

Engaged Spirituality

100
STORIES
of inspiration
and resilience

Center for Religion and Civic Culture
University of Southern California

Engaged Spirituality



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AN OVERVIEW OF

Spiritual Exemplars

A Global Project on Engaged Spirituality

Introduction

Around the world, humanitarians care for AIDS orphans, fight oil companies in the arctic, perform surgery in the middle of wars, save migrants from certain death in the desert or the sea, and give love and jobs to gang members. They work on intractable issues, often in the face of great challenges.

In November 2018, the Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC) at the University of Southern California launched a five-year project focused on people who dedicate their lives to human flourishing. The joint academic-journalistic project resulted in the publication of more than 100 stories of “engaged spirituality”—stories about how religious values and spiritual practices inspire and sustain social action.

Through “Spiritual Exemplars: A Global Project on Engaged Spirituality,” CRCC gained insights into how spiritually engaged humanitarians understand their lives and their work, as well as how their social action affects their beliefs and practices. This booklet presents an introduction to the project as a whole, as well as to these extraordinary individuals.

While there is a long tradition of research on “saints” from times past, CRCC’s project focused on living individuals—people from all over the world who are confronting issues ranging from climate change to human rights, poverty and gender equity. Moreover, it sought to bring these individuals’ stories to the public with the help of journalists as data collectors and storytellers. Stories of religious actors working for positive social change were told in major newspapers, magazines, an award-winning podcast and online videos.

As journalist Judy Silber describes in the trailer for *The Spiritual Edge* podcast, which produced 18 episodes from the project: “These are stories of struggle, often without resolution. They’re also stories of hope.”

We are grateful for the generous support of the John Templeton Foundation and Templeton Religion Trust, who took a risk on an innovative project that brought together scholars and journalists to reveal hope in the time of global uncertainty.



Innocent Eteng

Zannah Mustapha, with his family, opened schools in the Nigerian state where Boko Haram aimed to close them.

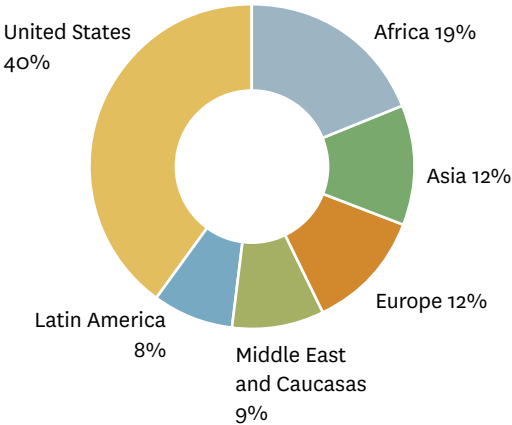
Who are Spiritual Exemplars?

CRCC’s project on “spiritual exemplars” expands upon a burgeoning field of research on moral exemplars, primarily undertaken in psychology and moral philosophy. Scholars leading this field ask why we should limit our understanding of human moral functioning by looking at the average; studying exemplars teaches us something about the full range of human potential.

Though scholars note that spirituality is important to exemplars, living or dead, we know little about how it functions for these individuals. This project fills that gap by interviewing people from a wide variety of religious and spiritual perspectives about the role that their values, beliefs and practices play in their lives—as well as how their efforts to advance human flourishing influence their spiritual orientation.

104 Exemplars

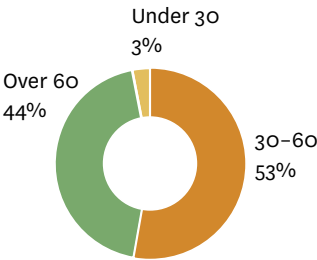
The project studied 104 Spiritual Exemplars across religious traditions—Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism and Hinduism, for example—as well as individuals who do not adhere to a particular tradition.



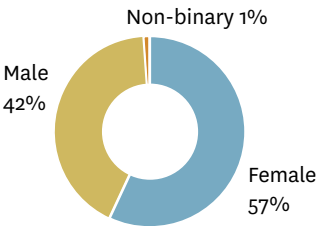
13 faith traditions

African Traditional Religions
 Baha’i
 Buddhism
 Catholicism
 Protestantism
 Eastern Orthodoxy
 Hinduism
 Humanism
 Indigenous Religions
 Islam
 Jainism
 Judaism
 Old Norse

Age



Gender



Because the idea of “spiritual exemplar” is highly subjective, CRCC crafted criteria to focus our work on spiritually engaged humanitarians:

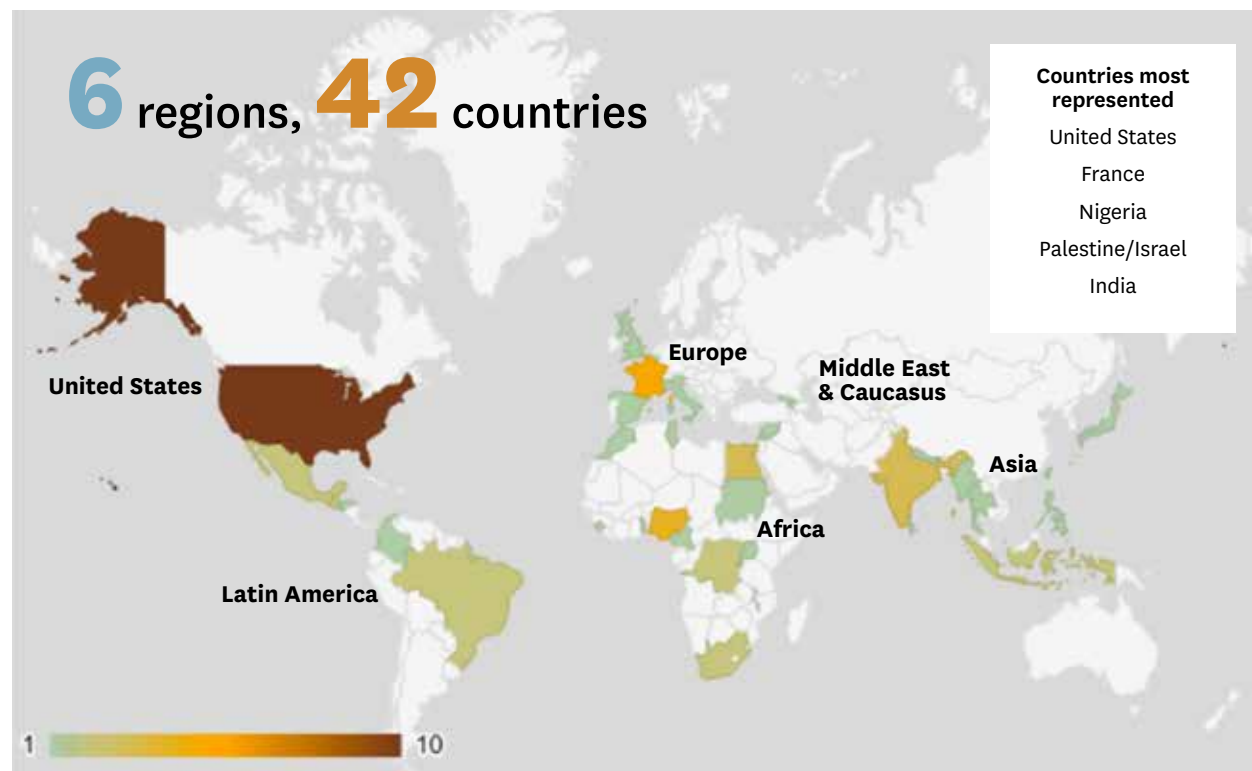
- 1) A living individual anywhere in the world;
- 2) Engaged in significant humanitarian work;
- 3) Inspired and sustained by their spiritual values, beliefs and practices;
- 4) Admired and emulated by others within and beyond their community;
- 5) Respects human rights, such as those defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

By looking at lists of prize winners and soliciting nominations from the public and pitches from our team of journalists, CRCC developed a database of 430 individuals fitting these criteria.

Of those, the project profiled 104 spiritually engaged humanitarians. Forty-two countries are

represented in our sample, along with 13 different faith traditions. While our sample is skewed toward humanitarians from the United States, in part because the COVID-19 pandemic limited travel, well over half are from outside the US. Nearly 20 percent are from Africa, 12 percent from Asia, 12 percent from Europe, about 9 percent are from the Middle East and Caucasus, and 8 percent are from Latin America. Overall, slightly less than a quarter of the people profiled were white/Euro-pean, and almost a quarter were Black/African.

On gender and age, we also have a good distribution. Fifty-seven percent of the exemplars were women. More than half are between 30 and 60 years of age. We initially speculated there might be more men than women, and that the sample would skew older than it did, since exemplars are often recognized later in life. The group includes both a Nobel Prize winner as well as little known figures, working day in and day out to improve their communities.



Telling Good Religion Stories

News coverage of religion can be cynical, focusing on corruption, abuse and the negative elements of religion as a crutch or escape from reality. With this project, CRCC aimed to introduce into the media landscape stories in which religion and spirituality are a force for positive social change.

We were interested in why someone would heroically commit themselves to a life of radical engagement with issues of justice and equity, oftentimes at a considerable cost to their own comfort.

We found that journalists were likewise interested in telling such stories. More than 350 journalists from around the world applied to be a part of the project. CRCC worked with 33 journalists over the course of the project, including two writer-photographer pairs, two video producers, and *The Spiritual Edge* podcast's editorial team. In addition to US-based journalists, the project's fellows lived in Brazil, Guatemala, Mexico, India, Indonesia, Israel, Georgia, Germany, England, Spain and Nigeria.

The journalists also were attracted to the project by the financial support it offered. Our deal with the journalists was that we would pay their travel costs as well as an honorarium for their work, and they, in turn, would provide audiotapes of their interviews with the “spiritual exemplar,” so our research team could analyze them for academic publications.

