

Justice and Faith: Individual Spirituality and Social Responsibility in the Christian Reformed Church of Canada

Project Description and Workplan

Background

- From January – June 2013, the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), in partnership with Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics (CPRSE) at the Institute for Christian Studies (ICS), and the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR), conducted the Justice and Faith Pilot Project.
- The pilot project provided valuable insights about key themes in CRC people's understanding of justice and faith, enablers and barriers to further engagement in doing justice, and strategies to mobilize CRC people to do justice.
- The present phase of the Justice and Faith project builds on the work and insights of the pilot project. It is funded by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Partnership Development Grant and by grants from OSJ, World Renew and Canadian Ministries. It is a two year project: July 2013 – June 2015.
- This project continues the partnership between the Christian Reformed Church, the Institute for Christian Studies/Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics, and the Centre for Community Based Research.

Purpose and Approach

The purpose of this project is to more fully understand the relationship between justice and faith in the CRC and to mobilize CRC people to embrace justice as an integral aspect of Christian faith and life. The project will focus on the tension between personal spiritual well-being and social action for justice.

The project adopts principles of community-based research. In particular the project will be participatory: a collaborative initiative between various CRC offices, agencies and ministries, the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR), and the Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics (CPRSE) at the Institute for Christian Studies. The project will also be action-oriented, mobilizing CRC individuals and congregations for justice throughout the process of knowledge production.

A cross-stakeholder steering committee will provide oversight and direction to the project. Steering Committee membership will include CRC/Agency staff members, ICS board/governance members and CRC pastors/lay leaders.

Research Questions

1. How is the relationship between justice and faith currently understood and practiced in North American (especially Canadian, evangelical) Christianity?

- What major social and intellectual trends shape the understanding of the relationship between faith and justice in North American (especially Canadian, evangelical) Christianity? What social and intellectual trends support a bifurcation or non-relation between justice and faith? What trends support integration?
- How do contemporary Christian understandings of the relationship between faith and justice compare to past expressions or understandings of this relationship?
- How is justice understood or lived out in relationship with personal piety; evangelism/Great Commission; faith formation and discipleship; missional living/missional faith?
- What dominant ways or lines of reasoning are used to describe or explain the relationship between justice and faith?
- What reasons are given for separating faith and justice or viewing them as non-related? What suspicions, fears or objections lead to such bifurcation?
- What reasons are given for insisting on the importance of integrating faith and justice?
- What insights from social science (esp. behavior change) are relevant to understanding and achieving justice mobilization?
- How is the relationship between justice and charity understood and lived out? What is the normative relationship between justice and charity?
- Where is the majority of the weight centred in the literature on how justice is/should be defined in relation to Christian Faith (and the Reformed tradition specifically). Is it grounded Biblically, theologically, philosophically, some other way, or a mix?

Main method: Literature review, also key informants

2. To what extent is doing justice a priority in the faith lives of CRC congregants?

- What reasons are given for being more, or less, engaged?
- What key barriers inhibit people from doing justice?
- What key enablers encourage people to do justice?
- What activities do CRC people describe as "doing justice"?
- What resources are CRC people drawing on to understand or define justice (i.e, the Bible/Bible studies, popular theology literature, denominational/church education courses/literature, sermons, specifically academic philosophical or theological literature on justice, peer blogs on the topic, etc). What resources are they drawing on to guide their actions for justice?
- Are there things about justice or justice work that make CRC people excited? Are there things that make them nervous?
- What do Canadian CRC people define as the "top priority(ies)" in their faith lives? Do they relate that top priority to justice in any way?

Main method: Congregational survey, also key informants and community forums

3. How can CRC people be best mobilized to embrace justice as an integral part of Christian faith and life?

- Does working more explicitly from the Biblical tradition help with mobilization efforts of justice as an integral part of Christian faith and life, or are there other resources that are more important for those efforts?
- Is more education about justice itself needed? Is more education about ways to make justice a part of one's life needed? Would making justice-education a greater priority in the church itself help?
- Is more education on Christian faith life needed? Would opening up a discussion, or developing materials about what living out one's faith as a Christian Reformed person (or a Christian more generally) be helpful?
- Would things such as mentoring programs be useful, where someone who has experience integrating justice as part of their faith life is paired with people who want to make it a deeper part of their faith life?
- What other kinds of programs help mobilize CRC people, and are there programs that don't help, or that hinder mobilization?
- Are there specific projects/issues that CRC congregants already feel strongly about, and would like to get more involved with?

Main methods: Key informants, survey, community forums

Research Methods

Literature Review: Review academic and popular literature and church documents concerning both social justice and personal spiritual welfare. This method will inform the development of interview protocols for subsequent methods.

Key Informant Interviews: Participants will be purposefully sampled to ensure a range of perspectives, and will be recruited with the involvement of Christian Reformed Church staff.

Survey of CRC members: A representative sample of the Christian Reformed Church in Canada membership will be surveyed, according to a sampling framework.

Community Forums: Half-day forums, open to everyone. These will provide opportunities to share learnings from the project, to verify and expand on these learnings and engage in further dialogue with CRC people.

