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### Faith, Farming and Food Justice

Catherine Curran

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# Faith, Farming and Food Justice

By: Catherine E. Curran

2020-2021

Presented to Ursinus College's Harold C. Smith Program in Christian Studies in fulfillment of the Charles Rice Post-Graduate Research Fellowship.

## **Abstract:**

Through a liberationist lens, religion and social justice are more similar than different. Food illuminates opportunities for building collective agency and community resilience in which religion and social justice might serve one another (White 2018). Specifically, faith communities can contribute to local food systems by using church-owned lands to provide access to farmland for beginning and BIPOC farmers, improve access to fresh, healthy produce, and enhance food security (FaithLands 2021). Faith communities are shifting mindsets from charity to justice and scarcity to abundance while addressing rural child hunger (Lietz-Bilecky 2020). Overall, this paper explores unique ways the Christian food movement addresses social, health, and environmental crises that challenge food systems.

Additionally, this paper describes personal experiences during a fellowship while exploring the process of vocational discernment as connection to self and surrounding place through farming in rural and urban contexts located within Ohio, South Dakota, California, and Oregon. Overall, this paper explores topics of food justice, liberation theology/ecological theology of liberation, faith community engagement, social justice, environmental justice, agrarianism, agriculture, food sovereignty, food systems, and hunger.

## **Video:**

For a visual introduction to this paper and fellowship project visit the following citation available as open access in the Ursinus Digital Commons.

Curran, Catherine, "Deep Meaning in Food, Community and Farming" (2021). *Charles Rice Post-Graduate Research Fellowship*. 3.

[https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/charles\\_rice\\_fellowship/3/](https://digitalcommons.ursinus.edu/charles_rice_fellowship/3/)

“In this video, Catherine Curran, Ursinus College Class of 2020, describes her post-graduate fellowship experience. Viewers are invited to watch introductory stories about farming and food systems across the United States and discover a creative path in life through a Quaker saying: ‘Let your life speak.’ The video serves as an educational resource for faculty/mentors and students who are applying to post-graduate opportunities.”

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I thank the farmers, activists, educators, religious and faith-based leaders and non-religious leaders and more who supported me during this year by sharing their time, knowledge, skills, experience and curiosity. As well as those who continue to dedicate their lives toward achieving social, environmental and food justice. I express deep gratitude to my professors, peers, friends and family for guiding me into this experience. I'd also like to thank previous and current Charles

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ursinus.edu/live/news/6251-narrative-as-sacred-textreflection-reframing-and>

Rice Fellows for their support and empathy. To all, your patience, encouragement, and reverence proved enduring and resilient amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

I'd also like to acknowledge the sacred lands I crossed during this experience. Although I am grateful for the transcontinental roads that made this journey flexible and easier, the history that came in developing the highway system carries unsolicited conflict, violence and ignorance. The ample and ranging landscapes in relation to varying ecological biomes of the United States deserve to be known truthfully in their sacred tradition with indigenous knowledge and history, as "indigenous ways of knowing". I want to express deep gratitude to the lands. During this opportunity, I gained close connection with lands I share the specific lands that I gained close connection while farming with during this opportunity. With great honor and pleasure, I express deep gratitude to the lands and acknowledge the following tribes that treated the land with importance and dignity<sup>2</sup>:

Cleveland, OH: Mississauga, Kaskaskia, Erie

Hot Springs, SD: Očhéthi Šakówiŋ, Cheyenne

Middletown, CA: Me-Wuk (Lake Miwok)

Central Point, OR: Tolowa Dee-ni', Takelma, Shasta, Modoc, Cow Creek Umpqua,  
Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde

Monroe, Oregon: Kalapuya, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, Confederated Tribes of  
Grand Ronde, Chelamela

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<sup>2</sup>Native Land Digital provides an incredible mapping resource for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples that also contains links to learning sources about a specific nation, language or treaty found here: <https://native-land.ca/> ; <https://native-land.ca/about/how-it-works/> . These nations were identified by address.

## Preface

Gaps in inequality are increasing in many areas such as income, welfare (or being-well), education, and access to other resources. There are certain themes across these areas such as power and agency. It is becoming increasingly critical to build connections within communities. Storytelling offers ways to build connection by giving a voice to a diverse demographic as well as an opportunity to relate ideas and experiences. This work is part of a post-graduate opportunity, a fellowship, in which the directive of the project asked to explore the intersection of religion and social justice. I decided to take on this opportunity because I was not familiar with faith communities advocating for social justice and empowerment. Although the intersectionality of religion and social justice can be slim and irrelevant according to common views, I found the intersectionality of religion and social justice to be purposeful and innovative.

Liberation theology achieves a balance of the intersection of religion and social justice. This opportunity was originally intended to be conducted internationally so my initial project was exploring liberation theology in Peru. I chose Lima, Peru because this was the place where liberation theology originally burst into the world as a result of Gustavo Gutiérrez's work. Additionally, comparing the culture of Lima to that of the Peruvian Andes would allow me to gain deeper awareness for my understanding of faith, ways of being, after completing my Spanish Honors thesis studying indigenous community reciprocity in the Peruvian Andes. I also wanted to continue the relationships built from previous Charles Rice fellows who interacted with communities in Ollantaytambo. As a result of the rapid spread of COVID-19 virus that led to a pandemic and international travel shutting down, what I ended up doing was very different. Although there are passionate scholars and activists in the United States surrounding liberation theology. Their work focused on addressing COVID-19 and raising awareness of the black lives

matter movement after George Floyd's death on May 25, 2020. The admirable and important dedication of activists required their full attention and, unfortunately for me, resulted in dead end communication as we were unable to partner for lack of time. I tried to join efforts with several organizations, but was turned down and recommended to continue on my own path.

I later discovered a creative path in life through a Quaker saying: 'Let your life speak'. This saying was originally introduced to me during my senior year when I participated in the UC LIVE internship program by the Harold C. Smith Program at Ursinus College in which we read Parker Palmer's book, *Let Your Life Speak*. This book helped ground myself during a very busy and confusing semester as I experienced reverse culture shock upon returning from a year of study abroad in Santiago, Chile. Simultaneously, I felt grounded in my sense of place while assisting a farm focusing on regenerative agriculture called Willow Creek Farm Preserve<sup>3</sup> for Rich Wallace's class *Community and Sustainable Food Systems*. In that class we explored Dr. Monica White's book, *Freedom Farmers*, that offers an alternative narrative of civil rights and black freedom movements. So during this fellowship, my path also focused on exploring my vocation for social and environmental justice through farming. With a desire to learn how to grow food as a form of liberation, I set out to farm across the United States volunteering on small scale farms in rural and urban contexts practicing various sustainable agricultural methods. I reflected on my narrative, learning to unlearn various biases that held a charity-based perspective on social issues like hunger and poverty. I discovered that learning about how we eat really helps us understand the world, which is why I explored an ecumenical approach to sustainable food systems. I hope this narrative

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.willowcreekfarmpreserve.org/>

serves as inspiration to the ways we can reflect on our own sacred narrative and how the forest garden carries meaningful work to achieve resilience.

The introduction explores the intersectionality of religion and social justice and various theoretical frameworks that approach socioeconomic inequality and environmental degradation. Part one gives context to the intersectionality of religion and social justice using food as a tool to address injustices. More specifically this section introduces food justice, outlines some of the challenges, and identifies potential solutions to more just, sustainable food systems. Part two identifies organizations working at the intersection of faith and justice and their current approaches to food justice. Additionally, this section provides potential solutions for faith community engagement in food security and food justice. Part three includes experiences at five different farms in Ohio, South Dakota, California, and Oregon. I also provide some knowledge about the different sustainable agricultural practices I learned.

The following is a personal statement I submitted as part of the application process for the Charles Rice Post-Graduate Research Fellowship in February of 2020. I share this to illustrate my initial mindset pursuing this opportunity prior to any challenges I faced leading up to and during the fellowship. Additionally, pieces of this narrative helped me explore the intersectionality of religion and social justice.

## Personal Statement: Growing to Become an “Earth-being”

In the distance, my glance veers up and down as a gush of boiling water erupts from the belly of a geyser. Gravity pulls the water down and draws my gaze to endless layers of land. Its tones of tans and turquoise shaping the sand surrounding the oval oasis just before the pointed volcano. A dreamscape floats before my eyes gently pulling me in and out of consciousness. Not even a road serves as a frame of reference to this never-ending panorama. Instead, Toyota Land Cruisers roam wild etching curvy parallel lines through the sand (just as Salvador Dalí might have...). Coincidentally I am in Bolivia, in the Salvador Dalí Desert.

The Cruisers remind me of the poet Antonio Machado, “Caminante, no hay camino. Se hace camino al andar.” This translates to “Traveler, there is no path. The path must be forged as you walk.” Apparently, Machado attributes his work to the Daoist contemplation of existence, which emphasizes naturalness, simplicity, and spontaneity. The adoption of this ideology guided me to design my own major, to pursue my own path. *Health and Society* is an interdisciplinary health studies major that connects courses that focus on our well-being. I was originally on the pre-med track, however, I transitioned to studying public health when I realized greater systemic issues such as healthcare access and socio-economic status jeopardize our well-being. Although pursuing this unclear path was uncomfortable, I knew that, much like the journey traveled by the Land Cruisers, I wanted to explore the vast landscape before me. Also like the Cruisers, my objective is ever-distant: social justice.

Like my change of major, I did not originally know that I would study abroad for a full year in Santiago, Chile. In fact, I initially convinced myself I could not go at all. I had a fear of missing out on life at Ursinus, of letting my teammates down by missing the indoor and outdoor track seasons, and of neglecting my responsibility to the Ursinus community as a Resident

Advisor. Despite all this, I knew I would benefit from going abroad to improve my Spanish language skills and develop my cultural understanding. So, I strategically decided to go during the Fall semester to minimize how much track I would miss. Yet, a couple months into studying in Chile, I found myself questioning, “What would it be like to live and study in another place, outside of the U.S., for a whole year?” I realized I had grown so much personally only within two months that I could only imagine how much a whole year abroad would change me. However, doubt and shame held me back. “Will you graduate in four years?” asked my mother and abroad advisors. “Won’t you compromise your relationships at Ursinus, especially for graduating seniors?”, my father conjectured. I even interrogated myself. “What about your commitments to the track team and a Resident Advisor?” To alleviate pushback, I would tell others “resume builder” was my reasoning for going another semester. Really, my heart yearned for more time to explore culture, language, and places for their discovery unleashed new meanings of life. I realized what matters to me was that I listen to my heart and let my life speak. I chose to stay another semester in Chile.

During my year abroad, I went to San Pedro de Atacama where I visited an indigenous family living in the desert. I am beginning to drool remembering the taste of homemade tortillas topped with strawberry jam and fresh goat cheese made by the abuelita and her daughter. The food was just so fresh and delicious. I recall the family mentioning how proud they were of their goat cheese because the whole town constantly requested for more of their cheese.

Andean peasants embody the long-standing principle of *ayni*, translated from Quechua meaning reciprocity. Although abstract, the concept of reciprocity can be seen concretely through exchanges of food. Similar to how the Andean family traded cheese for commodity foods like rice which cannot grow in the desert. Seemingly, this exchange of food serves like a promise. “Hoy

para mi, mañana para ti” translates to “today for me, tomorrow for you”. Conceivably, Andean peoples operate with the intent of serving the collective community.

Reflecting more on my experience with the Andean family, I recall the abuela say “Earth-being”, as she turned around and pointed to the distant volcano. I grappled the meaning of “Earth-being”. Did I hear her correctly? If so, what was the “Earth-being”? I did not see any outline of a person. It wasn’t until later when I read the book “Earth-beings” by Marisol de la Cadena that I realized Andean peoples consider “Earth-beings” as all existing features seen around them. “Earth-beings” then included physical structures such as volcanoes, as pointed out by precious abuelita. But this concept also includes human-beings, anchoring our fate to the Earth’s. “Earth-beings” cannot truly be understood through “objective” science. Therefore, a nuanced understanding of our spiritual relations with “Earth-beings” may foster a relationship that encourages affinities to nature. Thinking spiritually seemingly permits us to telescope backwards to integratively problem-solve for social justice and liberation.

With all of this in mind, I return to the question of “how should we live together?” My perspectives of the world are eternally expanded and I am grateful for meeting the kind-hearted Andean family. I am eager to learn more as a researcher hoping to contribute to intellectual innovations that ethically include indigenous peoples’ ways of thinking. Conceivably, evolving the answer to “what will I do?”

# Introduction: Intersection of Religion and Social Justice: Liberation Theology

The intersectionality of religion and social justice are often forgotten. Both religion and social justice address activities or affairs in society. They propose callings to be certain kinds of humans, to encourage thoughts that lead to righteous behaviors so that collective needs are met and continually served as love grows and technology advances to improve quality of life. When there is imbalance, gaps in community needs, religion and social justice respond to problems through service, advocacy, education, social movements and more. They strive to achieve balance and peace. Both have similar goals and would like to achieve similar outcomes.

However, people have different reasons for showing up to make a better world. For example, both religion and social justice address hunger. Yet, the intersectionality of religion and social justice similarities in their goals fade as demonstrated through the language we use. Faith communities often address hunger and food insecurity from their faith tradition, using Biblical scripture. Whereas, social justice, or some aspects of food justice, addresses hunger by measuring racial and economic disparities and enacting policy that regulates access and distribution of food production and consumption. Social justice is enacted by the government, but more realistically citizens enact social justice by organizing and/or voting. Such variable strategies for addressing hunger in addition to the distinctive language stakeholders use to talk about hunger or food security can be confusing for those seeking food. In effect, different reasons for addressing hunger impedes collaboration and opportunity for religion and social justice to not only serve one another, but to also serve the collective community. In a word, the intersectionality for similar goals disappears due to “politics” – in which case the intersection is avoided. Despite the inherent essence that both religion and social justice carry in addressing activities or affairs in society. The process by which

hunger is addressed can be the diversion that makes or breaks collaboration. Furthermore, challenging aspects of the intersectionality of religion and social justice exist in the sense of place. For example, religious leaders and groups meet in the church; whereas social justice activists may work or volunteer at non-profits. Yet, conversations about race, hunger and poverty belong in any place. We all live in the same community where individuals, families experience social issues of race, hunger, poverty, violence and more.

No matter religious affiliation, the intersectionality of religion and social justice carries hope and belief. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights starts, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (UN General Assembly art. 1). “I love that “dignity” comes before “rights”. Because dignity is about self. It’s about self-awareness. All sorts of things enter into it: religion and culture... and it’s about the homeless man that is invisible without his dignity” said Mary Robinson, the first woman president of Ireland (HUMAN the movie). If dignity is about selfhood, and “rights” complements “dignity” in our shrine of freedom, then “rights” are like an affirmation from the community that will not deny the truth of dignity. In this way, the relationship between dignity and rights exist as self and community, forming reciprocal relationships that reinforce human rights.

The idea of reciprocity carries strongly within Indigenous culture of the Peruvian Andes. *Ayni*, meaning reciprocity in Quechua, serves like a promise in politics (Mayer). In Spanish, reciprocity shows in the saying “Hoy para mi, mañana para ti”, which translates to: “today for me, tomorrow for you”. In this way, reciprocity is a governing principle to protect dignity and rights. Reciprocity exists because it functions within the community, *el Ayllu*. Reciprocal care includes features of nature, “earth-beings”, such as mountains, *Apu Ausangate*, in the community (de la Cadena). This inclusion represents the inextricably linked nature of human rights and reminds us

of how humans are inextricably dependent and in relation to nature. The promise to serve one another is a way to insure dignity. Many small farmers that grow the majority of food for the world live with the main value: to support their peers. This active value exemplifies the highest form of love, “agape” as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. defined it as “purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless, and creative” (King, Jr.). Community reciprocity shares resources of labor, land, and harvest. This kind of care offers true senses of being with dignity in the world that is representative of love. I imagine the intersectionality of religion and social justice living in these visions of human rights that coexist of a respectful, diverse “art of the commonplace” (Berry).

When developing a project exploring the intersection of religion and social justice, I came to find out why my mentor suggested I study liberation theology. Liberation theology is the literal intersection of religion and social justice. The founder of liberation theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez, reflected ethically on his powerful position as a religious leader in the Catholic Church to compassionately consider the perspective of the poor in their connection to struggle as well as their relationship to God. Gutiérrez “explains his notion of Christian poverty as an act of loving solidarity with the poor as well as a liberatory protest against poverty.” As a result, Gutiérrez critiques the way in which religious leaders talk about God’s challenges to the poor.<sup>4</sup> Gutiérrez envisions religious leaders addressing systemic political issues of poverty. With this intention in mind, providing a preferential option for the poor suggests empowering the poor with knowledge and consciousness that their situation of poverty is not their fault nor possibly a challenge brought by God. I think this objection is political and thus one reason why “Liberation theology and

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<sup>4</sup> Religious leaders have been called to address social injustices in multiple instances and contexts. Here Gutiérrez addresses poverty in Peru during the 1970s. Prior to Gutiérrez, in 1957, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave an address during the annual meeting of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A that “all too many ministers are still silent while evil rages” regarding that “the problem of race is indeed America’s greatest moral dilemma” (King, Jr.).

Gutiérrez have both been the subjects of repeated Papal scrutiny” (Rivers). Another reason being that a sense of blame can easily overtake the realization that these models and ideals are not serving everyone. This is because blame leads to shame, a feeling that is of personal and collective suffering. Yet, once we know that everyone is not served fairly, we cannot go back to the unknown, evade the truth. We cannot go back to what we were doing because we know that is not love. To be loved is to be held and free. Additionally, there is so much knowledge in pain. Getting the knowledge that you are impoverished is painful. But self-knowledge is liberating because you accept what’s challenging, then gain an understanding of how your situation could improve. Inasmuch as identifying broader systemic injustices such as poverty and financial needs to access resources, religious leaders can share knowledge and build understanding. This act alone can form the identity of the “collective agency” needed to achieve “community resilience”, as described later by Monica White. By forming a preferential option for the poor, religious leaders serve God. Gutiérrez being from Peru and presenting this theological narrative during the 1970s, an era of strong neoliberalism in Latin America, Gutiérrez filled the identity of the collective agency that led to social movements for liberation that spread across Latin America. Under the circumstances of resistance and even papal scrutiny, my mind diverts to Parker Palmer's comments on leadership in which Gutiérrez takes the power of “complicity [as] a source for profound hope for change” (Palmer 78).