The financial award allowed the journalists to produce “good journalism,” as one fellow described it. Although the COVID-19 pandemic limited travel and in-person access to their subjects, many journalists spent multiple days with the exemplar, interviewing and observing the individual's work and their community in some depth. They defined their work as ethnographic journalism, literary journalism or even “spiritual journalism,” which speaks to the personal impact reporting such stories can have on the journalists themselves.

The USC research team also did profiles of exemplars in Sudan, Uganda, Malawi, Congo, Egypt, Lebanon, France and the United States, which gave them first-hand experience of some of the challenges and inspiration of encountering exemplary humanitarians.

In our orientation meeting with the journalists, we stressed that we were not interested in putting exemplars on a “saintly” pedestal. We wanted well-rounded profiles that would also include the shadow side of exemplars' work, including burnout, vicarious trauma because of their exposure to human suffering, loneliness and costs to their families and friends.

Like the lives of the exemplars themselves, the stories emerging from this project are anything but Polly-Annish. They are filled with tragedy and trauma, and grapple with the evils of torture, genocide, abuse, inequality and discrimination. At the same time, aligning with the trend of solutions journalism, these stories present people working to address and solve their communities' most critical issues. And indeed, the solutions that these exemplars seek to implement are grounded in their spirituality—in a belief in human dignity, an understanding of karma or a value of gratitude, for instance.

Such complex stories are difficult to tell in 800 words, and pitching remained a challenge for many of our fellows. Nonetheless, articles have been published in the *New York Times*, *Guardian*, *Al Jazeera*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *America: The Jesuit Review*, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, various online publications and other venues. We are grateful to Religion News Service and Religion Unplugged for their partnership in helping these stories reach their audiences.



Erin Walters-Bugbee



Courtesy of Stephen's Children



Ken Chitwood



Top left: Fellow Diane Winston (right) interviews Konda Mason. **Top right:** Mama Maggie listens to children in Cairo's slums. **Bottom left:** Migrants from Sonia Tinoco García's shelter at the US-Mexico border. **Bottom right:** Fellow Priyadarshini Sen (left) with Hindu transgender rights activist Ranjita Sinha.

42 journalists and researchers

- >115 written articles
- 18 podcast episodes with *The Spiritual Edge*
- 11 videos



Insights into Engaged Spirituality

Bringing journalists into an academic project breaks some conventional standards of social science research, which typically focuses on controlled samples and standardized research protocols. Doing so allowed us to pull off a far-ranging project such as this, and to look at questions about how both journalists and academics craft narratives about the people they study.

To give the researchers and journalists a common frame, we provided an adapted “life story interview” tool (see page 62 for the guide), which encouraged journalists to solicit exemplars to share their life trajectories. Religion is not a “thing” that can be abstracted and examined in isolation; rather it is integrally interwoven in everyday experience. Furthermore, examining spirituality or religious identity at a single point in time is not adequate, as spiritual exemplars evolve in response to particular crises, events, opportunities—and the quest for meaning itself. Within these life story interviews, CRCC asked its researchers and journalists to touch on common themes: inspiration; sustenance, the reciprocal effect of the work on the exemplars’ spirituality, the shadow side, and their relationship with

institutional forces, whether their own organization or a religious institution.

Working with about 140 coding categories, academic researchers have processed hundreds of interviews, analyzing themes across the global database. Themes include: the life trajectory of exemplars, values they embody, their spiritual practices and beliefs, as well as their personal qualities and characteristics, program focus and strategies, and their shadow side.

It is simplistic to say that religion or spirituality inspires exemplars to act in the world. Rather, the interviews reveal multiple pathways to humanitarian work. For many individuals, it was a search for meaning and purpose in their lives. For others, they encountered a personal crisis or trauma in their community that called out for a response. And for some, it was a nearly accidental involvement where they engaged in initial acts of charity that then evolved into a life-long passion.

At the heart of exemplars are a number of values, including compassion, empathy, selflessness, hope, tolerance, courage and humility. These are individuals who live for others, not themselves or their own happiness. And yet joy and a sense of purpose permeate their lives.

Pathways to humanitarian work

- A calling
- Search for meaning
- Crisis and trauma
- Social need
- Accidental



The heart and shadow side of Exemplars



They are resilient individuals. They often see themselves as the vessels of a higher purpose or calling. They have a gritty perseverance, taking the long view on tackling an issue. Their theology or philosophy enables them to place temporary disappointments in a larger framework. At the same time, a subset of the exemplars showcase a little acknowledged value of spiritual sustenance: the prophetic call to end human suffering. Embodying a “holistic resilience,” these actors seek to dismantle the structures that require them and their communities to be resilient in the first place.

Although spiritual practices varied by religious traditions, common to exemplars were regular periods of prayer, meditation, corporate worship/rituals, and times apart in retreat. These practices renew them daily. While a few exemplars reported mystical experiences, there was something very this-worldly about their approach to the sacred and ultimate reality. Exemplars reported finding God, for example, in service to the poor and marginalized.

Their spiritual practices and contexts open exemplars to a consciousness of ideal relations, characterized by beliefs in the sacredness of all beings

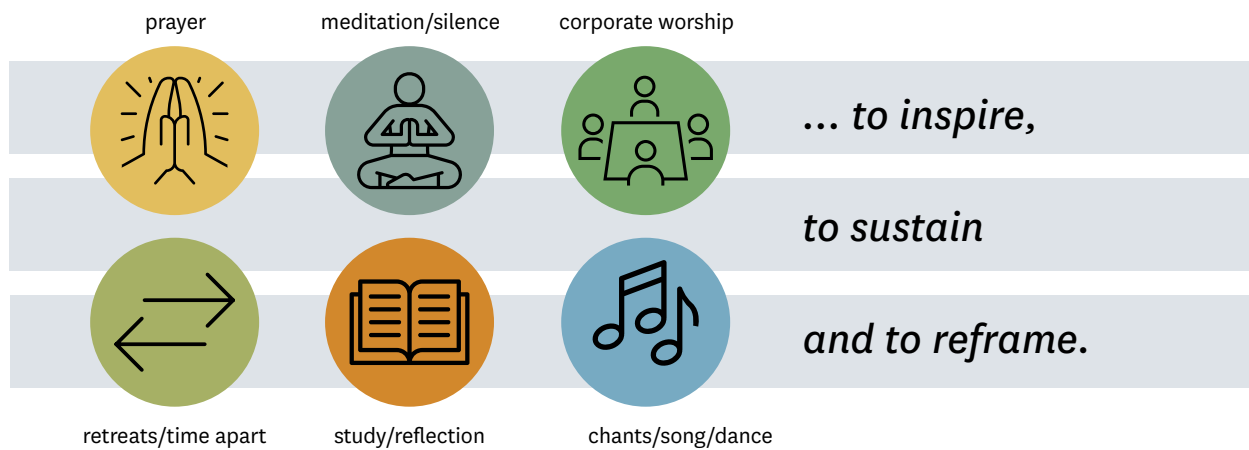
“As a woman of faith, I cannot give in to discouragement. This is the time to invent new ways to continue our mission.”

— Sister Marie-Stella Kouak

and the rights and dignity of all persons. This realm of consciousness becomes “real” in engaged spirituality—when prayer and contemplation connect helpfully with people in need. Their beliefs also enable them to frame and constantly reframe situations to find hope and possibility regardless of the circumstances.

Exemplars’ perspectives have been particularly refreshing in the midst of global turmoil caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which has endangered people’s lives, health and livelihoods while exacerbating the issues that exemplars seek to address. We have been struck by exemplars’ entrepreneurial spirit in the face of poverty and trauma. Perhaps visionary action is an antidote to pessimism, cynicism and paralyzing fear.

The role of spiritual practices is...





Patrisse Cullors (center) with fellow cofounders of Black Lives Matter, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi.

“For me, spirituality has the ability to support one’s safety, has the ability to support one’s resilience. I say the ability because I don’t believe all spiritualities do that. There are many spiritualities that further repress and subjugate people in their communities, but I’m calling for spirituality to be deeply radical in its ability to heal people.

I don’t think we’re people to be fixed, but rather, how do we hold faith for people who’ve had harm caused to them in a way that makes them feel like they have agency again? That’s what spirituality has the ability to do.”

— Patrisse Cullors



Carmen Santiago Alonso (far right) at a ceremony in Oaxaca, Mexico.



**“I know the risks that our lives run.
That same fear, however, has given me
the strength to continue on my way.”**

— Carmen Santiago Alonso

Directory

Directory

A Guide to the Directory

Each individual profiled as part of CRCC’s global project on engaged spirituality is listed in the following pages, along with a description of their work and personal journeys. You will see the wide variety of issues, causes, faith traditions and geographies. We list their organizations, locations and religions, and we assigned an “area of work” category to each.

The areas of work are not exhaustive, and many exemplars take a holistic approach to their work, offering, for instance, education, health care, job training and economic support, as well as spiritual care, within their organizations. However, we did our best to capture the primary focus of their work, collapsing related areas within larger categories as appropriate. We use the following areas of work:

- **Cultural empowerment**
- **Education**
- **Environmental justice**
- **Gender equity** (women’s empowerment/protection, sexual violence, trafficking, LGBTQ+ empowerment/protection)
- **Health care**
- **Humanitarian aid**
- **Human rights** (racial justice, immigration reform, war crimes, democracy promotion, migration/refugee rights, freedom of expression/press, prison reform, economic justice, bonded labor)
- **Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding** (conflict resolution, religious freedom, violence prevention, genocide response/recovery)
- **Socioeconomic development** (poverty eradication, hunger, homelessness, financial empowerment, land rights, corruption)

The descriptions, written by the journalist or researcher who conducted the interviews, highlight these extraordinary individuals’ stories, their accomplishments and how their spirituality interacts with the work they do in the world.

We encourage you to visit engaged-spirituality.com, where you can search for and read the full stories. You can also get in touch with the exemplar or their organization through the website listed within the directory.

