



## **Mobilizing Faith Communities to Accelerate Impact**

*Achieve Racial Equity in Minnesota  
Coordinate International Poverty Initiatives  
Eliminate “Toxic Charity”*

*“Alone we can do so little, together we can do so much.”  
Helen Keller*

Faith Communities in Minnesota have a rich history of putting their beliefs in action to solve social issues. When faith communities work in tandem and strategically with other public, private and nonprofit efforts they accelerate impact. Imagine if faith communities mobilized a community commitment to achieve racial equity, coordinate international poverty initiatives and eliminate “toxic charity.” The result would be a Minnesota Miracle.

Many collaborative approaches already exist. There is an opportunity to build on existing efforts to focus faith community by connecting the dots to other public, private and nonprofit efforts to maximize and accelerate impact locally and internationally.

Current cross sector collaboration demonstrates the efficacy of strategic approaches.

Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative, Isaiah, Jewish Community Action, Interfaith Outreach and Community Partners, Archdiocese Office of Social Justice, Faith in Minnesota and many others are delivering the “pews” (members of faith communities) to change public policy as they take concrete action to improve social disparities.

For example: Beacon Interfaith Housing Collaborative started with a humble effort to convert a nursing home into affordable housing. Beacon grew to become a movement of 88 faith communities that have collectively changed public policy, overcome “not in my back yard” resistance, raised the profile, priority and investments in affordable housing. Beacon's model delivers "the pews" during public policy discussions related to affordable housing. They mobilize public and private investments to accelerated development of affordable housing units.

Collaborative efforts accelerate change. Achieving racial equity in affordable housing, health care, education, nutrition, income and the pipeline to prison is a worthy and noble cause.



It is time to unleash the collective creative capacity of Minnesota.

Minnesota has an opportunity to put its collective wisdom to embark on an action plan. The following sectors working together will be smarter and more effective than working in isolation.

### Formula for Action

$$\begin{aligned} & \text{Faith communities} \\ & \quad + \\ & \quad \text{The Business Community} \\ & \quad \textit{(Fortune 500 Corporations, entrepreneurs, small businesses)} \\ & \quad \quad + \\ & \quad \quad \text{The University of Minnesota and Higher Education} \\ & \quad \quad \textit{(Integrate research, evidence based approaches and evaluation)} \\ & \quad \quad \quad + \\ & \quad \quad \quad \text{Philanthropic Community} \\ & \quad \quad \quad \quad + \\ & \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{The street smarts of people living in communities with a concentration of families} \\ & \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{living in generational poverty} \\ & \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad = \\ & \quad \quad \quad \quad \quad \text{Accelerated Impact/Real Measurable Change} \end{aligned}$$

It isn't a question of capacity.

Harvard Professor Bob Putnam documented the vast richness and uniqueness of Minnesota's social capital in his seminal work "Bowling Alone."

Minnesota state government has been a pioneer in addressing the underlying causes of generational poverty. Generous private philanthropy and faith communities have augmented public investments. Collectively Minnesota invests more in affordable housing, health care, education, nutrition, income and the pipeline to prison than most states. A robust plethora of nonprofit, faith community, and local and regional government programs has emerged. In addition to the investments in programs to alleviate poverty, Minnesota has a civically engaged population, more people engaged in their faith community, and more volunteers per capita than any place in the country.

Minnesota has the capacity, willingness and leadership to make it happen. The Itasca Project group of Fortune 500 CEOs and the University of MN President has placed the

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disparity gap as one of the top priorities to address for the economic vitality of the region. Greater MSP, the regional development initiative also sites racial equity as a key economic priority. Faith communities have mobilized to address racial and economic justice and improve access to basic needs.

The focus has to be on action with the “Fierce Urgency of Now” as Martin Luther King Jr. stated. Multi-sector efforts often devolve into collaborative stagnation and ritualistic inactivity that admires social problems without the urgency of action.

Invest in action and results.

Formula for investing in results:

- Invest and expand in current efforts that demonstrate measurable proof they are closing the disparity and scale up these initiatives to accelerate impact.
- Divest in initiatives that lack evidenced based results.
- Experiment with approaches that have promise, solid researched best practice, empirical evidence and convincing rationale.
- Conduct reality checks with people living in generational poverty to assure the approaches enhance the purpose and potential of individuals, families and communities.

Make Minnesota a Toxic Charity Free Zone.

There is a growing awareness of the potentially toxic consequences of charity. Charity in response to disasters and crisis provides compassionate support of the human dignity of the most vulnerable. This charity is noble and lauded. Continuing emergency responses after the crisis ends, and not expecting individuals to live to their full capacity or potential is a line of demarcation. Charity that crosses this line is toxic and contributes to the problem and ensconces people in poverty and dependence.

Privileged or poor, human nature yearns to thrive. The human condition yearns to take care of our selves and our children. Yearns to make our children’s lives better than our own. Human nature doesn’t seek a hand out. It loathes paternalistic approaches. Paternalism breeds resentment, hostility and disempowers. Poor people are not helpless victims waiting to be saved by the privileged. People living in generational poverty are humans striving to live their purpose and potential.

Donors, charities, taxpayers, faith communities and volunteers genuinely well intended and believe they are “doing good,” by providing money, programming, volunteering. If the

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efforts are not empowering individuals, families and a community to thrive without the assistance of the “giver” its unintended consequence is a dependency inducing paternalism that further ensconces people in poverty. This paternalistic approach serves people of privilege and helps them feel good about their philanthropy. It expands the Poverty Industrial Complex that is unaccountable for producing results that alleviate poverty. The privileged continue meanwhile to benefit from institutionalized racism that stacks the deck in favor of the privileged at the expense of the poor.

Awareness of the toxic capacity of charity is growing. “Poverty, Inc.” is a powerful documentary available on Netflix that traces the underbelly of “charity” and “giving” through the eyes of recipients. Poverty, Inc. documents domestic and international examples of how our philanthropic efforts cause more harm than good. Books like “Toxic Charity,” have also raised awareness.

Local efforts have global impacts.

Applying the “Formula for Action” to achieve racial equity in Minnesota can be used to alleviate poverty internationally. Connecting the dots with Nongovernmental Organizations, Faith Community Initiatives, and other public and private efforts has the capacity to accelerate impact.

Minnesota Miracles are within our grasp. Minnesota can be a toxic charity free zone. Coordinated efforts among the faith community, public and private and nonprofit sectors has the capacity to accelerate efforts to achieve racial equity and international poverty. It will improve the results of our time, talent and treasure.

Eradicating the intractable social sin of racial disparities in Minnesota is Miracle that won’t happen unless we work together to make it happen.