I gained a greater understanding of liberation by studying Gustavo’s work on liberation theology. This foundation helped me envision ways to explore how food systems can address inequities. Below are more details about liberation to give more context:

According to Gutiérrez true “liberation” has three main dimensions: First, it involves political and social liberation, the elimination of the immediate causes of poverty and

injustice. Second, liberation involves the emancipation of the poor, the marginalized, the downtrodden and the oppressed from all “those things that limit their capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity” (Gutiérrez). Third, liberation theology involves liberation from selfishness and sin, a re-establishment of a relationship with God and with other people. (Rivers)

The causes of poverty are complex and include: working wages, costs of housing, food, healthcare, child care, and reduced-fee legal support to escape unsafe environments such as domestic violence. But also addressing environments in which diversity is not celebrated and limited by: race, gender identity, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, immigration status, education level, mental illness and disability. With this in mind, it is likely you, yourself, or someone you know has been impacted by political and social issues in some combination: mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. We are human. We have the capacity to learn about empathy, compassion, courage, vulnerability, and authenticity.<sup>5</sup> I believe we can access these emotions to connect and imagine the struggles that are barriers to freedom inside of us, and in our communities. Listening to voices and stories build significant power. By learning about these dimensions of liberation, I not only learned more about myself in how I view the world, but how to step into the shoes of someone else in all corners of the globe. I believe we truly understand the value in addressing these political and social issues when we see peace. “Plant gardens and eat what they produce... Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (*New International*

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<sup>5</sup>To learn more about these emotions visit <https://brenebrown.com/> and read books by Dr. Brené Brown.

*Bible Jer. 29.5; Jer. 29.7)* Liberation for all in our communities is peaceful and prosperous, but in order for that to happen we need equity.

Equity differs from equality in that “equity is a process and equality is an outcome of that process.” (George Washington University online Master of Public Health program). The Race Matters Institute clarifies this distinction, “The route to achieving equity will not be accomplished through treating everyone equally. It will be achieved by treating everyone equitably, or justly according to their circumstances” (Dressel). By the same token, equity is a similar approach to a “preferential option for the poor” in liberation theology. Here is another example in which the conceptual framework takes a similar mindset, but the language differs. Just as the use of equity instead of equality makes a difference in meaning. Although they are interrelated, the distinction in a mission statement, for example, changes the approach of an organization completely by looking to make change broadly instead of a specific community. Then the approach impacts the community differently or may not even be effective. Language helps inform how we will benefit people universally. In order to achieve a place where people are treated fairly and equally, where there is justice and liberation, we need equity to get there. Equity is a process that involves forming building blocks to have access to needs that we all require such as food.<sup>6</sup> “Equity is a solution for addressing imbalanced social systems. Justice can take equity one step further by fixing the systems in a way that leads to long-term, sustainable, equitable access for generations to come” (George Washington University online Master of Public Health program).

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<sup>6</sup> There is a very helpful illustration by Tony Ruth distinguishing between inequality and equality as well as equity and justice through apple picking. Illustration is originally sourced from the 2019 Design in Tech Report which is accessible through the George Washington University online Master of Public Health program here: <https://onlinepublichealth.gwu.edu/resources/equity-vs-equality/> (Maeda).

Humans are inextricably dependent on nature and environment for resources and from the sense of place in which Earth is home. Equitable solutions require holistic mindsets in a time of ecological crises in which the most vulnerable especially face. An ecological theology of liberation, proposed by Daniel Castillo, extends discourse of liberation theology to the current global context “that grounds the preferential option for both the earth and the poor in its confession of who God is and what God desires” (Castillo xxvi). In this way, an ecological theology of liberation suggests a Christian praxis that conveys the intersectionality of religion, social justice and environmental justice. Castillo draws connections that reckon with not only environmental degradation but also racism and cultural degradation as expressed in black liberation theology and Latin American liberation theology. Additionally, Castillo argues the importance of political ecology which seeks to understand human interaction with the environment and natural resources. Castillo states:

Political ecology, as a general discipline, is aimed at understanding the ways in which power shapes the webs of eco-social relationships that constitute the world. Its judgment on these relationships is not uniform. In other words, while political ecology can function as a tool to argue for an option for the earth and poor, it can also be used to justify the technological domination of the earth and the oppression of the poor. (Castillo 9n24)

Political ecology talks about the ways we connect with the planet and enact environmental protection and thinks about where we grew up, how we grew up and what we've been taught in relation to the planet. Political ecology evaluates how our connection to the planet is really based on politics and culture. The interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary discourse provided by Castillo serves as a theoretical framework that informs conceptual understanding and language of

liberation.<sup>7</sup> Understanding this framework deepens the argument for why striving for justice matters, why we need preferential options for the poor and the earth. This is because it addresses the realities of the world in which we live, where community lacks belonging. The reality is that we are all interrelated, mutually tied. Thus, an ecological theology of liberation strives to build connection among community and awareness of the intersectionality of religion and social justice.

Gaining a theoretical understanding also informs action, in particular human agency. “Human agency transforms not only social landscapes but also ecological landscapes through the distribution of both economic and environmental costs and goods” (Castillo xix). History and our current context explains the power of human agency, such as our globalized political economy. Dr. Monica White furthers the concept of agency as “collective agency”.<sup>8</sup> A concept that I think demonstrates the theoretical framework of how religion and social justice can serve one another:

Collective agency, a concept that I coined based upon the data for this project, involves social actors' ability to create and enact behavioral options necessary to affect their political future. As such, it is an intrinsic part of social activism. How people understand and conceptualize their own agency affects their beliefs about whether they can influence the course of events in their own lives. Based on the information available to

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<sup>7</sup> Worthy of exploration is also *Laudato Si*, in which Pope Francis expresses views aligning with an ecological theology of liberation: “that God creates the human person to live in communion with God, neighbor, and earth, and that the human person’s corresponding love of God, neighbor, and earth exists as distinct but interrelated realities” (Castillo 67-68). Although the concerns from *Laudato Si* are inadequate for “the advent of the planetary emergency, specifically, the emergency’s relationship to the history and legacy of colonialism within the 500-year project” (Castillo 146).

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Monica White’s book provides historical data and stories on agricultural resistance and the black freedom movement. Using the framework of *collective agency and community resilience*, the book “offers another narrative of the relationship between labor, land use, and the black farmers whose contributions were intrinsic to the development of the agricultural sector of the United States of America... This book recovers the efforts of black landowners as well as the civil rights activism of sharecroppers, tenant farmers, and domestic workers... This book is an effort to recover, tell, and honor the stories of collective agency and community resilience of the black rural poor, a group the civil rights movement left behind” (White 3).

them and their interpretation of that information, their sense of agency allows them to make decisions either to resist or adhere to social boundaries. Those who join movements develop a type of agency that includes a willingness to give up the individual rewards granted by the hegemonic power of the social hierarchy and to find rewards in movement participation. ...

Most scholarship on the concept of agency concentrates on its psychological origins and impact and its implications for the individual. I propose *collective agency* as a way to expand theories of agency to include a collective dimension. A community does not have a consciousness in the same way an individual does, but when a group of people comes together and believes in their mutual success, this creates a separate type of consciousness that drives collective agency. The concept of collective agency provides grounding for this book's investigation [studying agricultural resistance and the black freedom movement] of those who share a collective identity and who join together in efforts to create new social forms [such as “community resilience”]. (White 7)

Religion and social justice are inherently intersectional in their similar mission for a peaceful, just world; they “share a collective identity” that has the potential to “join together in efforts to create new social forms” (White 7). Putting beliefs into action, integrating theory and practice, can be considered the task of the disciple. This theoretical framework of “collective agency and community resilience” helps us understand how religion and social justice can serve one another through deep reflection on our own self, our daily habits, our thought patterns: the task of the white moderate. To draw a connection between religion and social justice, I repeat what White says about individual agency: “How people understand and conceptualize their own agency affects their beliefs about whether they can influence the course of events in their own lives” (7).

In the light of comparison between agency and vocation, I see another example of the intersection of religion and social justice. Agency and vocation are related in the sense that both reflect on beliefs to guide action. Agency is “the ability to take action or to choose what action to take”<sup>9</sup>. Vocation “comes from a voice ‘in here”, calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given to me at birth by God” (Palmer 10). Vocation responds to the inner self, the nature of selfhood, that is “accepting the treasure of true self I already possess” (Palmer 10). The inner self requires love and nurture. Both of which need positive care and reciprocity within our relationships as well as the continuance of positive care and reciprocity to maintain relationships. I believe that we are capable of incorporating love, the highest form of love: “agape”, as Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. defined, into our daily lives for those that are most affected by economic, health and environmental food systems crises. Reflecting on our agency and vocation would support people’s dignity and rights.

I found White’s description of agency valuable in attempting to understand my vocation as a listener of the voice inside my head. Is the voice aligned with my beliefs? Or is the voice aligned with the beliefs of others and/or pushed on me by culture? I think, “Can I do anything about food security? It seems so abstract, big and complex.” As a listener of the voice inside my head, I evaluate my individual ability and make the choice to respond instead, “I can grow lettuce and onions for my local food pantry”. If agency affects my beliefs, and my beliefs affect my behavior, I wonder what other assumptions I carry about myself and the world. Charles Rice offers further perspective about our conceptual understanding of ‘belief’. “Faith and belief are used interchangeably in the New Testament. We’ve come to disassociate faith and belief...that they are

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<sup>9</sup> (“meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary”)

disconnected. We think of belief as a way of thinking when the original intent was a way of acting” (Tedx Talks “On Belief, Faith and Responsibility”). Thus, how people conceptualize faith or belief affects “whether they can influence the course of events in their own lives” (White 7). Accordingly, how we form collective agency. If people aspire to achieve peace, prosperity, food security, protecting our most vulnerable children by insuring equal opportunities to education, or whichever world they dream, they must inquire and reflect on their own agency, beliefs, faith, vocation. Our cultural, political, and economic environment in childhood and following developmental experiences impact our consciousness, our awareness of particular facts or feelings.<sup>10</sup> “Consciousness precedes being: consciousness, yours and mine, can form, deform, or reform our world” (Palmer 78). Our consciousness leads our path to a truer, more beautiful world.

I feel the relationship between agency and vocation can be seen in the garden. The garden is a place where humans can not only interact with nature, but also reflect on relationships with their surroundings, a place to share food with residential neighbors. “Plant gardens and eat what they produce ...and seek the peace of the city to what you have been sent.” (*New International Bible*). Jeremiah 29 describes the boundless relationships we can form with ecological communities of berries, butterflies, and beetles. To put it differently, Castillo’s interpretation of Scripture in readings of the gospels, expresses the “human/earth relationship at the heart of Jesus’s mission ... such that the vocation of the gardener portrays” as described in the Psalms (Castillo 119-120). While exploring the concept of vocation I came to understand how beliefs affect agency by addressing one’s inner calling and relationship with God. At the beginning of this fellowship,

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<sup>10</sup> Metacognition is another term that is related to the conceptual framework that mindfulness, agency, beliefs, faith, and vocation carry in the type of reflection that is called for as a response to this proposed theoretical framework of “collective agency and community resilience” among the intersectionality of religion and social justice (White).

my calling was to the garden. Although the traditional use of the concept of vocation “is rooted in deep distrust of selfhood but shouldn’t be deduced to traditional use; nor does vocation necessarily mean discipleship. Instead, vocation responds to the inner self, the nature of selfhood, “accepting the treasure of true self I already possess” (Palmer 10). In this way, I think integrating agency and vocation into my reflections helped me realize the power of gardening. Gustavo Gutiérrez stated, “We must incarnate an ‘environmentalism of the poor’ that, at the same time, learns to understand nature as a gift given freely by God – a God who desires that all of creation partake in the fullness of life. This is vital to the task of Christian discipleship” (Castillo xvi). Christianity explores human interaction with the environment from the beginning of the Bible with the story of Creation and the Garden of Eden. This derived my inspiration to explore faith and my vocation by farming during this fellowship. I also wanted to try to answer questions like, “Where does food come from? Whose hands have picked my food? What would Jesus eat? What might Jesus eat in today’s America?”

This work strives to explore sustainable food systems and faith. By doing this I hope to provide knowledge for faith communities and activists interested in addressing issues surrounding food systems. Hunger being a symptom of poverty and agricultural systems that violate the sanctity of life provoke a challenge to form an ecumenical approach to just and ecological food and agricultural systems. An ecumenical approach that uses their native land to cultivate equity to achieve justice. In learning about religion and social justice I discovered they share many similar objectives that ultimately promote well-being. They operate similarly to address social and ecological issues, but act for different reasons. I hope to highlight how faith communities are activists. Partnership with faith communities offers potential to expand capacity and develop unified efforts. By studying farming and food systems, I see how religion and social justice serve

one another. My hope is to connect the reader to how the act of eating can be humbling. There is creative and imaginative work ongoing that connects daily activity to worldly impact just within understanding the complexity of hunger, food systems, and food sovereignty. Food, faith, farming, community, justice, liberation and salvation are topics that respond to a “call to be a certain kind of person in the world” in the words of Rev. Charles Rice (Tedx Talks “On Belief, Faith and Responsibility: Charles Rice”). I hope the reader learns how easily one can cultivate sustainability, health, and liberation through reflection on personal narrative and agency in eating.

## Part 1: Food Justice

Before diving into all of the different perspectives and strategies that I have observed among the relationship of religion and food justice, I believe it is important to clarify what I think we should try to achieve and the context in which I am speaking.

Addressing hunger is a common social issue that is addressed by missions of justice and religion or faith. The path to ending hunger and food insecurity is through pursuing food justice and sovereignty. Food justice is an intricate concept that is described by a balanced social system and ecosystem which provides sufficient, healthy and ethically produced food to all members of a society (“What Is Food Justice and Why Is It Necessary?”). It shares much with social justice in that people of color are marginalized by how nutritious food is distributed and accessible. For example, the cost of organic produce and health-conscious foods and the proximity of the store that sells those foods. Additionally, food justice is related to environmental justice. For example, communities that live next to concentrated animal feed operations (CAFOs) experience the toxic waste of manure that runs off the farm when mismanaged; such agriculture negatively impacts human and ecosystem health, air and water quality, and access to green space. Food justice can be seen as a way to address hunger as a symptom of poverty. Alternatively, “faith and Indigenous communities see hunger as a witness to imbalance in the world: a deeper problem than a calorie deficit. When communities see hunger as a social, economic, and moral problem, they take systemic and collective approaches to its resolution” (Lietz-Bilecky and Duke WFPC). Interviewed organizations and individuals working around rural child hunger described shifting from a perspective of “charity to justice” in which “justice-focused solutions to rural child hunger”, for example, “address environmental justice, land justice, social justice and racial justice”. Furthermore, providing support for hunger by shifting a mindset from scarcity to abundance by

looking for available resources that support self-reliance (Lietz-Bilecky and Duke WFPC). Faith communities can be a central community to connect low income communities to resources like land, seeds and perennial crops like fruit and nut trees. This kind of support empowers the future of food through seed saving. One annual crop can reproduce many more seeds that can be saved for next year when the growing season begins. Installing these opportunities ensures a truer version of food security as the actual presence of food in the future. Empowering people to grow food for themselves is an opportunity to empower their health and spiritual well-being as they connect to nature. In this way, food security is much more than providing food.

Furthermore, this support develops understanding of ways in which people have agency. Discovering agency can begin by asking, “in what capacity do I have power to act on my situation?” Making use of agency releases dependency and promotes liberation from oppressive and insufficient social, legal or economic systems. Discovering agency leads to the path of food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is the ability to have a choice in what you eat. Homesteading and some versions of community co-operatives form self-sufficiency, lending on land, plants and animals to fill dietary requirements. This requires gaining knowledge, skills, ability and will to grow food. Food sovereignty also advocates for insuring food access to suit a community's ethics, beliefs, cultural background, health needs, and lifestyle.

An example of food injustice is the zoning laws inhibiting the presence of backyard chickens in neighborhoods. Yet policy allowing backyard chickens could provision resources that decrease malnourishment, food insecurity, and economic inequality. “Ultimate food security comes from imbedding production proximate to where we live. Supply chain issues and inflation are jeopardizing dietary requirements. What could be more socially just than insuring food security?” (Salatin). Knowing that food comes from a local source is food security because there

is greater guarantee that food will be on the table. Changing zoning laws to allow backyard chickens is an example of transitioning toward food sovereignty.

We can begin a broader development in the path to achieving food justice and food sovereignty in our communities by learning about our current food system. “Food system” is a concept defining and examining the current ways our society interacts with natural resources to obtain food. Food systems involve the production, distribution and consumption of food and comprise activities within social, economic and legal systems.

I invite the reader, for example, to try to call the phone number on the back of a food package and ask, “Where does this food come from?” It is likely the customer service agent will not know that information or claim the information is proprietary. We do not know the agricultural practices, the working conditions experienced by farmworkers, whether fair wages or exchanges are shared among supply chains, the transportation inefficiencies contributing to air pollution and natural resource depletion. Food systems are interdisciplinary and require critical thinking about the processes involved to get food from a farm to the table where someone consumes it, or is limited by variable factors and goes hungry.

Keep in mind, the journey of food is not limited to the kitchen table, but also at restaurants, school cafeterias, nursing homes, prisons, and more. The food system does not end at the table. Really the food system ends where food lands, possibly wasted in landfills. Many food security efforts try to distribute food to those who need it, as well as lots of researchers dedicate time and effort to food waste issues. Many farmworkers experience hunger themselves. “Food waste’s anti-hunger bent doesn’t only divert food from landfills — it diverts our attention from food justice” (Bryniarski). Many farmworkers are exposed to chemical pesticides and fertilizers that are hazardous to their health. Thus food justice also calls not only on social justice, but also for a

response rooted by environmental justice that strives to protect access to ecosystems. Chemical fertilizers and pesticides enter our waterways via rain and water runoff and impact water quality. Poor water quality can kill species in marine ecosystems, imbalancing the food web of animals and humans that participate through workers in the fishing industry. Although fish farms are becoming increasingly common, chemical inputs can still runoff and impact the health of the fish that becomes available in grocery stores, for example. Food justice elects transitions in our current agricultural practices that make up the majority of our food systems (Hervé-Gruyer and Hervé-Gruyer; Shepard; Rodale). We need to transition away from agricultural practices that are damaging human and environmental health.<sup>11</sup> Farmers need technical and financial support to make this transition. Consumers impact this transition by purchasing food from farmers, restaurants and stores that support sustainable agriculture. If consumers also choose local farm products, then they also support their local economy and nutrition security and lessen air pollution.