The directory is ordered by geographic region, with exemplars in alphabetical order within each region:

Africa
Asia
Europe
Latin America
**Middle East and
the Caucasus**
USA

Africa

Muhammad Ashafa

Interfaith Mediation Center
interfaithmediation.org
Kaduna, Kaduna State, Nigeria

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Imam Muhammad Ashafa is the administrator of the Ashafa Central Mosque in northern Nigeria's Kaduna State. A husband of three women and father of 22 children, he was born in the 1950s into a family known for producing Imams. Until 1995, he wielded a strong passion to fight in defense of Islam and its adherents at whatever cost. He served as Secretary-General of the National Council of Muslim Youths Organization, a group that fiercely engaged Christians in religious debates and bloody confrontations. During a 1992 religious conflict, he lost his spiritual teacher and two cousins. The incident forced him to learn religious tolerance. A moderate Islamic teacher helped him see people of other faiths through the eyes of humanity. Ashafa now works to build peace among members of diverse religious groups by facilitating dialogue and mediation via the Interfaith Mediation Center, which he founded and directs with his former enemy James Movel Wuye (see page 21).

JOURNALIST Innocent Eteng



Badr Baabou

Tunisian Association for Justice and Equality (DAMJ)

FACEBOOK damj.tunisie
Tunis, Tunisia

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Gender equity

For his pioneering work in ensuring justice and equality for sexual minorities since 2002, Badr Baabou was named the 2019 Front Line Defenders Global Laureate. The jury wanted to highlight LGBTQ+ activism in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots in New York and considered Baabou's work most noteworthy. Even though the rights of LGBTQ+ people are beginning to be integrated with other human rights claims in Tunisia, Badr has been the target of numerous physical attacks, arrests, online threats and verbal abuse. He is inspired by Saida Manoubiya, a prominent and free-spirited Tunisian Sufi saint from the 13th century who touched many lives with her activism. Despite the risks to his life, Baabou wants to persevere with his activism and raise debates on the fundamentals of democracy and inclusion of marginalized voices in society.

JOURNALIST Priyadarshini Sen



Marguerite Barankitse

Maison Shalom

maisonshalom.org/en
Gitega, Burundi

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Religious
tolerance and Peacebuilding

Marguerite (Maggy) Barankitse has witnessed horrific acts of genocide, political violence and social injustice, yet she is unwavering in her belief that evil will not ultimately prevail. When ethnic violence exploded in Burundi in October 1993, Barankitse, who is Tutsi, attempted to protect Hutu neighbors and colleagues. Tutsi militia members took her captive and forced her to watch 72 executions before ultimately letting her go. As the conflict continued, Barankitse set up Maison Shalom, or House of Peace, to shelter orphan children from both tribes. She expanded her efforts to include education, health care, microenterprise and psychological counseling. Barankitse moved her operation to Rwanda in 2015 when her life was threatened by the government. She continues to support Burundian refugees and is a vigorous advocate for forgiveness and reconciliation because without them, she says, the region “has no future.”

JOURNALIST Kim Lawton



Tom Catena

Mother of Mercy Hospital

Nuba Mountains, South Sudan

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Health care

Dr. Tom Catena was an engineering major and all-star football player at Brown University when he made the radical choice to enter medical school and head to Africa as a medical missionary. Initially, he thought he would stay a year or two. But 20 years later, he is still in Africa, moving from Kenya to the Nuba Mountains in Sudan, where he runs a hospital and medical clinic that serves a rural population of nearly a million people. Working 24/7, and seeing on average 350 patients a day, he starts each morning at 6:30 AM with prayer at the local chapel, saying the rosary on his walk there. During the civil war in Sudan, the area around his hospital was regularly bombed, and Tom worked around the clock sewing up victims and amputating limbs. He says joy is his focus, not happiness. Marrying a local nurse in his early 50's, they decided to call their first child “Francis,” after the 13th century St. Francis of Assisi who is reported to have said, “Preach always, and sometimes use words.”

RESEARCHER Donald E. Miller



Courtesy of the Aurora Prize (Adriane Ohanesian)

Agatha Chikelue

Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace

cofpfoundation.org
Abuja, Nigeria

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance
and Peacebuilding

Sr. Agatha Chikelue is a Catholic nun from the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary Mother of Mercy. At the Cardinal Onaiyekan Foundation for Peace, she develops training programs for interfaith dialogue and action in Nigeria and Africa. Sr. Agatha currently serves as chair of the Religions for Peace International Women's Coordinating Committee and co-chair of Religions for Peace Africa and Nigeria Women of Faith Network. Initially reluctant to heed the call to religious life, Sr. Agatha has become one of the most respected organizers of programming around conflict resolution and interreligious dialogue in a highly fractious nation of more than 200 million people. In Nigeria, generational traumas, poor governance and widespread corruption amplify long-simmering ethnic and religious tensions, especially between the country's predominantly Muslim north and Christian south.

JOURNALIST Nick Street



Courtesy of Agatha Chikelue

Mohammed Elgazzar

Deceased 2022

Yeditepe University

Alexandria, Egypt

FAITH Islam

AREA OF WORK Health care

Disciplined, dignified and driven, Mohammed Elgazzar—whose name ironically means “the butcher” in Arabic—saved countless lives as a war surgeon on the both sides of conflicts in Yemen, Syria, Sierra Leone and South Sudan. First taking up the scalpel to save a chick, Elgazzar was spurred on to study medicine in the face of his mother’s terminal illness. He was not able to save the chick, nor his mother. Inspired by a verse of the Qur’an from Surah Al-Ma’idah—“whoever saves one—it is as if he had saved mankind entirely”—Elgazzar became a highly qualified and respected surgeon. He served with Arab Medical Relief in Yemen. His life and that of his pregnant wife was threatened by rebels—some of whom he had treated—in Sierra Leone. He narrowly escaped carpet bombings in northern Syria. “I never planned on doing ‘humanitarian’ work,” Elgazzar said. “I saw people in need, and decided to do it. I believe I will be rewarded from Allah. I need nothing else.” Elgazzar passed away in 2022.

JOURNALIST Ken Chitwood



Helene Babiene Eweni

Exceptional Youth Initiative

FACEBOOK Exeptional Youth Initiative
Kumba, Cameroon

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Socioeconomic development

Helene Babiene Eweni is a youth pastor who believes part of her calling in life is to deliver hope to the poor and vulnerable because she is an orphan who experienced a tough life after her parents’ death. She holds the conviction that one who trusts in God “cannot be disadvantaged,” showing her intense devotion to God and spirituality. A humanitarian and activist from Kumba town in Cameroon’s Southwest region, she provides guidance and emotional support to younger orphans, advocates for children’s right to education, and offers free vocational skills and financial aid to women displaced by the Anglophone Crisis and those physically challenged. She is known for spearheading a health campaign in 2019 that brought free sanitary items and antenatal care service to hundreds of displaced pregnant women and girls in Anglophone Cameroon.

JOURNALIST Innocent Eteng



Courtesy of Helene Babiene Eweni

Jean Gakwandi

Solace Ministries

solaceministries.org
Kigali, Rwanda

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

From April through July 1994, an estimated 800,000 Tutsis were killed in the Rwandan Genocide, and many more were left with physical and emotional scars. Jean Gakwandi lost his entire extended family, but his immediate family miraculously survived while sheltered in the home of his German teacher. He felt emotionally numb, but the Biblical verse “comfort my people” (Isaiah 40:1) echoed in his ears. He started Solace Ministries in 1995, building it from intimate gatherings of widows into 56 communities of survivors around the country. Solace Ministries has assisted approximately 20,000 people through counseling and spiritual care, education, employment and health. Their medical clinic under the same name serves a client population of more than 50,000 patients a year.

RESEARCHER Donald E. Miller



Ela Gandhi

Gandhi Development Trust

gdt.org.za
Durban, Phoenix Settlement,
South Africa

RELIGION Hinduism

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance
and Peacebuilding

The granddaughter of Mahatma Gandhi, Ela Gandhi grew up in Phoenix, one of the oldest Indian settlements in South Africa and the site of Mahatma Gandhi's embryonic efforts at cultivating nonviolent resistance. Ela Gandhi later went on to serve as a social worker engaged in nonviolent protests and activism, fighting for social justice on behalf of the oppressed. Gandhi faced house arrest for nine years during Apartheid and lost her son, who was killed in the struggle for justice. She later sat on the government's post-Apartheid Transitional Executive Committee and served as a member of Parliament (1994–2004). Now retired, Gandhi remains committed to social justice and interreligious harmony. She founded and still chairs the Gandhi Development Trust, is a member of South Africa's Religious Affairs Committee, and works with international interreligious organizations such as Religions for Peace.

JOURNALIST Ken Chitwood



Courtesy of Ela Gandhi

Maggie Gobran

Stephen's Children

stephenschildren.org
Cairo, Egypt

RELIGION Eastern Orthodox
Christianity

AREA OF WORK Socioeconomic
development

Maggie Gobran is both a saint and a social entrepreneur. The daughter of an upper-middle-class family in Cairo's Coptic Orthodox Christian community, Mama Maggie, as she is known, made the radical decision in her mid-30s to give up her lifestyle to dedicate herself to serving children who live in the slums and garbage areas of Egypt. Today, Stephen's Children, the charity she started, serves 32,000 families each year. As a former management consultant and professor at the American University of Cairo, she has established an organizational structure that enables her to spend up to two months a year in a monastery, praying for the ministry as 1,500 staff carry out the work of Stephen's Children.

RESEARCHER Donald E. Miller



“This has been my journey: complete trust that I will be taken care of by God, complete trust that I will lack nothing, complete trust that I don’t need to surround myself with many things.”

Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe

Muhsin Hendricks

Al-Ghurbaah Foundation
al-ghurbaah.org.za
Cape Town, South Africa

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Gender equity

Imam Muhsin Hendricks is one of the world's first openly queer Muslim prayer leaders. Hendricks heads the Al-Ghurbaah Foundation, an international organization that helps LGBTQ+ Muslims reconcile their faith and their sexual orientation. Hendricks grew up in a religiously conservative community where his grandfather, leader of the local mosque, preached that gay people would go to hell. Homosexual activity is still condemned within much of mainstream Islam, as well as across much of the African continent. For years, Hendricks struggled over his own sexual identity. He studied religion, got married to a woman and had three children. He finally came out as queer in 1996. With an active presence online, Hendricks now seeks to support marginalized Muslims and promote a vision of Islam that he describes as "all-inclusive and compassion centered."

