me that the lack of drawing together the strands of our service work is a dis-service to describing TWC.

This takes nothing away from your thesis, which is an important contribution towards wider society and the social work profession, developing new lenses for looking at organizations

*Decentralized and Integrated*

Perhaps one of the greatest gains from The Working Centre’s social experiment has been to engage in praxis of love in a large scale. Social scientists have long doubted the human capacity to maintain a meaningful, stable, social relationship in large groups beyond 150 individuals (Dunbar, 1992; Purves, 2008). Through a decentralized yet integrated model of community building, The Working Centre is demonstrating how it is possible for small groups of people to collaborate in a coordinated fashion, in ways that reflect The Working Centre’s virtues. Such model of operational coordination frees up energy for smaller projects or new initiatives to
focus on developing relationships and serving, rather than being caught up in fundraising or administrative duties.

One of the reasons how this is possible is the close involvement of the co-directors on the ground (Mancini & Mancini, 2015). The directors are tightly involved in the day-to-day operations of The Working Centre projects. They do this by maintaining a close, ongoing dialogue with the project coordinators and involving themselves with each project. The founders believe that staying close to the work on the ground allows them to maintain relationships with people involved in the projects. Their involvement across the projects allows them to act like glue that holds The Working Centre together. Staying tightly involved also allows the staff to observe and emulate how the directors express the virtues of The Working Centre.

Sustainability

While their hands-on leadership has definite benefits, it also raises questions about the sustainability of their leadership style. The close involvement of the directors at the operational level is unique to an organization this size—currently, The Working Centre has approximately 120 people on payroll, and an operational budget close to five million dollars. Commitment is important, but so is balance and sharing the load. This is especially the case when considering the long-term sustainability of the initiative.

Historically, initiatives often lose momentum or drift away from the original vision when the founders pass. Despite being America’s most famous settlement house at its height around the turn of the 20th century, Hull House closed in 2012 after filing for bankruptcy. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference continues to struggle to find a uniting voice after its original leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., passed in 1968. In non-profit parlance, these two initiatives may have suffered from the “founder’s syndrome,” a condition whereby organizations find it difficult,
or impossible, to find an effective successor. These doers, Addams and King, were charismatic individuals. Built around such doers, their initiatives tend to adopt their personalities and vision. Some initiatives survive beyond the founders; unfortunately, many disappear or drift away from their original cause. Among those that survive and manage to grow, a common pattern is for the initiatives to become bureaucratized and to adopt inflexible, standardized approaches to work.

Given the strong involvement of the founders in The Working Centre today, it is not clear what their absence will mean to the future of The Working Centre. There is evidence in The Working Centre literature and the interviews that the strong presence of the Mancinis is not the only factor keeping The Working Centre spirit alive. The virtues run deep in the lives of the people at The Working Centre. They strive to live them fully, above and beyond their duties at The Working Centre. The people of the Common Table--that is, the project coordinators--also play a key role as connectors, role modeling the virtues through their actions with their colleagues. Still, how the transfer of the founders’ responsibilities unfolds will be critical for The Working Centre’s future.

Flexible Funding Structure

The triple model of funding of The Working Centre allows space for creativity and flexibility. The Working Centre draws funding from the government, community/private organizations, and social enterprises. Relying on multiple funding sources frees The Working Centre from dependence on any one funder. The model allows room for The Working Centre to work in ways that correspond with their praxis of love, that is, being relationship- rather than outcome-focused.

Government funding, despite its often onerous bureaucratic requirements, provides stability over time. Core funding allows room for The Working Centre to plan a budget for future
years. Private donors and corporate sponsors are important community partners that support the work of The Working Centre. However, unlike government funders, private sources can be difficult for organizations to predict donation revenue because so much relies on the goodwill of the donor or sponsor. Lastly, community tool projects do not require any reporting responsibilities, except for fulfilling internal fiduciary duties as a non-profit organization. However, they need the time to grow until they are self-sustainable or, ideally, generate a profit. Each funding type has a unique set of benefits and challenges that combined give The Working Centre flexibility in obtaining funding to meet its needs.

This is a great benefit of The Working Centre, as many non-profit organizations in Canada do not have a balanced funding model. Smaller non-profit organizations, especially, tend to over-rely on either government funding or the generosity of a few key members—neither of which are sustainable funding models.

**Action and Reflection**

It is not uncommon for non-profit organizations to be so caught up in the day-to-day work, that workers—directors and frontline—rarely find time for philosophical reflection. Often, the work of thinking and reflecting in non-profit organizations is separated from the workers and delegated to the scholars/consultants. The scholars/consultants, on the other hand, are often alienated from the day-to-day experience of the people that carry out the work. This is where The Working Centre has been exceptional in holding on to being in the liminal space. The constant cycle of action and reflection helps The Working Centre and the 120-plus staff to carry out their work in conscious ways. In addition to staff retreats, staff are invited to contribute to the quarterly *Good Work News*. In addition, The Working Centre presents staff annually with books as a token of appreciation. The books, secular in content yet spiritually nourishing, help deepen
people’s reflection on the meaning of virtues in their work and lives. Staff indicated that engaging in deep philosophical reflection help them “feel full.” Examples of titles staff have read in the past include *Transition to Common Work* (Mancini & Mancini, 2015), *The Art of the Common Place* (Berry, 2002), and *Braiding Sweet Grass* (Kimmerer, 2013).

**Human Labour**

The meaning of work is central to understanding the praxis of love at The Working Centre. The Working Centre recognized early on that economic activities are grounded in human relationships, and that the two are inseparable. Although The Working Centre offers job search support, it is concerned with more than just helping people find jobs. Through the community project tools, workers get opportunities to engage in good work. At The Working Centre, work is more than a paycheque; it is a basic human activity that allows people to give themselves in service to others. Through work, people have a chance to let go of their inborn egocentricity and contribute to something bigger than themselves. Rather than look to institutions, corporations, or government bureaucracy to enact this vision, The Working Centre creates spaces where workers can be meaningfully re-embedded in their community.

The meaning of human labour also concerned Jane Addams, Dorothy Day, and Martin Luther King, Jr. Each worked closely with labourers, unions, and politicians to advance working conditions. For example, King considered tackling economic inequality the “second phase” of the civil rights struggle. In fact, he was assassinated during his travels to Memphis, Tennessee, in support of striking African-American sanitation workers who were paid significantly lower wages than white workers (Pepper, 2003). King and SCLC were also planning the Poor People's Campaign for later that year, to pressure the federal government for a $30 billion anti-poverty package that included a commitment to full employment, a guaranteed annual income, and more
low-income housing (Burns, 2004). While The Working Centre’s approach has been different from the SCLC’s, they both demonstrate how a concern for economic justice is an important part of praxis of love.

**Unity of Life: Ecological Consciousness**

One of the ways faith is operative at The Working Centre is through its keen sensitivity to interconnectedness, not only of humanity, but also of humans’ relationships with the earth. Realizing the unity of life motivates care for all of it, a key wisdom shared across the world’s religious and spiritual traditions (Faver, 2011). As Kimmerer, a botanist and a Potawatomi woman, notes, humans are "the younger brothers of creation" and we have much to learn from our oldest teachers, plants and animals (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 9). The unity of life implies that injury inflicted on any part of life hurts the whole. The Working Centre acknowledges that humans’ injurious actions have reverberated across the planet, hurting not only each other, but the natural environment as well. The virtue of “living simply” recognizes that because the resources on our planet are finite, we need to reduce our impact on these resources to the greatest extent possible. The theme of 2019’s community education initiative was “Weaving Ecology.” Through a book-share program, speaking engagements, and film series, The Working Centre is taking the Kitchener-Waterloo community deeper in exploring our present ecological crisis. The Working Centre’s concern for the hurting environment stretches our understanding of praxis of love beyond humans.

While the five doers whom I had based the original praxis of love framework acknowledge the unity of life, in general, The Working Centre’s example is hugely helpful in refining the idea. The doers were responsive to the calling of their times—to Addams, it was welcoming of new Americans; to King, it was the civil rights struggle, and to Vanier, it was
befriending those living with disability. Many scientists and artists agree that the environmental crisis is one of the, if not the most, pressing issues of our time. The Working Centre is responding in ways that help us understand this issue and suggesting ways we can live responsibly.

Integration of Religious Tradition with Secular Ideas

While religious faith played an important role in opening the The Working Centre doors in 1982, it was not the only force. Many people, including the co-founders, discussed being influenced by secular ideas. As noted in the Virtues section, Christopher Lasch, Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, E. F. Schumacher, Ivan Illich, Wendell Barry, Ken Westhues, and other philosophers influenced the praxis of The Working Centre. Many of these authors are not theologians, but all reflect on spirituality, human relationships, community, and human labour—subjects important to The Working Centre. These authors provide an interpretation of the Social Gospel in ways that are accessible to non-Christians.

The marriage of religious and secular ideas has a direct impact on the work of The Working Centre. The majority of the staff that were interviewed identified faith as a strong inspiration. Several indicated that they are not Christians yet feel philosophically at “home” at The Working Centre. Others said they are “Christian by culture.” The non-Christian staff identified with The Working Centre virtues with the same intensity as their Christian colleagues.

One of the staff members indicated that although (person) had a Christian upbringing, (person) had walked away from the church in early adulthood. Then, in search of a “spiritual grounding” (person) returned to church again in university and felt inspired by “the messaging that [person] got from there without it needing to be Christian, just the messaging of love and forgiveness and serving others and caring for others and humility.” Now working at The
Working Centre, (person) finds “all of [person] favourite parts that would come from any sort of organized religion” reflected in the virtues.

A strong acceptance of the virtues by the people that do not associate with Christianity—or any faith—may indicate that praxis of love is relevant and compatible with non-Christians. The virtues provide a clear ethical standard that shapes the culture and the collective morality at The Working Centre. The reality today is that Canada is a secular society. Secular principles and norms undergird our legal, economic, political, and social institutions, as well as the conduct of everyday life. Yet, religion has not disappeared. Canadians have inherited a moral code that is based on the notions of the Golden Rule in the Judeo-Christian tradition. We may not learn about Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount at church or educational institutions, but the message about rejecting status, serving others, being in solidarity with those that are suffering, still resonates among some Canadians.

With the fastest-growing group of “spiritual seekers” in the United Kingdom and United States being the “spiritual and not religious” group (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005; Fuller, 2001), people no longer consider the church as a platform on which to wrestle with existential and spiritual questions. Canada is no exception, with a rising generation that no longer looks to the church for a moral grounding yet desires a personally meaningful and fulfilling life (Angus Reid Institute, 2015).

That people want a purpose-driven life, a sense of moral grounding, and to belong to a community of like-minded people, is not new. Aristotle contended that human beings have a natural end, telos, and that a good life depends on moving toward that end and living according to virtues that give meaning (Warne, 2007). People have historically addressed spiritual thirst through the church. However, today people want a fulfilling life without limiting themselves to
the institution of the church. One person stated that she had “found a faith” at The Working Centre by “belonging in something bigger than yourself.”

The Working Centre’s approach may demonstrate how contemporary faith can meet the challenge of maintaining relevance amid increased secularization. The virtues championed by The Working Centre and its expression of praxis of love open new avenues for religion to engage with contemporary societal problems such as economic inequality and environmental crisis. According to Habermas, the realities of Western modernity require a change in public consciousness and an appreciation of religion—what he calls a post secular consciousness (Habermas, 2008). A post secular consciousness recognizes that while secularization is here to stay, religion brings spiritual and cultural resources to contemporary struggles. Just as Wendell Berry is relevant to Christians interested in caring for creation, Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount can resonate with non-Christians who are concerned about those living on the margins of our society.

In facilitating a dialogue and collaboration between religious and non-religious people, The Working Centre has done a valuable service translating the Christian reflection on love into secular terms. For example, at The Working Centre, the belief that God created all humans as equal is translated into the secular argument that all humans have equal dignity and deserve a standard of living that gives them access to food and shelter. By merging religious and secular ideals, The Working Centre’s example of praxis may outline what is entailed in the dialogue between moderate religious and secular actors.

**Replicability**

Is The Working Centre replicable? In its highly relational approach to work, The Working Centre is the way it is today because it has stayed open to the specific gifts, skills, and strengths of the people involved with the movement. There are several place-specific factors that
led to the emergence of The Working Centre as we know it today. For example, the strong Mennonite presence in the Kitchener-Waterloo area was a significant factor in the local community’s openness to the praxis of love taking place at The Working Centre. In addition, the concern for the meaning of good work emerged out of the realities that the unemployed Kitchener workers faced. St. John’s Kitchen grew out of an existing local gathering place that St. John the Evangelist Church had been hosting in the early 1980s (Mancini & Mancini, 2015).

The co-founders’ ongoing effort to try to articulate the virtues of The Working Centre and provide a role model by living them out, daily, on the ground, is also an important consideration. As indicated previously, Joe and Stephanie Mancini play an important role in integrating a body of philosophical literature and applying it to the present realities of The Working Centre. That the philosophical ideas are breathed into the projects and daily operations in a consistent manner is what makes The Working Centre unique. Grasping The Working Centre’s model in its present form is not easy, and in fact, people can take the integration of spiritual understanding for granted (personal communication, October 22, 2019). The Working Centre, as we know it today, would not be what it is without the active role the co-founders have played in their unique interpretation and application of a wide range of philosophical sources discussed in this report.

Drawing from these developments, while the virtues of The Working Centre may carry meaning in other settings, it is safe to assume that The Working Centre in its current form cannot be standardized. Each setting needs to grapple with the local ecosystem in place and engage in ways that resonate with the realities of the people that inhabit the land.
Chapter Seven: Sanctuary

Doer

In 1992, when Greg Paul began working full-time at what would soon become Sanctuary, he had already been developing relationships with the street-involved community in Toronto for 18 years. Reflecting on the earlier days of his friendship with the community, he reminisced that he used to be convinced that he had answers for people’s lives. Looking back, he stated,

My earlier experience had involved touch-and-go activities – doing outreach for an evening or playing a gig in a bar, then going back home to “real” life. It took only a short while of walking day by day, every day, beside some of the poorest and most excluded people in the city – men and women whose lives had been smashed by repeated traumas, psychiatric illness and the homelessness and addictions that often resulted – to discover that my “answers” were irrelevant, my solutions ineffective. (Paul, 2015, p. 2)

Gradually, as his relationship with his friends deepened, he “discovered that [he] needed [his] friends as much as they needed [him]” (Paul, 2015, p. 2). He confessed that much of his time at Sanctuary has been spent “unlearning” what he thought he knew: “My greatest teachers have been – continue to be! – the people I thought I had come to rescue” (Paul, 2013, p. 2).

As the Sanctuary community grew in breadth and depth, Greg Paul sought to share parts of his Executive Director responsibilities with others. In the fall of 2003, he welcomed Alan Beattie to join him as the Managing Director to oversee the operations. Beattie and his wife, Colleen, had been part of the Sanctuary prayer group since its beginning. In addition, he was serving as a member of the Board of Directors and as one of the church leaders of the Sanctuary church. Having worked as the Director of Retail Operations at a Christian family bookstore for close to two decades, he had transferrable experience that was needed for the role at the time.
Paul officially stepped down from his Executive Director role in 2013 after entrusting the director role to Beattie. Paul continues to be a part of the Sanctuary community today. He speaks regularly at the Sanctuary church, represents the community through speaking engagements and writing, and continues to enjoy meals with his friends at drop-ins.

**Beginning**

Sanctuary began with Red Rain, a Christian band in the spring of 1985. Red Rain was born with a calling to take the message of Jesus where it usually does not get heard (Sanctuary, n.d.-a, para. 6). The band—Les Brown on drums, Dan Robins on guitar, Doug Virgin on bass, and Greg Paul on keyboard and lead vocals—performed many concerts in local bars, parks, jails, and on university campuses.