Transitioning food systems today involves listening to the people working in the fields, factory workers, restaurant and food service industry, to recognize the ways in which food (legal, economic, and social) systems oppress human dignity (““On Common Ground”: CIW, faith leaders come together in NYC for “an extraordinary conversation” ...”). Food can be used as a tool to understand the systemic issues and disparities within social, legal, and economic systems (Bowens 173). Food can also be a tool to help us understand how to achieve justice. The production

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<sup>11</sup> For further details and exploration of how agriculture can mitigate climate change in an optimistic way, watch *Kiss the Ground* on Netflix. Please note, this movie depicts stories of a largely white and male demographic and dismisses that Indigenous peoples and people of color have been practicing regenerative agriculture methods for long before today (Lucas; “Native Lands Stewardship Webinar Series”). Additionally, they have headed the environmental justice and sustainable food and farm movement resisting injustice through community-centered ways as demonstrated in the book, *The Color of Food* by Natasha Bowens, *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer, the campaign by La Via Campesina found here: <https://viacampesina.org/en/who-are-we/> .

and distribution of food impact socioeconomic inequality and environmental degradation. All of these aspects make up food systems.

Co-operative farming is a strong model for the future of resilient food systems. Faith communities are positioned in their collective group of peoples and land ownership to start co-operative models. Similar to the principles of liberation theology, the co-operative farming model protests against poverty and racism (White). Co-operative models (co-ops) are similar to Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) models because they focus on community, rather than grocery stores where individual consumers buy products. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines: “Co-ops are producer- and user-owned businesses that are controlled by -- and operate for the benefit of -- their members, rather than outside investors. The co-op business model is highly flexible and can address a wide variety of needs” (United States Department of Agriculture). Growing food and sharing food are ways of loving thy neighbor by meeting basic human survival needs.

Growing your own food is a way to not only seek freedom without economic demands, but also to resist political and economic systems that oppress and marginalize people. Food security was not demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the impoverished, unemployed people were looking to food banks for hunger relief. Even supply chains couldn't meet the demands of food supply as grocery stores shelves were found empty in particular departments and some places because workers were unprotected. Our globalized food system did not and still doesn't sufficiently handle protecting the health of workers in fields, factories, and stores while maintaining supply chains. Food security was demonstrated during the pandemic when communities participated in local food systems buying directly from local farmers. Local food systems built to serve a community provide the members access to information about how

the food is produced, and challenges to getting food. These efforts uplift communities through the self-determination of its members, as described by Dr. Shakara Tyler (School for Environment and Sustainability).

Although I was not directly impacted by the food shortages during the beginning of the pandemic, reading news articles and watching documentaries rendered plenty of fear in me. Learning from the past about weaknesses in food systems motivated me to learn how to grow food and support our transition to a resilient food system. My journey down this path began in college taking classes on food systems interning and volunteering at food banks, as well as being a Sustainable Food Fellow at Ursinus College. I advocated for students experiencing hunger on campus. Hunger was not recognized as an issue because purchasing meal plans is required by the college. However, the students who were responsible for paying tuition and work while studying disproportionately experienced hunger, and were mostly students of color. Daytime classes constrained students to work during the evening, so students missed dining hall hours for dinner. Despite paying for meals, students did not have access to food. Beyond this, carrying food out of the dining hall during lunch was not allowed despite the fact that there was always some amount of leftover food thrown out. These issues were brought to the attention of the Vice President, Dean of Students, and other college administration. I contributed to discussion by explaining barriers to food security on campus. Furthermore, I proposed solutions such as reusable carry out to-go containers and scholarships to support students in these circumstances. Being one of 20 students living on campus due to extenuating circumstances during the COVID-19 pandemic gave me further insight into the inequity of food security on campus. The initial two weeks of the pandemic we received carry-out meals in disposable containers. Because our county had the highest cases of the virus in Pennsylvania, the state mandated closing on campus dining services and kitchen staff

were furloughed without income. Students were given stipends to purchase food, however the nearest grocery store was 2.5 miles roundtrip walking. Fortunately, I had a car on campus and was able to make multiple trips to the grocery store each week to help several of my peers since there was insufficient storage space in the community refrigerators. I documented food access conditions so that future Sustainable Food Fellows and the Office of Sustainability could progress food security initiatives.

## Defining Food Justice

To me, food justice is an interdisciplinary concept that takes a holistic approach to achieve fairness by ensuring equitable access to regeneratively produced food with fair working conditions. It is a call to be a certain kind of consumer. To vote with your dollar when you buy food by supporting social justice, environmental justice, liberation, and purchases that promote a robust, circular, viable economy for a healthy planet. This calling might be to support freedom in human rights, animal rights, the common good, or for religious reasons — all of which strive to achieve a better quality of life.

Definitions of food justice vary. There are key aspects that should be considered such as food miles, relational/proximate, environmental protection, food accessibility, health disparities, and socioeconomic equity.<sup>12</sup> Alternative consideration for food justice could be stated as: “Three Aspects of Food Justice: Access to healthy, locally grown, fresh, culturally appropriate food. Living wage jobs for all food system workers – farmers, farmworkers, restaurant, food service, processing plant. Community Control through cooperatives, faith-based initiatives, community

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<sup>12</sup>“These main points are drawn largely from a conference talk by Dr. Gail Feenstra, UC Davis. Food Justice Summit, Fayetteville, AR, 2013” (Murphy-Erby, Y., et. al). <https://uark.libguides.com/foodjustice>

organizations”. However, variation and generalizations in the definition of food justice could make for inherently exclusive definitions. Jeff Rowe offers some perspective:

These definitions may not address the real life challenges of the communities they were intended to benefit, or alienate them by not addressing the concerns of a given community specifically. Individual communities want their own experiences reflected in their own definitions...

One major pitfall — for many of the definitions — is a lack of a defined audience, which is beneficial when considering food justice as a community activity. Identification of leadership, specifically who will be implementing the change, is also crucial. This way the food justice movement is better served by focusing on specific messaging...

Many claim food justice as a right. But who is granting that right? Where is it being generated? Additionally, the question of why the current food system fails at delivering the so-desired rights is not identified. In many of the definitions, the concept of what a community is remains nebulous. (Rowe)

Food justice as a right has been established in the state of Maine which is explored later in the paper as a political strategy for building equitable food systems and attempting to ensure food sovereignty. Defining food justice requires context. For example, a report studying rural child hunger and faith community engagement found practitioners expressing that context is key. “Building successful and equitable partnerships with rural faith communities requires paying attention to rural contexts along with their unique needs and concerns” (Lietz-Bilecky and Duke WFPC).

Food is necessary today, was yesterday, and will be tomorrow for humans and all creatures. Food insecurity commonly addresses the issue of hunger. Food justice is a way to address more

than hunger, it is a way to address racial and socioeconomic issues. Hunger prevails as a challenge in nearly every community across the U.S. and the world. This reality gives rise to the urgent need to move from a perspective of charity to justice. To think big like a national food strategy, but to act locally for its potentially significant impact too. In addition to the current challenge that hunger is a symptom of poverty, considering the future of food will be necessary to prepare for a “resource-compromised future” (Shepard). We are lacking a commonly known definition of food security that addresses the present as well as what will be supportive for the future. We want to eliminate hunger. But, learning from history, our current food assistance policies installed during the Great Depression of the 1930s have remained quite similar to today, and hunger prevails. Our imagination of hunger is limited by caloric intake rather than evaluating food nutrient intake. As well as the hungry, the malnourished are living with chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes. In order to secure a future of food for the hungry, we must not only address hunger as a symptom of poverty but food as medicine. This means cultivating an equitable approach to not only socioeconomic disparities and injustices, but how systemic issues impact our ability to address climate change especially as it impacts vulnerable communities. We must redefine food security to fit the future we are already building. Food security should entail regenerative agroforestry agricultural practices that are most likely to be resilient in addressing the future that will happen.

Current food insecurity efforts will need to change. Government food assistance programs participate in food systems by allocating budgets to purchase food. There are various buyers involved in government food assistance programs. To support farmers, Farmers Market Nutrition Program (FMNP) vouchers are given to eligible low income people. Additionally, commodity programs supply food banks. There is a crucial need to shift root causes and address symptoms in policies of legislation that direct government programs. Participation by our government is needed

by the food justice movement. In my experience working at food banks, dependence for food supply relies on unsustainable and unreliable government funding, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), subsidized agricultural crop commodities, and can be largely unhealthy donations like processed, sugary foods by charities and businesses (Imhoff and Badaracco). Furthermore, our imagination of hunger is limited by caloric intake rather than evaluating food nutrient intake. Malnourishment is then the issue of concern. In this way, the narrative of hunger changes entirely. Health becomes the measure of adequate food security. By using nutrition to evaluate access to food, public health professionals, such as dietitians, can support the food justice movement while addressing the presence of chronic diseases such as obesity and diabetes. Of course, factors such as metabolism, pre-existing conditions, a patient's family history, mental health, and more impact health. Yet, by focusing on nutrient-dense diets we can try to shift the food system to meet the health of communities. This would also require focusing more than we currently do on crops that offer nutrient-dense calories, such as nuts, acorns, seeds. As well as looking into local options so that we may have a chance of being resilient in the face of adversity. Indigenous knowledge and cultures provide insight into possible alternatives for our diets. We must also respect this knowledge; as well as honor the labor required to share knowledge.

Wirzba asks researchers related to the agricultural sciences (such as ecologists, soil scientists, plant breeders, etc.) "What does a land need to be fertile and healthy? When was the last time they designed a plant with flavor and nutrition in mind?" (Yale Divinity School) The researchers respond saying it's tricky because they are designing the plants to deal with the kind of herbicides or testing herbicide resistance, or designing the plants for a long transport lifespan and then designing for a long shelf life. Wirzba claims that he would argue that this is a violation of the sanctity of life. A violation that gets worked out on us, as the eaters of this food." Another

example by which research violates the integrity of food was demonstrated to me this year when I attended a graduate school fair where master's and doctoral candidates presented their research surrounding food science and nutrition to faculty and agrifood industry leaders. There was a keynote speaker by an alum who graduated 20 years ago. She was presented by the department chair to current students as a role model. The speaker worked to make fat free ranch and lower sodium in tomato soup to benefit consumer health. Yet, the speaker's main message was that "Taste is king", she explained further the company's goal: to bring the customer back to purchasing the product. I couldn't believe that someone who had gained so much knowledge about nutrition and food would still advocate for processed food that has shown to have negative effects on our health overall. She is right that indeed, taste is king, that the pleasure of eating is really a gift from God. However, the ethical implications of her research largely question the purpose of studying nutrition. Wendell Berry states, "People are fed by the food industry, which pays no attention to health, and are healed by the health industry, which pays no attention to food." This perpetuates food systems and food insecurity initiatives that do not value the quality of food nor "the sanctity of the life that is constantly circulating through it" (Wirzba). I find this frustrating as I consider my vocation and next steps after the fellowship. Nutrition often provides evidence for public policy yet higher education, research, and industry have historically and still do look to design and manipulate food packaging labels that inform consumers.

Land is foundational to food justice because we are reckoning with the power of land ownership that provisions economic prosperity. Not only is preserving farmland vital for food security and addressing climate change, but also the history and culture of land. The Homestead Act of 1862 sold public lands owned by the government for very cheap prices to achieve manifest destiny and incentivize Americans to move West (White). The culture during this time period

really only allowed white men to be landowners. This issued power to white men as those who were able to gain profits from the land by farming and selling the crop. Therefore, women, the farmers working the land, such as African American men, nor Indigenous peoples who had knowledge of the plants and animals existing on the land were not granted the opportunity to purchase land at such a cheap price. We see this today as the average farmer is a 62-year-old white male. Without access to land, applying knowledge and skills of farming the land makes it difficult to provide food security for their families, nor the opportunity to make an income for their family.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, today the cost of land is prohibitive for young farmers. Additionally, land has transformed as many crops were not native species, but seeds mainly brought from Europe. Of most notable concern, our topsoil has degraded due to tillage and conventional agricultural practices using chemical inputs. This dramatically changed the landscape for plants and animals that fed from the wild forage and as man knew “Creation”. At the end of the 19th century diets and food access were different than today. Transitioning from bison in the prairie to cows partially gives rise to the types of food we see in farmers' markets, grocery stores and our food system today. Preserving farmland is necessary to give opportunities of cultural healing for Indigenous peoples that experienced land dispossession and food access, as well as blacks and people of color that forcibly worked the land.

The nuances of the food justice movement today advocate for equitable access to food, nutrition security, sustainable farming practices, fair working conditions and wages in farms and factories and more. Such topics resonate among the faith and food movement as well (Tedx Talks “Soil & Sacrament: Fred Bahnson”). Defining food justice can be challenging partially because

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<sup>13</sup> Some efforts to promote economic prosperity for those who have skills in farming exist from farm business incubator programs like [Viva Farms](#).

food is such a personal experience. A proper and accurate definition of food justice may lead to issues of contempt. A person's experience with food may vary for fear or dissatisfaction of specific foods, eating disorders, autoimmune diseases that impact the gut and digestion such as ulcerative colitis or celiac disease. Food carries cultural traditions important to immigrants and family traditions. Food has religious traditions such as bread and wine embodying the body and blood of Christ. Food connects humans together as we appreciate the traditional foods that make up our family gatherings and cultural backgrounds. Food not only fills social gatherings but also embodies our ancestral connection; thus food is inherently sacred. The kind of food matters in determining a definition to which we seek to achieve justice. If food does not meet standards, then there are issues of contempt and more. For example, kosher food must be prepared in accordance with dietary laws, a certain purity. Therefore, definitions of food justice must address the audience and the experience of eating food (Rowe). These concerns are then very contextual to the circumstance and deserve appropriate attention when defining food justice. Indeed, this can be challenging - especially if we are to rely on food certifications on food product labeling - but we should respect and honor personal experience of food<sup>14</sup>. When leaders avoid nebulous conceptual definitions that make up theoretical frameworks for the movement, the result will be more effective.

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<sup>14</sup> In considering the definition of food justice, this certification program offers deep reflection for what should or can go into achieving food justice. ("Steps to Become Food Justice Certified")

## Part 2: Imagining an Ecumenical Approach to Building Sustainable Food Systems

When I think about food, I think about the sacred narrative it holds. Food is essential to all living things. Food is nourishing. Food is an expression of nurture and love. As humans, we have unique feeling abilities and emotional capacities that other living organisms, such as animals, share too.

I want to preface my suggestions for connecting with faith communities by acknowledging pain, abuse, and trauma experienced by humans that were caused by religious institutions and organizations, individuals of faith communities (especially family members), and more. Faith or religion should not be enforced upon anyone. History provides countless examples by which the iconic art of Jesus was used to oppress many people. People suffer for expressing their true relationship with faith, whether it be for having faith or, conversely, denying faith, or even an unsureness about religion. Contention around religion, ways of being, is often the cause of violence. We must accept that cultural healing involves decolonizing religion which requires learning to unlearn biases and assumptions. I think food and land are sacred entities that connect all of our narratives, no matter relation to faith. I want to respect, honor and uplift those who are trying to live a truer, more beautiful life by protecting their sacred relationship with food and land.

The life forms making up food systems are constantly changing as the life forms are flowing through the food system. In this section I share some theological foundations and faith-based approaches to resolving issues in food systems that are working to strengthen communities, build ecological resilience and support life by uplifting our connection to the land: agriculture.

## Theology of Eating

Our connection to the land is remarkably clear from a theological perspective in Genesis 2:7 of Scripture, “then the Lord God formed Adam from adamah” (human from humus). Adamah means humus. Humus is soil. Soil makes up the land. Adam arising from the adamah. Humans arising from the soil (Tedx Talks “Soil & Sacrament: Fred Bahnson”). The land not only gives to humanity but also receives. Inevitably we will return back to the humus after death. This piece of scripture shared with the story of Adam and Eve really demonstrates how connected we are to the soil. “The Salvation of lost and sinful man through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ by faith apart from works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit.” And regeneration in humus will arise again, a symbiotic relationship stewarded by youthful hands and sharing food.

Norman Wirzba is a theologian that I found incredibly helpful in connecting scripture to food systems. Wirzba combines perspectives regarding faith and food, forming a theology of eating. Wirzba speaks about how eating is a deeply personal experience, but also how eating carries great responsibility. Wirzba offers insight to the practical ways eaters can help transition toward a sustainable food system that values the care, effort, time, and love into growing nutritious food, while also supporting food, land, and agriculture workers. Wirzba discusses his book *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* in a talk to students in the school of divinity (Wirzba). I found particular interest in his response to the question, “Why should we care about chickens and how they are raised?” (Yale Divinity School). Wirzba draws an analogy to our children. Wirzba shares that he has four kids that are all runners who eat a lot and will do so in the 18 years of living under his legal responsibility and until they reach adulthood. Wirzba proposes: “What if we were to go to medical engineers and cut their life in half to nine years to lower the costs of food spent on children? What’s wrong with this process? It compromises the integrity of this life form.” This is

how we currently raise chickens and produce meat that we then consume. “Why should we think it’s any different for other life forms of this world?” Wirzba asks. I continue to inquire about this every day. Changing the natural way of life is a form of oppressing the integrity of life forms. Wirzba would argue that this is a violation of the “sanctity of life... A violation that gets worked out on us, as the eaters of this food” (Yale Divinity School).

Wirzba also added to my perspective of food security by looking at food as a gift from God. Wirzba says:

One of the first ways God's presence is seen in the world is the nurture of food to us. This is especially important for those who have experienced close encounters with hunger... The best answer theologians come up with for why God creates is because God loves. ... God's Creation of the world is a material, but manifestation of the exuberance of God's love and desires for others to be. (Yale Divinity School)

To have the opportunity to garden is a chance to witness one’s desire to be free, to “seek the peace and prosperity of the city” (*New International Bible Jer. 29.7*).

Food security and hunger are often misconstrued as responsibilities and obligations to feed the world. Conventional agriculture pushes to achieve high yields in an attempt to fulfill this myth, but results in environmental degradation and burden on the farmer. But we don't need to achieve high yields and exploit the land. People should have the freedom to build their own economy, to love others by letting them be free and food sovereign. Solving world hunger does not depend on food donations that are transported from another country, contributes to air pollution and expends natural resources. There is not necessarily a guarantee of food in the future unless we have local food systems. Shifting my mindset to focus on food as a gift from God in nature transforms my

optimism for food in the future. I think the gift of food, of sacrifice, will be shared in the setting of communal doing.

Hunger will not be solved through donations because it results in dependence and injustice as the community receiving the donation is inhibited from determining their sense of self. Foods grown in native soils are sacred and thus offer a truer, more beautiful sense of self and relationship to eating food, and God. Food sovereignty gives people the righteous opportunity to form not only a sacred relationship by farming with their native place, but also respecting the integrity and sanctity of life involved in growing the food that will nourish their mind, body, and spirit.