Congregational Coaching: Participating congregations will engage with a coach who will assist them in further following God's call to justice as an integral aspect of Christian faith and life. This will be an evidence-informed mobilization strategy rather than a data gathering method.

Workplan

Tasks	Description	Timeline
Stage I: Getting Started		
Project Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold preliminary telephone meetings with CPRSE, CRC to review the workplan, discuss the steering committee, and schedule research activities 	Aug. – Dec. 2013
Literature Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of social justice and personal spiritual identity literature, church documents and doctrine for social justice and spiritual welfare Post discussions online 	Ongoing (1 st sec. Oct. 2013)
Researcher training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Train researchers in community-based research methods 	Ongoing
Products: Project workplan; literature review and online postings/discussions relevant to findings; researcher training protocols		
Stage II: Key-informant Interviews		
Tool Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft key informant interview tools Draft consent forms/ethical protocols Draft sampling/recruitment plan for key informant interviews 	Sep. – Oct. 2013
Stakeholder Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect input from stakeholders about research and implementation plan 	Oct. 2013
Steering Committee Meeting #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold a steering committee meeting (teleconference) to present key-informant interview tools and work plan Revise key-informant interview tools based on committee feedback 	Oct. 2013
Ethics Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare and submit research strategy documents for submission to CREO 	Oct.-Nov. 2013
Key Informant Interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold up to 15-20 interviews with key-informants from the CRC community 	Nov. 2013
Summary Analysis #1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thematically analyze key-informant interview findings Compare and contrast key-informant interview findings against literature review findings 	Dec. 2013 – Jan. 2014
Steering Committee Meeting #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present draft of summary analysis #1 to Steering Committee Revise the analysis based on committee's feedback 	Feb. 2014
Products: KI interview protocols; summary analysis #1		
Stage III: CRC Survey		
Tool Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft CRC survey Draft consent forms/ethical protocols Draft sampling/recruitment plan Identify local champions for each targeted congregation 	Jan. – Mar. 2014
Stakeholder Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect input from stakeholders about research and implementation plan 	Mar. 2014
Steering Committee Meeting #3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold a steering committee meeting (teleconference) to present CRC survey tools and work plan Revise survey 	Mar. 2014
Knowledge Mobilization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribute summary analysis of key-informant interviews to CRC congregations in advance of survey 	Mar. – Apr. 2014

Tasks	Description	Timeline
Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local champions in each targeted congregation collect responses using pre-established sampling criteria Research team provides ongoing support as needed 	Apr. – Jun. 2014
Summary Analysis #2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thematically analyze qualitative components of CRC survey Extrapolate quantitative data Produce summary analysis #2, survey findings; compare and contrast with summary analysis #1. 	Jun. 2014
Steering Committee Meeting #4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present draft of summary analysis #2 to Steering Committee Revise the analysis based on committee’s feedback 	Jun. 2014
Products: CRC survey tools and protocols; knowledge mobilization; summary analysis #2		
Stage IV: Community Forums (for congregational and denominational-level feedback, verification, and further input)		
Forum Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft community forum agendas 	Jul. – Aug. 2014
Forum Promotion/logistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule and recruit participants Locate and book venues 	
Stakeholder Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect input from stakeholders about research and implementation plan 	Sep. 2014
Steering Committee Meeting #5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold a steering committee meeting (teleconference) to present community forum tools and work plan Revise community forum tools based on committee feedback 	Sep. 2014
Community Forums Delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold up to 6-12 forums within selected communities 	Sep. – Nov. 2014
Congregational coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Coaching” & grassroots knowledge mobilization at selected CRC sites 	Aug. 2014 June 2015
Products: Community Forum presentations		
Stage V: Dissemination		
Data analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze data from all sources 	Dec. 2014 – Jan. 2015
Report Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prepare draft of final report based on analysis of document review, key-informant interviews, CRC survey, and focus groups. 	Feb. – Mar. 2015
Stakeholder Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect input from stakeholders about research and implementation plan 	Apr. 2015
Steering Committee Meeting #6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Present draft of final report to steering committee 	Apr. 2015
Revisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revise the final report based on committee’s feedback 	May – Jun. 2015
Products: Final report		

Intended Outcomes

Knowledge Production	Justice Mobilization	Partnership Development
Increase knowledge of the extent and level to which Christian Reformed community members are engaged in matters of justice	Christian Reformed community members will have an increased ability to identify and respond to justice issues in their community	Develop collaborative working cross-sectoral relationships between the Christian Reformed Church, Centre for Philosophy, Religion and Social Ethics, and the Centre for Community Based Research
Identify terms and language to describe the concepts of social justice and justice-as-avocation that resonate with community members	A significantly increased number of community members will affirm working for social justice as a necessary and core aspect of their faith-practice	Use the fruits of those partnerships as a model for further cross-sectoral partnership development between academic and nonacademic institutions on important social issues
Identify and address barriers preventing community members from embracing and pursuing justice as part of the practice of their faith	Produce recommendations for implementing promising practices and strategies for mobilizing community members for justice; produce a workshop manual or booklet to help community organizers in their justice mobilization efforts	Develop networks for information sharing between academic and non-academic institutions working on similar topics, and possibilities for further future collaboration