The seed for Sanctuary Ministries was planted in 1990 when the band was invited by the century-old Central Gospel Hall to use the church building for storage and practice sessions. In December 1992, the church had its last worship service due to decreasing congregation. Red Rain, together with by-then Reverend Greg Paul, saw this as an opportunity to use the space as the new home of Sanctuary Ministries of Toronto as a “haven of safety, security and respect for some of the most needy and marginalized people in the city of Toronto” (Sanctuary, n.d.-a, para. 7).

In *God in the Alley*, Paul (2004) writes about the way God was calling him and his family to commit to what was taking shape. He states,

I became convinced God was revealing to us the nature of the calling we had been trying to discern for years. Early in 1991, we approached the elders of Richvale Bible Chapel about it, and in March 1992, the church commended us to full-time ministry—and boldly
commissioned me to play rock’n’roll in bars for Jesus! From that seed grew a community of faith in the downtown core of Toronto known as Sanctuary. (p. 7)

Paul was the initial Executive Director at Sanctuary. He continued to use the Central Gospel Hall building located at 25 Charles Street East, Toronto, as the home-base for activities such as movie nights, street outreach, lunch drop-in, and Sunday worship. Sanctuary Ministries was officially registered as a religious charity in 1996 and purchased its current building on Charles Street East on 2000.

Mission, Vision, and Values

Sanctuary’s core philosophy is articulated in the following statement: “At Sanctuary, we are becoming a healthy, welcoming community where people who are poor or excluded are particularly valued. This community is an expression of the good news embodied in Jesus Christ.” (Sanctuary, n.d.-b, para. 1) As stated in the vision statement, being a follower of Jesus Christ is central to Sanctuary’s identity. Sanctuary is registered as a religious entity—a church. Although the community welcomes people with a broad range of spiritual traditions, the work is motivated by Christians who feel called to love the neighbours on the margins (Sanctuary, n.d.-b, para. 1).

“Healthy,” to Sanctuary, is understood as individual and communal wholeness. It is the balance between mental, emotional, spiritual, and social/relational dimensions of our humanity that makes someone healthy. A healthy community is also understood as a welcoming one, that is, a space that “includes anyone who wishes to enter, regardless of age, ethnicity, faith or lack thereof, gender, sexual orientation or socio-economic status” (Sanctuary, n.d.-c, para. 5). Diversity is believed to make a community healthy as people can learn and benefit from one another.
Sanctuary provides a range of support such as hot meals, employment opportunity, and healthcare; these are considered a “response to” and “context for” the relationships they have with the community members (Sanctuary, n.d.-c, para. 1). The focus of the community life is on the relationship people have with one another rather than a set of outcomes.

**Main Projects**

Sanctuary has many projects and activities that define its praxis. First and foremost, it is a church. On Sunday, a small group of believers gather to do “That Sunday Thing”—as it is officially known—to break bread, pray, and engage in Bible studies. While worship service is available to all, membership in the church is not a prerequisite to participate in other activities offered by Sanctuary. The congregation is approximately 40 to 50 people and includes members from the street community as well as those who are not.

Sanctuary’s busiest gathering is the drop-in that takes place twice a week. The highlight of the drop-in is the community meal served to approximately 150 to 160 people. All the meals are prepared by the community members with the support of one kitchen staff who helps coordinate the cooking. Meals are served “family style.” Rather than having staff or volunteers serve meals to people in line, people sit at the communal tables and pass around the dishes. Staff and volunteers sit side-by-side to have the meals together. While the meal is being enjoyed, Sanctuary keeps the clothing room open for people to take any gently used clothing they would like. This way, people do not need to ask the staff for the clothes. When people are not sharing the meal, drop-in is a space for hanging out—playing cards together, chatting with friends by the fireside, sipping coffee, accessing the shower, or having a snooze on the couch.

The street outreach team walks the downtown Toronto streets to meet people where they are. By seeing them on the street consistently, people come to see the team members as familiar
faces. On an outreach walk, the team’s main job is to check in and offer sleeping bags, mittens, scarfs, or socks. However, it is not unusual for the outreach workers to stop and catch up with people about life. When team members are not out and about engaging with people on the street, they are assisting people with moving between houses/shelters, attending various legal or medical appointments, visiting at prison, and participating in townhall meetings to advocate on behalf of their friends.

In addition, the health clinic has been in operation since 1997 to provide accessible care to those who were falling through the cracks of the public health care system. Sanctuary has learned from experience that many of the community members cannot receive needed care due to systemic barriers such as lack of a health card or ID or traumatic experiences with hospitals and other mainstream healthcare options. The care team includes doctors, nurses, and nurse practitioners who focus on building a trusting relationship with those they care for. Examples of medical care the clinic offers is diverse, including wound care, prenatal care, and addiction services (Sanctuary, n.d.-d, para. 10). Through the health clinic, people can receive assessments, treatment, referrals, drug prescriptions, and supportive counselling. The clinic is open twice a week, and during the rest of the week, the care team spends time doing outreach on the streets and accompanying community members to their health-related appointments.

At Sanctuary, art is a vital part of the community’s lifestyle. True to its Red Rain roots, Sanctuary endeavours to draw from the transformative power of art to provide a means for “self-expression, self-realization, and human relationships.” (Sanctuary, n.d.-d, para. 1)

For the past 15 years, Sanctuary’s drama troupe, the Screaming Monkeys, has been creating theatre productions performing plays such as The Passages of Everett Manning, The Drawer Boy, and The Elephant Man. Weekly Open Art Studio is a place where it is hoped that
community members can come to express themselves. Some choose to write poetry, while others engage in reflective painting or play the drums. This creative work culminates in the Art Extravaganza, held three times a year to showcase drama, music, poetry, and art pieces produced by the Sanctuary artists.

Sanctuary’s first house, Lucas House, opened in fall 2004 to provide long-term housing for four friends within the community who were ready to make a commitment to communal living. With the additional support of mentors and staff facilitators, the community house at Sanctuary was intended to create a home rather than a “housing opportunity.” Four years later, a second home, Jones House, opened to welcome another group of four friends to live together.

**Switchback Cyclery** is a social enterprise which launched in 2013 with the purpose of providing employment to the community members while also generating revenue to support the operations of Sanctuary Ministries. Switchback offers bicycle repair services and sales of new bikes to the Riverside neighbourhood in Toronto. In addition to these core activities, employees at Switchback can also have access to training courses and “one-on-one mentoring to find supportive housing, banking and budgeting, accessing medical treatments and developing strategies for personal growth and development” (Switchback Cyclery, n.d., para. 3).

Nine staff are employed at Switchback—five of them from the street-involved community. Each staff member has a mentor from among the other staff, also known as “PCF”—a Personal Contract Facilitator. They meet biweekly to develop a strategy for meeting their individual goals such as improving their relationship with their family, getting a cell phone, bank account or accessing medical/dental care. When a goal such as dental care requires additional financial support, Switchback helps find resources or subsidizes part of the cost. The conversation that takes place between a staff and a PCF is confidential and private. The goal of
the PCF-staff relationship is to “provid[e] the tools to become relational, healthy, and do conflict resolution in a healthy way.” Switchback also supports staff to receive the necessary training to become certified bike mechanics.

**Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love**

**Faith**

**Faith as Motivation.** Expressing the goodness of Jesus Christ is part of Sanctuary’s vision and what motivates the staff in their daily praxis. For example, one staff member indicated that he is at Sanctuary because he believes “it is the right thing to do.” He stated that he believes he has been called to extend the love of Jesus to those who are hurting. Another staff noted,

I really do feel like I'm in this job because I believe that this is the kind of life that Jesus led and called his followers to lead, and that if we're going to try and live out the Kingdom of God in a small way on this earth, then we're going to have to go to the places and the people that Jesus lived amongst and to try and be that.

As noted by the above speaker, staff members expressed a strong desire to follow in the footsteps of Jesus through action.

**Faith as Hope.** Staff members also indicated that their faith provides the hope and strength to continue the work. A staff member explained that she would be burned out and feeling hopeless if she did not have faith in a loving God who has promised justice. She indicated that she found solace in believing that when the team prays for their street-involved community friends, God's presence accompanies their friends every night. Similarly, another staff articulated that she believes “God is love and that ultimately everything is going to move together in a
loving way even though I can't see it. I don't know what that looks like, but I do believe that—that helps.”

**Faith as Practical.** As described by the staff, the common thread that brings the staff together is the calling to engage in praxis grounded in everyday relationships and in community of relationships. Faith is understood not only as an ideal, but also as real and practical in the sense that it is experienced in day-to-day interactions with the community members who are often living in sickness, pain, and poverty. Another staff member further explained that as a follower of Jesus, it was important how he related to the people around him:

Jesus hung out with the drunks. He hung out with the poor... the poor were around him all the time. He... hung and ate with lepers and all and the outcasts and he was constantly judged by the elite, or the religious elite, even for that matter about who he was hanging out with. And so, I would say, very clearly, to me, faith in action is what you actually do see at Sanctuary.

**Insularity of Christian Faith.** Although all the staff that I spoke with identified as Christian and affirmed that their faith has played a strong motivation in doing this work, several also admitted that they struggled with their faith. Many of the staff that I interviewed shared that they had comfortable upbringings: they received loving care from their parents, and their families were involved in the life of the church in suburban communities.

From being at Sanctuary, though, they have become much more critical about what it means to be Christian and the church’s collective lack of response in the face of suffering. At Sanctuary, staff members had come to accompany many friends whose life had not been as comfortable as theirs or their Christian friends. Many had experienced adversity in childhood and were—and continue to be—exposed to violence, poverty, and trauma. One of the staff members
explained that the longer (person) is at Sanctuary, the more (person) struggles with the negligence (person) observes in society. (Person) noted that it has become more conflicting for (person) to return to the suburban church of (person’s) childhood where the message is one of ‘follow God and he will give you great things.’ In (person’s) time at Sanctuary, (person) has come to know many people who follow God faithfully, yet life had been filled with pain and suffering.

Another staff member compared Christian churches as a “fitness centre” where people go and work out “so that they can look at themselves in the mirror and compliment in each other on how good they look.” He acknowledged that his faith encourages him in his work but rejected the notion of Christianity that was inward and self-serving. He added, “Jesus was salt and light, right? Those are outward-looking metaphors that the church is salt and light.” He emphasized that being salt and light, to him, meant being grounded in the world and actively working to change it for the better.

**Love**

**Love Is Relational.** Love is a core aspiration at Sanctuary—it explains why they do it, how they try to do their work, and what they are trying to do. Having a meaningful relationship with people as an expression of love is considered more important than simply “getting things done for” them. An experienced person stated that when new staff members join the team, (person) tells them, “Your job is to open your heart and love people.”

This does not mean helping does not happen at Sanctuary. Helping happens organically because embedded in loving relationships, is the wish to want “the best for somebody.” In this sense, even though there are differences between the staff and the community members—one
party being in paid employment to do the work—the former desires a closer relationship with community members and makes room for friendship.

**Love Is Practical.** According to a staff member, a big part of the work involves translating what God’s love looks, feels, tastes, smells, and sounds like in everyday reality. Making God’s love as concrete and as real as possible is crucial because love can be a foreign concept to many of the Sanctuary community members. Many of the community members have previous experiences of abuse and mistreatment. Many have a difficult time understanding love or have serious misconceptions about what love is. A staff member noted, “[W]hen you say to someone, “Hey, God loves you,” that doesn't mean anything… you might as well say God ‘schnogles’ you, because what is that? I don't know what that is. I don't know what that would feel like.” He continued to explain the dilemma around the experience of love,

If my friend like Sue… is going to know that God loves her… someone's going to have to show that to her. Someone's going to have to, first of all, show her what love is so that when I actually get around to telling her that God loves her, that will mean something to her. She can say, “Oh, you mean like God does something like what you do for me and what you guys at Sanctuary do? That's what you're talking about? Now there's a God who I may or may not believe in. That's what he or she, whatever feels towards me? It's something like what I experience from you? Oh, wow. Oh, that's good news now.

According to a staff member, sometimes, love may involve simply walking alongside someone who is suffering or telling them that they are loved and that they are here for a purpose. And other times, love may entail driving four hours to pick up someone from jail or helping them move for the fourth time that month. While love is understood as being practical and concrete,
Sanctuary staff noted that it is more than mere actions. Several staff noted that to love means to be in a relationship that is mutual and reciprocal.

**Love Is Mutual and Reciprocal.** The type of relationship that Sanctuary strives for comes from the idea that all humans are flawed and broken, and hence, need each other in this journey called life. A staff member noted that vulnerability borne out of the shared recognition that none of us are perfect and that we are all struggling in our own unique ways. She explained that one person could be battling with cocaine addiction, while another is struggling with workaholism, yet they both speak to our shared, broken humanity that hungers for fulfillment.

Even though there is a distinction between staff and community members in that the former work within the structure of a paid employment, Sanctuary strives for mutual relationships as much as possible. Sanctuary holds that those that have more and those that have less need each other to become whole together. Staff indicated that they aspire to reveal their humanity and share their vulnerabilities with community members as much as possible.

It is important to note that mutual relationships are different from transactional ones. A staff member indicated that in our society, people tend to view transactional relationships as more dignified than a unidirectional helping relationship based on need because there is a sense that the support received was hard-earned or well-deserved. In such relationships, having resources gives them confidence to request something or some action of someone else. However, the staff member explained that mutuality asserts that we each have something of value, and we need each other to become well together.

The type of love that Sanctuary seeks to live out in the community is one which people would experience in a trusted friendship or a family. One staff member noted, “People will talk about their family—their Sanctuary family and their street family, which also attaches to the
concept of home.” And because building relational intimacy requires time, a degree of commitment is required. This person continued, “I think the characteristics of relationships that have meaning are that there's commitment to each other.”

**Praxis**

**In God and With People.** Sanctuary is a church—it is registered as a religious establishment and staff members need to identify as Christians to work there. Staff gatherings regularly involve prayer for one another, worship takes place every Sunday, and the street community calls them a church. An important aspiration for the Sanctuary church is to be grounded in the world.

The way worship service runs is an example of the desire to be in God and with people. Instead of rows of chairs or pews facing a pulpit or altar, people sit around a square with the communion table at the centre. There is no pulpit. The band is at the back of the room, farthest away from the cross and behind all the chairs. Sanctuary does this deliberately “to make the point physically that the band is merely part of the congregation and not the proper focus of attention” (Paul, 2008, p. 143). As recorded in my field notes, there is no apparent presider who guides the order they worship. People call out songs they want to sing, sometimes making a comment or a joke followed by laughter from the group. People freely ask questions and offer comments while teaching takes place. Through its informality, it seems that the Sanctuary church seeks to send a message that the people gathered around are the focus, rather than religious orthodoxy.

A staff member indicated that, for her, to be a follower of Christ meant to commit herself to a life-long journey with her street-involved friends whom she has come to embrace as her friends and chosen family.
Whole Relationships. At Sanctuary, the mutuality and reciprocity between people make the relationship meaningful. However, putting into practice mutual giving and receiving can challenge how community members relate to staff on a day-to-day basis. A common illustration that staff members shared was borrowing money. A community member may ask to borrow $10 from a staff member and the staff member may lend her the money the first few times. However, if the practice becomes a pattern, the staff may need to initiate a conversation. If one person is constantly giving and the other is only receiving, it sets up an expectation, and such a dynamic is believed to create a lopsided relationship. In the event this happens, a staff member indicated she would have a conversation with the community member about the dynamic. Although the talk might be awkward, she noted that her experience has generally been positive because it happens in the context of a trusting relationship. She noted,

But I think the same people who are asking me to borrow money are often people that I'm already pretty close with, have a relationship that it actually sometimes ends up strengthening that friendship because I think it also implicitly says to the person like, "I actually really care about you and I really want to be friends with you so I don't really want this to be in the way." So it's been really rewarding after the awkwardness, that's really good.

