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2018: Sacred Sector in Review

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There is a broad trend in the nonprofit sector to focus on holistic integration of mission into everything a nonprofit does. This approach attempts to break down the silos that often develop in different departments and sub-communities of the same organization. For example, it is a common complaint among nonprofit employees that program teams have a hard time working with development teams. The program team is client-centered: focused on meeting the needs of their services recipients, managing their budget, and all the other daily operational tasks of running their program. The development team, on the other hand, is funder-centered: focused on telling the story of the program's impact in a way that resonates with donors, foundations, businesses and government. It is often challenging for these teams to fully appreciate the other department's role or find common language for describing the impact of the program for different audiences.

In recent years, many nonprofit associations and subsector groups have offered capacity building (helping organizations grow their programmatic and operational abilities) and professional development opportunities to help organizations take a comprehensive, integrated approach to advancing their missions. At the heart of this approach is the development of synergy between different areas of organizational life and working towards mission alignment in each area.

This trend is perhaps even more prevalent among faith-based nonprofit organizations. Unlike their secular peers, faith-based organizations (FBOs) essentially have a dual mission. They are committed to advancing a specific purpose, such as empowering returning citizens to reintegrate fully into their communities or offering vocational training to young mothers. Yet their missions have a specific, sacred motivation. Many FBOs believe they are called by a divine creative being - by God - to serve in a specific area. Therefore, to fully integrate and advance their missions in everything they do, faith-based nonprofits must be attuned not only to how each area of their organizational life furthers a particular service-area, but how each area reflects and lives out their distinctive, sacred identity.

Integrated Approach to Mission Advancement

This year, three very different books were released that touch on themes of furthering the mission and impact of an organization or a cause in the public square. These books touch on the theme described above of breaking down silos and taking a more integrated approach to advancing a group's sacred purposes. But each of these books actually goes beyond the focus of building the capacity of a single organization. Though these books may originally appear to be quite different, they all take a systems approach, addressing how groups can work together to advance a mission bigger than their own, whether that mission is spiritual transformation through Christ or ending gun violence.

In [*How Change Happens: Why Some Social Movements Succeed and Others Don't*](#), Leslie Crutchfield explores the factors that contribute to the success of certain causes in bringing about real legal and cultural change. This book builds upon the foundation that Crutchfield helped lay in [*Forces for Good*](#), a seminal book about the practices essential for nonprofits to achieve high impact. As Crutchfield herself notes, many of the findings in *How Change Happens* reflect and expound upon the same themes as those first developed in *Forces for Good*. Namely, both books emphasize the importance (whether for individual organizations or for social movements) of relationship development with multiple groups: individuals, peer organizations, government and public policy officials, businesses, funders and broader civil society and citizen networks. Crutchfield states in *How Change Happens*: “in this book, the unit of analysis was not just individual organizations, but entire *movements* - the constellations of nonprofits, government agencies, policy shops, faith-based organizations, associations, media and millions of grassroots and community members that make up any major change effort” (171).

As a follow up to their popular book [*Mission Drift*](#), which explored how faith-based organizations can remain “Mission True” in a culture that sets them up to drift away from their faith-based identity, Peter Greer and Chris Horst recently released [*Rooting for Rivals: How Collaboration and Generosity Increase the Impact of Leaders, Charities and Churches*](#). This book encourages FBOs to consider pursuing the mission beyond the mission. It makes a Christo-centric argument that organizations that claim an identity in Christ should be pursuing kingdom purposes beyond the their own organizational goals: “We have come to believe that no matter how many guardrails we put in place or how many bylaws we draft to fend off drift, faith based organizations cannot be Mission True unless they exist for a purpose beyond their own organizational borders” (22).