Students should have the chance to learn in school where our food comes from, if we are to address helplessness. Farmers should be invited to teach about growing food to witness the sacred experience of life coming from the soil as well as the peace in the garden. Access to land is then inherently necessary to form this sacred relationship. Yet many have been oppressed from access to land as known in the history of slavery and land ownership today. Over 60% of farm workers are people of color, but white people own 98% of all farmland (National Agricultural Statistics Service (USDA)).

## Political Strategies in Addressing Food Systems

There are various ways to address issues of food systems. Policy describes values, regulates behavior and is portrayed in our legal system through governance as well as organizations. Just as amendments are made to the constitution, faith communities also have governing bodies to regulate entities. However, addressing systemic issues requires proposing changes. Food justice advocates and leaders of the Christian food movement, like Nurya Love Parish, demonstrated to me how political strategies can be enacted in faith communities similar to how non-profits and

lobbyists from industry influence national or state level politics: by proposing amendments or new laws (Parish).<sup>15</sup>

Faith communities participate in the food movement by making institutional changes within governing bodies of faith communities.<sup>16</sup> For example, each year the legislative governing body of the Episcopal Church, called the General Convention, passes resolutions. In 2018 there were 19 resolutions passed for the care of God’s Creation. In particular, Resolution D053 by Nurya Love Parish illustrates how faith communities can engage with institutional change (Empsall). The resolution “encourages that all dioceses, parishes and missions create partnerships enabling the use of church-owned land for regenerative agriculture and biodiversity conservation projects in order to mitigate climate change” (Love Parish; Empsall). This resolution represents a political activity at an organizational level. The significance of this resolution is to demonstrate institutional changes which are enacted by policy. The impact of a policy change demonstrates a shift in values by the institution that is the episcopal church. The policy demonstrates a moral responsibility and obligation to support regenerative agriculture and ecological stewardship, which adds consideration in the decision-making process.

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<sup>15</sup> Nurya Love Parish openly claims (honorably) that she did not start the Christian food movement as it already existed. However, she wanted to connect with others regarding issues of our food system. So she was resourceful and used the internet to facilitate greater connection among Christians who are passionate about just and ecological food systems that serve Creation. Thus, an online directory called the “Christian Food Movement” was created to be a vessel for connection including education resources (books, videos, podcasts), organizations and people categorized by geographic location, and more. This directory is no longer online. I found it to be very useful in the beginnings of this fellowship for learning and research. However, there are other online resources available upon using search engines.

<sup>16</sup> Here, serves another example mentioned in the introduction noticing how religious leaders are called to address social injustices such as race, poverty and also environmental degradation. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. address in 1957 to the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. serves as an example where religious leaders inspire Monica White’s “collective agency” ((King, Jr.; White).

Different from faith communities, food justice advocacy can be seen as an argument of food as a human right. For example, in November of 2021, Maine passed the nation's first constitutional amendment protecting the right to grow your own food. The amendment states:

All individuals have a natural, inherent, and unalienable right to food, including the right to save and exchange seeds and the right to grow, raise, harvest, produce, and consume the food of their own choosing for their own nourishment, sustenance, bodily health, and well-being, as long as an individual does not commit trespassing, theft, poaching, or other abuses of private property rights, public lands, or natural resources in the harvesting, production, or acquisition of food (Maine State Legislature; Kulwicz).

As a result of being an amendment brought on by the food sovereignty movement, this policy differs from that of the Episcopal Church which addresses Creation.

Yet public policy embodies religious beliefs as well. State Rep. Justin Fecteau (R-86) of Maine states in his testimony supporting the legislation:

While most bills are simple texts written in statute in order to convey a message, this resolution, to establish a right to food, is pure poetry. Whether it is the theory of Evolution or of Creationism, the Right to Food is the Original Right of all living beings...

This isn't a bill, it isn't a resolution, it's a manifesto of our Original Right. It's a public health statement, it's an affirmation of our relationship with Mother Earth, and it speaks to the spirit of Maine. (Fecteau)

This serves as an example of the different reasons for which people come to movements. Additionally, the different ways in which we can address issues of food systems.

In a liberationist lens, both strategies of governance attempt to improve access to food to some degree. By making change happen in the legal system, the constitutional amendment by

Maine surrounding food sovereignty is probably the most direct strategy to achieve the right to food. Yet, the resolution encouraging stewardship of Creation with church-owned land provides a great example by which social systems can make change. Pondering the quantity of undeveloped land owned by churches makes me wonder about the impact faith communities can have on hunger and acquisition of food. Nevertheless, the greater institutional change towards supporting ecological stewardship and food access, the greater opportunity exists for mitigating social disparities and climate change. Faith communities address hunger in the same arena as private and public food security programs. In these perspectives, the case for building collective agency and taking systemic approaches to resolve imbalances in the world

I had a chance to reflect on the role of the Christian Food Movement in forming the Resolution D053 policy with Nurya Love Parish. She mentioned there is a lack in the imagination of Christian communities to engage in ecological stewardship as part of protecting Creation. After attending various churches this year, I agree with Nurya Love Parish. There is a lack of teaching about how to put theory into action. This is why I mentioned liberation theology in the beginning of this paper. The history of liberation theology and social movements in Latin America enacted a cultural change and empowered the impoverished to rise and protest. A beginning step entails asking questions about how things came to be, learning history. Then shifting the mind to imagine possibilities through sharing questions, history, and values into sermons inspired topics of conversation. Talking about the issues, offering solutions, and talking about their nuances and consequences is part of putting theory into action. Lastly, planning the change, completing the change, and starting the process all over again leads to holistically managing the culture. Talking and acting are part of how we engage cultural change in order to achieve justice. Religious leaders

can use their power and agency to educate and inspire change. The people must internalize these ideas into their narrative and act upon their newly founded understanding of the world.

While I was traveling across the country in my car, I realized the establishment of churches across the country is abundant. Considering the total land dedicated to faith communities, there is a lot of potential to build collective agency to enact efforts to mitigate climate change. Knowing the presence of church buildings, I imagine great opportunities for churches serving as community centers. Church communities are declining in their attendance. I remember listening to Nurya Love Parish, an active leader in the Christian Food Movement, on a podcast discussing the need for churches to change or they will not exist in the future. Nurya Love Parish believes that an ecological revival in the church could be a way to connect with younger people to continue the presence of churches. I agree. I think my generation wants to do meaningful, purposeful work. They want to be inspired and connected to social and ecological communities. There has to be a connection across generations in order for churches to exist in the future, and ecological stewardship could be that very thing that passes faith to the next generation, and it is needed now more than ever. Humans are biologically wired to appreciate nature. We don't exactly know why we appreciate beauty, but we know that humans find nature to be beautiful. I think this is important to realize why people might come together to steward the land. There is art and play, actions that express oneself, in stewarding the land too.

## Serving One Another: Inspiration from Faith Communities

Try to imagine nature in your life. In the last century or so, the world has lost 75% of its edible plant varieties. That might be hard to comprehend as food is really abundant and so versatile that we can craft endless recipes. However, this loss in biodiversity threatens our food and nutrition security. Churches could become seed banks or offer seed libraries that provide opportunities to access healthy and affordable food, foster connection to the land, increase communal doing by growing food together or trading seeds. One seed can lead to access to food for next year through seed saving, and possibly years of food security especially considering the seeds could be locally adapted to be grown in that location (Chaskey). The bounty of food could be experienced on lands owned by the Church as well. As Nurya Love Parish states, “Land is part of Creation” (Clark). Imagine seeing an actual Garden of Eden at Church or having service within the garden. Maybe wheat could be grown on the Church property and harvested and milled locally to be baked into bread and enjoyed right in the very same garden it was harvested. Or a food forest sitting outside the chapel with an orchard of fruit trees with medicinal herbs and berry bushes growing in the understory (Hurley and Emory; Philadelphia Orchard Project). Maybe there is a bench in the shade of an oak tree that is home to a family of songbirds. Faith communities have the potential to work together to create this dream as it is heaven, here on earth.

In the following sections I share about organizations in which I gained familiarity during this fellowship journey. There are four organizations I mention that all have distinct approaches to improving food systems issues. Additionally, each offers unique perspectives and opportunities for building “collective agency” within the intersectionality of religion and social justice. These organizations built a mental framework that served me in understanding ways I can contribute to

food systems as an individual, as a collaborator with faith communities, as well as deepened my inquiry and experiential learning as I volunteered on farms.

## FaithLands

FaithLands is “a growing national movement to connect and inspire faith communities to use their land in new ways that promote ecological and human health, support local food and farming, enact reparative justice, and strengthen communities” (FaithLands).<sup>17</sup> In 2021, the organization published the FaithLands Toolkit that contains many amazing examples. I couldn’t explain their mission better than the authors so the following is a description from the Toolkit.

Welcome to FaithLands, an initiative to engage faith communities in ecological stewardship and reparative justice through the land. FaithLands is an invitation to join us in envisioning a world where land held by religious institutions is transformed into sustainable gardens and farms for the greater good of the land and all who depend on its bounty for sustenance and well-being. We believe faith communities are uniquely positioned in community and in their theological foundations to look at the land they own—the grounds of the congregations, synagogues, mosques, and churches; the retreat centers and places of worship that rest on arable or ancestral land—and to ask, How could this land be used to honor our connection to all that is, and our role in supporting a vibrant community? What is the untold story of how this land came to be in our possession? What is its origin? From whom was it taken and from whom was it withheld?”

FaithLands offers a space to ask and answer, How can we use this land to repair relationships, to redress the wrongs of our ancestors, to heal the life within the soil? And, what would be the most just use of this land?

The FaithLands Toolkit serves as a guide to support faith communities in considering their respective spiritual traditions linking those core values and beliefs to the land. Through case studies and thoughtful conversation, it offers ways to join a growing number of faith traditions in the production of food, the support of basic human needs, and the building of resilient communities while also promoting equity and justice through the land. As you delve into the toolkit, we invite you to keep

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<sup>17</sup> FaithLands is an initiative associated with the Agrarian Trust.

in mind the questions posed in this introduction to better understand your faith community's opportunities to address this political, social, and environmental moment in ways that will honor your deepest beliefs and traditions. (FaithLands Toolkit, 4)

The work of FaithLands is significant. By drawing connections to how we can serve one another, collaboration comes to fruition. In this way, FaithLands has provided a collective consciousness and guides us to build “collective agency” (White). By sharing land, faith communities can support BIPOC farmers seeking to farm but are prohibited from doing so due to the cost of land and initial costs of farming. Thus, FaithLands also exemplifies the intersectionality of religion and social justice. The abundant opportunities that come from access to land promote versatile options such as food access, conservation for ecosystems, reparation and reconciliation to land displacement, and more; such options resolve interrelated issues such as hunger or food insecurity, air and water pollution, and other cultural, economic, health, environmental crises most affecting vulnerable communities. We can address injustices and inequities through the access of land and providing technical and financial support. “By putting land in the hands of conscientious farmers, faith communities can support a food system that reflects our shared values of justice, equity, sustainability, and reconciliation” (FaithLands). FaithLands unites similar missions of religion and social justice for food security and community resilience.

The idea of using faith-based lands has tradition since after the fall of Rome around 1100. The wine for the Eucharist was known to be made on church land, or vineyards attached to monasteries (Standage 85-86). Today, faith-based lands, or faithlands, are an abundant resource that can address many issues at once and provide multi-purposeful, multi-beneficial solutions. The provisioning of forest gardens with woody, perennial fruit and nut tree crops and other edible species, for example, on faith lands could add to nutrition security and enhance ecological

resilience (Hurley and Emory). Fruits, nuts, berries, seeds, and leaves can be sources of nutrition offered in green spaces in cities or parks. The use of faithlands has potential to do so much good for the people and the environment.

Learning about FaithLands transformed what I thought I knew about land management practices, particularly how I saw Churches. Every time I see Churches, my imagination kicks into gear asking questions. What native species exist in this area? Which are lacking, which are overly abundant? What edible species would serve well in this space? What would bring people joy on the walks, perhaps flowers lining the sidewalks? Trees lining the road entering the parking lot might add a bucolic feature. What species can grow in the understory and shade of the tree? What is the demographic of the weekly church attendance? What is the demographic of the community surrounding the church? What economic, cultural, health, environmental challenges need to be addressed? Would they be interested in attending community events at the church? If so, what amount of open space might be good for play and festival events? What does the community think would be a good balance between the presence of nature and open space? How will the current grass and ecosystem interact with plant species brought into this place? Who will be able to maintain the Church grounds? Would volunteers be interested or would someone need to be hired and how much should they be paid for their care and love toward the plants? What will the lands look like in 15, 30 years? What species can adapt to unpredictable weather events or patterns brought on by climate change? A range of questions for a range of possibilities.

## Black Church Food Security Network

My experience talking with Rev. Dr. Darriel Harris was profoundly motivating in the sense of being connected to someone amid quarantine during the pandemic who had the experience on the ground that I craved but couldn't pursue.<sup>18</sup> I asked about his role in the Black Church Food Security Network.<sup>19</sup> This organization addresses the problem of food deserts by transitioning abandoned parking lots into community gardens using raised garden beds. They take an equitable approach by focusing on low income communities, who are also people of color that are marginalized by grocery stores. Food deserts are places where access to food is limited or nonexistent, especially access to fresh produce or healthy foods. If there is food present in urban low-income areas, it is common that there is only a convenience store that sells processed, unhealthy foods. This disparity presents itself in view of the demographics of population health, where food deserts also have high rates of obesity and diabetes (Plainsong Farm & Ministry).

Food deserts can also suddenly appear. In 2015, thousands of protestors took space in Baltimore to express their feelings of deep pain and anger over the death of Freddie Gray. This led to many convenience store closures. Rev. Darriel Harris told the Thomson Reuters Foundation, "If you're getting your food from school or if you're getting your food from the corner stores, and then the schools and the corner stores close — then how can you eat? It became a huge issue" (Biron). The Black Church Food Security Network responded by leaning into local farms to gather, transport and distribute food in churches located in the food deserts. Churches serve as communal places to carry out food security efforts. But, moving "idle land" into agricultural use would decrease the likelihood for emergency efforts. Today the Black Church Food Security Network

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<sup>18</sup> To learn more about a Christian perspective of food go watch this source from Rev. Darriel Harris (WFPC Duke).

<sup>19</sup> <https://blackchurchfoodsecurity.net/>

provides “training, technical assistance, and funding to church gardens in Ohio, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Indiana, Tennessee, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Nebraska” (Black Church Food Security Network). Today, the Black Church Food collaborates with more churches across the mid-Atlantic.

Additionally, they model a mutually beneficial opportunity for growers/producers to sell produce and nutrient-rich food at miniature farmers' markets to churches on days that they worship or gather, uniquely named as the “Soil to Sanctuary Market” (Black Church Food Security Network). This brings an economy to the Black farmer, particularly supporting African American owned businesses.

I also had the opportunity to discuss with Dr. Rev. Darriel Harris about his research on faith-based communications. He utilized scripture as a way to connect with communities in Kenya with high rates of disease and educate them about health interventions. But, “They only wanted to talk about the Bible”, said Rev. Harris. That being said, I realized it may be difficult to create faith-based communications surrounding food justice due to my steep learning curve of the Bible. I proposed a question to Rev. Harris, “What would Jesus eat today?” He was speechless, he had never thought of applying his theological foundations to approach food justice in such a way, as if Jesus were alive today. Interacting with faith-based leaders taught me that it should happen more often. From my experience, combining knowledge of scholars and practitioners seems to be the future. Rev. Dr. Darriel Harris is a special case in that he is a scholar-activist. He is both a religious leader and a scholar, so his knowledge is interdisciplinary by training, yet his being is holistic by spirit. Even though his research was focused on health interventions for disease and in Kenya, I opened the possibility for which his technique could be applied elsewhere. By discussing different

ways of knowing and being we can imagine or creatively build upon existing frameworks and networks to achieve resilience.

## Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative

The work of Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative, also called Interfaith Food, is compelling because they strive to bring together faith communities to coordinate shared interests in addressing hunger.<sup>20</sup> They improve upon common food security efforts by trying to address disparities in the food system with ‘best practices’. This is true especially focusing on people impacted within their local and regional food system. For example, in their “Sea to Sonoma” program they connected with local fishermen (or women) in a fishing village near Bodega Bay, located in Northern California, who were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative “June 2021 Newsletter”). Interfaith Food coordinated with local fishermen to buy their catch at market price using a grant funded by the USDA and cooked the fish to be culturally appropriate according to the low-income community receiving the food. This is a good example of taking an equitable approach to improving local food systems and achieving social justice, food justice, and environmental justice.

I had the chance to learn and engage in discussion on how Interfaith Food is working to expand faith lands. They discovered a tool that would identify potential land owned by faith communities that could be transitioned to form new community gardens, increasing access to

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<sup>20</sup> To learn about their mission see: <https://interfaithfood.org/about/> . To access helpful resources engaging with in the food and faith movement see their abundant list of resources here <https://interfaithfood.org/resources/> .

locally produced food while also mitigating food insecurity. This tool is called LandVision.<sup>21</sup> This software was made with intended use by real estate agents to understand the status of land (property) by ownership. However, this software identifies land that is religiously affiliated or faith-based. Data can be exported to Excel or Google Sheets as well as ArcGIS mapping software that can drive connections by leading to better access to storytelling. Thus, being useful to government entities to inform policy decisions as well as non-profits with established networks and connections within state, regional, or national levels. The discovery began by asking “Where are the faith lands? How much acreage exists?”

From the LandVision mapping software, land owned by faith-based communities was identified and the data was cataloged, forming a map of faithlands. This information helps realize the potential that faith communities have in providing access to farmland, addressing food security by creating local food access, as well as transitioning land to serve the ecology of the land to mitigate climate change. In their September 2021 Newsletter, Interfaith Food published an update. “Interfaith Food has been inventorying lands in Northern California owned by faith-based groups, and identified well over 100 parcels that are 5 acres or larger that may be suitable for leases to BIPOC farmers and others” (Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative). These parcels are opportunities for economic justice by providing access to land for growing food. Additionally, they are opportunities for social justice by providing access to local food. Moreover, sustainable farming practices protect the “sanctity of life”. We can ask “How can we serve the ecology of this land? What does this landscape desire ecologically to adapt to climate change and can there be a balance that serves the social landscape too?”