Several staff members emphasized that the mutual and reciprocal relationships they strive for at Sanctuary are different from professional helping relationships that abide by strict boundaries. One staff explained,

The usual social work construct, the professional-client relationship, is all about the client being vulnerable and the professional not being vulnerable at all, and hence there's no
real intimacy. We have to be vulnerable towards each other in order for intimacy to actually occur.

A staff member noted that he strives for a “nonprofessional” as opposed to an “unprofessional” relationship. During my field work, it was common to read or hear stories such as a staff member inviting a community member to his home for a family movie night, friends at Sanctuary celebrating a staff member’s wedding or birthday together, and a staff member taking her friend’s clothes home to wash during the friend’s hospital recovery.

In describing their relationship with community members, staff did not use words such as “clients” or “patients” but instead often referred to them as “friends.” Sanctuary does not keep “case notes” or “records” of people. Although staff may have a folder to keep someone’s Toronto Community Housing Corporation letter safe because they have been asked to, for example, Sanctuary is emphatic about not keeping files of people. A staff member may help community members file their taxes, but this is considered a gift that is shared with the rest of the community, not a service. In this sense, the tax files may stay in the office because many community members do not have a stable address, but they are not considered case management records. The health clinic is an exception because they keep medical records, but the information is kept confidential and not shared with the rest of the team.

Several staff members indicated that the work is meaningful and fulfilling because they feel like they receive much from the community members. Unlike a model of service provision where care is often only one-directional, staff feel deeply cared for and loved by the community members. A comment that staff members often hear from community members, especially when someone dies is, “You guys have the hardest job. You kind of love us, and then we die.” One staff shared,
I have been cared for in my times of brokenness and vulnerability by this community in ways that would never happen in a corporation, or conventional church, or social work structure of any kind that I'm aware of. I think that my life is a lot richer because I've learned more about who people are, about the suffering of people, and that's opened up my own suffering, my own neediness. It's taught me both how good and how bad I am, to use really simple terms, how rich and how poor I am.

Staff referred to this notion of mutual caring as “doing life together.” Generally, it is an accepted social convention that those who have more material resources help those who have fewer. In the same vein, staff noted that people with resources are often more comfortable giving, helping, fixing, and providing answers to those around them. However, Sanctuary believes that it is important for people to learn to receive. This opens up a window of opportunity for “people who have always been charity cases” to learn to “give,” while also giving those with material wealth an opportunity to receive care and support.

As an illustration, one of the staff members shared the story of a time when (person) was at the drop-in and just received news about (person’s) best friend’s critical illness. Noticing the poor state that (person) was in, one of the community members asked what had happened to (person). “And I just broke down and told her about [my friend]. She just held me while I cried.” After dinner, she came back to drop-in and told the staff, “I just picked up this little thing on the road,” referring to a charm bracelet in her hand. "I'm going to keep it in my pocket. Tonight, I'll put this in my pocket where I put my hands when it's cold, and every time I feel it, I'm going to pray for [your friend].” One week later, she came back to the drop-in and told (person) that the night they spoke, she found every church in the city that is open at night and prayed for
(person’s) friend. Then she asked, “How is your friend?” The staff member said that (person) was moved deeply at how much she cared.

Other staff members shared similar stories about how they have been recipients of generous love and care from the community. It is common to hear stories of community members pooling their panhandling money to give it to a staff member on their birthday.

In fact, several staff members indicated that if grace has been extended, it is not from the staff towards the street-involved community, but the other way around. A staff member who identified as a white, heterosexual, Christian male indicated that many of his Indigenous friends at Sanctuary “have no reason for them to love or trust me. I represent their enemies.” Yet, he added that through the friendship he has been developing with the community members, he has leaned to “receive love, when there's no reason for people to love me.”

Sanctuary’s desire for loving relationship is not limited to the staff’s relationship with community members but is expressed in the relationship among co-workers as well. Sanctuary affirms the importance of supporting each other and holding one another accountable to the work they do as a team. What is considered “good” to one person, may not necessarily be so to another, since staff present a wide range of theological, social, and cultural backgrounds and experiences. The work can be “confusing” at times as people navigate through intersecting cultural systems with no prescribed manual.

To facilitate accountability and mutual support among staff, each staff member at Sanctuary is assigned to a Covenant Group (CG) and a Department Group (DG) from the time of the hire. The CG is a group of three to five engaged in different projects that meet every six to eight weeks. The CG is a space for staff to check in with one another more deeply beyond the weekly staff meetings. Each group decides on the topic of discussion; subjects can range from
personal care to fundraising and donor relations. The DG includes staff with similar work responsibilities such as outreach, art, administration, bicycle shop operation, and health clinic. DG meetings generally involve discussions about community member updates, ongoing programs, and community resources or partners. According to Sanctuary, these meetings and groups provide mutual support among staff in dealing with the complexity of their work.

Every Monday morning, at staff meetings, the team spends 30 to 45 minutes checking in on each other, and this is considered the most important part of the meeting. The team may go around asking how each person is doing or it may spend special time with one staff member, giving needed care and support to deal with a particularly difficult situation. Team check-in also happens before and after the drop-in on Thursdays. Much happens at drop-in meals, and staff use the check-in time to discuss any challenging encounters or complications they are experiencing. They ask each other,

  How's your heart? Thursday was tough for you. How are you today? Maybe you should be not on this Thursday [drop-in], maybe you should take a break. What's required?
  What's the best thing for you? How can we make sure that happens and [that we are] holding each other lovingly accountable?

Staff indicated that, in fact, the support they receive from their colleagues is an important part of what sustains them through their difficult moments. Other staff members also expressed several times that they feel their co-workers “have each other’s backs.” According to a staff member, “recognizing how deeply we need to care for and love each other” is one of the reasons why, perhaps, the turnover rate at Sanctuary has been lower compared with other organizations that do similar work. Many of the staff had worked at Sanctuary for over 5 years, and some as long as 25 years.
Community. Although developing deep, supportive friendships with community members is encouraged, Sanctuary emphasizes that the work of building community cannot be done by a single individual as an act of heroism. It is the collective bonding held together that makes a community healthy. One of the staff members compared community to a net: "No one string could hold whatever is in it on its own. But if a number of strings come together to form a net, it works.” Similarly, Sanctuary encourages staff to have a relationship with a wide variety of community members. A staff member may find that they have a special connection with a community member. Although such relationships are encouraged, the staff member is discouraged from becoming the only “string” that supports that person. For example, if Patty is the only person who calls, lends money to, and visits Kelly, a community friend, there is a risk that if Patty becomes unavailable, there would be no one else in the team that could be there for Kelly.

According to Sanctuary, another way to understand community is through the analogy of an ecosystem. People live in different ecosystems that operate with different social conventions, culture, and relationship norms. One of the staff members explained that the ecosystem middle-class people inhabit is different from the one that street-involved community inhabit. For example, in the middle-class ecosystem, if one offers to get something for one’s friend at a grocery store, it may be uncouth for that friend to start filling the shopping cart. However, in the street community, there are different social conventions in operation that defy what people from a different ecosystem consider “normal.” For this reason, Sanctuary warns people against engaging in praxis independently. “One-on-one work is just not sustainable,” a staff member commented.
Generally, interactions among people depend on the ecosystems they are from. Sanctuary often receives calls from people who have befriended someone from the street community for some time, and they find themselves in a social quagmire, not knowing what to do. They have become good friends, but one person feels that it is not sustainable for them to constantly give money or buy them food when asked. People also call asking for advice as they feel like their friend has come to depend on them to provide and they feel uncomfortable about the relationship dynamic. Or, they were threatened the last time they met, and not sure if they can continue to meet alone. When people are under the impression that they are the only source of help, the ethical dilemma people feel is significant. “[I]t makes a huge difference to know that someone else is going to be there and just to love them with the love that you actually want but can do it in this moment when you can't,” explained a staff member. Building relationships in the context of a community has many benefits: it helps people to get to know their friends more holistically, it challenges the egocentric idea that you are the only person that can save them, and it makes relationships more sustainable over the long run.

For this reason, when people come to Sanctuary looking for opportunities to “help,” they are told that their job is to first get to know the community members. Sanctuary has a special name for volunteers: Person of Relative Power (PORP). When a PORP starts coming to Sanctuary, they are instructed not to do much for the first six months. The individual is discouraged from giving money, providing car rides, or sharing their cellphone numbers. Instead, they are to use the time in getting to know the community and learning to receive.

Sanctuary is mindful about the way in which power, influence, and authority get expressed within the community. While the staff’s relationship with the street-involved community is important, the way Sanctuary tries to build community among staff by putting in
place structures and procedures is also notable. Whereas the authority structure at most work places is similar to that of a pyramid, a staff member compared Sanctuary’s structure to a “pancake.” Together with the Executive Director, a group of four to five other staff members, form the Leadership Group (LG) to provide leadership to the organization. Sanctuary staff, with the exception of the Executive Director, rotate every two years to join the group. The LG model flows from its commitment to operate with a non-hierarchical structure so that the typical responsibilities of the Executive Director (e.g., decision making in the areas of human resources, financial oversight and planning, liaising with Sanctuary’s Board of Directors, and planning staff retreats) can be “shared more broadly with others on the staff team” (Sanctuary, n.d.-g, p. 1). According to a staff member, that Sanctuary does not replicate and perpetuate systems of oppression is important to the type of community and relationships it is trying to build. “Jesus came to free us and speak against powers that bind people and keep people down … [but] if we reflect those bad structures within our own organization… then we’re going to mirror that in the way we treat people,” a staff member noted.

When making significant decisions for which Sanctuary feels every team member’s voice needs to be heard, the organization adopts the Consensus-Oriented Decision-Making model (Sanctuary, n.d.-e, p. 1). Staff have three voting options: Agree, Stand Aside, or Block. To pass an idea, there must be a 75 per cent Agree with no Blocks. A 50 to 75 per cent Agree will require further discussion as a team on the subject. If consensus is not reached, the team will decide whether to consider the subject Dead or revisit the subject later. Less than half Agree from those present for the vote will mean the subject is Dead.

According to Sanctuary, the rotating leadership model and the decision-making model are procedures in place to share power within the organization in more equitable ways. However,
staff members noted that there are also real challenges associated with the process. The most obvious is that it generally takes longer to make a decision. One staff indicated,

> I personally would wish that we could move things along faster, but realistically it's hard to when there are so many voices around the table. But I do think it is going well because I think it does open up space for more voices and more perspectives to be heard. Especially voices that otherwise might not speak up or may not ever be heard.

Another challenge is that in its attempt to make the structure more equitable, as noted by a staff member, the current approach ironically feels “top heavy… in a different way.” That is, it can feel like “the rest of the community's freedom to generate ideas and make decisions has been diminished” because the conversations about the organization is now concentrated among staff. According to the staff member, Sanctuary’s locus of authority used to be concentrated in management; while this was not perfect, it gave staff more freedom to pursue individual initiatives. The staff further explained that they would prefer that the process were “a bit more fluid and more responsive to the community's initiatives themselves, rather than us from the top making as many decisions as we do right now.”

During the data collection phase, I learned that the staff recently had an opportunity to reflect on their present-day structure and they questioned whether the pendulum has indeed swung too far. While the conversation about equitable power distribution is part of an ongoing conversation at Sanctuary, the desire to create a more mutual and reciprocal community appears to be an important consideration for them as they continue to refine their praxis.

**Current Struggles**

**Chronically Traumatic and Violent Circumstances.** The reality of working at Sanctuary is that there is an ongoing interaction with people in very difficult conditions,
including exposure to violence and aggression. Whether it is a direct experience (primary trauma) or witnessing a traumatic event (secondary trauma), staff reported that they are often exposed to events and stories that give rise to intense emotions. Staff shared stories about their friends, often under the influence, acting violently towards them or others. Several indicated that they had had their property destroyed, or were spat at, physically assaulted, or threatened. Staff members indicated that stories of violence and aggression, even when they do not involve them directly, are still painful to hear. Several indicated that they had been experiencing symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder.

This reality is unlike that of first responders, who usually do not have a pre-existing relationship with those they are trying to help. A staff member shared that regularly being exposed to the traumas of close friends has been emotionally and spiritually taxing on her. She wants to comfort her friends in trouble, yet to be exposed to the full story of how violent their partner is, can be difficult to process.

In a way, that community members are sharing their pain is a sign that they feel safe, and hence trust the staff enough to share their pain with them. At the same time, it creates complexity because staff members are vulnerable human beings with finite resources who can only do so much in response. Friendship, unlike a professional-client relationship, requires that people be mutually vulnerable and intimate. A staff member indicated that when she sees her friend in pain, she also feels hurt.

Still, because it is important for Sanctuary to be a space where community members experience physical and emotional safety, when safety is threatened, Sanctuary intervenes on behalf of the community. When a community member jeopardizes the security and safety of others, Sanctuary may consider imposing a “drop-in restriction.” Sanctuary uses a Responding to
Violence rubric to guide discussion around the duration of the restriction and organizational course of action (Sanctuary, n.d.-f). Several staff members indicated that they generally appreciate the tool because prior to its arrival, staff tended to base decisions on emotions or a few strong voices in the room. They expressed that the rubric has put in place a degree of standardization that has been helpful in managing complex situations.

Several staff noted that there were challenges associated with putting restrictions on people to access Sanctuary. It was noted that the practice raises real tensions around the desire to have mutual friendship with community members and the need to create a space that is safe for everyone involved. What makes the situation more challenging is that the community members that Sanctuary tries to welcome are often ones that it needs to protect others from. Staff also indicated that they experience a moral dilemma when they need to put a restriction on a member because Sanctuary’s drop-in may be the only way to have a meal on a particular day. Restricting access when a community member experiences mental health or addiction issues further elevates the ethical tension.

Staff also noted that the violence and aggression that community members act out is often rooted in a deeper sense of social injustice and structural oppression that they have experienced in life. They indicated that a restriction has felt like a punitive approach that does not address the real, deeper systemic issues or relationship wounds people carry. Police rarely get involved, but when they are called, it is generally considered by Sanctuary the last resort.

As much as violence and aggression are part of the challenge in the everyday praxis taking place at Sanctuary, the deeper wounds the staff shared were related to the death of their friends. At the time of writing, Sanctuary staff had over 20 of their friends pass away in 2019 alone; this has been the highest number of deaths in any given year since opening its door in
1992. A staff member noted the “injustice” that people on the margins do not have an opportunity to live up to their full potential. Several noted that systemic issues such as lack of affordable or supportive housing and poor funding for public services such as mental health care and shelters, have contributed significantly to the higher mortality rate of the street-involved community. One also indicated that “the sharp edge of poverty is represented by opioid overdose, and the violence that comes from crystal meth” and other types of illicit drugs.

Part of the explanation why some find grief more debilitating than violence is that people do not have adequate time and space to mourn. When appropriate, Sanctuary holds a memorial service for a passed friend. However, “When you go through a period like we're in right now, nobody has time and space to adequately process their own grief when people just die week after week, after week. When you can't grieve well, it does damage,” a staff member noted.

Even for a long-time member, learning to live with the trauma of losing loved ones is still an extremely difficult experience. After a long time of caring about the Sanctuary community, (person) noted a need to stop (attending) memorials and funerals because of reaching an emotional limit. “I've done some healing, but there's still a lot there”. (Person) also added, “I’m hopeful that our younger staff will avoid that.”

**Self-Care.** To manage the challenge that comes with the work, several staff indicated that they have learned to care for themselves. Many affirmed that it is very important to set appropriate boundaries if one is committed to praxis of love in the long-term. For example, a staff member shared that he has learned to ensure that his weekends and vacations are truly restful. He does not engage in stressful volunteer work or a side job and tries to be out of the city
for vacations. These practices have helped him set necessary boundaries and ensure that he is resting so he may return rejuvenated and fully present.