JOURNALIST Kim Lawton



Noé Kasali

**Bethesda Counseling Center/
Université Chrétienne Bilingue
du Congo**
congoinitiative.org/bethesda-
counseling-center
Beni, North Kivu province,
Democratic Republic of the Congo

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Health care

Noé Kasali is a father, mental health counselor and evangelical pastor. He came to counseling work with the belief that mental health counseling is critical for personal and community transformation in the DRC, where people have suffered from political violence and trauma for decades. His counseling practice of providing care, love and compassion is informed by his Christian faith. In 2018, Noé and his team at the Bethesda Counseling Center responded to the Ebola outbreak in the Beni region. Noé developed alternative burial rituals for people who could not safely bury their loved ones during the epidemic. Noé also provided psychological support for health care workers as well as grief counseling for family members of Ebola victims.

JOURNALIST Shaina Shealy



Courtesy of Noe Kasali

Edmund Kaszibuloh Koroma

Deceased 2022

Alagendra Secondary School
Makeni City, Sierra Leone

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Education

Father of three sons, Edmund Kaszibuloh Koroma was born to a Muslim family and converted to Christianity while attending a seminary school of the Catholic mission in Makeni. During his country's 11-year civil war, he led 87 former child soldiers—who were wanted by rebels—to safety. A teacher and psychosocial counselor, he also provided free education to hundreds of poor and vulnerable children through a secondary school he started. His disposition to render humanitarian services was first motivated by religious teachings he received on charity and tolerance while growing up. He served on his city's interreligious council and his friends called him "two in one," joking that he was part Muslim. A dream in which Jesus blessed him and instructed him to remain faithful and his community's challenges strengthened his resolve to help others. Koroma passed away in 2022.

JOURNALIST Innocent Eteng



Marie-Stella Kouak

Vivre dans l'Espérance (Living in Hope)

Dapaong, Togo

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Health care

A Catholic sister and nurse, Marie-Stella Kouak founded “Living in Hope” to assist those who suffered from AIDS in 1999. Soon, she was faced with AIDS orphans. She opened a first orphanage in 2004 and a bigger one in 2010. “Faith only has a meaning in action,” claims Sister Marie-Stella, who wakes up every day at 4 AM and keeps a busy schedule until late in the evening. Easily recognized by her white veil and loud laughter, she spends a lot of time driving around the savannah to do home visits. The association supports 1,250 children living with foster families. It also runs a shop, a sewing workshop, health center and an income-generating farm. She plans to open a maternity hospital and a primary school. Marie-Stella’s priority is that “her sons and daughters” get a good education, a qualification and a stable and healthy life so that they won’t reproduce risky behaviors that would spread the HIV and create new orphans.

JOURNALISTS Clément Girardot and
Julien Pebrel



Julien Pebrel

Courtesy of Dr. Tom Catena



Innocent Eteng

Top: Sister Marie-Stella Kouak has started two orphanages and supports 1,250 children living with foster families in Togo. **Bottom left:** Dr. Tom Catena treats a child at Mother of Mercy Hospital in the Nuba Mountains, Sudan. **Bottom right:** Edmund Kaszibuloh Koroma with a former child soldier who went through Koroma’s school.

Denis Mukwege

Dr. Denis Mukwege Foundation
mukwegefoundation.org
Bukavu, Democratic Republic of the Congo

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Health care

Nobel Peace Prize winner Denis Mukwege felt called to become a doctor after watching his father, a Pentecostal minister, pray for a sick child, unable to provide medicine. Though his family was poor, Mukwege pursued a medical degree with the faith that God would provide. Mukwege received the opportunity to study medicine in Bujumbura at the University of Burundi and graduated with a medical degree in 1983. To help women injured during childbirth, he continued his education in gynecology at the University of Angers in France. In 1999 he founded Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, where thousands of victims of sexual violence during armed conflicts have been treated. Although he has been a target of attempted murder, he is still active, spurred on by a God-given mission to serve others.

RESEARCHER Donald E. Miller



Zannah Mustapha

Future Prowess Islamic Foundation
futureprowess.org
Maiduguri, Nigeria

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Education

Zannah Mustapha has dedicated his life to providing free and quality education to vulnerable children, especially those affected by the Boko Haram insurgency in Maiduguri, the capital of Nigeria's terror-torn Borno State. The former Islamic court lawyer runs a non-discriminatory policy that allows for the admission of qualified kids irrespective of their religion or what side of the divide they fall on. He educates children of soldiers who died fighting the insurgents, those of dead jihadists and orphans whose parents Boko Haram had killed. His intervention effort has a high impact given that the literacy level is just 23% in Borno, where the number of out-of-school children has swelled from less than 600,000 in 2008 to 1.8 million due to Boko Haram's destruction of thousands of primary and secondary schools and killing of nearly 1,000 teachers.

JOURNALIST Innocent Eteng



Rosemary Nyirumbe

Sewing Hope Foundation
sewinghopefoundation.com
Gulu, Uganda

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Socioeconomic development

Sister Rosemary Nyirumbe, a Sister of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, received CNN's Hero Award in 2007 for her work with child soldiers and victims of sexual exploitation who had suffered under Joseph Kony, the rebel commander of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). At night, 40,000 village children would flee to city centers to escape LRA raids, and up to 500 would sleep at the compound of St. Monica's Catholic Convent. At St. Monica's, Sr. Rosemary started a school as well as sewing and catering program so the girls could earn a living. More recently, she started a village for orphans, along with a school and medical clinic, on the Uganda border with Sudan. Sr. Rosemary says, "I have never started a project because I had the money. If it is God's will, the project will be finished." By taking a vow of poverty, she says that she feels incredibly rich—because she needs nothing.

RESEARCHER Donald E. Miller



Ida Puliwa

Othakarhaka Foundation

othakarhaka.org

Mulanje, Mulanje District, Malawi

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Socioeconomic development

Ida Puliwa is a social entrepreneur and community organizer. Inspired by a woman who gave her a scholarship to college with the instruction to “pass on the kindness,” she founded the Othakarhaka (“Passing on the Kindness”) Charity Foundation in 2012 to transform poor struggling villages into self-reliant, sustainable communities. The Foundation’s 6,000+ volunteers support programs in girls and women’s empowerment, health, education, sustainable agriculture and agroforestry, social welfare for the elderly, and care for orphans. Thanks to her work, new agricultural approaches have more than quadrupled the production of maize for many elderly people. She also funds dozens of girls and boys to attend secondary school. Ida draws her strength and vision from her Pentecostal church and daily prayer, quoting Psalm 121: “My help comes from the Lord, the creator of the universe. Our God does not sleep and slumber.”

RESEARCHER Donald E. Miller



Patricia Fortlage

Ahmed Toufiq

Minister for Islamic Affairs

in the Government of Morocco

Rabat, Morocco

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Ahmed Toufiq is the Minister for Islamic Affairs in the Government of Morocco. A historian, novelist, essayist and scholar of religious literature, Toufiq has held key positions in both religious and secular spheres in the Kingdom of Morocco. He is a consultant to the UNESCO World Memoir Program and a personal advocate of interfaith dialogue; the director of the Institute of African Studies at the Mohammed V University in Rabat; and director of the General Archives Library in Rabat. Toufiq has also taught at the Divinity School at Harvard University and the University of Sorbonne Nouvelle in France. As a Sufi, Toufiq believes a “correct Muslim” is never surprised by the multiplicity of faiths and cultures. Toufiq believes his spiritual and mystical beliefs have nurtured his academic pursuits and political life.

JOURNALIST Priyadarshini Sen



James Movel Wuye

Interfaith Mediation Center

interfaithmediation.org

Kaduna, Kaduna State, Nigeria

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

The son of a former Nigerian soldier, 60-year-old James Wuye is an Assemblies of God church pastor who, in the late 1980s through the early 1990s, led a violent Christian group. The Youth Christian Association of Nigeria physically targeted Muslims during religious riots in Kaduna state. He learned tolerance the hard way after losing his right hand during a Muslim-Christian conflict in Kaduna in 1992. Pastor James committed his life to building peace among followers of different religious groups. With Imam Muhammad Ashafa (page 14), he founded and directs Interfaith Mediation Center. Together, the former foes established peace clubs in about 40 colleges and universities across Nigeria with about 10,000 members. They have brokered peace between religiously-divided and warring communities in several northern Nigerian states and beyond Nigeria, including in Sri Lanka and Iraq.

JOURNALIST Innocent Eteng



Asia

Swami Agnivesh

Deceased 2020

The Bonded Labour Liberation Front

Chandigarh, Haryana, India

RELIGION Hinduism

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Swami Agnivesh was an unconventional Hindu seer, politician and social reformer. He was globally known for his work against bonded labor and slavery through the Bonded Labour Liberation Front, which he founded in 1981. Between 2004-2014, Agnivesh headed the World Council of Arya Samaj, a social reform movement to revive Hinduism and challenge its dogmatism. Agnivesh's spiritual life fed his political and social rebellion. His social work and progressive message won him global accolades, as well as put him under attack from Hindu nationalists. Until his death in 2020 at age 80, Agnivesh lived in austere conditions, his room holding only a cot, towel, a few pieces of the same saffron robe, a chair and a table, with no air conditioning or heat. With characteristic placidity and ease, Agnivesh shared how he remained committed to truth. His interview for the exemplars project was the last he gave before his death.