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.digmap.com/platform/landvision/>

We are at a time in history where farmland access is limited. Unfortunately, many would-be farmers – particularly farmers of color – find the cost of land prohibitive. Farmland competes with development and urban sprawl. Providing access to land acknowledges the sacred and historical attributes and attempts to amend relationships with native communities who were invisibilized.<sup>22</sup> The dignity of those who have been displaced from their native land, murdered, abused and forcibly worked the land. It’s inspiring to know faith communities are reflecting on the history of the land and choosing to steward the land with ancestral knowledge, plants and animals.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, providing access to local food also supports the sacred experience of eating, deserved by all beings, and especially those who deserve to be treated with equity, such as those who experience racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and economic disparities.

Faith-based organizations and faith communities are abundant and positioned in place morally and geographically to lead ecological stewardship and reparative justice through the land, as expressed through the work of FaithLands and Interfaith Food. Using the LandVision mapping technology as a strategy is similar to that of GoodLands, which is a “nonprofit organization that maps the landholding of the Roman Catholic Church globally”, stated well in an article interviewing Molly Burhans who is the Founder and Executive Director of GoodLands (Berger). “GoodLands contracts with Catholic communities to help them map and create land records for their property portfolios. They then use that understanding to analyze and optimize their property’s use and management for environmental and social impact as well as financial management”

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<sup>22</sup>Bison were murdered by colonists at once as a way to invisibilize Indigenous peoples through starvation. This sacred and native animal carries significant meaning to North American land and has the potential to restore land through regenerative grazing to reverse climate change. The original migration range of bison, which was considerably the range for most of their existence, traveled from central Mexico into central Canada and from Oregon to as far east as Alleghenies in Pennsylvania up until the early 1800s (Florida Center for Instructional Technology).

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.indigikitchen.com/about/>

(Berger). GoodLands partners with Esri, a leader in Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology to form a data-based map.<sup>24</sup> Molly Burhans is an example by which Data Analytics and Landscape Design, as well as Ecological Design can transform landscapes (Geography) and human interaction with the environment (Political Ecology) - all in which can support farming and communities. “Religious bodies sit on a lot of legacy land,” says Rev. Nurya Love Parish. She points to the fact that, from a religious perspective, land “is part of Creation and needs to be managed with wisdom” (Clark).

Interfaith Food attempts to “advance this vision” of wisdom by “sharing models, strategies and resources across faith traditions to help leaders bring programs and best practices to their congregations, camps and retreat centers” (Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative “About”). Interfaith Food reconnects faith-based leaders in their annual Faith, Food and Farms Conference. This year the gathering was organized in conjunction with the National Faithlands Gathering where Interfaith Food reported in their September 2021 Newsletter, “more than 30 people from 9 states focused on how to make lands owned by religious institutions available to more farmers and ranchers” (Interfaith Food). At the conference updates were shared about mapping the faithlands in Northern California. Additionally, the group heard from farmers that are successfully operating farms on lands owned by churches, and also from those who have faced challenges to identify ‘best practices’ (Interfaith Food).

The conference also included tours of current faithlands that planned to highlight: “a 4-acre farm run by an immigrant farmer on the campus of Redwood Adventist Academy; Urban Adamah a Jewish community farm providing education about relationships between Jewish faith

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<sup>24</sup> <https://good-lands.org/>

and food; and two community gardens” (Interfaith Food) I find this sort of conference to be exemplary. Personally, listening to farmers' stories, seeing models and hearing strategies is inspirational and part of the process in transitioning to resilient food systems. Hopefully more and more faith-based leaders from other states will expand capacity by taking on the inventorying faithlands in their regions so that access to farmland increases.

Interfaith Food also shared a Call to Action by Sha’von Terrell, Deputy Director of the National Black Church Food Security Network. Terrell said, “Churches and church associations through their assets and financial commitments may aid in the development of farmers’ markets, supply chains, and other arrangements which can help to create equitable food systems and advance food sovereignty” (Interfaith Food). Terrell suggests support can be provided to progress the food and faith movement and advance sustainable agriculture and food systems:

Nationally: Support the Justice For Black Farmers Act

Regionally: Support the regional food infrastructure by purchasing produce from Black farmers

Locally: Incorporate a racial and economic justice lens to ministry planning by partnering with the Black Church Food Security Network. (Interfaith Sustainable Food Collaborative “September Newsletter”)

We need to incorporate support at various levels because realities of injustice exist at every level. We are all in this together, it is like a group project, meaning involvement from everybody is required. Cultural change is not needed in one specific place, it is needed in our home, in our neighborhood, our community, our city, our state, our nation, continent, our planet. The environmental justice movement fundamentally exists from involvement. We are all connected and we need to be.

## The Coalition of Immokalee Workers' Fair Food Program

The Coalition of Immokalee Workers' (CIW) Fair Food Program focuses on protecting the rights and dignity of farmworkers. The Fair Food Program (FFP) “is a unique partnership among farmers, farmworkers, and retail food companies that ensures humane wages and working conditions of workers who pick fruits and vegetables on participating farms”<sup>25</sup>. Some examples of monitoring include access to drinking water, shade, and a complaint line to report violence. FFP is a type of Worker-driven Social Responsibility (WSR) model<sup>26</sup>, which was recognized in a report by MSI Integrity<sup>27</sup>, a non-profit incubated by Harvard Law School's International Human Rights Clinic<sup>28</sup>. This report studied multi-stakeholder initiatives like Equitable Food Initiative (EFI), Fair Trade International and Rainforest Alliance, and found these initiatives failed to protect human rights in food supply chains and the private sector. MSI Integrity recognizes the Fair Food Program as the new “golden standard for private governance” (MSI Integrity)<sup>29</sup>. Seemingly, the grassroots work of CIW that led to FFP inspired the non-profit MSI Integrity to their “new direction: applying lessons learned from the grand experiment in multi-stakeholderism to promote business models that center workers and communities in their governance and ownership” (MSI Integrity). Centering the voice of the worker is working to advance human rights in supply chains. Consumers demanding the voice of workers to be heard also significantly contributes to safer working conditions and a more ethical food system. This is why the Fair Food Program (FFP) also markets their Fair Food label. By purchasing food with the Fair Food label, consumers communicate to

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<sup>25</sup> (“Home - Fair Food Program”)

<sup>26</sup> <https://wsr-network.org/what-is-wsr/>

<sup>27</sup> MSI Integrity stands for Institute for Multi-Stakeholder Initiative Integrity.

<sup>28</sup> (“History”)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.fairfoodprogram.org/recognition/>

businesses and supply chains that they care as much about farm workers as they are willing to pay extra for humane working conditions and wages.

The farmworker justice movement advocates for more than economic prosperity. FFP recognizes the strong faith that farmworkers have and that religion plays a central role in advancing human rights (““On Common Ground”: CIW, faith leaders come together in NYC for “an extraordinary conversation” ...”). Congregations have welcomed farmworkers to share their stories. Providing this opportunity allows farmworkers’ experiences and harsh working conditions to be heard in a communal space for the knowledge and benefit of the farmworker and of the community. By listening and expressing interest and concern with empathy, “the story behind your food” can begin to be understood (CIWvideo). However, the power imbalances among faith-based organizations and immigrant farmworkers should be addressed at the interpersonal and structural levels (Erwin and Stephenson). Increasing transparency within our food systems is vital to protecting the dignity of those who pick our food. “Almost half of the approximately 2.4 million migrant and seasonal farmworkers in the United States are undocumented,<sup>30</sup> making them ineligible for government assistance, such as workers’ compensation, disability benefits, federal nutrition assistance, and Medicaid,<sup>31</sup> despite contributing to these systems through payroll taxes each year<sup>32</sup>” (Broad Leib et al.). This is the reality of farmworker conditions. There is a lack of food justice scholarship and food justice actor participation supporting farmworkers. Faith-based organizations and faith communities offer the possibility for allyship to further research and development of equitable strategies to support farmworkers (Erwin). Furthermore, the history of

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<sup>30</sup>(“Immigration and Labor”; “The Migrant / Seasonal Farmworker”)

<sup>31</sup>(“National Agricultural Workers Survey (NAWS) Fact Sheet”)

<sup>32</sup> “Migrant workers contribute an estimated \$1.5 billion to the Medicare system, \$7 billion to the Social Security system, and \$2.6 trillion to the U.S. economy over a decade” (Southern Poverty Law Center).

working in the fields carries sexual abuse, disease and mutation from exposure to chemical pesticides. Documenting the transformation from the past to current conditions experienced by farmworkers can help us learn and apply programming like that of FFP needed elsewhere.<sup>33</sup> By sharing their story, farmworkers are given the opportunity to heal trauma and share the grief with the community to engage in cultural healing.

Although I was not humiliated nor forced to work in harsh working conditions, while working on farms this year I did gain an idea of how tough the weather can be and how unsafe farm labor can be. In California, there were at least five heat waves with above hundred degree temperatures. In South Dakota, I experienced about negative thirteen degrees Fahrenheit during the winter. These were record-breaking temperatures that will likely occur again in the future. I remember picking crops before weather events like heat waves and unexpected rain during drought because we could lose the crop if we didn't pick them immediately before the expected weather event. Today we have advanced technology analyzing weather and expert meteorologists spreading awareness to support farmers and prevent hospitalizations and death from weather events. We should be taking care to use these resources, which have required significant investments, to our advantage and help farmworkers.

Much of our agricultural systems grow in a monoculture, single crop operation where the risk of losing a crop has more significant consequences, such as: wages of farmworkers, financial health of farms, landowners, eaters and consumers that experience downstream effects of the food supply chain in grocery stores and restaurants. Farmers and farmworkers receive pressure to “feed the world” and manage a farm business that on average makes less than \$300 a year. These realities

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<sup>33</sup> Some documentation about those who pick our food already exists such as the movie *Food Chains* (2014). A film highlighting agricultural labor in the United States and includes the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (CIW) and can be found on YouTube or Amazon Prime.

undermine the skills, knowledge, intense labor, and emotional perseverance required to farm. They also ignore the harmful impact of chemical pesticides and herbicides and fertilizers.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that 10,000 to 20,000 farmworkers are harmed by acute pesticide poisoning every year, which doesn't account for the long-term effects of being exposed to toxins day after day and year after year. The herbicides and pesticides that farmers use on their crops are neurotoxins, carcinogens, and hormone disruptors. Many of those used in the United States are banned in other countries. The government agencies (the Food and Drug Administration, or FDA, and EPA) that should be regulating these chemicals for human safety are not doing their job. (Hyman)

A food production system based on agroecology and biodiversity would promote greater adaptation to adverse weather conditions, thus resilience in our food systems. Not only would this provide a greater likelihood for achieving true food and nutrition security – the promise for a future with food – but also economic prosperity for farmworkers.

I see migrant farmworkers working in monoculture strawberry fields near my hometown. From learning about the advocacy and storytelling by CIW and FFP that took place in congregations, for example, the proximity and gravity of the situation feels ever present to me. Solutions to transition away from monoculture and use of chemical inputs are already available and being explored on strawberry fields in California.<sup>34</sup> Using techniques of agroecology requires time and patience, yet the rights and dignity of farmworkers could begin to change for the current and next generation today.

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<sup>34</sup> <https://www.agroecology-pool.org/portfolio/farmer-researcher-partnership-santa-cruz-california/>; <https://magazine.ucsc.edu/2017/03/strawberry-fields-for-better/> ; <https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/pesticide-predicament-californias-strawberry-growers>

## Researching an Ecumenical Approach to Sustainable Food Systems

There is limited research understanding the impact of faith-based organizations in the context of hunger and food systems. Additionally, there is little food justice scholarship seeking to explore and understand the processes by which faith communities operate or interact as a non-governmental organization and stakeholder in promoting change in food systems (Erwin). In conversation with Dr. Rev. Darriel Harris, who studied faith-based communications, and Professor Davis, who co-authored a book on religion and sustainability including social movements, both shared this sentiment as well. Conducting outreach for research is also challenging considering the secular groups of religion, even Christianity alone. In which case, Emma Lietz Bilecky shared with me that a snowball effect research method was significant to completing her research exploring faith community engagement and rural child hunger. There were challenges in trying to form research understanding the complexity of farming and spiritual relationship with the land as various disciplines are involved. I share these various challenges to not only express where there are gaps in knowledge (including myself and academia), but also various ways I imagined contributing to literacy and our understanding of faith and food justice.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, these organizations offer opportunities to which individuals can respond to a call for action and volunteer with such organizations that address multiple issues involved in social and environmental issues.<sup>36</sup> I hope I've portrayed various ways to explore the intersection of religion and social justice whereby conducting research for public service can be multi-purposeful through the lens of food systems.

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<sup>35</sup> Other faith-based organizations that I came across but did not interact with or thoroughly examine include: Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Come to the Table in North Carolina, [The Abundant Table](#), ChurchLands. The FaithLands Toolkit carries over 80 examples of faith communities using their land in creative ways to strengthen communities and build ecological resilience.

<sup>36</sup> Further examples beyond provided include:  
<https://works.swarthmore.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1175&context=fac-religion>

## Part 3: Farming

In this section I share personal reflections of my relationship to land, food, and society through learning about farming, origins of food, and farming as an act of faith. Mostly I share about the farms in which I volunteered, and where I truly felt my vocation running through myself. I share stories and experiences learning about building my relationship with the land from various perspectives including vocation, technical various agricultural practices, and how I gained nuanced understandings of food systems.

### Personal Reflections on Faith, Food and Farming

I did not grow up regularly attending any religious service. However, my family identifies with the Presbyterian tradition of Christianity. Although my relationship with religion was distant as a child, I recall going to church once or twice a year for Christmas, and for Easter Sunday. The elders in my family practice often and attend church weekly. My understanding of faith has grown during this fellowship opportunity as a result of my efforts to rekindle my family connections to be surrounded by faith and family history. My great uncle is a retired minister of the Presbyterian Church. I recall visits that included watching him give sermons at a small, rural church in North Carolina. My great aunt tells me that she was a preacher's wife and took care of the family while my great uncle took care of the church. As a teenager, I learned the value of service through their lens of faith while volunteering with my great aunt and uncle. I would join them for car rides to deliver food through meals on wheels. This experience was also my first time gaining understanding of food security. Religion also appeared in my life by my attendance at an Episcopal private high school. We had weekly chapel sessions that had interfaith readings but mainly took an ecumenical approach, especially in prayer. During college a best friend from home introduced

me to the author Bob Goff who speaks more about faith than religion. Bob Goff's books, *Love Does* and *Dream Big*, opened my eyes to love, imagination, and sense of self through stories. This past year and a half I attended more church services combined than my entire life to understand Christianity more and deepen my connection with my family and friends who are religious. I am unsure whether I have either begun considering what faith means to me or begun my journey already, but I know there is great meaning and connection among faith communities especially surrounding my vocation for farming and ecological stewardship and my passion for food justice.

My decision to explore my vocation through farming began from taking Rich Wallace's *Community and Sustainable Food Systems* class during my senior year of college. Simultaneously I participated in class discussions learning about agriculture from an interdisciplinary lens while engaging in experiential learning on farms every Thursday during a three-hour period. We visited farms with models oriented toward supporting sustainable practices and community agriculture such as having CSA programs, educational programming, farming on land trusts and more – all of which exemplify a common mission of cultivating communities that support not just feeding humans, but all living beings such as birds, bees, butterflies, arthropods, and more. Much of our time was dedicated to Willow Creek Farm Preserve which is local to my college in Collegeville, Pennsylvania and focuses on regenerative organic agriculture. Our class was split into small groups to rotate each week focusing on three aspects of the farm: farm management, youth education, and marketing and communications. I learned how to harvest sweet potatoes, plant lavender on a slope to avoid soil erosion, and the value of cover crops. This class being in the Environmental Studies Department, I gained knowledge about environmental health. I learned that the use of synthetic, chemical fertilizers and pesticides that are used in current industrial agricultural practices contribute to pollution in our watersheds, impacting water quality of which concerns public health;

but also impacts land and water ecosystems, like the dead zones in the Gulf of Mexico that inhibit ecosystems and our fisheries where fish are supposed to be able to breathe, eat, grow and live naturally. I also learned about a commonly unspoken history of the Black freedom movement provided by Monica White in her book *Freedom Farmers*. As discussed in the first part of this paper, she writes about achieving community resilience through collective agency, resistance and self-sufficiency. An empowering read that ignited my understanding for liberation and what it means to be human. The combination of learning about social justice in the classroom and experiences with farms furthered my deep passion for food justice.

Exploring my vocation while being on farms made sense to me. I knew that nature brought me healing, and I was curious how to grow food. My passion for promoting equity in food systems became evident as I came to realize that agriculture is the root of change for food systems not only because that is the beginning of our food system, but also where the narrative of slavery and racial injustice began in the United States. I wanted to not only understand the challenges farmers experience, but also what barriers impede transitioning toward food systems that are health-promoting, economically viable, equitable, and ecologically sound. Learning about the theology of eating and various ways in which humans are spiritually and emotionally connected to the land also inspired my desire to farm. I wondered if farming might be an occupation that suited my role in transitioning food systems. I enjoy being outside, movement and using my muscles, and working on challenges that stimulate me and give me a sense of purpose. Farming has a routine. I enjoy the rhythm.

While farming during this fellowship, I also reflected on parts of my story, my sacred narrative, in order to explore my vocation. I did not grow up understanding Creation. I gained an appreciation for nature at a young age for its aesthetic beauty and peacefulness, but I did not know

food came from the ground. My family did not have a garden in the backyard, nor did I have one at any school I attended. When I was little I went to the grocery store with my father. I have been responsible for making my own lunch since probably second grade. I think this might have started out because I was a very picky eater and hated the cafeteria food. I wouldn't eat lunch and so when I came home, I ate a buffet of snacks - slim jims, cosmic brownies, sugary cereal and pretzels in ice cream. Eating for nourishment was not in my vocabulary or understanding of health. My family does not even cook very much. I am an only child so my parents spoiled me and I pretty much ate whatever I wanted. We usually ate take out so I had more freedom to choose anyway, thanks to the various options many restaurants offer.

My family does not carry the tradition of farming either. Although my family has unique relationships with agriculture. The first "farmer" my family recollects is my grandfather on my mothers' side who bought land to start an orange grove in central Florida during the 1970s. He hired farmworkers to take care of the orange grove while he managed a petroleum oil distribution company. Whereas my other grandfather as well as my father work in the phosphate fertilizer industry as chemical engineers. My grandfather's generation involved in the chemical industry likely contributed to the regulations and safety protocols that exist today to attempt to prevent hazardous exposure. My grandfather died of cancer before I was born. Really, I never met either of my grandparents. Yet, I gained an understanding of intergenerational community through hearsay and living vicariously through friends and their families. I share my family's background, participating in the oil industry and chemical fertilizer industry, as reflection of my personal narrative. This reflection helped me understand how I view the world, my bias, as well as understand my agency so that I may ask, "What is possible?"