While staff members are encouraged to seek out ways to do individual self-care, Sanctuary, as an organization, has set up a structure of support in place. In addition to participating in CG and DG, each staff is expected to meet with a trauma therapist regularly to debrief about traumatic incidents in the course of their involvement at Sanctuary. While staff are strongly required to engage in trauma therapy, if they have other methods of processing work-related stress and trauma that are personally more meaningful or effective, they may choose those.

Also, staff may take a sabbatical for four to six months every seven years. What this time looks like will be different for every person. Some choose to simply stay away from work; others use the time to receive new training or pick up a new hobby. The point is that people are using the time to do what they “really need in that moment.” Several staff indicated that they appreciate the organizational supports in place in recognition of the toll the work can take on staff.

**Future Directions**

**Handover of Authority.** Sanctuary considers the exercise of power and authority an important aspect of praxis of love. Sanctuary members are mindful of how leaders’ presence in the community influences decision-making. Hence, they have given proactive and careful thought to how the handover of authority takes place at Sanctuary.

They acknowledged that Sanctuary should not revolve around a central figure and must create space for diverse voices from the community to emerge. The process of easing out has been a work in progress. As indicated earlier, after having served as the Sanctuary’s Executive
Director for the first 11 years, he invited Alan Beattie, then Board Member and current Executive Director, to share the responsibility of managing Sanctuary.

Past and present “leaders” worked alongside each other sharing their leadership roles for 10 years. “(Person’s) skills are so much more suitable than mine to lead us on the next leg of our strange journey together” (Paul, 2013, p. 2). When making a transition of leadership the Sanctuary’s belief was the previous leadership reduce their involvement in decision-making.

In practice, for Paul this means not being part of the hiring committee or the leadership team, to limit how much weight his voice carries in decision making. He is also trying to ease out as the primary fundraiser and make space for others to share in that role. Although the transition is still underway, the steps Sanctuary has taken over the past decade demonstrate how a leadership change from the founder can happen smoothly.

**Highlights of Considerations on Praxis of Love**

*Mutuality and Reciprocity*

Praxis of love seeks to nurture mutual and reciprocal relationships between people. People who strive for praxis of love prefer friendships to professional relationships with people they are trying to support. Hence, having a meaningful relationship with people is considered more important than simply providing services. People are fundamentally considered equals, and hence demarcations in relationships including professional boundaries, religious, racial and/or class divides are challenged. However, how realistic mutual and reciprocating relationships are in the context of paid employment needs to be considered.

**Community**

That people are weak and need each other is an important consideration for praxis of love. Community is a space where people come together to depend on one another and be
nourished through relationships. In a community, there is a shared, mutual interest in looking after the wellbeing of one another. Praxis appears to be grounded in everyday relationships and in community of mutually caring relationships.

_Surviving Chronically Traumatic and Violent Circumstances_

Praxis of love involves being in solidarity with people who are in pain. This may involve exposure to frequent traumatic and violent circumstances, voluntary poverty, and sometimes even imprisonment.

_Self-Care_

Praxis of love can be demanding, so there needs to be space to retreat from praxis to care for oneself. Although self-care measures are highly individualistic, faith appears to play an important source of strength and hope to many. At the same time, many also express struggles around faith. Whatever the approach to rejuvenation is, finding ways to look after oneself while engaging in praxis of love appears to be important.

_Integration of Faith and Secular Ideas_

Although faith appears to be an important motivation to start an initiative, and remains a core one throughout, praxis of love may also involve meshing of secular processes and ideas with faith. Because the context of praxis of love is the day-to-day reality that people live in, certain secular approaches can help interpret and apply praxis in the everyday world.

_Leadership Transition_

Because the doer—the founder and originator of the initiative—is considered core to the initiative’s identity, handover of authority appears to be an important consideration for the survival of the initiative.
**Human Frailty**

People engaging in praxis of love often discussed aspirations to love people others deeply and practically. Motivated by love and faith, practitioners engage in social initiatives with the intention to help others. They become a beacon of hope to others. As the initiative grows, the pressure to do good, public adulation, and temptation to stay in the limelight also appear to accompany the doers in different settings. Because humans are limited beings, such demanding expectations can put much pressure on people. Realistic expectations that practitioners, including the doers, are only human need to be considered.
Chapter Eight: MCC Toronto

Doer

Reverend Doctor Brent Hawkes (1951- ) was born and raised in a Baptist family in Bath, N.B. He came to Toronto in 1976 after reading a job posting for the MCC Toronto in the gay magazine The Advocate (Porter, 2016). He became the pastor the following year at what was then a four-year-old, gay-friendly church that met in offices, backyards, church basements, and bars (McDiarmid, 2014). The church is part of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches and considers itself an inclusive church with roots in the LGBTQ+ community (Porter, 2016).

Over the course of his 40-year ministry at MCC Toronto, Rev. Hawkes has made advocacy for gay rights a focus. He has been described as a “charismatic preacher,” a “celebrated activist,” (Seitz, 2017), a “visionary” (Wong-Tam, cited in McDiarmid, 2014), and “Toronto’s famous gay pastor” (Blatchford, 2017).

His struggles for advancing the human rights of LGBTQ+ people have been well documented. The day after the 1981 gay bathhouses raid, when more than 286 men were arrested, Rev. Hawkes and other activists led over 3,000 protesters at a rally against police brutality (MCCT, 2020c). Hawkes later went on a hunger strike for 25 days (Porter, 2016), which eventually resulted in the City of Toronto establishing the Bruner Inquiry. Rev. Hawkes and MCC Toronto were also at the epicentre of the AIDS epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s, with members of its congregation offering hospice care and Rev. Hawkes overseeing funeral ceremonies when many other churches refused. (Porter, 2016). In addition, he participated in numerous sit-ins and protests, was beaten by police, and handcuffed himself to the Ontario legislature railing (McDiarmid, 2014).
Rev. Hawkes is perhaps best known for performing the world’s first “legally” recognized same-sex marriages (Kevin Bourassa and Joe Varnell, and Anne Vauteur and Elaine Vauteur) using the ancient Christian tradition of publication of banns, on January 14, 2001. While officiating the weddings, Rev. Hawkes wore a bulletproof vest under his vestments and was escorted by 12 uniformed policemen. After the Registrar General of Ontario refused to register the marriage documents, MCC Toronto sued the provincial government, which resulted in the legal recognition and backdating of the marriages in Ontario in 2003 (MCCT, 2020c). The Canadian government legalized same-sex marriage four years later (Porter, 2016).

During an interview with the CBC, when asked to comment on how the fight for gay rights meshed with Christianity, he commented:

The spirituality is matched with social justice. Jesus said when you do it to the least of these, you do it to me. In the early days, being gay, you weren't welcomed in the Christian community… and being Christian, you weren't welcomed in the gay community. The gay community was very angry at the church and I understand why, because of the oppression and discrimination that the church has shown… Just because the church has attacked you… doesn't mean you should give up on God or spirituality. (CBC News, 2014, para. 7)

In recognition of his fight for LGBTQ+ rights, Rev. Hawkes has received numerous awards and honorary doctorates. In 1994, Rev. Hawkes received the City of Toronto Award of Merit, the highest civilian award given by the City of Toronto (LGBTQ+ Religious Archives Network, 2020). In 2007, he was named to the Order of Canada. Four years later, he officiated at the state funeral of his good friend and leader of the New Democratic Party, Jack Layton. He
also served as the grand marshal of the World Pride Parade in 2014, the highest honour that the LGBTQ+ community can bestow (Wong-Tam, cited in McDiarmid, 2014).

Near his retirement, Rev. Hawkes was charged with sexually assaulting a former student in the 1970s in Nova Scotia. The scandal was made public after he officially announced his retirement in the thick of the #MeToo Movement. He was acquitted after the presiding judge found inconsistencies in the testimony of the witnesses (Lalani, 2017).

Rev. Hawkes officially retired from the church in January 2018 and was succeeded by Rev. Jeff Rock. Rev. Hawkes continues his activism through the Rainbow Faith and Freedom Movement, an international organization he founded to unite religious LGBTQ+ people in the fight against “religion-based” homophobia. (CBC News, 2014, para. 7). He believes that LGBTQ+ people of faith stand a better chance of combating religion-based homophobia than their secular counterparts (Boisvert, 2017). He retains the title of Senior Pastor Emeritus at MCC Toronto.

In 2006, Rev. Hawkes married John Sproule, a retired computer programmer. They have been together for 34 years (Porter, 2016).

**Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches**

MCC Toronto is a member of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches (UFMCC), a denomination that was established in Los Angeles in 1968 by Rev. Troy Perry after he was removed from his Pentecostal church for being gay (Roberts, 2000). Rev. Perry was aware of the spiritual needs of the LGBTQ+ community; several of his friends had committed suicide, convinced that God did not love them (Sweet, 1994). Rev. Perry held the first church service with 12 people. After he put an advertisement in a national gay magazine, however, people from across the USA responded positively. The denomination grew quickly, but
members faced peril. A couple of years following the first service, 16 Metropolitan Community Churches were burned to the ground, resulting in 31 deaths, and several pastors were beaten up; one was murdered (Sweet, 1994).

To date, there are 172 member congregations in 33 countries (UFMCC, 2019). MCC Toronto is the largest among the UFMCC denomination member churches (UFMCC, 2019).

Beginning


Today, Rev. Rock serves the church as the senior pastor. Before joining MCC Toronto, he was a minister at the Gaetz Memorial United Church in Red Deer, Alberta.

Mission, Vision, and Values

According to an informant, MCC Toronto “has always considered itself a human rights church”; that is, even back in 1973 when the congregation first gathered, “it was to be an LGBTQ+ church at a time when [one] couldn't be LGBTQ+ in any church.” The mission of MCC Toronto is “to build bridges with a vibrant spirituality that transforms lives and transforms the world” and the vision is “to be a growing, inclusive, spiritual community that creates a just, kind and loving world for all” (MCCT, 2020e). The core values that drive the church include
“spirituality, advocacy, and diversity” (MCCT, 2020e). A total of 13 staff are currently employed to minister and to support operations (MCCT, 2020d).

Main Projects

MCC Toronto has three major projects: spiritual services, the LGBTQ+ Refugee Program, and the Triangle Program.

According to an informant, approximately 400 people participate in Sunday worship service and about a couple thousand people consider themselves congregants. The combined online and in-person weekly attendance exceeds a thousand congregants (Seitz, p. 37). There are three worship services on Sundays: 9 am, 11 am, and 7 pm; the 11 am service tends to have the highest number of attendees. The service is also webcast live and followed by hundreds of weekly viewers internationally (Seitz, 2017, p. 34).

Established in 2007, the LGBTQ+ Refugee Program assists refugees who identify as LGBTQ+ and who are fleeing violence, state-sanctioned persecution, and arrest. Since the program opened, it has supported over 3,500 asylum seekers and sponsored 55 refugees (MCCT, 2020c). Currently, the program assists around 800 people a year, with about 400 people registering annually.

The program broadly falls into three major support initiatives: (a) Refugee Claimants, (b) Private Sponsorship and Resettlement, and (c) Advocacy and Education (MCCT, 2020a). The Refugee Claimants initiative offers refugee claimants weekly information and orientation sessions; referral to legal, healthcare, or mental health services; and monthly peer support meetings. The Private Sponsorship and Resettlement initiative sponsors and supports the resettlement of individuals who suffered persecution abroad based on their gender identity and expression and/or sexual orientation. Under this initiative, about 10 to 15 refugees are sponsored
to come to Canada annually. Last, the Advocacy and Education initiative advocates for the advancement of LGBTQ+ refugee rights and provides education for the broader community. It does so by collaborating with other partners such as the Canadian Council for Refugees and the Rainbow Coalition for Refugee.

MCC Toronto is the only LGBTQ+ exclusive Sponsorship Agreement Holder for refugees in Canada. Since 2007, the church has sponsored over 55 LGBTQ+ refugees by itself and in partnerships with other groups.

The Triangle Program is Canada’s first and longest-running high school for LGBTQ+ youth now run in partnership with the Toronto District School Board and MCC Toronto. The school has been in operation since 1995. Although the church covers the overhead costs to house the Triangle Program in the basement, the school operates independently of the church (MCCT, 2020b).

Summary of Interviews

This section summarizes four interviews conducted with key informants at MCC Toronto who were knowledgeable about how faith-inspired praxis of love was being carried at the church. These summaries bring forward unique elements of the praxis of love framework for activist institutions, groups, and individuals.

To ensure confidentiality of the informants, “they,” “them,” or “their” will be used to disclose gender identity. The italicized first letter differentiates the nonbinary singular pronoun from the regular plural. They is substituted for he or she. Them is substituted for him or her. Their is substituted for his or her.
Informant One

The informant stated that the primary purpose that drives their life’s work is love—to learn to love oneself, others, and God unconditionally. To love abundantly is a life goal that they is “always striving towards” and the “ultimate source of unconditional love is from God.”

The informant indicated that the work of MCC Toronto is heavily informed by the “anti-oppressive framework.” According to them, the anti-oppressive framework in application means “taking a more systematic approach” in looking at issues such as racism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia. They noted that there is a difference between being “not racist” and “anti-racist.” The former may consider tokenistic gestures “enough,” whereas the latter considers the work of removing barriers as ongoing.

In fact, they pointed out that the church has not always been inclusive, especially towards racial minorities. There was a time in the church when the presiding minister had to be assisted by “a man and a woman” in worship service who were “preferably white and black [sic] or a person of color [sic]” (Seitz, p. 42). The informant stated that MCC Toronto today is trying to move away from this type of “tokenistic, sort of 1990s vision of diversity” towards “a 2020 vision of diversity” that is intentional in asking “Who is represented and who is not represented? What barriers are there to fuller inclusion? How do we visibly show that diversity? How are we taking an anti-oppressive look?”

According to the informant, other examples of anti-oppressive work at MCC Toronto include celebrating an open communion regardless of whether or not someone comes from the same religious tradition, allowing laypeople to consecrate communion, enabling unbaptized individuals to become members of the church (with voting privileges and opportunities to be a member of the board), and proactively searching for diverse members to join the board.
Traditionally, Protestant or Catholic Christian churches generally limited these religious practices to baptized members of the community or to ordained ministers. The informant stated that the intention behind these changes is to make MCC Toronto a more inclusive space of worship where everyone can belong.

The informant noted that they find great satisfaction in overcoming barriers that would normally divide people by class, race, or history. They find it rewarding to see people “encounter each other in each other’s full humanity,” because, ultimately, to them, the meaning of life rests in learning to love oneself and others unconditionally.

While they finds engaging in praxis of love satisfying, they noted that doing so also positions them close to people’s wounds. In their work, they stated that they witnesses emotional scars that desperately need healing. They has learned that the fear of not “belonging” and not being “lovable” is a universal human experience. When people are in fear, one observes that “conflict arises” among people because people are afraid that “if you give away too much love, you run out.” As a response to this scarcity mindset, they has been trying to create a model of abundance in which “love is love is love, and the more you share, the more you have”.

The informant indicated that another challenge of engaging in praxis of love as a Christian is that despite Jesus’ message being about “non-judgment and love,” “Christians are seen as the most judgmental and in some ways non-loving people in the world”. This has meant that MCC Toronto has to fight an “uphill battle” to prove to people that the church is “an inclusive, non-judgmental community.” They added that many in our society are lonely and seek the type of non-judgmental community that MCC Toronto offers, but negative perceptions of Christians means that MCC Toronto is the “last place that they know to look for it.” To address
this issue, MCC Toronto has launched a new website and has been actively trying to reach out to people.

The informant is less concerned about what people believe than with “creating a community where people can grow and learn”. They said that at any given Sunday worship service, it is not uncommon to observe a refugee sitting next to the Mayor of the City of Toronto, who is also sitting next to somebody who is homeless. Also, the congregation is not limited to Christians. According to them, members of the church include individuals who identify as Jewish, who may love the stories of Jesus but do not regard Jesus as their Messiah or Saviour. MCC Toronto members may also include people who do not associate with any religion. Irrespective of beliefs, the church “endeavour[s] to have them feel fully included in [the] congregation.”