JOURNALIST Soumya Shankar



Parveena Ahanger

Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons

apdpkashmir.com

Srinagar, Kashmir, India

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Parveena Ahanger advocates against enforced disappearances and has been at the forefront in demanding justice for victims of violence in Jammu and Kashmir after losing her own son to an enforced disappearance. The Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons has documented the cases of a thousand victims. Until India curtailed such activity in Kashmir, relatives would gather monthly to hold "silent protests" to commemorate the disappearance of their loved ones and to seek answers from the state about the whereabouts of the missing persons. In 2020, Ahanger's home and office were raided by the National Investigation Agency for suspected links to terror activities. Ahanger was not charged with wrongdoing. Ahanger was awarded the Rafto prize in 2017 and was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for her work. She lives with her remaining three children, their families and her husband.

JOURNALIST Soumya Shankar



Ahanger requested to not be pictured

Cirilo “Sapi” Bawer

Kalinga culture-bearer

Lubuagan, Kalinga Province,
Philippines

RELIGION Indigenous Religions

AREA OF WORK Cultural empowerment

Cirilo “Sapi” Bawer is an Indigenous culture-bearer for the Kalinga people of the northern Philippines. Since 1967, when he began performing and teaching Kalinga ritual dance, Bawer has worked to preserve and transmit Kalinga folkways as an educator and community organizer. After his retirement as a teacher and principal at a local Catholic mission school, Bawer cofounded a nonprofit organization called SCODA, an acronym for Salidum-may (“festive song”) Community Development Association. In addition to supporting Kalinga cultural initiatives, SCODA sponsors projects—including a maternal health clinic, a small water-pumping station and improvements in sanitation—to ensure the welfare of Kalinga communities.

JOURNALIST Nick Street



Noel Rojo



Noel Rojo



Noel Rojo

Top and bottom right: Masue Katayama has improved the quality of care for older adults in Japan’s aging society. **Bottom left:** Tuenjai Deetes (right) works with hill tribes in northern Thailand.

Tuenjai Deetes

Hill Area Development Foundation

ienearth.org

Chiang Mai, Thailand

RELIGION Buddhism

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

Tuenjai Deetes is a Thai social and environmental activist who has dedicated more than four decades to working with the hill tribes in northern Thailand, whose members often lack the citizenship papers that would give them rights within Thailand. For these purposes, she established the Hill Area Development Foundation in 1986. However, her activities in terms of sustainable agriculture and human rights protection do not end there. As a former senator, a member of the National Legislative Assembly in Thailand, and a member of National Human Rights Commission of Thailand, she has addressed many human rights violations across the country. She has also initiated various amendments of laws and regulations for naturalization.

JOURNALISTS Magdalena and Noel Rojo



Kushil Gunasekera

Foundation of Goodness

unconditionalcompassion.org

Colombo, Sri Lanka

RELIGION Buddhism

AREA OF WORK Humanitarian aid

As a young boy, Kushil Gunasekera felt compassion for the people of his ancestral village in Seenigama, who lacked the facilities to realize their potential. After achieving success in his career, he founded the Foundation of Goodness in 1999 to provide a holistic response to a community's needs and works to uplift the lives of rural communities through learning and empowerment. In the aftermath of the 2004 Tsunami, Kushil mobilized a team to reconstruct and rejuvenate Seenigama. Within three years, the Foundation provided medical, educational, vocational and recreational facilities to more than 25,000 inhabitants across 50 villages via 30 empowerment sectors, free of cost. The Foundation has expanded its widely extolled holistic model for rural empowerment to 400 villages around the country. Kushil's philanthropy is fueled by karmic worldview, making him confident that the more he gives, the more he will have to give.

RESEARCHER Nalika Gajaweera



Ashin Issariya

Anti-Adhamma Committee

Yangon, Myanmar

RELIGION Buddhism

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Ashin Issariya joined the monkhood as a teenager after the 1988 democracy uprising. He became a key leader of the 2007 Saffron Revolution, a series of protests led by monks and nuns protesting the military junta's grip on democratic politics. His outspoken sermons, under the alias "King Zero," led to a warrant for his arrest and a two-week police manhunt, which he fled by escaping to Thailand. He returned in 2012 to Hpa-An and set up a small monastery. Issariya leads the "anti-Adhamma committee" (the Dhamma refers to the Buddha's teachings), which pushes back against militant Buddhism from within the clerical establishment. He is also active in the White Rose Campaign to improve interfaith relations and communal tensions between Buddhists and Muslims. He travels around Myanmar and Southeast Asia to preach his message of peace and tolerance.

JOURNALIST Krithika Varagur



Masue Katayama

Shinko Fukushimai

Yokohama, Nishi-ku, Japan
shinkoufukushikai.com

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Health care

Masue Katayama has spent the last four decades of her life creating nursing homes and childcare facilities in the most aged society in the world. Born into a Buddhist family during World War II, she converted to Catholicism and credits the Church as the source for many of her ideas for her business. As founder of the Social Welfare Corporation Shinko Fukushimai, Katayama is an idea-maker. She has set trends in the field of social services, such as meeting international standards for quality management in nursing homes; improving the quality of public homes; employing immigrants, homeless people and other marginalized groups; and making nursing homes into places where the wider community gathers. She also shares her know-how by providing consulting services for clients from abroad who are interested in Katayama's approach.

JOURNALISTS Magdalena and Noel Rojo



Fachrudinn Mangunjaya

Center for Islamic Studies, Universitas Nasional

drfachruddin.com
Jakarta, Indonesia

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

Fachruddin Mangunjaya is a conservation biologist and pioneer of Islamic environmentalism. He is originally from Central Kalimantan on the island of Borneo and spent summers as a nature guide in the rainforest. He has trained clerics at more than 30 schools in Indonesia to promote wildlife conservation, forestry, climate change awareness and more. He has also written "Friday sermons" for clerics who live near areas of conservation interest. He consulted on the National Clerics' Council's 2014 decision to issue a fatwa on climate change and has consulted extensively for the UN. He helped draft the Islamic Declaration for Global Climate Change that was announced in Istanbul in 2015. He is also now full-time professor at his alma mater and leads teams of students on research projects in West Java and the Riau Islands.

JOURNALIST Krithika Varagur



**"Without integrity,
no one listens;
without trust,
no one follows."**

Alissa Wahid

Indira Ranamagar

Prisoner Assistance Nepal
panepal.org
Jhapa, Nepal

RELIGION Indigenous Religions
AREA OF WORK Gender equity

Indira Ranamagar of the Magar tribe in Nepal is a strong Indigenous auntie. Her spirituality is her drive, work and unwavering belief in equality for women, regardless of their station in life. She is a social justice warrior who walks her talk. Determined to get an education and work to change a system that undervalues and often brutalizes women, she eventually went to college and achieved her dream. Ranamagar works with the lowest of the low in Nepal, a Hindu country that sees low caste incarcerated women as deserving of punishment and unworthy of training or outreach. She speaks truth to power in a way that still allows her to access her clients in jail yet lets corrupt leaders know that she won't take no for an answer.

JOURNALIST Mary Annette Pember



Chao-hwei Shih

International Network of Engaged Buddhists
inebnetwork.org
Hsin-Chu City, Taiwan

RELIGION Buddhism
AREA OF WORK Gender equity

The Venerable Chao-hwei Shih performed the first Buddhist same-sex wedding in Taiwan in 2012, paving the way for the country to legalize gay marriage in May 2019. She is part of an international group of engaged Buddhists who believe their tradition requires more than an individual quest for enlightenment and who use the insights gained from meditation and Buddhist teaching to lessen the suffering of others. In a Buddhist world where many still think women should bow to male masters, Chao-hwei is a leading voice for liberation in Asia and beyond. She is known for her work promoting animal rights, environmental conservation, climate action, human rights, LGBTQ+ rights and gender equity. The author of 30 books, Chao-hwei is director of the Department of Religious and Cultural Studies and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences at Hsuan Chuang University in Taiwan.

JOURNALIST Julia Lieblich



Ranjita Sinha

Association of Transgender/Hijras of Bengal
Kolkata, India

RELIGION Hinduism
AREA OF WORK Gender equity

Ranjita Sinha, a trans activist from Kolkata, India, is at the forefront of the movement for the rights of transgender people in India. She was one of the leading voices behind India's 2014 Supreme Court ruling that granted the right of self-determination to trans people. She has not only lobbied the government to improve transgender health care, but has also been campaigning for their right to education, skill-based training, job quotas and basic amenities. Sinha travels widely across the country to change people's perceptions about trans people, break their prejudices and to encourage them to adopt a more inclusive approach toward the third gender. Sinha has set up a shelter home for abandoned trans people and has pioneered the worship of the androgynous Ardhanarishwara—an idol representing Hindu god Shiva and goddess Parvati during the Durga Puja festival in Kolkata.

JOURNALIST Priyadarshini Sen



Alissa Qotrunnada Munawaroh Wahid

Gusdurian Network Indonesia

Jakarta, Indonesia
gusdurian.net

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Alissa Wahid is a trained family psychologist most recognized for her work on multiculturalism, democracy and human rights. She currently focuses on leadership development for interreligious youth leaders. She directs the Gusdurian Network Indonesia (GNI), named after her late father, President Abdurrahman Wahid, who was known as Gus Dur. GNI hosts thousands of grassroots-level activists in more than 100 cities in Indonesia, working to promote interfaith dialogue and understanding, active citizenship, democracy and human rights. Alissa is also active in Nahdlatul Ulama (NU), the biggest Muslim organization with more than 50 million members, as General Secretary of its Family Welfare Agency. As a leader, she lives by the principle: "Without integrity, no one listens; without trust, no one follows."

JOURNALIST Ken Chitwood



Courtesy of Alissa Wahid



Soumya Shankar



Mary Annette Pember



Noel Rojo

Top: Swami Agnivesh gathered a group of activists at an ashram outside New Delhi, India. **Bottom left:** Indira Ranamagar works with imprisoned women and their children in Nepal. **Bottom right:** Masue Katayama cooks for her staff.