I share my experiences of farming to help bring understanding of what farming is like for faith communities interested in starting community gardens or providing access to farmland or ecologically centered land management practices, people interested in farming, or those who are curious about the positive power of farming and the time and effort to protect the “sanctity of life” (Wirzba).

## Soil and Sacrament

Conviction for farming is evident in the passage of Jeremiah 29, “Plant gardens and eat what they produce... and seek the peace of the city to which you have been sent.” Farming not only offers peace as food production meets needs of community members, but also the act alone provides solace, peace and well-being individually and perhaps contributes to peace in the community. Fred Bahnson says, “Planting gardens and seeking peace are really symbiotic relationships... The sort of thing a church should be doing, sort of like planting marigolds with tomatoes” (Tedx Talks “Soil & Sacrament: Fred Bahnson”). This vision of soil and sacrament that Fred Bahnson presents is not new. The Bible carries stories about our connection to soil, the beginning of humanity, and of food. Planting gardens carries tradition and one could argue more importantly, keeps us grounded in simple things that matter. Keeping the soil alive for future generations relies upon continual planting of gardens. Just as community and culture must pass on certain characteristics to maintain continuity. There should be nuances of culture, biophysical and metaphysical, to put traditions in check because if they are no longer serving the community then there’s need for improvement. Today, there’s lots of room for improvement. Farming as a practice still has a great impact that can help us improve culture.

Further evidence of conviction for farming as portrayed in Genesis 2:7, “Then the Lord God formed Adam from adamah”. Human from humus. Indeed, this direct connection is part of

ancient history and our sacred narrative and should not be forgotten. However, that does not mean planting gardens is something you must do. Supporting your local responsible farmers that support the planet while making tasteful crops helps to continue our sacred narrative. These passages furthered my purpose, passion and reasoning for seeking to explore my vocation through farming. I sought to understand more about our connection to the land and all that lives from the land. Conviviality describes my sincere sentiment about going to farm. Learning about all the creatures and beings that are what make up an ecosystem contains great curiosity. Yet, I wanted to experience this learning. I wanted to take a pause from the classroom. I wanted to put my faith in my hands. I didn't want to just study the faith and food movement. I wanted to engage with farming beyond my mind to also participate with my hands and legs, my whole body.

## Urban CSA at Community Greenhouse Partners in Cleveland, Ohio

My first farming location during the fellowship was at Community Greenhouse Partners (CGP) in Cleveland, Ohio.<sup>37</sup> CGP is a non-profit organization that strives to provide local, organic produce at urban markets in low-income communities. CGP established their location in the “heart of downtown Cleveland” on a three-acre property that was formerly a Catholic parish. Inspired by principles of permaculture, they transitioned parking lots to raised-bed vegetable gardens and hoop houses, as well as the lawn to a food forest.

I think of CGP as an example of FaithLands. FaithLands is “a growing national movement to connect and inspire faith communities to use their land in new ways that promote ecological

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<sup>37</sup> <http://communitygreenhousepartners.org/about-us/>

and human health, support local food and farming, enact reparative justice, and strengthen communities” (FaithLands). In like manner, the land where CGP resides was previously a Catholic Parish. CGP uses permaculture and organic farming to support ecological and human health in marginalized communities. In this way, CGP strives for a similar mission to FaithLands. For these reasons, I went to CGP to understand how faith-based land could be transitioned in regard to community, food and farming.

CGP has performed a variety of projects since they formed around 2008. In the past, they provided educational programs on gardening to community members from the surrounding neighborhoods, they provided access to personal raised bed gardens along with the needed materials such as seeds, tools, and irrigation sources which allowed community members to grow their own food. Even building an aquaponic system within one of the greenhouses (hoop houses) that farmed tilapia.

As a non-profit, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the efforts of CGP greatly and highlighted unforeseen weaknesses in local food security efforts. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) mandated stay at home quarantine to avoid the spread of the virus. The quarantine restrictions were announced in Spring of 2020 around the same time of year that planting occurs. CGP was forced to basically shut down. Programs by CGP greatly depended on regular volunteers who were typically college students from the local universities. Specifically, participation by Greek life organizations. Consequently, depending on seasonal volunteers prevented CGP from being able to fulfill its goal of producing fresh and local food for vulnerable communities right when they needed the help most. Additionally, programming that educated local community members and young kids how to grow food also effectively ended.

Because I was volunteering in Cleveland during the cold winter months of December and January, it was challenging to begin my ambitious mission of learning how to grow food. The raised bed gardens were resting during the winter and the aquaponic system is underground and thus would freeze if we tried to use it. However, observing the design and modeling of these food production systems helped me imagine the possibilities of urban farming while also understanding the puzzling features of each growing method.

Although raised bed gardens were out of the question in the winter, greenhouses offer alternative possibilities for extending the growing season. Achieving local food security year round requires using cold hardy crops that are adapted to grow in colder conditions. Crops such as kale and beets (and their greens!) meet dietary requirements, contributing to immunity during the flu season, while also reducing the risk for chronic diseases through anti-inflammatory properties that are found to increase lifespan. Thus, providing access to fresh vegetables achieves more than food security, but really nutrition security.<sup>38</sup>

Greenhouses and hoop houses also provide an opportunity to get an early start on spring planting. Greenhouses allow us to start seeds early so that once the weather is warm we can put out several week old transplants instead of ungerminated seeds. Under hoop houses the ground thaws quicker and we put our transplants earlier. We constructed cold frames which function as an added layer of insulation for the plants which get seeded directly into the soil. These cold frames were built from thick plastic sneeze guards that were donated by a local business which was shipped too many during the pandemic. In this way, local partnerships sharing and redirecting

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<sup>38</sup> To address hunger, insuring local food security is necessary. Lots of food is grown in places like southern Florida and southern California and distributed to feed people during the winter season. However, another issue in transitioning to local food systems is the impact on migrant farmworkers who already don't receive fair wages for their labor in Florida and California fields as highlighted in the documentary *Food Chains* and the work of the Fair Food Program by CIW.

resources within the community provided the opportunity for imaginative solutions to support local food systems.

At CGP, there was a greenhouse housing a hydroponic system to grow lettuce. The greenhouse itself could provide protection from snow and wind during the winter, but does not produce enough warmth for lettuce to grow. However, the greenhouse could insulate the warm air needed to grow lettuce. Therefore, we used a rocket stove mass heater to keep the greenhouse warm enough for the lettuce to grow. This heating system consisted of three parts: the rocket stove, made out of a repurposed oil drum, the mass heater, a large mass of cob (a mixture of straw and mud) covering the exhaust pipes which sat below the lettuce and served effectively as a radiator, and chimney pipe to pull heat throughout the system and release the exhaust outside. Other volunteers and I collected broken or fallen tree branches on the property for firewood to fuel the rocket stove. We worked as a team running the stove every six hours for about an hour. Some volunteers had late night shifts while others had early morning shifts, but we were determined to get lettuce to people and live up to the name of community greenhouse partners. Tending to the needs of the fire determined our success in heating the greenhouse amid dropping temperatures of the night. However, it was not the only part of the greenhouse that required continual maintenance. Since the lettuce was growing in a hydroponic system, ensuring sufficient water in the tank was vital for the water heater and water pump to work. Yet, water hoses left outside will freeze. Understanding the weather conditions and how various systems operate under different conditions was essential and is what ultimately allowed us to successfully grow lettuce through the winter.

Growing hydroponic lettuce was different from growing food in the soil not only because so much more water is involved, nearly the main medium in the growing environment. But also hydroponic systems rely on synthetic fertility sources for nutrients. Hydroponic lettuce certified by

the National Organic Program (NOP) with the “USDA Organic” labeling is commonly seen at retail commercial/grocery stores. However, Certified Naturally Grown (CNG), which bases their organic standards on NOP organic standards, does not even offer hydroponic certification “because almost all successful commercial operations rely on synthetic fertility sources” (Certified Naturally Grown). Yet CNG is open to feedback if you think they should change their policy.

Besides growing hydroponic lettuce, volunteering at CGP introduced me to microgreens. Despite winter conditions, the heated house offered a place to grow food from seed to sprout. We lived in a house that was originally built around the 1850s where priests and nuns of the church resided. One room was converted to grow microgreens indoors. There were UV lights hung from the ceiling to help the plants grow, fans for air flow, and reflectant wallpaper to increase UV light transmission. These conditions allowed us to grow pea, radish, sunflower, and broccoli microgreens. I was so excited to learn about growing microgreens that I did not really recognize that we stopped the growing process. Microgreens are really sprouts before they become vegetables. Each sprout eaten was previously a seed that sprouted. I not only grew microgreens, but also had the chance to harvest, clean, weigh, and pack the microgreens into our van for the farmers' markets, as well as the CSA program. Thus, I experienced the entire seed to market production process.

My first time seeing plants grow from seed was very unique. I had strange feelings of power being the entity watering the plants. Water is a basic factor to help plants grow bigger and faster. It was as though I waved a wand and magically I made the plants grow. But such a belief was not true. The “mystical and spiritual nature of germplasm” have their own ability (Chaskey 74 ch.7n2). The seed patiently awaited my attention. I did not *make* the plants grow. Later in the year, I came to see the beauty and grandeur of what every seed is capable of becoming.

As a non-profit, the Covid-19 pandemic impacted the efforts of CGP greatly and highlighted unforeseen weaknesses in local food security efforts. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) mandated stay at home quarantine to avoid the spread of the virus. The quarantine restrictions were announced in Spring of 2020 around the same time of year that planting occurs. CGP was forced to basically shut down. Programs by the CGP greatly depended on regular volunteers that were college students from the local universities. Specifically, participation by the Greek life organizations, such as fraternities and sororities, which had long-standing ties to the non-profit. Even though quarantine restrictions didn't completely prevent volunteers, fear from the pandemic almost completely destroyed CGP's volunteer base. During this crucial time. Furthermore, college classes and Greek life activities were not so common during the summer and so CGP still didn't have volunteers in the summer to catch up on unfinished work. Consequently, without volunteers the non-profit was limited in the amount of produce they could even attempt to grow. In the end, this prevented CGP from being able to fulfill its goal of producing fresh and local food for vulnerable communities right when they needed the help most. Additionally, the programming to teach local community members and young kids how to grow food was also effectively ended.

## Animal Husbandry at Serendipity Farmstead in Hot Springs, South Dakota

Serendipity Farmstead is located in the southwestern corner of South Dakota near a small rural town called Hot Springs, which attracts tourists for its hot springs. This small-scale farm focuses on animal husbandry and meat production.<sup>39</sup> Through animal husbandry, they hope to regenerate their land's topsoil which was degraded from overgrazing and being densely populated with cows. Basically, the previous owner farmed a feedlot.

In addition to animal husbandry, Serendipity is expanding their operations to contribute to the local food system by building a deep winter greenhouse.<sup>40</sup> This type of greenhouse will allow them to grow year-round, hence the winter as well. They plan to grow hydroponic lettuce, vegetables, and fruits in their greenhouse. Pulling methods of permaculture, they will plant species in vertical and horizontal layers to maximize space and capture light and heat available. Their strategy is to mimic the current demands of the globalized agriculture system or wants of local consumers, which means growing tropical foods such as bananas and pineapples.

By going to Serendipity Farmstead I learned what it means and feels like to farm during the winter. In addition, I immersed myself in the cultural experience of living in a rural landscape. After living in Cleveland for two months, rural South Dakota also offers comparison regarding local food systems in a rural vs urban context. I gained perspective of meat production in how rural landscapes contribute to food systems because animals like cattle and yaks require large spaces to move. In South Dakota, the geography, politics, and social culture presents a tense dichotomy between the western cowboy and native American. For example, bison previously ranged the

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<sup>39</sup> <http://serendipityfarmstead.com/>

<sup>40</sup> <https://serendipityfarmstead.com/greenhouse/>

plains instead of cattle. I found it particularly interesting that rural communities depend on social media, such as community Facebook pages, to share local news.

I distinctly remember arriving at Serendipity Farmstead. I wasn't in the city anymore. I was in a valley, surrounded by mountain ridges. Except to a Florida native those ridges were "only hills" as described by my WWOOF host. I still think back in awe at the features of the land. So different from flat swampy Florida. The weather was cold, but there was not any snow on the ground - yet.

Our first day, I learned so much by shadowing my farm hosts. By watching them perform daily chores I gained understanding of how they complete tasks. This was important to continue the same regimen and routine for the animals. So, we walk out the door and take care of feeding the chickens first because they are hungry and once they are eating then they will be occupied and filling their water source will be much easier, as well as collecting eggs from the chicken coops. The same method follows for every animal. Next were turkeys, pigs, goats, llamas and lastly yaks. After tending to all the animals we returned to the house for breakfast. Homemade bread with fresh eggs atop. I was so enamored by breakfast that I was caught off guard when my farm hosts asked me to give a farm report. *Uh, a report?* I wasn't expecting to be asked that, I was a follower with a huge learning curve. I repeated all the farm chores. This sufficed. It was important to communicate the status of the farm so that everyone was on the same page and would be able to determine later if modifications would need to be made to our daily plan or maybe animal feed was running out and needed to be ordered. The structure and organization here was very different from the urban farm in Cleveland.

The learning curve between farms is huge also because every farm has different earth-beings to steward whether they be animals, trees, perennial or annual crops, the list goes on and

on. And more distinctly, every farmer has different personality types, work styles, lifestyles, methods of management. I recall disagreements among farmers managing the same exact farm. As a volunteer, I have to respect and honor the desires and goals of the farm. This was very challenging for me because I had learned different practices from previous farm experiences or from reading and watching. I had different perspectives just from being an outsider. Additionally, I had my own understanding regarding project management not even related to farming.

There is a specific routine to efficiently complete the farm chores, which was especially necessary to practice when even colder temperatures came down to -13 degrees Fahrenheit! I realized what being on the brink of frostbite meant. I would swing my arms in circles, like a centrifuge to what felt like breaking blood vessels open so blood would flow smoothly again to the tips of my fingers and throughout my body.

The main task of a farm with animals is to take care of the animals, which is necessary every single day of the year. For a farmer to go on vacation requires bringing in someone that is familiar with taking care of animals and has a relationship with the animals. Perhaps, neighbors could help but in this farm's case, the neighbors were also farmers who were responsible for taking care of their own animals. This reality of a farmer is concerning, especially regarding their well-being. There is immense everlasting stress to keep a farm functioning and operating. I remember learning that as an occupation, farmers have the highest rate of suicide out of any other job. I understood that simply from their workload and commitment, not even considering the financial burden and legal contracts.

## Permaculture at Golden Rocks Permaculture Farm in Middletown, California

Golden Rocks Permaculture Farm is located in a small rural town called Middletown in Northern California.<sup>41</sup> This farm focuses on fresh culinary and medicinal herbs, herbal tea blends and seasonal organic produce. Using techniques from permaculture, this farm tries to emphasize incorporating native species on the land to increase biodiversity. While techniques of permaculture are abundant, just like nature, this farm focuses mainly on poly-cropping, planting multiple species together, and companion planting, coupling species that are mutually beneficial to provide benefits such as pest control. They also sell fresh farm eggs. They actively participate in community events centered on local food and housing justice. They offer community education and workshops in Natural Building and Herbalism, Permaculture Design Services & Workshop Leadership.

I planted summer crops such as okra, summer squashes, melons, sweet bell peppers and spicy peppers. I was able to compare growing cucumbers, zucchini, patty pan squash, and tomatoes to other farmstays I experienced. I learned how to operate a drip irrigation system with electric timers. Taking the time to set up and maintain irrigation systems can improve productivity by eliminating the time and effort of hand watering. Yet irrigation systems are not necessarily intuitive by design because they can be easily susceptible to breaking due to stress from heat, causing leaks and breaks (and wasted water use). Additionally, I have learned to expect small animals chewing through water hoses to get water and quench their thirst. And so experiencing the nuances of implementing systems on farms has taught me to understand the need to prepare for repair or replacement costs, especially in urgent scenarios like water leaks that can have trickle down

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.goldenrocksfarm.com/about-1>

consequences in which crops do not grow or produce fruit without water. So this is particularly frustrating when such an issue compromises your own food supply, as well as a struggle attempting to sell food at the farmer's market.

My WWOOF host at Golden Rocks Farm encouraged volunteers to try out projects that interest them. So I helped build a quick hot compost pile. There are many, many types of composting methods. We experimented with the Berkeley hot composting method which is about a 25:1 ratio of carbon and nitrogen materials (Deep Green Permaculture). We collected materials high in carbon like dried, "brown" material such as dried leaves, thin sticks. We also used dried blackberry canes because they were abundant, but this might have been a mistake because they are quite resilient species and can very easily root themselves again and encroach the raised bed garden area. Wild blackberries are one of my favorite snacks I've discovered this year, but their thorny canes are just despicable and make for a precarious situation when you've eaten all the blackberries around the edges and cannot reach the rest of the blackberries. Nevertheless, blackberry canes filled our quota to make the compost pile. We broke the blackberry canes into smaller inch-long pieces, filling 50 5-gallon buckets, which took hours of work but would speed up the breakdown process and ensure the blackberries would not sprout again. Then we collected about 5 5-gallon buckets of material high in nitrogen such as green grass clippings and weeds. The compost pile did get hot enough to produce steam, but unfortunately took longer than 18 days and so I never found out how it turned out. Hopefully the pile will create compost for next season and improve soil fertility in the garden beds.

In addition to helping out with stewarding the gardening, I coordinated selling produce and medicinal herbs at the Farmers' Market. The Middletown Farmers Market occurs every Friday 5-8 PM during the summer to promote local and organic food consumption as well as support local

farmers in facilitating an opportunity to connect with the community. This was the first year the farmers market was held in the center of town in a park in front of the library. This way the public library could also serve the community with access to electricity for live music and access to public bathrooms. The park also offered amenities of large, open spaces with soft white and green clovers for grass shaded by trees, benches for elders to sit and enjoy locally made foods, and a pavilion for the musicians. The market being on Friday night allowed neighboring towns to come and visit as well, improving access and supporting the local economy. SNAP, FMNP and CalFresh (California's food stamp program) vouchers were also redeemable at the farmers' market furthering access for community members who are low income as well as supporting farmers by bringing economy to them. I noticed this reality was particularly notable when less community members were even present at the farmers' market towards the end of the month. People await their paychecks until the beginning of the month in which these markets typically had the best sales by margins of double or triple even.