MCC Toronto has a deeply rooted tradition of activism going back to its inception. For example, when the informant was interviewed for their current position, they said that the first two questions the hiring panel asked were (What are your credentials? What specific focuses?) and the third question was, “Do you have any political experience?”

Although the informant believes that the separation of church and state is important, they encourages “religious people taking political, collective action in the church” about issues such as poverty reduction, justice, inclusion, and diversity. They believes that to make change is inherently the work of all religious traditions.

The informant acknowledged that, although the church has accomplished much in securing and recognizing LGBTQ+ human rights, the work is not over. In a recent strategic review of the church, community members made it clear that they wanted MCC Toronto to leverage its experience as an activist and a human rights organization to ally with those
advocating for anti-racism, Indigenous rights, and the work of ability and disability in emerging human rights. As an expression of this commitment, the church is seeking to rebrand as the “Metropolitan Community Church and Human Rights Center of Toronto.”

The informant stated that it was helpful that (their predecessor) announced their intent to retire a couple of years prior to leaving; this gave people time to prepare. They added that (their predecessor) had been “very respectful in trying to give people the space” to establish new ways of working after they left. For example, (their predecessor) did not attend MCC Toronto services for close to 12 months after leaving, but now attends “occasionally” to worship with the community. This informant also acknowledged that (their predecessor had a high profile), but (their predecessor) was supportive throughout the transition, reassuring the (informant), “[You] don't have big shoes to fill because [I] took the shoes with [me].”

The informant indicated that while (their predecessor “was the perfect person” in the job), change has been welcome for the most part. Their absence has also opened up new discussions and opportunities for the future of the church, as symbolized by its rebranding.

With respect to (their predecessor’s difficulties), the informant stated that they was not the best person to speak on the matter. They noted that “it left a lot of people asking a lot of questions” and there was a sense of relief when (it was resolved).

**Informant Two**

The informant was referred to me as someone who had played an important role in securing the right to same-sex marriage in the early 2000s. When asked what motivated them to get involved in the cause, they stated that “as a gay person and (a professional),” they was troubled by how “the law had been used to oppress gay people.” As someone who had lived through the HIV epidemic in the 1980s and 1990s, they had witnessed how the lack of legal
recognition could impact same-sex couples in practical ways such as the right to visit a partner in hospital and to be in charge of a funeral. They believed that having marriage rights would “improve the quality of life for same-sex couples.” Their faith has been one of their motivations in caring about LGBTQ+ rights. They has strongly felt that being a faithful Christian and an advocate for LGBTQ+ rights was “consistent with the message of Jesus Christ.”

They added that activism has always been central to UFMCC as a denomination, just as it has been in parts of the broader Christian church. For example, they referenced Tommy Douglas, a Christian minister leading up to his political career, and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., as spiritual leaders who were invested in political activism. MCC Toronto follows in the tradition of fighting for “equality” and “human rights,” and “standing up for the poor and the disenfranchised.” In fact, they pointed out that “[i]t wasn't emperors that embraced Christianity originally, it was slaves and other outcasts that took up Christianity as a faith.” To the informant, “it is absolutely central to [MCC Toronto’s] identity that [it be] a church that is committed to an active human rights agenda in the community, not just in our church, but in the street, out in the world, promoting the dignity of every human being and God’s love for everyone.”

In terms of (the change in leadership), although MCC Toronto “has done quite all right… [it was] definitely a difficult transition.” The informant stated that despite ample notification given to the church, some of the congregation members “have gone dark,” either because they worried about the consequences for the church or because they could not accept the transition.

(Under the previous leadership), the informant noted that they used to often say to the church leadership that MCC Toronto was “failing in [the church’s] mission, because if you looked around the church, it was extremely white, even though Toronto was more than 50 per cent non-white.” (Now), the church is “more diverse than it used to be.” The informant added
that they believes (current leadership is right) for MCC Toronto. It is “energetic,” “dynamic,” “spiritual,” and “has a commitment to important social justice issues that really didn't hit the radar screen (previously).” For example, the issue of including two-spirited people and Indigenous issues (have moved) to the forefront of the church’s attention.

**Informant Three**

The informant was referred to me as someone who could speak about the church’s (activities). When asked about their motivation for being involved with the (activities), they noted that the Christian teaching of “radical love and agape” is the “driving force behind the spiritual work and the concrete work that [activity] does.” Agape, according to the informant means “being able to love other people [at] the expense of your own life, the way that Jesus did.” It also means “not being afraid to speak up in the face of injustice.” It is about “actions” and “sacrifice” that one makes to improve someone else’s quality of life. The informant sees this type of love at MCC Toronto as more than an emotion; it is “a way to be in this world, a way to act in this world”. Ultimately, the informant stated that while bringing about systemic change is essential, they does it because they “care[s] about relationships” and they wants to create a better world to live in for the people they loves. For the informant, systemic change and personal relationship go hand in hand, and the driving force for doing large-scale societal change and relational work is love.

However, they made an important distinction between Christianity as a “colonial project” and qualified that the informant follows “mostly the teachings” of the faith. The informant added that being a Christian is a personal calling, and they does not believe in “imposing this calling to other people.” Not everyone in the (activity) is Christian-identified or has a faith. According to
the informant, what is important is that people doing the work share the same values and make everyone in their space feel comfortable.

The informant stated that the guiding values of the (activity) are “empowerment,” “transparency,” “solidarity instead of charity,” “equity,” “social justice,” and “compassion and kindness.”

According to the informant, “empowerment” is about providing people with tools to make their own choices and build their own future. Something as simple as explaining to someone what a food bank is can make a big difference. In another example, as has been noted for immigrants in the literature, being ignored or silenced is an all-too-common experience going through services in Canada (Yan, Anucha, & George, 2017). That is why, for the informant, letting people make their own decisions and talk for themselves is a crucial component of how they works.

Being “transparent” by sharing any information available with the (people) is an important aspect of building trust and making the (people) feel safe.

The informant noted that the notion of “solidarity instead of charity” is about making support and help a mutual endeavour. The informant believes that they contributes to (people’s) wellbeing just as much as the (people) contribute to theirs. The informant argued that “solidarity” implies that “you are part of my body and I am part of you. And when you suffer, I suffer. And when you thrive, I thrive.” On the other hand, the “charity” model assumes that “you have all the needs, I don’t have the needs, and I provide for those needs.”

Nevertheless, as much as the (activity) seeks to work from a solidarity framework, it acknowledges that power imbalances exist in the relationships between staff/volunteers and (people). The (activity) thus tries to apply the value of “equity” whenever possible by constantly
being cognizant of and asking questions about “where those powers and imbalances [are] and how can we address this?”

On a broader scale, the “social justice” lens makes them pay attention to where “the system fails, understanding where the gaps are, [and] understanding where we have power to make those changes.”

The values of “compassion and kindness” are about meeting people “where they’re at and accompanying them in the path of liberation towards being able to express themselves fully.” According to the informant, experience of “compassion and kindness” is especially important for people who have lived with internalized homo/trans phobia.

The informant noted that one of the rewards of doing this work is the deeply meaningful relationships that they get to build with people. By walking along (people), they get to see them overcome challenges and flourish. This transformation gives, the informant claimed, tremendous satisfaction in doing this work.

At the same time, the informant also said that a major challenge of the work involves not having the resources to address the needs that they knows exist. For example, they pointed out that there are unmet mental health needs in the LGBTQ+ community that must be addressed. Other challenges include (common anti-LGBTQ+ and anti-immigrant rhetoric). They attributed the rhetoric to the scarcity mentality that people have. The informant believed that capitalism puts us in competition for basic needs, and if there was a “real distribution of wealth,” there would be enough for everybody. Other personal challenges included setting boundaries. As someone who periodically suffers from depression and anxiety, bearing witness to the suffering of people that they cares about has been emotionally taxing.
According to the informant, creating a safe space for people to connect with each other and form friendships and build community is very important for the (activity). Supporting (people) is not simply about getting them through the process. There is an effort made to learn each others’ names and to stay connected. Celebrating milestones and each others’ birthdays are other ways to build a community where people feel they belong.

Although building community internally with (people) is important, so is “building community with others outside of the (activities) and outside of MCC Toronto,” such as extended queer, racialized communities. The informant added that they has become good friends with the leaders of partner organizations through work activities. They have become each other’s “chosen families” as allies and shared dreams and visions. The informant noted that “if relationships weren't the center of this work, then [I] wouldn't be doing it.”

The informant believed that although the church had come a long way in advocating for the rights of homosexuals, there is still work left to do. They especially noted that there is an important role for the church to play around anti-racism by educating congregants; revisiting its own policies, guidelines, and structures; and calling the government to do transformative work in Canada’s institutions. They asserted that MCC Toronto must continuously evaluate itself to ensure that racism is not perpetuated in the church space and that the church continues to be a healing space for racist people and people experiencing racism.

The informant noted that (past leadership) has shown them and countless others in the community tremendous kindness. And although MCC Toronto has helped make significant headway on LGBTQ+ rights under their leadership, the informant also felt that (past leadership) had limitations. For example, as (an) activist, they noted that the church has not stood up for the rights of (my community). According to the informant, the church space has not been “100 per
cent comfortable” with (my community’s) views, so they have kept their activism outside of the church and maintained silence within MCC Toronto. In this regard, the informant noted that (past leadership) was a “product of Canadian society…” Instead of relying on the church to take on (my community’s) activism, the informant has opted to be “strategic” in advocating for (their community within the church).

The informant also added that they did not think (past leadership) did enough when it came to standing up for Black Lives Matter (BLM). This was in reference to the incident during the 2016 Pride parade in which members of the BLM Toronto group halted the parade for about 30 minutes while demanding that Pride Toronto no longer have police floats, and that they hold a public town hall with groups such as BLM Toronto, and that they prioritize the hiring of Black transgender women and Indigenous people (CBC News, 2016a). The parade did not resume until Pride Toronto Executive Director Matthieu Chantelois signed a memorandum agreeing to the group’s demands (CBC News, 2016a).

The informant contrasted (past leadership’s) conciliatory approach to earlier radical style of activism. They stated that (past leadership) wanted to “build bridges between BLM, racialized communities, and the police” rather than “amplif[y] the voices of the people who actually need those changes to happen.” By doing so, the informant thought that (past leadership) worked in a way that put (past leadership) at the center of the proposed change process, and to them, this was a missed opportunity for the church to stand in solidarity with racial minorities.

**Informant Four**

The informant first heard about MCC Toronto when they was working (elsewhere). Two of their staff were picked up during the 1980s bathhouse raids. They was expected to fire them, but they refused. They had heard about (past leadership’s) advocacy work, and it had a lasting
positive impression on them. They saw (past leadership as practicing what was preached). Their children say that this was the beginning of their social justice work. They got involved with the church in (early 2000s and joined as a member years later).

This informant discussed the importance of “faith in action.” As a long-time member of MCC Toronto, they believe that “if Jesus walked into MCC Toronto or Regent Park, he’d feel quite at home because there's nobody doing things to be seen,” but rather doing them for the “right reason.” To them, MCC Toronto is more than just a “gay church,” it is a place “for all people, every faith, gender” where everyone is welcome. They further added, “I don't think God or Allah or Jesus cares what labels we put on ourselves. It's the way we’re living [emphasis added].” They try to understand different cultures and religions and build relationships with people who are not like them. This “intention,” the purpose-driven, deliberate taking of action, is very important to them. They explained that it is not enough to attend church service weekly or say, “I will do this,” what is important is that “you’ve got to live it now.” As an expression of their faith in action, they have been involved with the (activity), especially in the late 1990s as a (mentor). They have also been teaching English, sewing, and knitting for participants at (another church) for over a decade.

**Highlights of Considerations on Praxis of Love**

This section highlights what I understood to be the important messages from MCC Toronto for considering and carrying out praxis of love.

**Faith in Action**

Christian faith is a key motivation in being involved with the praxis of love taking place at MCC Toronto or at other spaces outside of the church. Their understanding of their faith focused on the teaching of love embodied in Jesus Christ, rather than the church as an institution.
The love that motivates them is one that is practical and concrete, leading to action and change in the world.

**Seeking Justice**

Although Jesus’ teaching of love is an important motivation, so are ideas such as the anti-oppressive framework, which seeks to address power imbalance in institutions and society and to remove barriers that lead to systemic oppression. Values of equity, social justice, solidarity, and empowerment flow from an anti-oppressive understanding of how power functions at an individual, group, and societal level. To these informants, Christianity is not in opposition, but rather complementary to their motivation to seek justice.

**Love Grounded in Relationships**

Love is grounded in interpersonal relationships that are mutual and reciprocal. Love accepts other people for who they are. Love treats others as equals. The informants rejected the idea of giving a hand-out as an act of charity. Significantly, none of the informants mentioned excellence in clinical skills or professional competence as driving forces in their work, an idea that is often found in the social services and healthcare literature (Kottler & Jones, 2003; Srivastava, 2007).

**Community**

Religion has long been criticized for being exclusionary in order to enforce orthodoxy; the informants rejected such religious dogmatism, and sought to create a space of where everyone, irrespective of their relationship with Jesus Christ, is welcome. The informants noted that MCC Toronto should be a place where members experience inclusion and belonging.
Facing Aggression

One challenge in engaging in praxis of love is that people experience aggression and violence, as when Rev. Hawkes had to wear a bulletproof vest while officiating a wedding ceremony and the congregation had to endure homophobic slurs in their own sanctuary. Other forms of aggression were also noted. Informants shared that they find it difficult to listen to anti-racist, homophobic, or transphobic rhetoric because, as one person put it, “when you suffer, I suffer.” Engaging in praxis of love means that one comes to love and care for the other. And facing the ugliness of humanity and raw evil is a dimension of doing this work.

Sometimes, aggression may come from among those engaging in praxis of love. There are persistent ongoing challenges and costs when dealing with issues of personalities, politics, and self-interest. What one believes to be justice may not coincide with what the other person believes. In a praxis that aims to intervene in external realities, doers often face pressures and struggles intensely from parties pushing and pulling in different directions. The internal and external political pressures seem to be inherent in the arena of political activism and need to be manageable within a real-world praxis.

Making Change Non-Violently

Despite the opposition that people doing this work face, MCC Toronto and the informants’ stories suggest that making nonviolent change is possible. Rev. Hawkes’ public struggles provide good examples. He adopted tactics like those used by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference fighting for civil rights in the 1960s United States. He handcuffed himself to the Ontario legislature railing until his demand was heard. He fasted for 25 days demanding a public inquiry into the bathhouse raid. And he participated in numerous sit-ins and protests together with thousands of other LGBTQ+ members and their allies demanding equal
rights. As noted by the informants, the fight is not over yet, but these efforts were not wasted, as LGBTQ+ people in Canada enjoy better rights compared with 10, 20, or 30 years ago.

**Pressures of Being on The Pedestal**

Despite the (former leadership’s) long career as a spiritual leader and activist, they was not always regarded as good enough. As noted by one of the informants, they was criticized for their perceived complicity related to the Toronto Police Service and their lack of enthusiasm in defending BLM. Not only this, but there was some criticism over the lack of diversity in the church during his tenure. Though they was acquitted in 2017, the sexual assault scandal damaged their reputation.

People come to idealize people engaging in praxis of love. People want them to love unconditionally, to have a flawless character, to be stronger—these are god-like qualities and impossible for humans to embody perfectly. Doers can be motivated by praxis of love and make mistakes. Most or all will slip, sometimes seriously, over time. If people are idealizing doers as heroes, then perhaps, it is not the doers’ fault when unrealistic expectations eventually hit the wall of reality.