Europe

Chân Pháp Dung

Plum Village

plumvillage.org
Loubès-Bernac, France

RELIGION Buddhism

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Brother Chân Pháp Dung (Dharma Embrace) escaped Vietnam by boat as a child, and his family settled in Los Angeles' San Fernando Valley. After working as an architect, he ordained as a monastic under Thich Nhat Hanh, who founded Plum Village in France after he was exiled from Vietnam for his peace activism. In Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings on Engaged Buddhism, Pháp Dung found a way to heal the anger he felt about his own family's circumstances and the societal injustices he saw in Los Angeles. Now a senior dharma teacher, he brings mindfulness to international climate accords, activists, schoolteachers, young adults and more. He is committed to building modern-day "communities of resistance" as an answer to the challenges of modern, urban society. Along with Sister True Dedication, Pháp Dung represents the Plum Village monastic community's efforts to continue the legacy of Thich Nhat Hanh.

JOURNALIST Megan Sweas



True Dedication

Plum Village

plumvillage.org
Loubès-Bernac, France

RELIGION Buddhism

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Sister True Dedication (the translation of her Vietnamese monastic name, "Chân Hiền Nghiêm") grew up in Britain's countryside and attended Cambridge, where her boyfriend introduced her to Plum Village. She continued to practice mindfulness and visit Plum Village while working for the BBC News, until both she and her boyfriend decided to ordain as monastics. She worked closely with Thich Nhat Hanh and Sister Chan Khong on efforts related to climate change, human rights and other social issues. A dharma teacher, True Dedication has spoken about Engaged Buddhism at TED and Salesforce's Dreamforce conference, and she also edited Thich Nhat Hanh's books, drawing on his teachings from before his 2014 stroke. Along with Brother Chân Pháp Dung, Sister True Dedication represents the Plum Village monastic community's efforts to continue the legacy of Thich Nhat Hanh.

JOURNALIST Megan Sweas



Teresa Forcades i Vila

Physician and Benedictine nun
catholicethics.com/ethicists/
teresa-forcades-i-vila
Barcelona, Spain

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Health care

Sister Teresa Forcades i Vila resides in the Benedictine monastery of Sant Benet de Montserrat. Routinely called Europe's most radical and vocal nun, Forcades is known for her public disagreements with the Catholic Church's position on abortion, contraception, same-sex marriage and women's ordination, as well as her criticism of the profit motives of pharmaceutical companies and vaccine skepticism. Forcades earned a medical degree from the University at Buffalo School of Medicine, a Master of Divinity from the Harvard Divinity School, and has published several books including, *The Crimes of the Big Pharmaceutical Companies* and *Feminist Theology in History*. The Catalan nun temporarily left the Benedictine order from 2015-2018 to campaign for Catalan independence. Today, she runs the Sinclètica Monastic School's multidisciplinary graduate degree program.

JOURNALIST Linda Freund



Delphine Horvilleur

Liberal Jewish Movement
Paris, France

RELIGION Judaism

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

A French feminist rabbi captivates thousands of Jews, Muslims, Christians, believers and atheists with reflections on death. At 47, with a wild mane of dark brown hair that curls like a Hasid's, Rabbi Delphine Horvilleur does not comfort people with talk of "the chosen" and a God who intervenes in the world. One of only four female rabbis in France, she considers herself a storyteller who mines Biblical narratives for modern meaning. In a country committed to *laïcité*, or secularism, she is the rare intellectual to bring religious texts, psychoanalysis and art into the public square. And she calls for a plurality of religious voices. Her words might have stayed within her liberal Jewish congregation of 1,200. But during the pandemic, Horvilleur began a weekly talk on Jewish texts from her living room that went viral on social media in France and beyond.

JOURNALIST Julia Lieblich



Courtesy of MEDEF

“There’s my ideal of the monastic life, and maybe I think I can find peace in the simplicity. I think [Thich Nhat Hanh] was saying, ‘No, you need to dare to find peace in the action.’”

Sister True Dedication

Azza Karam

Religions for Peace

rfp.org
Amsterdam, Netherlands

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Azza Karam serves as Secretary General of Religions for Peace (RfP)—the “United Nations of religion”—representing 90 nations and six regional interreligious councils. She also holds a professorship in religion and development at Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. She previously served in various positions at the United Nations (UN) and helped found and coordinate the UN Inter-agency Task Force on Religion and Development, which brought together more than 600 faith-based and interreligious organizations from around the world. At RfP she founded the first Global Women of Faith Network. Growing up in Egypt and India, and with a doctorate in political Islam, Karam is an advocate for multilateral interreligious dialogue and peacebuilding, as well as for women’s rights within religious institutions and in society.

JOURNALIST Ken Chitwood



Courtesy of Azza Karam

Fazlun Khalid

The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences

ifees.org.uk
Birmingham, United Kingdom

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

Fazlun Khalid is one of the world’s foremost experts on Islam from an ecological perspective. A scholar and activist, Khalid has for decades worked to both raise environmental consciousness among Muslims as well as demonstrate the inherently ecological ethos of Islam to world leaders and the broader public. In 1994, he founded the Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences, an organization that gathers and interprets Islamic texts that pertain to the environment and formulates educational and conservation projects based on such principles. He has overseen transformational initiatives in Tanzania, Saudi Arabia, Madagascar, Indonesia and elsewhere, and has lectured on Islamic environmentalism at places like the United Nations, Davos and the Vatican. In 2019, he published *Signs On the Earth: Islam, Modernity, and the Climate Crisis*.

JOURNALIST Meara Sharma



Andreas Kornevall

Earth Restoration Service

earthrestorationservice.org
London, United Kingdom

RELIGION Old Norse

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

Andreas Kornevall is an environmentalist, writer, scholar, storyteller, educator and facilitator. Having previously worked in international development, directed a charity that plants woodlands around the world, and founded the Life Cairn movement, which generates memorials for extinct species, Kornevall’s current focus is on excavating and disseminating knowledge about ancient Norse spirituality, a pre-Christian, polytheistic tradition. This involves studying and lecturing on mythology and folklore, holding public storytelling gatherings and conducting ancient Norse ceremonies known as Blóts. Kornevall’s interest in Norse spirituality emerges from his Swedish heritage as well as his long-standing interest in the natural world. In Old Norse customs he uncovers a profound ethic of environmentalism and potent language for contemporary environmental crises.

JOURNALIST Meara Sharma



Gary Mason

Rethinking Conflict

rethinkingconflict.com

Belfast, Northern Ireland

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Gary Mason, a Methodist Minister, spent 28 years as a clergy person in Belfast and was involved in the Northern Irish Peace Process. Two Protestant loyalist paramilitary groups announced the decommissioning of their weapons in Mason's church. Mason also led faith-based redevelopment organizations and created a mixed Protestant-Catholic community that continues today. In 2015, Mason founded Rethinking Conflict to bring what he learned while working on the Irish Peace Process to others in Ireland and beyond. He has spoken to more than 60,000 people in recent years. He remains motivated by seeing people's lives turn around, as well as the thought that he could have ended up as a combatant rather than a peacemaker.

RESEARCHER Brie Luskota



Courtesy of Gary Mason



Megan Sweas



Brie Luskota



Linda Freund

Top: Retreatants gathered around a bonfire on New Years Eve at Plum Village, France. **Bottom left:** Murals in Belfast, Northern Ireland serve as a reminder of the city's efforts to overcome decades of conflict. **Bottom right:** Father Mussie Zerai says mass for an Eritrean refugee community.

Mehool H. Sanghrajka

Institute of Jainology

jainology.org
Middlesex, United Kingdom

RELIGION Jain

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Mehool Sanghrajka isn't your typical tech guru. His worldview is grounded in ancient Indian philosophy—one which inspires him to serve not only his close-knit Jain community but also people he has never met. Mehool was made a Member of the British Empire by the UK government and Queen, an honor given to recognize his outstanding public service as a Jain and his work in education. Along with his leadership in the Jain community, Mehool is also the CEO of a social enterprise that focuses on improving the life chances for children through digital technology and distance learning. Technology expands humans' reach and that is why Mehool has decided to pursue it. He believes education is the best way to get people out of poverty. That may be an end, but the means are tied to his faith.

JOURNALIST Athar Ahmad



The Taizé Community

Taizé

taize.fr/en
Saône-et-Loire, Burgundy, France

RELIGION Protestant/Catholic

AREA OF WORK Education

The Taizé Community is a Christian monastic fraternity composed of more than 100 brothers, from Catholic and Protestant traditions, who originate from about 30 countries. In 1940 Brother Roger Schütz, a Reformed Protestant, created Taizé as a response to World War II. The ecumenical community aims to live as a “parable of communion”—a symbol that people of different languages and backgrounds can live together and be reconciled. Following Brother Roger’s idea that the community must be “dynamic” in order to address the issues of our time, the community takes in refugees and is engaged in conversations about the climate crisis and the abuse crisis in the church. The community is famous for the Taizé chants that have spread all over the world, as well as the tens of thousands of young people who visit each year. Brother Roger was killed in 2005; today the prior of the community is Brother Alois.

JOURNALIST Stephanie Saldaña



Bart Weetjens

The Wellbeing Project

bartweetjens.be
Antwerp, Belgium

RELIGION Buddhism

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Bart Weetjens wants to save the world by teaching meditation to one entrepreneur at a time. By training CEOs to connect with something in the universe bigger than the bottom line, he believes they will become better and happier human beings who will create happier, more compassionate employees, too. But his real target is social entrepreneurs—self-sacrificing individuals who spend their considerable talents and energies battling global ills like poverty, disease, violence and other human-made blights, often at the cost of their own mental and physical health. Improve their inner well-being and their “well-doing” will improve, too. And, the hope goes, so will the world. Weetjens, a Belgian who became well-known in the non-profit world for breeding HERO Rats that sniff out landmines, is now focusing on teaching Buddhist meditation at the corporate level around the world.