Working at the farmer's market was challenging because there were a variety of people at the market. Some people carried their food stamp redemption coins openly, while others didn't so it was difficult to know when to be even more generous or not. Some were interested in learning more about food including how it was grown, what is permaculture, and how one grows food. While others just wanted to shop for produce for their family and were concerned about being overpriced. What I wish people understood and expressed appreciation for is the amount of love and care that goes into supporting the farm ecosystem.

I value my experience at the farmer's market because I had many opportunities to fill an educator role. I have been told by many mentors and friends that I would be a good teacher or professor because my personality is very enthusiastic and I am very passionate about my interests.

While working at Golden Rock's farm stand, I could share what I learned each week, such as spreading lavender cuttings and planting garlic around the edges of the bed to detract pests. I also could share knowledge I gained about medicinal herbs or ideas for healthy recipes for those seeking to learn how to improve their health or widen their cooking skills. Working at the farmers' market taught me new lessons about myself and how I understood the world.

While working at the farmers' market, I was able to satisfy my curiosity and learned new ways of engaging farming into conversation. Community members shared empathy for the record-breaking summer heat waves above 100 degrees. I explained to shoppers how we had less produce that week because the weather conditions brought on by climate change were too stressful for the plants to fruit and produce vegetables; while also sharing concerns about working in the heat, they invited us to come to their private pond for a cool swim. As other farmers walked around the farmer's market to say hello I could ask questions about fixing the irrigation system. I also met someone who was previously a worm farmer. He was located next to a cow pasture with a lot of manure which fed the worms. He then sold the compost made by the worms. Sadly, when the cow farmer no longer farmed, the worm farmer stopped too and had to move onto something else to sustain himself. These lessons broadened my understanding of community and sustainable food systems.

I also had an opportunity to understand the business and financial means behind working at farmers' markets. For me they are generally an enjoyable experience and very different from observing agroecology on the farm. However, farmers' markets can be nerve wracking as they could be an unsteady and unpredictable form of income that exists seasonally. Granted I have read about positive and successful cases that farmers experienced from committing to farmer markets

as their means of selling their farm products.<sup>42</sup> Yet, I've also learned about business management models for farms in which farmers form a financial partnership that is a commitment to understanding the unpredictable experience of nature. For example, a restaurant signs a contract made by the farmer that agrees to pay a fixed cost for supplying produce during an allotted time period. This may mean that the restaurant does not have guaranteed access to specific vegetables, but a diversified farm will likely have a variety of produce available in which case if one crop were to not produce, another crop could be substituted. Paying an upfront cost also gives the farmer greater flexibility to diversify the farm and prepare various means of supplying the restaurant. This also creates a sustainable relationship by which the restaurant does not have to find new suppliers and can have an opportunity to include heirloom vegetables on their menu which often exhibits a distinctive characteristic such as superior flavor or unusual coloration. Presenting heirloom vegetables at a farmers' market is tricky because many people are afraid to buy foods that are new to them. Even if they are able to taste test the food before buying, some people don't even want to try. I empathize and try to connect with people by sharing my fear of food that stuck even entering college. But the fear overcomes the surprise of pleasure and joy waiting for them. I wonder if people have ever had the opportunity to connect with another life form living off the land, like growing their own tomato plant from seed, and taste their magical creation of a ripe tomato off the vine. The growing process requires daily love, nurture, and patience: a worthwhile relationship.

I began to understand this relationship more deeply after participating in a Spring Equinox ceremony my farm host performed. This ceremony resembled one that indigenous peoples may do

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<sup>42</sup> Although I hate using the word product to describe the "sanctity of life" that nourishes humans and animals. Food is a beautiful artwork produced by farmers in harmony with their animals, plants, the land, and overall their agroecosystem. Yet the word 'product' best describes the capitalistic system in which farmers seek to participate to enhance their livelihood like everyone else.

to welcome the spring season after winter. So before we started we collected material for the ceremony. I gathered colors from nature such as flowers, leaves, grasses to form a mandala that would represent harmony and peace. Everyone gathered sitting around the mandala. My farm host began the ceremony by beating a drum with rhythm. Then she sang a song about the changing of seasons and invited us to join her by repeating the lyrics following her cues. After the song ended we sat in silent prayer. Then we stood up and moved to a small collection of dried materials to start a fire. We had the opportunity to throw a small stick in the fire, representing anything we felt we needed to release from our life and burn. We were also welcome to share what that might be. I don't remember what I said out loud exactly. But if I were to go back to that moment I would say, "I choose to burn the fear that depression defines who I am and what I am capable of doing. I hope this will strengthen me and instill faith in myself". Although my farm host was not affiliated with any religion in particular, she was a person of faith. Her intention to create sounds by music and singing with the community changed how I envisioned expression of oneself. The changing of seasons offers an opportunity to not only accept time moving by me but also what I can surrender and let into my being. Working with the land at Golden Rocks Permaculture Farm was special because the farmer responsible for stewarding the land had an intentional spiritual relationship with the land full of respect, honor, and gratitude.

## Regenerative Agriculture at Lane Creek Reserve in Central Point, Oregon

My fourth experience volunteering on a farm during this fellowship was at Lane Creek Reserve in southern Oregon outside of Medford.<sup>43</sup> Lane Creek Reserve is a family farm that is certified organic through Oregon Tilth. They choose to implement regenerative agricultural practices and polyculture, a planting with multiple species, in Hügelkultur berms, a style of raised beds in which the bottom is filled with wood, to promote soil health. They also engage in animal husbandry and implement rotational grazing with their cows.

The main goal and purpose of regenerative agriculture is to build or rebuild topsoil which ultimately means focusing on soil health. Conventional agricultural practices have led to soil degradation after decades of killing life in the soil by tilling with tractors and using pesticides, herbicides, fungicides and chemical fertilizers. Now we must “regenerate” soil. Although regenerative agriculture does not have a commonly agreed-upon definition, like organic agriculture, focusing on building soil is necessary to resolve topsoil loss. Here are the core principles of regenerative agriculture: minimize or eliminate tillage, protect the soil, increase biodiversity, and integrate livestock (McGuire).

I went to volunteer at Lane Creek Reserve to learn more about regenerative agriculture. I had heard so many great and promising notions that the impact regenerative agriculture could make for our future. Not only would regenerative agriculture bring health to the soil, healthy soil would make healthy plants, eating healthy plants facilitates healthy people, healthy people form healthy communities, and healthy communities can maintain a healthy planet by giving back to the soil. I studied public health in college so learning about regenerative agriculture profoundly changed my

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<sup>43</sup> <https://lanecreekreserve.com/our-practices/>

perspective of health. I realized human health is inextricably linked to environmental health. As a result, I became passionate and stoked to experience regenerative agriculture.

Regenerative practices are intended to promote soil fertility by bringing nutrients to the soil. Plants need nutrients from the soil in order to grow. So each time a plant grows, the plant uptakes nutrients from the soil. The nutrients in the soil deplete slowly and if not rebalanced again, growing plants may be difficult. Nutrients in the soil are similar to money in a bank. When the nutrients are used up by plants, they must be restored. Of course, agroecology is much more complex and cannot be stated simply while being accurate. Even so, my hope is to share why regenerative agriculture is the way forward, or at least portray it as an immensely better alternative than industrial agricultural methods used in the past 100 years.

Furthermore, these practices are believed to sequester carbon from the atmosphere, directly counteracting a major aspect of climate change! Regenerative agriculture serves as a framework and model that transitions away from conventional agriculture and intends to grow plants resilient to weather events brought on by climate change such as broad and quick temperature changes, drought, downpour of rain, and more. By spreading mulch, the soil stays covered and retains moisture which is very important during the dry season so plants will be more likely to adapt to drought conditions and withstand adverse weather conditions. Additionally, mulch prevents weed growth and helps control disease as well as manages pests. Mulch also promotes mycelial growth which gives structure to the soil and spreads nutrients among its network. Worms also need a moist environment to digest and build compost in the soil. Movement by the worm spreads compost which also plays a huge role in building nutrients in the soil by which plant roots feed and receive nutrients to grow. While volunteering at Lane Creek Reserve, I spent a decent amount of my time there spreading mulch. One day while weeding and planting chamomile, we noticed beautiful

edible mushroom spores growing from the mycelium. Mycelium looks like thick white spiderwebs that are growing in mulch. They transport nutrients and sequester carbon from the atmosphere into the soil. Seeing mycelium and edible mushrooms growing around the crops was awesome because it really shows that the soil is healthy and fertile for growing plants. And ultimately demonstrated to me that agriculture has the power to not only adapt to climate change, but also maybe reverse climate change, fulfilling my motivation to farm.

I also learned how to really start growing food while I was at Lane Creek. I designed a garden using knowledge I gained about companion planting. This required researching best practices for how plants grow. Some plants attract certain pests away from the food producing ones so having a diverse variety of crops meant less work removing pests and weeds from the garden. There were more than 30 types of plants I seeded. After the seeds sprouted, I transplanted the several varieties of vegetables, herbs, and fruits into bigger pots or the garden I designed. I also learned about the medicinal benefits of herbs.

In addition to gaining familiarity with an exponential number of seeds I never saw before, I also gained more experience working with animals. I checked on the animals' well-being twice daily. I fed the animals, ensured they had sufficient water, collected chicken and duck eggs, and checked for any injuries or disease. I cleaned their facilities regularly such as the chicken coops where the chickens lay eggs, and the pool for the ducks. Lane Creek hosted animals with injuries such as Crook, a female duck, who was born with a neurological disorder that limited her ability to hold her head up. Getting to know Crook reminded me of the range of personas that bring life to places, in this case, the farm. Crook was very independent and stood her ground against the other overwhelming and bothersome male duck, Bandit. Lane Creek also raised baby chicks for meat while I was there. I had the chance to nurture the baby chicks and see the precious, adorable,

and curious behavior of developing chickens. Additionally, cows are really shy creatures that take time to develop trust in relationships. I learned that cows love to eat pumpkins. Their white faces become orange in the fall when a neighbor brings donated pumpkins by a local church! Even greater, the seeds of the pumpkins are good for cows' digestion. Pumpkin seeds are also known to prevent worms since cows inevitably eat worms while consuming grass, their main source of food. Creation serves many purposes!

I also learned a new way to build partnership through community engagement. Lane Creek Reserve partners with local grocery stores and restaurants to divert food waste that is not safe for human consumption, but is safe animal consumption. Produce such as bruised apples and lettuce past the "best by" date are not generally an issue for the strong stomach acids and digestive systems of pigs, goats, or sheep. Produce that is shaped oddly and typically not bought make for delicious meals and treats for animals or serve to build the compost pile that will return nutrients back to the soil. The compost is made over time from a combination of mulch/straw hay, animal poop, and the wondrous work of worms.

I recall growing zucchini which started out the season super well with 100% germination rate, meaning all of the seeds we planted sprouted! This was largely thanks to the nutrient rich compost we used. The plants were happy and ready to be put in the ground. From this experience of growing food, I've learned that asking about the system in which food grows matters more so than asking which components (vegetables) should be grown in the garden. This is because the methods of the system are what give the seeds appropriate conditions to thrive. In which case, a more critical question would be, what are simple and cost-effective methods appropriate for churches?

I recall another experience at Lane Creek that stays with me when I eat. While I worked at Lane Creek I developed relationships with the animals. I brought the pigs food often and snacks of bleu cheese leftover from the local creamery. Wirzba says, “A really sobering reality for humans is that for us to live, others have to die.” I remember eating the pork harvested from the pigs I fed. It was so delicious. Perhaps what I was tasting was love, not in a violent way. The joy and love we gave the pigs was returned back to us in the form of food, as a gift from God.

I also remember my WWOOF host actively praying for rain on the West Coast this year. Frequently, I asked my WWOOF host, “What are we doing today?” She simply responded, “Pray for rain.” Even before the season started, news articles announced that scientists were already calling for a drought this season. Water supply was valuable not only for the farm, but also needed for the community that Lane Creek Reserve provided food. A wildfire took several homes the year prior. Regenerative agriculture can help us grow food to mitigate climate change, but agroforestry in brittle environments (more on this later) such as the West Coast is deeply needed to protect livelihoods and community vitality.

## Dry Farming at Lilliputopia in Monroe, Oregon

Lastly, I journeyed to a tiny eco-farm located in a small rural town in Oregon called Monroe with a population of around 617 people. Lilliputopia cultivates a local food system by providing access to their fresh, seasonal produce and eggs through their farm store located onsite that is open April to October.<sup>44</sup> This farm really interested me because they specialize in dry farming techniques growing vegetables without irrigation, pesticides or chemical fertilizers. Furthermore, Lilliputopia conducts research observing drought resistant crop varieties and collaborates with Oregon State University, as well as partners with the Dry Farming Institute<sup>45</sup>.

While I was volunteering at Lilliputopia, I interacted with many different fruits and vegetables I had never seen growing on a plant before. I harvested lots of varieties of tomatoes, melons, winter and summer squashes, eggplants, peaches, Japanese and Italian plums, pears, apples, okra, ground cherries, corn, carrots, green beans and more. I planted garlic. I weeded so the crops wouldn't have to compete for water and nutrients. I gained skills such as how to install posts for a trellis and fencing. I saved seeds to plant for next year's crops. I removed crops and prepared the vegetable beds for the winter season by putting down compost and mulch. Once harvesting slowed down, we worked on building a water retention wall using earth-building techniques. Despite working on only three acres of land, there was always a list of things to do and rhythm to continue.

The farm store also contributed to the rhythm of the farm. The farm store is open every Friday, Saturday and Sunday from April to October. In order to open the farm store, crops must be harvested in a timely manner to keep the produce fresh. We harvest on Tuesdays and Thursdays

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<sup>44</sup> <https://www.lilliputopia.com/>

<sup>45</sup> <https://dryfarming.org/>

since the plants keep growing on their own schedule no matter when we tell them the public want their produce. After harvest, we move the produce from the field to the cold storage room in the barn. Friday we rise and carry the produce from the barn to the farm store where we will arrange the produce ornately to appease the aesthetic beauty that humans appreciate about delicate and mouth-watering fruits and vegetables. Once the store is ready, we take the welcome signs out to the side of the road to communicate that the farm store is open for people to come and get their ‘maters (tomatoes) and other goodies until the hours of the day pass, the sun starts to set and we close the farm store. Subsequently, the produce is tucked away in the cold storage room of the barn to conserve the produce for market on Saturday and Sunday. Then, Sunday we sort the produce that is less desirable for chickens and compost to consume, we keep portions for our weekly diets, share with neighbors, or donate food to the local food bank in town.

Opening the farm store wasn’t exactly like opening flood gates. Community members and shoppers floated into the store every hour or so, some moments are busier than others. The farm store has only been open for one year. The store opened during the pandemic as a result of the farmers’ market at the local high school closing to protect students and the community from COVID-19. People came to the farm store from word of mouth and mainly because they saw a cute, homemade and hand painted wooden farm store sign on the side of the road driving down Route 99 traveling from Corvallis to Eugene or vice versa. They came to the farm store to explore. “Wow! I never knew this was here!” A reaction I heard from many while helping at the farm store. It was amazing to witness people seek out locally produced fruits and vegetables and care whether they were naturally grown. Customers asked if pesticides or chemical fertilizers were used, which we happily told them no. The farm store also carried work of many local artists including pottery, handmade wool socks from an old sock machine, jewelry, handmade hats, photography of scenic

Oregon, as well as value-added organic products like herbal teas, honey, and CBD oil. The community around the farm store was visible through these local pieces of work. I got to meet some of the people behind the unique work displayed at the store. It was like seeing the expression of the community's imaginations expressed through art. Many customers shared glee and joy celebrating this, too. In this way I saw how a farm store cultivates a center of play and expression. Some community members even came to share their love of music and played live music at the farm store. Lilliputopia Farm Store is an example of a business and community center that I would like to be available to my community. A place where people gather to say hello, share company, celebrate local talents and skills, invest in the local economy, and so much more.

Some days I focused on helping around the farm more so than staying in the farm store. One Saturday I was picking raspberries and I heard a family walk by me and towards the farm store. "That's what I want to be when I grow up! I want to be an organic farmer!" a young boy shared with his parents. His parents acknowledged his dream after a long pause, "Oh really?" They hesitated, grinning and nodding. I only heard that piece of the conversation, but I was shocked. My body wanted to jump up and down and wave my arms around to get their attention while I shouted "Me too!" *Me too?* I stopped picking raspberries. They entered the farm store. My mind was processing trying to find words to connect and assure the young boy he was not alone. The next thing I know the young boy is walking by again wearing one of Mimi's handmade straw hats with a red ribbon flowing in the wind, smiling and walking with long strides. I smiled so big. The family walked to the car and headed out. I continued picking raspberries confused at my emotions but realizing why I was outside instead of inside the farm store. I really do want to be a farmer when I grow up. I later found out that the young boy pulled out his wallet and spent nearly all of

his allowance on that hat. This kid spent \$65 on a hat and believed he was investing in his future, our future toward a healthy planet.

The next day I was spreading compost in the field. I look at my phone. There's a missed call from my farm host and a text saying the young boy is back and interested in helping out. I ran to the farm store. I am ecstatic! He had biked to the farm store by himself carrying his straw hat and immediately wanted to learn how to farm. We spent that morning harvesting cherry tomatoes and getting to know each other, sharing our curiosities. I had the pleasure of working with him a few more days, the last of his summer break, before school started in the fall. We picked plums, apples, and peaches. We dried tomatoes and Italian plums in a solar powered dehydrator. And our agreed favorite was starting brassica seeds in the greenhouse so he could add to his garden in his backyard. I'll admit that I did have fear that the young boy had high expectations of me teaching him about organic agriculture. I got him a copy of the Dry Farming Institute brochure<sup>46</sup> from the little free library in the farm store. I was just beginning to learn myself even. But this young boy eased my anxieties by sharing similar inquiry and curiosity. That was the beauty. Even more so, this young farmer already had a chicken coop with two Rhode Island Reds, two White Leghorns and two Orpingtons - six chickens laying eggs for his family to enjoy.

I also learned about the value of support in building community vitality. A small neighborhood in Corvallis receives yard waste consisting of leaves, twigs, and other decomposable matter collected by the municipality. Over time, this yard waste attracts worms who do the dirty work of moving nutrients around within the pile and casting their nutrients (poop), cultivating a mix of ingredients that fertilize the soil, a material called compost. Plants love compost because it

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<sup>46</sup> <https://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/smallfarms/dry-farming-resources>

contains a mix of nutrients and beneficial organisms such as worms and fungal mycelium. The small neighborhood hosts a place for the leaf mulch where the symbiotic relationship of worms and decayed plant matter, not only supports plants growing in their yards, but also food for the community. This community in Corvallis shared their beautiful compost with Lilliputopia. Five humans worked together for an hour using pitch forks to move the dense, thick leaf mulch compost into a trailer. I had the pleasure of witnessing this community support growing, but also gathering and transporting the compost to support the ecosystem growing at Lilliputopia.