A pedestal is an uncomfortable place to occupy. Doers are humans who have responded to the call to be heroes, upon whom we project our hopes and dreams (Becker, 1973). When they disappoint us, we are challenged to reconcile the good and the bad, the light and the shadow, the contributions and the damages. There needs to be compassion for dealing with human frailty.

**Transfer of Authority**

Because doers are such dedicated—and, often, charismatic—public-facing figures, their initiatives often become synonymous with them. It can be difficult for them to transition out of their role, to step out of the limelight, to relinquish control over resources and decisions, and to
trust others to forge ahead. Even if the task is purportedly a collective responsibility, transfers of power from the doer or originator may be resisted. The centrality of a charismatic doer can make it difficult for others to accept new realities or for successors to establish themselves and seek new directions. A considered, careful philosophy and policy around the transfer of responsibility is important if the initiative is to prosper after the doer’s era ends.
Chapter Nine: Conclusion

The dissertation journey started with my dissatisfaction with the world of social services. On the surface, I was frustrated with the true value of professional service and questioned whether my work was having any positive impact. As I kept wrestling with the question, I realized that I was looking for something much more fundamental. I wanted to imagine an alternative to the way we have come to care for one another. I wished to understand human relationships that were respectful, restorative, and responsive. As someone whose spirituality was formed in the Christian tradition, my attention turned to the works of Jane Addams, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Jr., Jean Vanier, and Mary Jo Leddy. The “doers,” as I have come to refer them, were innovators in spirituality and public initiatives. Whenever I was wavering in my commitment to care, these doers provided me with wisdom and models of practice motivated by love. Drawing from the works of the doers, I developed the original faith-inspired praxis of love framework. I then set out to explore how the framework is reflected in the everyday realities of people who are not as well-known as the doers, but who nonetheless are inspired by their faith to care about their neighbours.

In this chapter, I highlight topics that were not addressed in my original framework. The conversations I had with people while walking down the alleyways of Toronto and the observations I made witnessing the work of people in various settings have afforded me new insights into a praxis of love. Prior to the case studies, my understanding of a praxis of love was rather idealistic. I wrote about the beauty of work inspired by love. I still believe these efforts are beautiful, but the case studies helped me gain a more complex understanding of a praxis of love and its everyday applications. People candidly shared with me the sacrifices they made, the daily
challenges they encountered, and how their praxis engagements were not always “pleasant or satisfying.”

I believe a praxis of love offers a framework to guide a valuable helping process. By emphasizing faith as a key motivation, the framework offers insight into how faith can connect people and offer a source of positive inspiration. Some of the literature tends to present religion in a critical light, suggesting that it is backwards or promotes discrimination (Dawkins, 2006; Harris, 2004; Hitchens, 2007). While I do not deny evident failures in some faith-based institutions and communities, the focus of this project is on positive contributions made by everyday people for whom faith is an important source of love and hope. And by reporting on praxis of love initiatives, and the people working in such sites, I wish to illustrate some of the strengths and challenges of engaging in faith-inspired work in contemporary settings.

I also believe that it is important to discuss the burden of ordinary people who are trying to engage in a praxis of love. People discussed the challenges that they experienced in trying to follow their Christian ideals. Faith often took people to places that were less common. Despite their struggles, people shared why they believed in the work that they did and explained their commitments. I see them as unsung heroes experimenting with alternative ways to connect and to build relationships and communities. Faith-inspired praxis of love as a guide to relating and building connections has not received sufficient attention in the literature. I believe that it is important to reflect on this model.
Faith’s Inspiration and Burden

For people engaging in a praxis of love, faith provides a foundation for these people’s core beliefs and values. It provides a structure for understanding love and directions for how it can be practiced in everyday life. Like the rays of sunlight that sustain a tree, faith nourishes them.

It is important to note that faith is not just an individual experience (e.g., personal values and meaning, one’s personal relationship with God, individual spiritual practices, etc.), but also a collective experience (e.g., shared values and meaning, community life, religious teaching, etc.). So, while faith provides the core beliefs and principles, the communal aspects of undertaking a praxis of love instil and reinforce the importance of loving others and applying the teachings. The individual and collective dimensions work in tandem to ground the person in making sense of their faith in everyday practice.

While many who were interviewed in this study noted that their Christian faith provided the beginning of a process for praxis of love, faith was not limited to the wisdom tradition. People drew from their wisdom tradition while also drawing from other sources of non-Christian inspiration.

The communal expression of faith among those engaging in praxis of love could be overtly Christian. For example, staff members at Sanctuary and MCC Toronto engage in worship services on Sundays and may pray for one another during their team meetings. Such communal expression of faith was also observed in the initiatives of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Dorothy Day. However, it is worth noting that the expression of faith need not be overtly religious in the praxis of love. At the Sanctuary, the value of community and friendship is expressed at the drop-ins as they partake in family-style dinners. At The Working Centre, the values and virtues
considered important to the organization (e.g., work as gift, rejecting status, living simply, serving others, building community, and ecological works of mercy) are woven through various community activities and platforms such as Good Work News, the quarterly newsletter, the collection of books for sale at the Queen Street Commons Café, and the Mayor’s Dinner, the annual fundraiser.

Faith-inspired values are communicated among one another verbally as well as in the ways that people treat one another and the types of projects that are initiated. Those engaging in a praxis of love in these investigations generally were not members of a profession with codified ethics and standards of practice. The collective aspect of praxis of love helps to communicate and reinforce the shared values, core beliefs, and principles that sustain people. Shared faith also helps those who do not associate with the Christian faith to understand the values of the group in ways that are relevant to their everyday practice.

Faith also provides hope within a praxis of love. People discussed being discouraged or distressed by the realities that they confront. For example, Martin Luther King, Jr., frequently wrote about the plight of the African-Americans and poor people in the United States. Those at MCC Toronto discussed the stigma and discrimination affecting the LGBTQ+ community. Faith, whether it means a personal relationship with God or being part of the faith community, helps people to focus on things that are considered important. King’s “I Have a Dream” speech captures this sense of optimism, which is sustained by his faith in God and a vision of a better tomorrow. At the individual level, faith can provide the hopeful thoughts reflected in people’s beliefs that one can find pathways to desired goals and their motivation to use these pathways (Snyder et al., 1991). It is easy for those sharing a hot meal with hungry people to feel the effort is not worthwhile. A single meal may not make much of a difference in a chronically homeless
person’s life. The planetary environmental challenges we face today can seem too big of a challenge for an individual. However, many people whom I met in the field spoke about not giving up. Faith can help people persevere through hard times and stay optimistic.

Macy and Johnstone (2012) point to “active hope,” the type of hope that is a sustained practice. Through supportive relationships, people become part of bringing about collective hopes. Hope in a praxis of love is generated and sustained through seeking company, sources of support, tools, and insights that help on our journey.

Similar to how hope is expressed through actions, love is a reality experienced in people’s lives. Love is not just an ideal or an emotion; it is practical with real-life implications. Love could be demonstrated in ways that are as simple as spending time together to share a cup of tea. Love could also be one’s life mission. What is important is that it is actionable and relational. The people I spoke with at MCC Toronto do not think it is enough to tweet about LGBTQ+ refugee rights, but believe it is necessary to take concrete actions to sponsor, support, and welcome refugees to their community. Rev. Hawkes did not only preach about Christ’s love. He wore a bullet-proof jacket during the first same-sex matrimonial ceremony to demonstrate the extent to which he was willing to affirm the humanity and wholeness of sexual and gender minorities.

For people engaging in a faith-inspired praxis of love, love is a way of living rather than an approach to helping. To love one’s neighbours is not a preference or opinion but ideally a lifelong aspiration. For those involved with Romero House and MCC Toronto Refugee Program, welcoming strangers, becoming neighbours, and walking with refugees are seen as a way of life reflected in actions.
To say that faith-inspired praxis of love is a way of life implies that it is based on a disciplined reflection about faith. This happens individually and collectively. A way of living is not a destination or an event. Such continuous engagement with ideals poses difficult standards to meet. There often are tremendous strains and pressures to live up to personal and collective Christian ideals. Participants discussed feeling burned out, experiencing primary and second trauma, as well as needing to take time off to ensure that they had the strength to carry on. For example, participants said they would purposefully not engage in volunteer work that was emotionally taxing or that they would make sure to be out of town on breaks so they would not be pulled into emergency situations. Some indicated the importance of taking regular breaks to rest and recover.

Some people that I interviewed also expressed concern about the “hypocrisy” of fellow Christians when it came to living out the faith. Some at the Sanctuary stated that they had a difficult time relating with Christians who are comfortable in their “middle-class environments.” Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote the Letter from Birmingham City Jail in response to fellow Christian clergymen who, in an open letter, condemned the Birmingham protests as “unwise and untimely,” and urged the civil rights activists to engage in local negotiations and the court process rather than protest. In a letter explaining why the civil rights movement could no longer wait, King (1963) wrote,

I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership of this community would see the justice of our cause and, with deep moral concern, would serve as the channel through which our just grievances could reach the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed. (para, 28).
Similarly, the paradox of their faith was too familiar to members of the MCC. The strongest opponents to the legalization of same-sex marriage were fellow Christians who had a narrow definition of marriage as an institution.

While Christianity serves as a strong motivation, religion is not the only source of faith in a praxis of love. People draw from a mix of ideas that are relevant to their area of praxis. Such inspiration can help them reflect on their praxis, imitate those that embody the values of love, and learn from others that have walked a similar path. Just as King was inspired by Gandhi’s message and his practice of satyagraha—nonviolent resistance—drawing from various philosophies and approaches can broaden one’s understanding of the complexities surrounding praxis. Ideals, values, and principles can be drawn from secular literature, art, and philosophies. As observed at Sanctuary, for those working closely with individuals living with addictions, people often seek training in mental health services, harm reduction, and naloxone use. The Working Centre draws from the teachings of Indigenous thinkers and elders about concern for ecology. Whether Indigenous, secular, or scientific approaches to human problems, all commonly provide valuable additions to practical applications of a praxis of love.

**Reciprocal Relationships**

A praxis of love places a heavy emphasis on reciprocal relationships; people support one another through mutual care and friendship. In this relational model, the distinction between the “giver” and the “receiver” found in traditional caregiving or helping relationship is less apparent. Instead, ideally, people with diverse abilities and gifts share life together and, in the process, come to be recognized by diverse aspects of their selves.

Some understood this type of relationship as being “friends” and others used terms of such as “community members.” Even though people involved in a praxis of love had official job
titles such as “Executive Director,” “Nurse,” “Housing Worker,” or “Employment Counsellor,” they shied away from using these titles. They preferred to refer to each other by their first names instead of job titles. They believed that formal titles and responsibilities were needed to run organizations and projects effectively (e.g., an Executive Director to sign funding contracts on behalf of the organization, a Housing Worker to assist people in accessing housing resources, or a nurse to provide specialized wound care), but the titles were ideally representative of their gifts, rather than their status within the organization or project.

Relationships in a praxis of love look markedly different from professional helping relationships. In a praxis of love, people with diverse abilities and gifts can ideally contribute to relationships in different ways. Every person, no matter his or her level of wealth, intelligence, physical abilities or social status, has something to offer others. This aspiration is most evident at L’Arche, where people with and without intellectual disability share life in communities of friendship and belonging.

In a praxis of love framework, relationships are grounded in notions of companionship. “Companion,” from Latin, is made up of com (“together with”) and panis (“bread”); it refers to someone one can share a meal with as an equal (Wolfelt, 2016). Companionship requires sitting together, being present to one another, walking together, and sharing multiple aspects of living. Companionship is not about assessing, fixing, or resolving another’s problems. Instead, it is about orienting oneself towards another and being together.

Because companionship relationships are non-hierarchical, in a praxis of love, “being with” is strongly preferred over “doing for.” For example, although staff members at Sanctuary coordinate the provision of hot meals for their community members, the meal is prepared together with the community members, and all sit side-by-side and share the food. In the process,
both “giver” and “receiver” offer something of the self to the other, without expecting in return something of equal or similar value (Wondra, 2004).

Reciprocal relationships present a unique set of rewards and costs. First, interviewees in this study indicated that they experienced joy in their relationships. Many indicated that they enjoyed the sense of care and belonging that one often experiences in companionship. They appreciated feeling seen and loved for who they were, rather than for what they were doing or could provide. For example, a staff member at Sanctuary who had children noted that community members regularly cared for (person’s) children and asked about their wellbeing. Another staff member stated that the companions at the site helped (person) cope with the traumas of losing loved ones.

However, there are also costs that come with such reciprocal relationships. Sharing a close bond with another person requires commitment. Such depth in relationships does not happen quickly. People need time to get to know each other. One needs to be available, investing time and emotions. It requires that people engaging in a praxis of love be ready to make a significant investment in developing such relationships. Staff members at The Working Centre and Sanctuary sometimes stated that they saw their jobs as a life-long vocation.

Reciprocal relationships can also be emotionally demanding, as they require authenticity. People are encouraged to be transparent about their imperfections. Mary Jo Leddy noted that it is difficult to fake oneself when living with others in close quarters for a sustained period of time. In like manner, the staff at The Working Centre and Sanctuary also shared that they needed to bring their “whole selves” to work, because if they did not, people would notice and wonder what was wrong.
Unlike professional helping relationships, which typically keep personal matters separate from work, those engaging in a praxis of love strive for wholeness in theirs. In *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*, Palmer (2004) wrote,

> Wholeness does not mean perfection: it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life. Knowing this gives me hope that human wholeness—mine, yours, ours—need not be a utopian dream, if we can use devastation as a seedbed for new life. (p. 4)

Bringing the whole self to a place of employment can be challenging. There will be times when reciprocal relationships conflict with the demands of employment. For those engaging in praxis of love at work, formal employment requirements must be balanced against aspirations to cultivate reciprocal relationships.

**Shared Affection**

Several praxis of love initiatives emphasized a shared affection. The subject of the affection varied depending on the initiative. At Hull House, the residents and the recently arrived European immigrants who made up the majority of the neighbourhood people shared an affection for the Near West Side of Chicago. The residents hosted social and history classes, facilitated art activities, and held concerts. While the residents tended to be “from more privileged backgrounds” than the neighbours, they aspired to cross the social chasm through joint activities. They worked together to improve the conditions of their neighbourhood and the surrounding area.

At L’Arche, assistants and the members share an affection for sharing their life together. The members, people with learning disabilities, and assistants share responsibilities around the home according to their unique capacities while emphasizing a shared sense of belonging. Each L’Arche community has its own rituals of connection, such as sharing a meal daily or celebrating
one another’s birthdays, to make time to share joy, create shared meaning, and enjoy each other’s company. Rituals and traditions symbolize a shared identity and values that bring the community members together.

Similarly, Mary Jo Leddy emphasized the importance of shared affection for the street on which Romero House stands. Reflecting on her experience living at Romero House, she stated: “What we shared in common was the street, the space in between us that no one owned, but all of us were responsible for” (Leddy, 2020). She adds that while the intensity of the neighbours’ involvement may not be the same as that of Romero House staff and interns, the neighbours are involved in the lives of the refugees who live on Wanda Street. On this street, the neighbours get to know each other and try to contribute to one another’s wellbeing by assisting with job searches, inviting the children to a play date, and meeting other needs as they arise. The support is not a charitable act nor an obligation, but a shared affection for the wellbeing of the people with whom they share the street. To celebrate their shared affection, the Wanda Street neighbours host an annual street party.

At Sanctuary, the street-involved community in the downtown core convenes regularly at weekly drop-ins. Staff members do not share a living space with community members, but emphasize sharing life through sustained friendship. Daily, cooperatively prepared, “family style” dinners are shared. In doing so, the Sanctuary aspires to provide a refuge in the form of a physical space and interpersonal connections. They share an affection for their friendships and community space.

The perceived benefits of shared affection are several. When people share a common affection for a house, street, neighbourhood, or community, the responsibility to improve its
conditions is shared among many; people can be united around what they are for rather than against. In togetherness, people can face life’s challenges and overcome a sense of alienation.