Sharing Impact to Advance Common Goals

It is interesting to note that both *How Change Happens*, and *Rooting for Rivals* are books written very consciously to amplify and expand the message of previous books. While *Forces for Good* and *Mission Drift* both focused on the habits of individual organizations necessary to advance their respective missions and increase their individual impact, the follow up books released this year both take up the theme of collective impact and applying a broader approach to advance a common purpose greater than one's own organizational aims. *Rooting for Rivals* is written for a decidedly Christian audience and takes up the question primarily of how Christian ministries can better collaborate with each other, as opposed to how faith-based organizations can collaborate with government or other non-religious entities. In contrast, *How Change Happens* is not targeted toward faith-based nonprofits, but more broadly toward those engaged in nonprofits and civic life. Nonetheless, both books come back to the idea of collective impact as essential for advancing causes that transcend any singular institution.

Crutchfield writes that collective impact is only possible when multiple groups across different sectors and segments of society collaborate in a mutually beneficial way. Crutchfield also notes the importance of “a centralized infrastructure” and an organized system to guide all actors to a common social goal (57). Greer and Horst introduce a vision of collective impact focused on collaboration that “seeks first the kingdom of God” (22). They emphasize that Christian nonprofits should collaborate to increase their impact beyond their own organizational borders and have a vision of God’s greater purposes. Rather than competition, Greer and Horst encourage faith-based nonprofits to cheer on their peer organizations as organizational brothers and sisters in Christ (54).

The Faith Factor

2018 also saw the paperback release of [*The Angola Prison Seminary: Effects of Faith-Based Ministry on Identity, Transformation, Desistance and Rehabilitation*](#), by Michael Hallett, Joshua Hays, Byron Johnson, Sung Joon Jany and Grant Duwe. This book, written for an academic, specialist audience, offers invaluable insights into the impact of a faith-based Inmate Minister program on inmates at maximum security Louisiana State Penitentiary (“Angola”). Analyzing three years of social research focused on the distinctive Inmate Minister program, this book “explores the implications of religious programming for an American corrections system in crisis, featuring high recidivism, dehumanizing violence, and often draconian punishments.” The authors of *Angola Prison Seminary* focus on the scientifically backed, distinct and multifaceted contributions faith-based programming can make in the life of inmates in terms of their self-worth, their identity, their capacity to rise to leadership positions within prison, recidivism rates and crime reduction.

Angola Prison Seminary is particularly important to the larger themes of collaborating across sectors towards greater common impact discussed in both *How Change Happens* and *Rooting for Rivals*. Like *Rooting for Rivals*, *Angola Prison Seminary* focused specifically on the distinctive contributions of Christian ministries (the Inmate Minister program in particular) to addressing systems-wide challenges, in this case, within the American corrections system. And as with *How Change Happens*, the authors of *Angola Prison Seminary* emphasize that solutions to social challenges as complex as those posed by the American prison system are going to be equally complex and require multiple groups working together to bring about lasting change. *Angola Prison Seminary* does urge us to remember the role of religious institutions in crafting such solutions: “it is apparent that any effective strategy will be needlessly incomplete unless the power of religion and religious communities, and the networks of social support found within them, are integrally involved” (211).

Holistically Advancing the “Mission Beyond the Mission”

All three of these books are quite distinctive in terms of their intended audiences, tone, and points of emphasis. Yet *Rooting for Rivals*, *How Change Happens*, and *Angola Prison Seminary* all take the view that unlikely collaborations and partnerships among different groups are essential in advancing purposes larger than any single program or institution. These books share a recognition that innovation happens when organizations and movements take a holistic, integrated approach toward advancing their own missions while having their eyes on the greater “mission beyond the mission.” Sacred Sector, an initiative which I direct for CPJ, is likewise dedicated to empowering faith-based organizations and emerging leaders to adopt a comprehensive, multifaceted vision for advancing their own missions and in working with other actors to advance common causes that transcend their institutional boundaries. Sacred Sector empowers diverse faith-based organizations to incarnate and

integrate their faith-based missions into everything they do: in their organizational practices, public policy engagement and public positioning. This “Three P’s” framework recognizes that each of these elements are interconnected and must work together within an organization so that it can achieve greater impact and collaborate with diverse partners without sacrificing its faith-based identity.