I learned Lilliputopia started out with dry farming practices because they do not have water rights as the property is zoned as residential land. Agricultural land can be very expensive and thus unattainable for those who desire to be a farmer. My WWOOF host actually participated in WWOOF volunteering for a year as well before making her decision to start a farm. Luckily, she had financial support and found a three-acre property that makes up Lilliputopia Tiny Eco-farm.

Living within the municipality and a residential zoning ordinance, they are only allowed a certain amount of water per month. They applied for a USDA grant to install a rainwater catchment system that will store, supply, and provide water during the beginning of the planting season in Spring. Oregon's rainy season typically occurs during the fall and winter months. This limits the typical growing to drought-resistant, or dry-farmed crops during the summer such as tomatoes and squash. Whereas the winter season permits cool-weather tolerant crops such as lettuce, broccoli, beets, green onions, kale and chard. Food grown inside a greenhouse or high tunnel also extends the growing season. Rainwater flowing off the roof of the greenhouse is collected in a barrel. Once filled, the water from the barrel is pushed uphill to the top of the property by an electrical pump to two 3,000-gallon water storage tanks. These water tanks then gravity feed water down the slope to irrigate the perennial crops while they establish. Tree crops present on the farm include hazelnuts,

cherries, grapes, kiwi berries, Asian persimmons, apples, pears, plums, and peaches - totaling about 65 trees. Establishing trees is valuable because they develop a “permanent agriculture”, also known as permaculture, or restoration agricultural system that sequesters carbon and ideally lasts a longer period of time and less work input due to the eliminated need to plant seed every year.

Lilliputopia demonstrates a comprehensive narrative of a first-generation farmer responding to a call for farming to save the planet, promote community vitality, local sustainable food systems, and inspires me to continue exploring how I can pursue my vocation through farming. I plan to start my own garden next spring from the seed I saved.

## Sharing Gardens in Monroe, Oregon

While volunteering at Lilliputopia, my WWOOF host introduced me to the founders and coordinators of a local non-profit in Monroe called Sharing Gardens. The founders converted an abandoned field owned by the local church to an organic community garden. This garden is exemplary of the kind of work FaithLands and the Christian Food Movement promotes. Starting in 2009, after 13 seasons (years) later, Sharing Gardens continues while all materials and labor are donated to the non-profit. Today the founders serve as garden coordinators. They add to the local food system in Monroe by filling CSA orders for local residents who would like locally produced fruits and vegetables, are not able to garden, or just want to support the community garden. I was given a tour of their abundant community garden during the fall season and an opportunity to ask about their cooperative model. Instead of separate raised bed gardens with multiple renters coexisting on the same property, this community garden grows food altogether in one large plot, shared by all. By growing food in a large plot space is maximized, the community shares stewardship responsibilities to manage pests and weeds cooperatively, and practices mutual generosity (The Sharing Gardens). Additionally, sharing is viewed as a reciprocal relationship.

This theoretical framework is demonstrated by sharing food in exchange for sharing time and effort toward the garden, and community. Surplus food is donated to the local food bank located right next to the church and community garden. The founders' vision hopes for sharing to be the cultural norm. Touring Sharing Gardens was a surreal experience after learning about FaithLands and witnessing an example of how land owned by faith communities can be converted to support the health, food security, and climate in a just and supportive way. Additionally, volunteering at Sharing Gardens was very unique to my other WWOOF experiences for their strong sense of values rooted in moral and social principles were pronounced. Although I am unsure whether Sharing Gardens will continue forward after the founders retire or pass, I greatly admire their efforts to establish local food, educate self-reliance, and provide for their community.

## Farming Summary

This past year I worked on farms to further my understanding of both religion and social justice. Given that the Bible begins with the story of Creation and shortly follows is the story about the Garden of Eden. I sought to understand how a relationship of reverence among land, plants, animals, and shepherds working together allows fruitful abundance for the community. Because of farming, my idea of community expanded from humans to also realize that the term 'community' includes animals and plants in addition to humans. Animals and plants digest and produce energy that flows into the human food web. This connection leads to the provisioning of ecosystem services that contribute to food access and is necessary to ensure true food security. Addressing basic needs such as shelter, food, water, air, and health are important for humans, and a forest garden offers refuge for animals and plants too. The intersectionality of religion and social justice are not commonly thought to respond to environmental issues despite being poised in their theoretical (and theological) foundations to do so. The art of living in the garden presents

opportunities to address our actions that are destabilizing earth's climate, acidifying oceans, rising sea levels, and participating in agricultural practices that have degraded much of the world's topsoil.

I learned a variety of sustainable farming practices during this fellowship: indoor and winter growing with microgreens and hydroponic lettuce at an urban CSA in Cleveland, Ohio, animal husbandry in rural Hot Springs, South Dakota, permaculture in northern California, regenerative agriculture in southern Oregon, as well as dry farming tomatoes in the Willamette Valley of Oregon. All of the farms seek to grow food in ways that support the health of the soil and the people consuming the food. However, each farm was distinct in the types of food produced as the animals and plants grown on the farm varied. Each farm was also distinctive in their approach: to steward the land and residing ecosystem, to connect with the land, to grow food, to meet nutritional requirements, to provide access to food to various demographics of the population, to manage financial and business demands or desires. Farming varies just as much as the personalities of people vary. Some farms appeared more organized, creative, or just curiously different than others. The farm could be considered a reflection of the behaviors and work and communication styles of the farmer — all with unique nuances. All in all, I found a lovely common mission among all the farms I visited: a healthy planet.

I came into this fellowship thinking that farming is very complex. Yet I have found that is not necessarily true. Farming is complex, but not complicated. I understand how farming works and how the ecosystem functions due to interconnectedness, but there are infinite possibilities to understand how the soil biology and animals interact or relationships develop within an ecosystem. I realized farming is not complicated because you can interact with a complex system in simple ways. Yes, farming can be entirely considered an experiment, but given the appropriate nutrients

and environmental conditions the plant should do well. Animals require feed, water and care. In general, just putting a plant in the ground improves the quality of the soil and increases your likelihood for success in the future. After farming for a year, I find the endless options you can do with land rather overwhelming and intimidating than the practice itself. There are many different ways to grow food, in addition to the various climates as well as plant and animal species that could be grown. For example, growing olives and almonds in arid, dry climates of California is not possible in the wet, humid conditions of Northeast Ohio. Knowing that farming and growing food is not complicated gives me hope that creating local food systems is possible, especially with the support of faith communities and their land. Many of the farms I visited operated like homesteads that resist our current globalized food system that is largely oppressive to humans and the planet. Because they were able to feed themselves and steward the land in ways that support the environment in small plots of land there is great potential to replicate and enhance food security. I did not work on farms with industrial, conventional methods that dominate the agricultural landscape existing today in the United States. Globally, small scale farms run by women in countries that are considered low or middle resource availability are the majority that contribute to our current globalized food system. We can preserve the “chickenness of the chicken” as Wirzba says without sacrificing its dignity nor integrity. So, farming has taught me to believe transitioning food systems to be largely equitable and ecological is complex, but not complicated.

Learning the ethics of food and the environment was also crucial to how I will engage in learning about growing food. By gaining a mindset of abundance, I discovered that diversifying plants and animals builds resilience and prosperity. Inviting the “pests” to the community in the garden will serve to manage other “pests”. This means that although a plant may not be edible by me, it may be edible by a bug that will eat that plant instead of the fruits that are edible to me.

## Conclusion: Reflections on Lessons Learned and Vocation

I seek out connections among communities who are passionate about their religion and social justice and to create a collective agency that has the potential to address climate change and the socioeconomic inequities that impact our global population. I believe food offers us ways to build this collective agency by focusing on agriculture as the base of our food system. Reforming our agricultural systems is not only a way in which we can inspire agency to combat climate change, but also a way to connect faith to Creation. There is great significance in efforts like FaithLands that inspire faith communities to bring church-owned land into food systems, helping farmers get access to land and improving communities' access to food. Eating can be an act perceived not only as personal, but also social, environmental and religious.

I can enact change toward social and environmental justice on an individual level through food. This can be achieved through choosing to buy local food that is mostly aligned to regenerative organic agroforestry practices and is produced in fair working conditions. I often struggle to find these foods in grocery stores or restaurants. So when I go to purchase food I ask: "What is possible?" and I wonder, "What might Jesus eat today?" By choosing to invest in products that align better with this ideal, I am expressing my demand to the market as a consumer. I am one eater in the world, but I recognize that I exist and therefore have power to resist practices that harm people, ecosystems, and ultimately the planet. This voice and knowledge did not form by myself. I acknowledge communities who have been resisting inequity, sharing wisdom, and calling for just and sustainable futures. During this fellowship, I broke habits and long standing beliefs that formed during my childhood development. I challenged myself to be open-minded to new foods such as bison in chili, heirloom tomatoes and purple potatoes. When I ate farm fresh foods I gained a greater appreciation for eating the literal fruits of my labor. I recall indulging in several types of

dry-farmed tomatoes that have distinct compositions and layers to their flavor; they were grown without irrigation, pesticides or chemical fertilizers. Now I seek out better quality ingredients and foods that nourish my mind and body. Indeed, these foods are healthier and thus serve my overall lifespan. I benefit in my mental, physical, reproductive, social, and financial health by putting these foods in my body. In effect, these foods impact how I serve my communities. All things considered, food is a tool to understand our agency which informs how we can address inequities and achieve justice. I believe it is my responsibility to decide wisely and support myself, my communities, and our planet.

I connected with faith-based leaders and organizations working at the intersection of religion and social justice to learn how their work uses food justice and food sovereignty to strengthen communities. I learned that hunger and food insecurity initiatives are increasingly shifting from approaches based in charity to justice. Furthermore, these efforts are shifting from mindsets of scarcity to abundance. This helped me understand and evaluate my bias surrounding hunger and poverty as well as privilege in food access and nutrition security. My vocation seeks to increase accessibility and affordability of equitable foods that promote conservation and sustainability. I think we should redefine food security to be based on nutrition and sustainability. Yet, this vision of nutrition security does not align with how federal institutions currently measure food security in programs like SNAP. Faith communities address hunger in the same arena as private and public food security programs. I think cultivating collective agency among religion and social justice is necessary to effectively address food security. Perhaps, a national food strategy could be the solution. Faith communities have incredible opportunities for insuring food security by using their land to plant native, edible species and woody fruit-producing trees on land owned by churches. Additionally, farmers get access to land and people get access to food. Focusing on

communities with black, indigenous and people of color would promote reparative justice and equitable solutions that foster solutions for an ecumenical approach to food systems. The future of society will always entail eating. Shall eating be an act imagined with pleasure in the future? And regenerates Creation? Using faith lands to sequester carbon combats climate change and protects Creation. Preceding this fellowship, the pandemic demonstrated vulnerabilities in supply chains and our food systems. There were empty shelves in grocery stores and an increased number of people going to food banks due to unemployment and financial hardship. For these reasons, I think we should be building local food systems that source from local farms with sustainable agricultural practices to fulfill procurement needs of the food industry and food insecurity initiatives.

Upon learning about an ecological theology of liberation, I gained an awareness about socioeconomic inequality and climate change in a theological theoretical framework. This deepened my ability to connect with faith communities. I realized my vocation through a liberationist lens which allowed me to realize how agency and vocation are connected. Thus, I discovered ways in which religion and social justice can serve one another and how they are more similar than different. I recognized this in myself too. While pursuing the process of vocational discernment, I applied the Quaker saying, “let your life speak” (Palmer). Allowing my life, my narrative, to come forward and speak helped me identify my true, inner voice over cultural expectations imposed on me. My hearing also improved as I identified my voice. I felt trustworthy of myself and my journey. I clarified my “Why?”, my purpose and passion. This influenced my decision to farm during this fellowship. My sacred, ancestral narrative identifies me as a white woman born in the United States with Irish European descent and intergenerational family loss due to exposure to the agricultural chemical industry. In combination with knowledge and experience I gained in college surrounding food security and food systems, my passion for

equitable and ecological food systems is rooted in transitioning my sacred narrative to align with reparative justice. My faith is rooted in family - something that is constant throughout my lifespan. I can also share this passion for food justice with faith communities that are currently or seeking to use their land for regeneration. I will move from theory to practice by engaging with Creation through working on farms, land and stewards of the land. I let my life speak this past year by working on farms and realized ways in which stewarding the land rewards more than food as a gift. I found working on farms fosters equanimity for my psychological well-being. I realize how I can move between theory and practice. In the future I hope to engage with farm communities so that I install opportunities by which I faithfully allow nature to nourish my selfhood.

I also chose to work on farms this past year instead of understanding poverty for this reason: peace exists in the garden. The broader systemic injustices causing poverty are issues of politics and economic pressures. Growing populations give even more reason for building local food systems and having more community gardens. There is a greater guarantee to feed the world through agricultural practices from permaculture and restoration agriculture, like Mark Shepherd proposes, because vertical and horizontal layers by trees, shrubs, ground cover, and roots are utilized. More calories and nutrients are produced in less space through such practices, which are not commonly used in the United States.

I wanted to get to know faith communities better and understand what faith is and what faith means to me. I wanted to take time to understand my relationship with food and the land. I had a lack of discussion in talking about growing food, knowing what harvest takes. I wanted to try to answer questions like, “Where does food come from? Whose hands have picked my food? What might Jesus eat in today’s America?” Particularly, I noticed that in my understanding of the food justice movement, that faith-based work was missing from my conversations on social justice

and liberation. I didn't know how much faith communities are involved in activities surrounding food justice and environmental justice.

Exploring the intersection of religion and social justice has meant exploring social issues like race, hunger and poverty to understand how stakeholders and communities of religion and social justice are working to address the issues. Finding the intersection of religion and social justice surrounding food and farming was difficult. Religious leaders don't necessarily focus on social justice, or specifically through food and farming. Similarly, activists tend to not share their religion within their efforts - that is a research opportunity in itself. Scholars, journalists or writers tend to not incorporate religion in conversation with food justice work. Hence, there are gaps in food justice scholarly work, too. Exploring this intersectionality allowed me to realize there are inspired faith communities that "use their land in new ways that promote ecological and human health, support local food and farming, enact reparative justice, and strengthen communities" (FaithLands). I know of communities who are taking on preferential options for the poor and the earth through community projects in the garden. Now that I know, there's a possibility of joining them for my next steps. Maybe my narrative continues by starting new efforts on faithlands. I have a better understanding of growing food. Although there is much to learn, I know more than I did a year ago, and, I am not alone, there are communities to join.

Participating in this fellowship has been deeply meaningful for the various purposeful directions I can now explore. As I conceivably evolve the answer to "What will I do?", my future will likely expand pondering ideas explored throughout this paper such as exploring my agency and vocation, where I fit into the food system, and learning more about faith community engagement. I will also find my farmer. I'll be shopping at farmers' markets and choosing wisely in the grocery store and restaurants until I can join a CSA program that directly connects me to a

farmer with a similar mission to mine. I am unsure where my career will take me as the food and faith movement is alive and well. Similarly, the food justice or food sovereignty movements are in progress. Owing to the legacy of Charles Rice, who had a significant role in developing this fellowship opportunity, I imagine working with children and schools to be a fulfilling and impactful path. Charles Rice says, “I believe the children are the future. Teach them well and they’ll lead the way. Show them all the beauty they possess inside. Give them a sense of pride and make it easier. Let the children’s laughter remind us of how it used to be” (Tedx Talks, Charles Rice). Their sense of play will bring joy and celebration to the miracle of food - a party awaiting in the garden or farm. I also recognize there's a need to make a preferential option for the poor and Earth in legal, economic, and social systems. When I think about the challenges facing a healthy and just planet, I find this quote by Archbishop Desmond Tutu compelling: “There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they’re falling in.” Farmworkers experiencing hunger and poverty despite feeding the population is difficult to imagine, but an unfair truth that is often unacknowledged by the media. I imagine helping to actualize ideas discussed in this paper within my geographical community. I know that planting one seed, transforming one plot of land, can lead to other parcels transitioning.

In understanding the intersectionality of religion and social justice, working in the garden has connected the abstract to the concrete for my faith, agency, and vocation. Perhaps, the verb *gardening* is the intermediary between theory and action. Growing food requires study in how to plant and nurture a seed, the diligence of vocation to continually care for the plant, and the will to love thyself to enjoy the delicious fruitful rewards of your labor - a gift you may also give to someone else. The lesson in growing food also serves me personally: improving myself and my work in social justice requires study, continual maintenance, and the will to love. The garden is a

place I can go to be reminded of these lessons. Every living thing is connected to the garden because that is where our food is grown. The garden is where our needs are met, that is where improvement and change can happen.

Although there is great suffering today, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic continues, I share a passage from the Bible that gives me hope:

The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will fulfill the promise I made to the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David, and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be called: "The Lord is our righteousness." (Jeremiah 33:14-16, NRSV)

It is through one step at a time, one plant at a time, one animal at a time, one ecosystem at a time and so on that I can cultivate change. I believe peace awaits in the garden. Food provides pleasure, adding to what it means to be human, and can be shared and enjoyed together. We get to consider heaven on Earth. I hope you'll join a collective agency for community resilience.

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# Additional Resources

Guide for building local networks such as local food systems: <https://actionguide.localfutures.org/>

Education surrounding religion, economics, and ecology: <https://www.religionandjustice.org/>

To begin eating in just, sustainable ways ask questions such as:

- Where do I buy food?
- Where does the food I buy come from?
- What friends, family or community members can join me in this new challenge to eat foods that are produced in ways that are just, regenerative/sustainable/organic?
- Are there Fair Food Certified farms located near me? (CIW/Fair Food Program)
- Are there local farmers' markets, CSA (community supported agriculture) programs that would connect me to a local farmer?

Ask farmers (credits to Rodale Institute):

- Can you tell me about how this food was grown?
- Does your farm and/or supplier hold any certifications like USDA Organic, Regenerative Organic Certified, Land to Market, or others?
- How do you control pests and weeds on your farm?
- How do you ensure your soil has the nutrients it needs? Do you use fertilizer, cover crops, compost, or something else?
- What do your animals hear and where do they live?
- How do you protect your farmworkers and field laborers?
- What got you into farming?
- Tell me about your land and why you love it.