There are also challenges to sharing affection. At L’Arche, thousands of assistants aspire to be part of an inclusive community. Most of them are in their teens or early 20s and leave within their first two or three years (Vanier, 2004). According to Thérèse Vanier (2004), the founder of L’Arche in the United Kingdom and the sister of Jean Vanier, when assistants are exhausted, “there has nearly always been a component of difficult, intense relationships in which the assistant feels emotionally drained, almost to the point of feeling that their inner space has been invaded” (p. 102). Being close to one another can create opportunities, not only to wound, but also to reveal one’s insecurities. For example, when an assistant witnesses a community member being treated poorly by their parents, it can awaken feelings of fear and pain if the assistant has suffered even a remotely similar experience. Moreover, Thérèse Vanier (2004) adds that “assistants are often young and idealistic and feel that relationships are all-important” (p. 101). Prioritizing relationships at the cost of administrative duties can create tensions for the leaders as they try to supervise the assistants.

Similar struggles have been noted in other initiatives. For example, Sanctuary staff indicated that, despite trying to create a shared space of belonging, they constantly struggled with the marked differences in authority and living circumstances between themselves and community members. Staff have jobs, and most have stable ways of living. Community members typically do not. Staff also have the responsibility and the authority to exclude community members who are disruptive or a danger to others.

While a shared affection among a group of people can create a sense of solidarity and cohesion, a praxis of love must not overlook the struggles that come with it. A reflection on the
procedures around setting healthy and appropriate boundaries is needed. This will especially be the case in settings where paid staff are working or living side by side with those who are considered members of the community.

**Human Frailty**

Other-regarding love is a primary value of a praxis of love framework, but people engaging in it are fallible human beings. Despite the best of intentions, they still fall short of ideals and feel significant pressure to live up to their aspirations. The pressure may be external (what others expect) and internal (what oneself expects “should” or “must” be done).

People in these investigations often talked about the challenges of trying to live by their faith-inspired values. A praxis of love involves sharing ourselves. This makes it imperative for people to care for themselves and to create time and space so they can rest and rejuvenate. When we are struggling internally, we may experience burnout or compassion fatigue, which will impact ourselves and those around us negatively. Some indicated that they felt guilty for not being emotionally available for their families when they returned home from work. Others reached out to trauma therapists, team members, or mentors to process difficult emotions.

The pressure was especially true for doers who were confronting very high expectations—perhaps to the point of not being allowed to have frailties. Occupying the public-facing space can lead to many identifying their hopes and dreams with the persona of the doer. A doer may become unwilling to relinquish the authority or attention attached to their position. These high expectations make it hard for them and others to reconcile that, while doers may be extraordinary, they will still make mistakes and cannot always be behaviourally or ethically appropriate.
Many schools and organizations named after Jean Vanier quickly renounced their affiliation with him and changed their organizations’ names after report of his sexual misconduct came out. Martin Luther King Jr. was dismissed by some because of claims of multiple marital infidelities. Yet expectations of perfection for ourselves or our role models ignore the realities of life. We need to consider whether a fault or even non-acceptable action necessarily negates all of the good intentions and activities connected with ourselves or others. There needs to be a place for compassion and redemption when we cannot live up to our ideals.

People engaging in a praxis of love need to acknowledge human limitations. When people make a mistake, it is important that there be a process to restore that person’s humanity. There is a social media trend demanding people who say and have done objectionable things be ‘de-platformed,’ stripping them of speaking engagements and reputation (Henley, 2021, para. 1). As the writer Adrienne Maree Brown states, when people make mistakes, we need to challenge the thought that “we can dispose of each other and that will dispose of the problem” (Brown, 2021, as cited in Henley, 2021, para. 4). People are not objects and should not be treated as such.

When people make a mistake, due process needs to be exercised. We must exercise a loving mindset with the goal of healing—for those who have been harmed and those who have harmed. Even when people are found to have done wrong, there needs to be a process of restoration that respects the inherent dignity and worth of the person and welcomes him or her back to the community.

We must also not lose sight of all that those who have erred have done in their work, nor be blinded by a single act or weakness. Jean Vanier may have become diminished for many of us, but it warrants asking whether L’Arche is now without value or whether Vanier did not make valuable contributions to its creation and maintenance. The civil rights movement in the United
States engaged in difficult, even unsavoury struggles. Martin Luther King and other movement leaders had clear limitations and frailties. Yet most of us would agree that their struggles for civil rights were needed and helpful. Some of us might argue that the failings were also unavoidable. A praxis of love has to accommodate human frailties.

**Shared Responsibility**

Because no one person “owns” a praxis of love initiative, successfully transferring authority needs to be carefully considered. The doer was inevitably the main focus and the driving force in originating the initiatives that we reviewed. Yet, in the long run, initiatives have to be owned by the participants and staff who will sustain them. However, because the doers are the ones familiar to the public and seen by many participants as the essential driving force, the initiatives and their identities often seem inseparable. This was the case of Jane Addams and the settlement movement, Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement, and Martin Luther King, Jr. and the civil rights movement. Such close identification makes it difficult for the doers to transition out of their role. Most of the doers in these investigations recognized this principle of shared responsibility and strived in various ways to make the transition to cooperative leadership happen.

To transfer responsibility means stepping out of the limelight, relinquishing control over resources and decisions, and trusting others to take care of the initiative. It can be seductive to a doer to remain the centre of attention and to want recognition. The doer may also come to believe that they can do what needs to be done better than anyone else. Such belief may result in the doer depriving others of opportunities to share the responsibilities.

Part of what is being passed on is a set of values and ways of working that motivated the birth of the initiative. Transferring responsibility and leadership is an essential component of a
praxis of love approach if the initiative is to outlive the involvement of the doer or expand beyond the capacity of a single person to initiate and sustain. For example, when the main benefactors of Hull House, Jane Addams and Mary Rozet Smith, passed on, Hull House came to mainly depend on government subsidies. When public funding was reduced, Hull House filed for bankruptcy, and eventually closed in 2012. Similarly, Greg Paul, aware of the importance of sharing leadership responsibilities, tried to avoid attending fundraising events to ensure that he did not remain the central figure associated with the Sanctuary.

Sharing responsibility is not easy. Communal ownership brings with it a new set of challenges. For instance, Sanctuary has set up a Leadership Group to share and support the Executive Director’s decision-making authority. The benefit of this process is that a decision is carefully considered with input of various perspectives; however, a difficulty is that the decision takes a long time. Not only does it take time to listen and money to pay the staff engaged in these conversations, it also takes energy to listen well and ensure that relationships are not damaged along the way.

Resistance to transferring authority may come from the community or the doer. At the MCC Toronto, Rev. Brent Hawkes had been the central figure in the life of the church for a long time, and some members struggled with the idea of a new leader. At another site, the doer expressed concerns that others could adequately support the efforts going forward. From our point of view, efforts to develop communal capabilities and a willingness to trust others with shepherdng the initiatives is critical for most praxis of love initiatives. But such transfers are emotionally and intellectually challenging and ongoing. And they will change as participants and circumstances change.
Promoting Change

A focus on fostering positive changes in the broader social and political environments is required in a praxis of love framework. All of the praxis of love initiatives considered in the literature review and field investigations had making improvements in the community a core ambition. Perhaps this is not surprising, given that the original criteria for selecting praxis of love initiatives was bringing a new positive initiative into being.

However, there was a broad range and substantial variety in how various initiatives approached political and social change. All initiatives articulated a vision of what the doers wanted to create and why this was preferable to existing conditions. This vision motivated and guided their efforts, and they hoped to encourage others to follow a similar path. King’s vision of racial justice moved many people across the racial spectrum and around the world. Some, such as L’Arche communities and Romero House, explicitly tried to create new ways of working and living to reflect their vision and to model new realities for others. Others saw a major pathway to social and political change through creating a variety of new community resources that reflected their vision and to make the communities better places to live. For example, The Working Centre’s Job Search Resource Centre compiles and makes resources available to assist people looking for work. The Commons Studio and Recycle Cycles are other examples in which The Working Centre tries to widely share community resources. Doers such as Addams tried to influence public policy through lobbying and advocacy work. A few, such as King and Hawkes, focused primarily on changing oppressive social conditions through direct social and political action, which often involved active civil disobedience activities and disruptions of the status quo. Most praxis of love initiatives in these investigations had their own combination of these
approaches, but all have social and political change as a core focus. It is a basic element in a praxis of love framework.

**An Updated Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love Framework**

I undertook the thesis to develop a conceptual framework to understand and to guide the type of practice that is inspired by faith and driven by love. The gap in the literature was a lack of focus on the role these motivations play in helping practice. I set out to look for illustrations in the literature that resulted in the original faith-inspired praxis of love framework presented in Chapter Three. Building on the original framework, I also examined how faith-inspired praxis of love was reflected in selected contemporary initiatives.

This chapter summarized the new insights gained from the case studies of current praxis of love initiatives. What I observed led to a more nuanced and applied understanding of praxis of love realities. What I present below is an evolved conceptual framework of faith-inspired praxis of love.
Figure 4

An Organic Perspective on Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love
### Table 5

**Definition of Praxis of Love Elements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Foundational Elements</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith</td>
<td>While people draw from their wisdom tradition, they also draw from other sources of inspiration. Faith provides a foundation for people’s core beliefs and values. Faith inspires the nature of love that to be pursued and praxis. Faith can be a motivation as well as a source of challenge in carrying out praxis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Love is a life-long commitment to care for others’ wellbeing. Love energizes praxis. Conceptions of love affect how praxis is carried out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praxis</td>
<td>Praxis is the process through which one’s faith and love are expressed through action. Praxis is the synthesis of faith and love in everyday application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Operational Elements</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reciprocal Relationships</td>
<td>People support one another through mutual care. Relationship is non-hierarchical and focused on companionship. Reciprocal relationships take time and energy to develop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Affection</td>
<td>People share an affection for something they have in common. People are united around what they are for rather than against. Setting healthy and appropriate boundaries among members can be a challenge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>Hospitality is the intentional encountering of those who are different and unfamiliar into a shared space. A balance between welcoming the new and preserving tradition and legacy is required.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Frailty</td>
<td>When people make mistakes in the context of a praxis of love, they acknowledge errors as part of our humanity. They strive respond with a process of restoration and healing of the person(s) who has been affected by the mistake as well as the person who has made it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared Responsibility</td>
<td>The motivation is to share responsibility in managing the initiative. A praxis of love strives to carefully consider and plan the responsible transfer of authority from the originator/doer to the next general of leader(s). When the hand-over is not carried out, the risk is that the initiative may not survive the doer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonviolence</td>
<td>Nonviolence is a commitment not to harm and love those who are in opposition to oneself. The process of nonviolence can be emotionally taxing and slow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promoting Change</td>
<td>People aspire to work towards making positive improvements. The process of change requires disrupting the status quo which can be challenging.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4 provides an overview of the updated conceptual framework. The framework shifted to an image of a tree for several reasons. The image reflects the dynamic and evolving (living) process found in a praxis of love. It also depicts what is intended (seeded) and where it is taking place (soil, humidity). Praxis of love initiatives also need care and nurturing over time (tended, pruned). They will encounter welcome and threatening events that require proper responses (sun, snow). As it matures, the initiative may endure, or it may not. Also, the initiative may foster new initiatives or not (propagation). We need to view a praxis of love as a varied and complex undertaking that takes many shapes and must be nurtured intentionally. There are many varieties of initiatives, and there are no guarantees.

For example, Hull House was rooted in the Near West Side of Chicago and flourished under the care of Jane Addams, the residents, and the neighbourhood. The biggest threat to the initiative during Addams’ time was when she delivered a speech in New York City on July 9, 1915, in which she questioned nationalism and maintained her pacifist views (Knight, 2010). Addams’ reputation suffered greatly, and she turned from being a much respected public intellectual and a leader of the suffrage movement to a “target” for editorial writers (Knight, 2010). Addams pressed on and managed to recover her reputation. Despite Addams’ legacy and Hull House’s many accomplishments, Hull House filed for bankruptcy in 1992.

L’Arche also grew with much tending. A friendly invitation by its former originator, Jean Vanier, to his friends has expanded into an international network around the world. When the report about Vanier’s sexual assault was published by L’Arche International posthumously, it shocked many who had built a saintly image of the originator. Following the news, many Canadian organizations withdrew their public endorsement of Vanier. However, despite the
human frailty of the founder, L’Arche continues to live out the ideals of companionship articulated and exemplified by Vanier.

In the updated framework, the foundational elements—faith, love, and praxis—are positioned above the tree of praxis. These elements address the question: What is the faith-inspired praxis of love? Faith is listed above love, and love above praxis because of the foundational role faith plays in influencing one’s understanding and expression of love. Faith provides the doers and practitioners with a sense of purpose and meaning, and simultaneously a deep sense of responsibility for how they engage in a praxis of love. Faith also influences people’s sense of responsibility to love others. Love sits above praxis because the latter feeds on love in order to grow. Praxis of love is the result of a faith combined with love for humanity. In Figure 4, the foundational role faith and love play on praxis was portrayed in the sun shining above the tree.

The tree represents praxis and addresses the question: How is the faith-inspired praxis of love manifested in everyday living? The operational elements illustrate how people in praxis of love initiatives endeavor to act: reciprocal relationships, shared affection, hospitality, human frailty, shared responsibility, nonviolence, and promoting change.

As was the case in the original framework, not all operational elements will be equally emphasized across different initiatives. Certain elements will be core to one or a few of initiatives (e.g., Shared Affection at Sanctuary and Romero House), whereas elements such as Promoting Change (as argued above) will be found by definition in various forms across all the initiatives. Also, multiple elements can be reflected in the initiatives (e.g., Reciprocal Relationships, Shared Responsibility, and Promoting Change at Sanctuary) and the emphases can change over time (e.g., from emphasis on Reciprocal Relationships and Shared Responsibility to
dealing with Human Frailty at L’Arche). Each element of praxis in the framework is considered important and independent of the other elements. Together the elements offer a general description of a faith-inspired praxis of love.

In this updated version of the framework, I removed the element of “community” from the earlier framework because it was imprecise. Even among scholars and authors who write about community (Berry, 2018; Born, 2010; McKnight & Block, 2010; Putnam, 2000; Vanier, 1989), there is a wide variety of definitions. Ivan Illich (1971) referred to a class of words so flexible that they lose their actual meaning; Uwe Pörksen (1995), Illich’s colleague, later conceptualized them as “plastic words.” For this reason, in the revision, I refer to “shared affection” and “shared responsibility,” instead. “Whole relationships” in the first framework has been amended to “reciprocal relationships” to accurately reflect the ethos of mutuality. Lastly, “in God and with people” in the original framework has been removed and has been included in the description of the role faith and love plays in praxis.

I believe that the faith-inspired praxis of love conceptual framework provides practical and intellectual insights for future investigations into Christian and other initiatives in helping practice. The framework can guide future Christian practitioners who wish to integrate their faith with helping actions and help current Christian practitioners explain their motivations to their secular colleagues. It gives them a language to describe and to explain their work. The framework also permits secular and other non-Christian practitioners to better understand the motivations of their Christian colleagues and to find common ground with them. It provides non-Christian educators with a way to connect with and to motivate Christian and other students of faith.
Perhaps most important, it gives all of us a language focused on what different groups have in common rather than what divides us. People with different beliefs and priorities can understand and cooperate with each other notwithstanding their differences. I return to this point in the epilogue to this dissertation.