Each of the three books touch, to some extent or another, on organizational practices, public policy and public positioning. Yet one of these elements is prominent within each book while the other two play a supporting role in crafting each book’s overall message. *Angola Prison Seminary* specifically takes up the question of how one faith-based program, the Bible College operating with Angola, engaged in explicitly religious *practices* that resulted in transformative experiences and positive outcomes for the inmates and the broader prison ecosystem in general. *How Change Happens* offers particular insight into how a variety of individual and organizational change-makers, applicable to faith-based nonprofits, can engage effectively in shaping *public policy* by starting at local and state level: “Change makers must work within the confines of the system created by the framers of the U.S. Constitution, who purposely constructed a federalist scheme designed to vest very limited powers within the highest levels of government and push most authority out to the states” (73). And *Rooting for Rivals* addresses the real issues facing Christian nonprofits right now with respect to public perception and their need to engage in positive *public positioning*. Greer and Horst note that: “Over the past few decades, the percentage of Americans who trust the church has been cut in half and the numbers who distrust the church have more than tripled.”

Maintaining Faith Identity While Working Across Difference

Meaningful collective impact, in almost any case imaginable, will require the involvement of faith-based individuals and institutions. As *Rooting for Rivals* points out, faith-based institutions contribute 1.2 trillion to the U.S economy each year, the median congregation gives \$150,000 in social programs to their communities annually, and the vast majority of disaster recovery efforts in the U.S. are led by faith-based nonprofits. Greer and Horst note: “Faith-based urban mentoring organizations, Christian schools, pregnancy resource centers, prison ministries, refugee settlement agencies, job training organizations, community development organizations, and all sorts of other creative endeavors dot the streets of our country” (52-53).

When positive faith-based impact is stifled, either due to legal or cultural barriers, it is ultimately the populations and communities we are trying to serve and transform who lose out. In *The Angola Prison Seminary*, we learn that the success of the Bible College model largely rested on the fact that this Louisiana prison allowed Inmate Ministers to serve fellow inmates “in diverse, consequential and unconventional ways that have truly been transformative for many” (234). The authors note, however, that because Angola is truly exceptional in allowing inmates to lead their own congregations, it would be hard to replicate the success seen here in other prisons. They state that the positive impacts on inmates and the broader corrections system seen in Louisiana will not be possible at other prisons until “policy-makers are willing to modify existing legislation and policies” to allow inmates at other prisons around the country to play more active leadership roles in prison congregations, and in general (234).

All three of these books ultimately explore how different institutional groups, and religious groups in particular in *Rooting for Rivals* and *The Angola Prison Seminary*, can fulfill their particular roles in contributing to a larger vision, whether that is spiritual transformation or social change. Each book

explores how particular groups work within a larger ecosystem of other governmental, nonprofit, faith and citizen players to bring about maximum impact. To work toward major social change, or as we might say as Christians, toward a Kingdom vision, it is essential that individuals within organizations undergird themselves spiritually for the work they have been tasked with. *The Angola Prison Seminary* provides a research-based snapshot of Christ-transformed inmates pouring into the lives of their fellow prisoners. *How Change Happens* asks activists to consider how to cultivate partnerships in diverse sectors of public life to manifest sustained change across time. And *Rooting for Rivals* asks Christian nonprofit leaders to consider how they can be good organizational neighbors to their organizational peers, building them up whenever possible. Each of these books asks or shows us how to build relationships with those both similar to and unlike them to start a process toward long-term transformation.

Although Crutchfield's *How Change Happens* does come up disappointingly empty-handed in terms of many specific examples of the role of faith-based organizations in achieving social impact, she does turn to a powerful religious figure in citing how one builds the essential skill of empathy in order to work with those across difference toward a shared goal. She introduces Jesuit Father John Dunne's practice of "passing over- deliberately entering into the experience of others and understanding what they believe with complete empathy.... far from dissolving his own religious commitment, he held that this practice helped him see his own beliefs more clearly."

And that has been the very goal of this exploration of books that largely show us how distinctively faith-based institutions can work in complex cultural and public policy contexts with multiple actors and contribute to the common good without losing their faith identity.

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