JOURNALIST Kimberly Winston



Mussie Zerai

Agenzia Habeshia

habeshia.blogspot.com
Rome, Italy

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Father Mussie Zerai is an Eritrean Catholic priest and cofounder of Agenzia Habeshia, an NGO that works with asylum seekers and refugees. Dubbed “the migrant priest” and the “refugees’ first responder,” he has received thousands of emergency calls from distressed refugees on wrecked and sinking vessels in the Mediterranean Sea over the past 20 years. Once he receives a call, Zerai, a 2015 Nobel Peace Prize nominee, contacts NGOs and the Coast Guard, following up until action is taken. If it isn’t, he protests on news outlets, social media and via email campaigns. His faith and prayer life give him the footing to continue taking such calls and encourage survivors, despite bearing witness to innumerable deaths along the world’s most dangerous migration route. His actions have saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

JOURNALIST Linda Freund



Sarah Zouak

Lallab

lallab.org
Paris, France

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Gender equity

The daughter of Moroccan immigrants, Sarah Zouak faced discrimination growing up and was told by an academic adviser that being a Muslim feminist was a contradiction in terms. This comment helped propel Zouak’s tour of five Muslim-majority countries to interview Muslim feminist entrepreneurs. When she came back, she founded Lallab. Part women’s empowerment group, part advocacy organization, Lallab has built a pluralistic community dedicated to bettering the lives of Muslim women in France. The group, whose name is a combination of the word “laboratory” and “lalla,” Arabic for madam, has successfully challenged the French mainstream media to include Muslim women’s voices. But its public profile has also made it the target of vicious online harassment. With French Islamophobia on the rise, Lallab’s leaders worry that authorities will take steps to curtail its work.

JOURNALIST Naomi Zeveloff



“The UN is supposed to be the quintessential universal culture and they don’t do religion? It was almost a denial of self. ... Religion is the heartbeat of anything that we think we can do to heal the world’s problems.”

Azza Karam

Latin America

Carmen Santiago Alonso

Deceased 2022

The Esperanza Project/ Flor y Canto

esperanzaproject.com
Oaxaca, Mexico

RELIGION Catholic/Indigenous Religions

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

A Zapotec woman, Carmen Santiago Alonso was a social and environmental activist and an establishing director of an organization called Flor y Canto, A.C. (Centro de Derecho Indígenas “Flor y Canto”). The organization has been defending the rights of Indigenous peoples for more than 25 years. Some of the most important work that the organization has done in regards to human rights is in the field of environmental protection and clean water. Santiago Alonso, alongside her team and Indigenous communities in Oaxaca, fought mining activities in the state as well as searching for solutions to reduce the impacts of climate change on Indigenous communities and their livelihoods. She passed away in 2022.

JOURNALISTS Magdalena and Noel Rojo



Ismael Moreno Coto

Radio Progreso

radioprogreso.hn.net
El Progreso, Honduras

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Jesuit priest Ismael Moreno Coto is a long-time Honduran human rights activist widely known as “Padre Melo.” Melo is widely respected in Honduras and internationally for his brilliant political analysis and for directing Radio Progreso, one of the few independent media outlets in Honduras. The radio station, based in El Progreso near San Pedro Sula and with offices in Tegucigalpa, is often the target of threats and intimidation—as is its director, Father Melo. Since his ordination as a Jesuit in 1989, Melo has made it his life’s mission to be an advocate for the poor and the disenfranchised. He continues this mission both through his academic work and as a respected leader of popular movements, often traveling internationally to bring attention to such issues as corruption and politicians’ ties to drug trafficking, and how the oppressive Honduran political climate contributes to the high rate of migration to the US.

JOURNALIST Maria Emilia Martin



Julie Coyne

Education and Hope

educationandhope.org

Quetzaltenango, Guatemala

RELIGION Humanism

AREA OF WORK Socioeconomic development

Julie Coyne never planned to leave her native Connecticut, but over time, found herself bound to the community in Guatemala's beautiful but impoverished Highlands region, where she has worked for more than 22 years. Education and Hope provides comprehensive scholarships to more than 200 students at all levels, from kindergarten to university. An after-school program offers daily tutoring and recreation to more than 100 students, providing meals, showers, health care, supplies and transportation, as well as offering employment to the mothers, grandmothers and graduates of the program. While the project focuses on education, Julie's eclectic spiritual life creates a deeply healing environment centering love and compassion, where children and adults can lay down their pain and return to their communities nourished and empowered to navigate very difficult circumstances.

RESEARCHER Arpi Miller



Courtesy of Education and Hope



Noel Rojo



Kiriatiana Freelon



Noel Rojo

Top: Jenifer Colpas Fernandez's NGO Tierra Grata provides access to clean energy, water and safe sanitation to rural communities in Colombia. **Bottom left:** Brother David Santos' advocacy helped Brazil adopt quotas to educate Black, Indigenous and poor students. **Bottom right:** A ceremony in Oaxaca, Mexico, where Carmen Santiago Alonso advocated for environmental justice.

Jenifer Colpas Fernández

Tierra Grata

tierragrata.org
Cartagena, Colombia

RELIGION Humanism

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

Jenifer Colpas Fernández is a social and environmental activist who founded the NGO Tierra Grata. The organization provides ecological toilets, solar lamps and water filters to the most remote communities in northern Colombia. Colpas started volunteering when she was a teenager. She traveled to India and Brazil, which, paradoxically, made her see poverty in her home country. Her stay in Asia as well as her social work had an impact on her spirituality. With time, she started doubting the Catholic institutional religion she was educated in by her grandmother and began practicing Buddhist meditation. A key word in her vocabulary as well as in the vocabulary of the organization is gratitude. Colpas was named a CNN Hero in 2021. Tierra Grata received the Goalkeepers Global Goals Awards by the Gates Foundation and The Green Awards of Latin America.

JOURNALISTS Magdalena and Noel Rojo



Courtesy of Tierra Grata

Mônica Francisco

Terreiro da Gomeia

Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

RELIGION Protestant/African Traditional Religions

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Mônica Francisco is not your “typical” Brazilian evangelical pastor. Born and raised in a favela, she has spent three decades fighting for the human rights of favela dwellers, women and Afro-Brazilians. She was elected as a Rio de Janeiro state representative on the ticket of a political party that has pushed for the legalization of abortion. She also pastors a small evangelical church—Gilead. Candomblé is a Brazilian religion based on African beliefs. Although she is Christian, Francisco helped to save the remains of one of the most historically significant Candomblé temples in Brazil, the Gomeia Candomblé temple. In Brazil, religious intolerance has increased so much that many Candomblé temples (and their worshippers) have come under attack by zealous Christian evangelicals. A local mayor wanted to destroy the temple’s remains and transform the land into a daycare center. In 2020, Francisco successfully helped to save the temple’s remains.

JOURNALIST Kiratiana Freelon



Courtesy of Monica Francisco

Neris Gonzalez

Salvadoran torture survivor

San Nicolas Lempa, San Vicente, El Salvador

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Twenty years ago, Salvadoran torture survivor Neris Gonzales prevailed in a landmark human rights trial in the United States when the jury found two leading Salvadoran generals responsible for atrocities committed by their subordinates. Neris could have retired from the activism that had once caused her to risk her life. But her faith motivates her to keep going. She has spent recent years back in the United States working at the Texas border with Salvadoran refugees who tell her stories of gang violence and sex trafficking. And she is doing the unthinkable in a country that rarely punishes its perpetrators: She and another survivor have initiated a case in El Salvador against the same generals to bring them to justice on their home turf. The odds are against her, but Neris and her supporters believe in publicizing a history many would rather forget.

JOURNALIST Julia Lieblich



David Santos

Educafro

educafro.org.br
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Education

In 1980, Frei David Santos, a Franciscan brother, started one of the first college preparation initiatives for Black and poor people in Brazil. This work led him to lobby government and education officials to adopt quotas in Brazil's public universities. In 1998, the state university of Rio de Janeiro became the first public university to adopt quotas for Black students. Thus far, more than 20 million people, Black, Indigenous and poor, have benefited from affirmative action. David Frei's legacy is a new Black movement in which younger people are claiming their Blackness and fighting for their rights with a newly invigorated energy.

JOURNALIST Kiratiana Freelon



Rosalina Tuyuc Velásquez

National Association of Guatemalan Widows (CONAVIGUA)

globalministries.org/partner/lac_partners_national_coordination_of
San Juan Comalapa, Guatemala

RELIGION Indigenous Religions

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Rosalina Tuyuc Velásquez is a Mayan Kak'chiquel human and Indigenous rights advocate from Guatemala. Her powerful story mirrors the long history of struggle of Guatemala's Maya, especially that of its women. Born into a family of healers and artisans, Tuyuc was just one of many victims of Guatemala's long civil conflict, which lasted for almost four decades before peace accords were signed in 1996. She used that tragic experience to form CONAVIGUA, an association of war widows that fought for the rights of women who were raped and widowed during those years. Now, some 25 years after the war's end, and after many decades of dedicated public service, including serving as a member of Congress, Rosalina Tuyuc is promoting healing based ancient Maya wisdom.

JOURNALIST Maria Emilia Martin



"I think it's a love of the people, the community, the children. I have faith that gives me strength to overcome whatever obstacles I find. The generals pray to a rich God. I pray to a just God. The trial was the best therapy. But this victory is not enough. We need more victories."

Neris Gonzalez

Middle East and the Caucasus

Huda Abu Arqoub

The Alliance for Middle East Peace
allmep.org
Jerusalem, Palestine

RELIGION Islam
AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Huda Abu Arqoub is a Palestinian who has worked for decades in conflict transformation. Born in Jerusalem and raised near Hebron, today she is the regional director for the Alliance for Middle East Peace, a network of more than 150 organizations engaged in people-to-people work to create the foundations necessary for a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. She is committed to building common networks of what she calls “co-resistance” to the occupation, to the “politics of acquaintance” that allows for people on both sides to meet one another, and to advocating for the belief that people on all sides need liberation. A feminist, she advocates for the centrality of women’s voices in conflict transformation. The Vatican awarded her the 2017 Laudato Si Prize in recognition of her work in dialogue.