While the current study was limited in scope, future research programs will benefit from considering praxis of love motivated by faith traditions other than Christianity. In addition, a study of how praxis of love is being practiced in spaces that are not faith-inspired will generate new insight into the applicability and relevance of the framework.
Epilogue: Connections with Social Work

I began this chapter by stating that I started the dissertation journey with a desire to look for an alternative way of caring to the ones I was accustomed to in social work. It was important for me to think beyond the frameworks and models of practice that I already had encountered. Drawing from the works of the people whose approach to helping and caring work had inspired me, I developed the original faith-inspired praxis of love framework. The multiple-site case study in this thesis allowed me to draw new insights and lessons from current initiatives and to update this framework. To come full-circle, I wish to close the dissertation by offering my insights into what this faith-inspired praxis of love framework might offer social work.

My observation as a student, instructor, and clinical practitioner in social work has been that, even though the doers and the initiatives included in this study did not consider themselves to be practising social work, the profession has a keen interest in their approaches to caring work and social change. Social work scholars continue to study the five original doers’ work (Chaiklin, 2011; Forster, McColl, & Fardella, 2007; Hamington, 2007; Johnson, 2004; Malekoff & Papell, 2012; Nussbaum, 1984; Shafer Lundblad, 1995; Walsh, 2011). For example, the settlement movement, the Catholic Worker movement, the civil rights movement, and L’Arche have been ongoing subjects of interest in social work literature. Walsh (2011) exemplified social work’s admiration for Vanier’s (2011) work when she wrote:

The thought of Jean Vanier related to his deep religious commitment to Christianity, his vision of a caring and loving community, and his use of evocative language to articulate his vision, all contribute to a conception of helping others that challenges the limits of the rational-technical and professional model so endorsed by contemporary social work (p. 340).
Although less has been written about The Working Centre, Sanctuary Toronto, and MCC Toronto and their originating doers, many social work students have sought—and successfully completed—field placement opportunities at these sites. Some have also been employed or are currently working at these places. The Lyle S. Hallman Faculty of Social Work had a partnership with The Working Centre to train internationally educated individuals interested in Canadian social work education (The Working Centre, 2011). The Working Centre also has a partnership with Wilfrid Laurier University, a field placement option in which students “apply community engagement theories and principles” (Wilfrid Laurier University, 2021, para 3). The website further notes that “almost every student who has taken the Community Engagement Option has said ‘this Option has changed my life.’ It could change yours too!” (Wilfrid Laurier University, 2021, para 4).

Social work scholars and other parts of secular academia have been attracted to elements of praxis of love as they explore and sometimes adapt to or integrate them. I contend that, notwithstanding the doers’ and their initiatives’ Christian influences, many in social work find praxis of love inspirational and have found their initiatives compatible with important elements of the secular motivation of the profession (Forster, McColl, & Fardella, 2007; Hamilton, 2007; Johnson, 2004; Nussbaum, 1984; Walsh, 2011).

The same could be said about Christian practitioners interested in adopting non-Christian approaches to helping and caring work. Faith was an important motivation in many of the initiatives, but it was not the only inspiration. As noted at The Working Centre, there was an ongoing intellectual effort to marry the philosophy of secular thinkers with the ideas of faith, love, and praxis. Some of the non-Christian staff at The Working Centre noted they were attracted to the initiative because of the innovative ways of thinking about developing
community resources, and their work provided an opportunity to live and work in a manner that aligned with their personal values. Similarly, much has been written about MCC Toronto as a model of social action.

My intention is not to present the faith-inspired praxis of love framework as being superior to, or a critique against, mainstream social work. Faith-inspired praxis of love framework and mainstream social work draw from different motivations and adopt a set of values and principles that are different. Yet, there are multiple overlapping areas that one could build upon while allowing some differences to exist. For example, participants involved in praxis of love shared about similar trials and tribulations commonly experienced by social workers. People discussed the struggles around burn out and compassion fatigue. They shared the importance of caring for oneself in doing this work. Also, people noted the challenges in navigating relationship boundaries with community members and the apparent power differential despite their effort to “walk alongside”. Fostering an empathetic relationship while also trying to carry out responsibilities associated with employment can be tricky. In addition, people indicated the challenges of living out praxis of love at the organizational level. Focusing on what we hold in common would be a fruitful conversation for building connections, expanding our thinking, and considering ways of working together.

However, despite interests in faith-inspired praxis of love, there is a more troubling picture within social work. Christian social work students often talk about feeling alienated and being isolated within their programs. As an educator teaching in secular social work institutions, I have met students who felt uncomfortable identifying themselves as Christians even though their faith was very important to their identity and to their decision to enter social work. Others have written about Christian students being ridiculed or verbally attacked by fellow students, and
sometimes by faculty, after expressing opinions on controversial social issues (Canda, 2003; Hodge, 2002; Thyer & Myers, 2009).

In a recent study of encountering people who hold contentious differences, Braganza (2020) found that Christian social work students reported being met with deep suspicion, fear, or hatred by some of their non-Christian counterparts and instructors. This tension that Christian students experience in secular social work institutions has been highlighted in Hodge’s scholarship (2002; 2005; 2006a; 2006b) as well. Although less has been written about the experience of Christian social workers in secular service settings, based on my observations, I expect that the experiences of Christian students are not significantly different from those of social workers.

It is in light of such tension that I believe the faith-inspired praxis of love framework can help bridge distances between Christian and non-Christian social workers by providing a template for connecting dialogues and initiatives. Christian social workers can adopt the framework in articulating their motivations for helping and caring work. The framework can assist them in explaining the role faith and love plays in their work and what praxis of love can look like, as well as illuminate its similarities with and differences from contemporary models of social work practice. It also can help Christian practitioners to open up to the secular motivations of their colleagues.

In a like manner, non-Christian social workers can use the framework to understand their fellow social workers’ motivations. Braganza (2020) found that her participants, involving Christian, Muslim, and LGBTQ+ social work students, expressed a deep desire for more constructive encounters. Instead of single-sided conversations aimed at proving one is right and the other wrong, this praxis of love framework can assist with understanding how to engage with
other perspectives and ways of working. For example, Christian social workers can use the framework to articulate their motivation in seeking reciprocal relationships or sharing affection. At the same time, non-Christian social workers can use the framework to learn about their Christian counterparts’ intentions and find among their ways of working methods that are compatible with social work practice.

In her Caring Encounters Guiding Framework, Braganza (2020) offers principles and step-by-step processes that can help people navigate contentious differences. She recommends that for a genuine encounter to happen, involved parties need to maintain flexibility, see the counterpart’s humanity before differences, and maintain humility throughout the conversation. During the encounter, people need to make an intentional choice to remain in encounters, consider how emotions (theirs and their counterparts’) are impacting the conversation, and take into account the contributions (even if minimal) that the counterpart is making. People need to carefully develop a more balanced and nuanced understanding of difference. The point of such dialogue is not to relinquish differences, but rather to encourage a “caring encounter” that brings forth new conversations, insights about self and other, and fosters relations (Braganza, 2020).

As the doers and the participants in this study have noted, we have much to gain from encountering one another from a mindset of caring that recognizes commonalities and welcomes differences. Encountering across class differences was Addams’ preferred way of living and working at Hull House. Leddy has also written about the value of coming together centred around what is held in common rather than the differences. I believe that the faith-inspired praxis of love framework can assist in facilitating contentious conversations among Christians and non-Christian social workers.
This dissertation contributes to this important dialogue between Christian social workers who feel misunderstood in their call to put their faith in action and secular members of the social work community who may be suspicious of such motivations. Written from a Christian perspective, the framework of faith-inspired praxis of love is presented as a tool to facilitate a common ground of understanding. By focusing on love as the prime motivation for caring feelings and actions towards others, the framework provides the groundwork for principled practice that is compatible with important elements of the non-faith-based motivation of the social work profession. If one can get past the prejudice surrounding faith, people may realize that principled practice, motivated by faith or not, is more compatible than we have believed.
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Appendix A: Reading List


Appendix B: Research Agreement

Research Agreement

Please complete the following by check-marking any permission listed below that you approve, and please provide your signature, title, data, and organizational information.

☐ I hereby authorize Monica Chi, a student of Wilfrid Laurier University, to use the premises (facility identified below) to conduct a study entitled Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love: A Multiple Site Case Study.

☐ I hereby authorize Monica Chi, a student of Wilfrid Laurier University, to recruit research participants for a study entitled Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love: A Multiple Site Case Study.

☐ I hereby authorize Monica Chi, a student of Wilfrid Laurier University, to have access to approved internal documents to conduct a study entitled Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love: A Multiple Site Case Study.

☐ I hereby authorize Monica Chi, a student of Wilfrid Laurier University, to present the overall findings to, and seek feedback from, individuals affiliated with the facility of my choosing.

______________________________    ______________________________
Signature                        Date

Print Name: ________________________________
Title: ________________________________
Facility Name: ________________________________
Appendix C: Interview Guide

Description
- Do you have a religious affiliation? If so, what is your affiliation?
- How many years have you been involved with this community/organization?
- What brought you to this community/organization?
- What are your roles and responsibilities at this community/organization?

Origins
- What motivated the start of this community/organization?
- What ideas inspired the work and activities of this site?
- How did the desire to put faith into action motivate the start of this site?
- What sense of interpersonal relationships were the originators trying to establish?
- What sense of community were the originators trying to build?
- What sense of injustice were the originators trying to address?

Current Reflections
- What motivates you to be involved with the site?
- What sustains your involvement with the mission of the site?
- What ideas, other than faith, inspire the work and activities of the site? How do these ideas blend together with faith?
- What type of challenges/struggles does the site encounter in engaging in praxis of love?
- What are some lessons that you would like to share about praxis of love?

Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love
- How is faith understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is love understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is praxis understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘in God and with people’ understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘whole relationships’ understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘community’ understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘hospitality’ understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘nonviolence’ understood/expressed/experienced?
- How is ‘change-making’ understood/expressed/experienced?
Appendix D: Interview Invitation E-Mail Script – General

Hello,
I am a PhD Candidate at Wilfrid Laurier University’s Faculty of Social Work conducting research on how faith and love inform the work at ___(the site)__. I am hoping to understand what motivates people to do good work and engage in social change. More specifically, I am looking to speak with people who can share with me their perspectives on how ideas related to faith and love have inspired the activities taking place at ___(the site)__ and how love is expressed through work. The one-on-one interviews will take 60 to 120 minutes. Through the interview, participants will have the option to reflect on the role that faith and love have played, and continue to play, in inspiring the activities taking place at ___(the site)__. I am conducting the case study at two other communities that are similar to ___(the site)__. Your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. There will be no repercussions for not participating. Please reach out to me if this is something that you might be interested in talking about or if you have any questions. If you have any questions or simply want to find out more about the study, contact me at mchi@wlu.ca, or call me at 519-884-0710 ext. 5231. Please note that you may also be contacted by me if you are considered to be in a key position that may be able to speak about faith and love related to ___(the site)__. Thank you for your consideration,
Monica Chi
Appendix E: Interview Invitation E-Mail Script – Individual

Hello ____ (name)_____.

I hope you are well. I am following up on the email that was sent out earlier about the research on how faith and love inform the work at ___(the site)__. Given your role at ___(the site)___, I thought you would be a key person to speak with. I am hoping to have a one-on-one interview with you to discuss how ideas related to faith and love have inspired the activities taking place at ___(the site)___ and how love is expressed through work. The interview will take 60 to 120 minutes at a location of your choice.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and confidential. There will be no repercussions for not participating.

If you are interested in participating, please let me know when a good time would be for us to speak.

Thank you for your consideration,

Monica Chi
Appendix F: Information and Informed Consent

Wilfrid Laurier University Informed Consent Statement

Faith-Inspired Praxis of Love: A Multiple Site Case Study

Monica Chi, MSW, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University
Primary Supervisor: Dr. Gary Cameron, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to learn how faith and love are understood and put into action in the organization you are affiliated with. The researcher, Monica Chi, is a Laurier PhD Candidate in the Faculty of Social Work working under the supervision of Dr. Gary Cameron.

Information

Participants will be asked to participate in an interview asking questions related faith and love and how they are being expressed at the organization. The study will take about 60 to 120 minutes to complete. Data from approximately 45 research participants who are knowledgeable to speak about faith-inspired praxis of love taking place at the organization will be collected for this study.

- As a part of this study you will be audio-recorded for research purposes. You have the right to refuse being audio-recorded. Only the researcher and the transcribers she will be working with will have access to these recordings and information will be kept confidential. You will be able to preview these audio files. The audio files will be transcribed by December 2020.
- The audio files will not be used for any additional purposes without your additional permission.

Risks

Sharing your thoughts on how faith and love is understood and expressed at your organization, presently and historically, may involve risk of privacy loss. To manage this risk, the researcher will delete all personal and identifying information. If the researcher wishes to use a direct quotation from the interview, the researcher will give you the option to see the quotation in context and seek permission to use. No information will be included that would reveal the speaker’s identity in any written report. Only aggregate results will be published/presented. You are also free to discontinue the study at any time and choose not to respond to any questions without loss of repercussions.

Benefits

Participants may benefit from the participation in this research project by assisting the researcher to learn and disseminate valuable information about how faith and love is being expressed in places like your community/organization. The research will contribute to the body of knowledge on how faith can be a motivation for engaging in good work and social change. This will benefit those who are serious about their faith and wish to put their faith in action through love of neighbours. This will also benefit those who are interested to learn about the role faith plays in motivating good work and social change.

Confidentiality

The data will be kept in a locked cabinet or a password-protected computer which only the researcher can access. The confidentiality/anonymity of your data will be ensured by following these procedures:
A code will be used in place of your real name in any notes taken by the researcher and/or included in any final papers.

Identifying information will be stored separately from the data and will be destroyed by the researcher once the thesis has been defended successfully.

The researcher and the non-research professionals will be transcribing the interviews. As such, the professionals may have access to your audio recorded interview to transcribe it. These professionals, however, have agreed to keep all data confidential.

During the transcription process, identifying information (e.g., your name) and demographic information will be removed. This information will be stored separately from the transcript of your interview. Your transcript will be given a code that only the researcher will have access to in order to be able to link your demographic information to your transcript.

The researcher’s thesis supervisor, Dr. Gary Cameron, will have access to the audio recordings and transcripts, but only for the purposes of assessing and critiquing the researcher’s interviewing strategies.

The anonymized data will be stored indefinitely and may be reanalyzed in the future as part of a separate project (i.e., secondary data analysis).

While in transmission on the internet, the confidentiality of data cannot be guaranteed.

Only aggregate results will be published/presented.

If your interview is quoted, you will have the option to see the quotation in context and provide permission to use. No information will be included that would reveal your identity in any written report.

Compensation
There is no compensation for participating in this study.

Contact
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study you may contact the researcher, Monica Chi, at mchi@wlu.ca or 519-884-0710 x 5231.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board (REB# 3908), which receives funding from the Research Support Fund. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Jayne Kalmar, PhD, Chair, University Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-1970, extension 3131 or REBChair@wlu.ca.

Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer any question or participate in any activity you choose. If you withdraw from the study you can request to have your data removed/destroyed if the data has not been analyzed and/or included in a final report.

Feedback and Publication
The results of this research might be published/presented in a thesis, course project report, book, journal article, and/or conference presentation. The study results will integrate data collected from interviews, observation, and document review. The final publication will involve a production of a case study report.
• The results of this research may be made available through Open Access resources.
• You will be able to access a copy of the final report through Wilfrid Laurier University’s Scholars Commons http://scholars.wlu.ca. Additionally, if you would like a copy of the final report, you may contact the researcher at mchi@wlu.ca.

Contact
If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, or if you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study, you may contact the researcher at mchi@wlu.ca or (519) 884-0710 ext. 5231. You may also contact the researcher’s advisor, Dr. Gary Cameron by email at camerongary@wlu.ca or by phone at (519) 884-0710 ext. 5240.

Consent
I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I had all questions answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study. I agree to be audio-recorded. I agree to the use of quotations (knowing that any identifying information will be removed).

Participant’s name ____________________________
(please print)

Participant’s signature _________________________ Date ______________

Researcher’s signature _________________________ Date ___________________