JOURNALIST Stephanie Saldaña



Lara Aharonian

Women’s Resource Center
womenofarmenia.org
Yerevan, Armenia

RELIGION Humanism
AREA OF WORK Gender equity

Lara Aharonian directs the Women’s Resource Center, which was founded in 2003 to provide a safe space for women in post-Soviet Armenia. For nearly two decades, Aharonian has been campaigning actively against sexual and gender-based violence. She has advocated for the rights of sexual minorities and women living in the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region. Despite the multiple death and rape threats she’s received from far-right groups, she has made radical love the crucible of her work. This has helped her expand her base not only in Armenia but also in other regions of the Southern Caucasian region. Aharonian is among the few women who is actively engaged in peacebuilding with women from Azerbaijan and Turkey. She draws inspiration from Armenia’s ancient spiritual traditions to continue with her activism.

JOURNALIST Priyadarshini Sen



Jean Bouchebel

Witness as Ministry

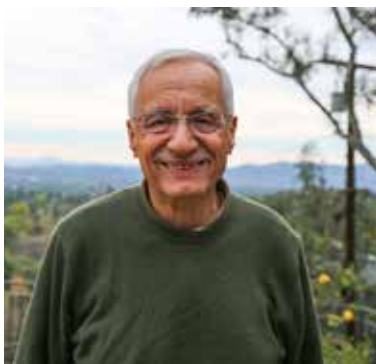
wamcares.org
Beirut, Lebanon

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Humanitarian aid

A native of Lebanon and an orphan, Jean Bouchebel rose up the ranks from bus boy to manager within hotels before following God's call to serve others. He returned to Beirut in the midst of civil war in the early 1980s, working to provide assistance to those displaced and otherwise affected by the war. When he became Country Director of World Vision Lebanon in 1984, he initiated and supervised 80 emergency relief, reconstruction, reconciliation and community development projects and oversaw a staff of 185. Jean spent 28 years with World Vision International, most recently as Director of Resource Development, and in his retirement, he started Witness as Ministry to continue to provide relief both to Lebanese and refugees living in Lebanon, irrespective of their faith.

RESEARCHER Donald E. Miller



“Michael”

Pseudonym

Breaking the Silence

breakingthesilence.org.il
Tel Aviv, Israel

RELIGION Judaism

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Michael grew up in a Zionist family, and always wanted to serve in the Israeli army. When he was 18, he joined, and eventually became a commander. During that time, he patrolled the Palestinian city of Hebron, and later fought in Gaza. Then, after he got home from the army, Michael decided to speak out against his own violent actions during his time in the army, with an Israeli organization called Breaking the Silence. Later, his decision to speak out came back to haunt him when Israeli state officials said that he was either a liar or a traitor. Since then, Michael became a leader in the movement of former Israeli soldiers speaking out against violence. This exemplar has requested anonymity due to the sensitive nature of his work.

JOURNALIST Shaina Shealy



Munther Isaac

Christ at the Checkpoint

christatthecheckpoint.bethbc.edu
Bethlehem, Palestine

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac is the director of the Christ at the Checkpoint conference, held at Bethlehem Bible College in the Palestinian West Bank. The conference, which draws international participants, aims to raise awareness of the Palestinian condition among evangelical Christians, providing a powerful counterpoint to the evangelical Zionist narrative of Jewish biblical right to the land. In addition to his role at the conference, Isaac is the academic dean at Bethlehem Bible College and pastor at the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church, also in Bethlehem. A married father of two, he is the author of several books, including, most recently, *The Other Side of the Wall: A Palestinian Christian Narrative of Lament and Hope*. He grew up in Beit Sahour, near Bethlehem.

JOURNALIST Naomi Zeveloff



Courtesy of Munther Isaac

Makvala Margoshvili

Deceased 2021

Marshua Kavkas

nazysguesthouse.com/
marshua-kawkas
Pankisi Valley, Kakheti, Georgia

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Cultural empowerment

During the Soviet period, Makvala Margoshvili served her community as a nurse. When the Chechen-Russian war erupted in 1994, she started humanitarian actions to help incoming refugees and initiated peace prayers at the local mosque. In 1995, she created a women's musical ensemble despite the resistance of her community, with the aim of making Kist and Sufi Islamic cultures better known in Georgia and abroad. Her ensemble Aznash still exists today and has performed in many countries. In 1999, she founded the NGO Marshua Kavkaz (meaning "Peace in the Caucasus" in Chechen language) as an umbrella for her social and cultural activities. The NGO was mostly active in promoting the development of rural tourism in Duisi and the surrounding villages. Makvala passed away in 2021.

JOURNALISTS Clément Girardot and Julien Pebrel



Jacques Mourad

Deir Dar Musa

deirmarmusa.org
Aleppo, Syria

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Father Jacques Mourad is a Syrian Catholic priest and a member of the monastic community of al-Khalil. Born in Aleppo, Syria, he spent years as a monk at the Syrian monastery of Deir Mar Musa, a spiritual community dedicated to interreligious dialogue between Christians and Muslims. In 2000, Fr. Jacques moved to al-Qaratayn in order to restore the monastery of Mar Elia, which became a safe haven for displaced Syrians seeking shelter when civil war broke out. In 2015, Fr. Jacques was kidnapped by ISIS and held captive for five months, until he was rescued by his Muslim friends. He wrote of his ordeal in the book *Un moine en otage* ("A Hostage Monk," with Amaury Guillem, 2018), which spoke of his ability to dialogue with and forgive his captors. It won the Literary Grand Prize of L'Ouvre D'Orient in 2019 for its "witness of exceptional humanity." He was elected archbishop of Homs, Syria in 2022.

JOURNALIST Stephanie Saldaña



"Sameer"

Pseudonym

Combatants for Peace

cfpeace.org
Jericho, Palestine

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Sameer started fighting the Israeli occupation as a kid by throwing stones and tagging buildings with political graffiti. When he became an adult, his mode of resistance morphed into an even more violent one. In an unexpected event, Sameer began to change his understanding of resistance. Today, he dedicates the bulk of his time to organizing former Israeli and Palestinian fighters to end the Israeli occupation with a group called Combatants for Peace. The group rebuilds schools the Israelis have demolished, and talks to people all over this tiny, divided land about what it's like to grow up on the other side of the wall. These days, he's a leader in the nonviolent resistance movement to end the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This exemplar has requested anonymity due to the sensitive nature of his work and the realities of living and working in occupied Palestine.

JOURNALIST Shaina Shealy



Zurab Tchanturia

Metropolitan bishop of Nikozi and Tskhinvali
Largvisi, Georgia

RELIGION Eastern Orthodox Christianity

AREA OF WORK Socioeconomic development

Born as Zurab Tchanturia, Bishop Isaiah became a monk in 1994 and was appointed Bishop of Nikozi and Tskhinvali in 1995. Prior to joining the Church, he had been inclined towards arts, working in painting workshops and studying animation. Bishop Isaiah is currently involved in developing educational and cultural activities in the conflict zone neighboring the de facto Republic of South Ossetia. Buildings belonging to the Church were bombed during the 2008 war between Georgia and Russia. The war pushed Bishop Isaiah to reconstruct what was destroyed and further develop his cultural endeavors. He spearheaded the establishment of the Nikozi Art School in 2009 and subsequently the Nikozi International Animation Film Festival in 2011. The Nikozi Art School is a free afterschool program that delivers a broad range of courses to around 150 kids and teenagers.

JOURNALISTS Clément Girardot and Julien Pebrel



Courtesy of Isaac



Priyadrashini Sen



Julien Pebrel

Top: Munther Isaac, a Lutheran minister in Bethlehem, raises awareness of the Palestinian condition among evangelical Christians. **Bottom left:** A man lights candles at Geghard Monastery in Armenia. Lara Aharonian is inspired by Armenia's ancient spiritual traditions. **Bottom right:** Women in the Pankisi Valley of Georgia, an area Makvala Margoshvili worked to uplift during her life.

United States of America

Aisha al-Adawiya

Women in Islam, INC

FACEBOOK Women in Islam, Inc.
New York City, New York

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Gender equity

Aisha al-Adawiya knows that women don't always feel welcome in American mosques. They are sometimes turned away, sent to basements to pray or discouraged from serving on the boards of directors. Al-Adawiya has devoted her life to changing that. As a young woman in New York City, she heard Malcolm X's message of Black pride and saw him define justice as spiritual calling. He inspired her to convert to Islam. In 1992, she created Women in Islam, Inc., the first national women's organization founded by and on behalf of Muslim women. Al-Adawiya works at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City, and she speaks widely—and bluntly—about the need for women to participate fully in the nation's 2,700 mosques.

JOURNALIST Monique Parsons



Aziza Essa/Middle East Eye

Fouzia Azizi

Jewish Family and Community Services

jfcs-eastbay.org
San Francisco, California

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Fouzia Azizi fled Afghanistan for Pakistan with her family nearly 30 years ago. The difficult days as a struggling refugee first in Pakistan and then, twelve years later, in California are now behind her. But memories of hardship and discrimination remain, fueling a passion to help others. That desire propels Azizi's work as director of refugee services at East Bay Jewish Family and Counseling Services. There, she and her team—many of them recent Afghan refugees—have assisted more than 750 people since the fall of Kabul in August 2021.

JOURNALIST Diane Winston



Courtesy of Fouzia Azizi

Shailly Gupta Barnes

Kairos Center, Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival

kairoscenter.org
New York City, New York

RELIGION Hinduism

AREA OF WORK Human rights

In 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. and other activists launched an organizing effort that connected civil rights to economic justice. Today, a new generation of anti-poverty activists have renewed that call, building a Poor People's Campaign for the 21st century. One of its leading tacticians is an Indian American who grounds her commitment to economic justice in her family's Hindu faith and practice. Shailly Gupta Barnes grew up in the Chicago suburbs in an upper-middle class family and moved quickly into a successful corporate law career. But serving in the Peace Corps in Niger changed her trajectory, showing her that religious leadership could transform how a community cares for its most vulnerable members. Now back home in the US, Barnes is a policy strategist for the Poor People's Campaign, working to end poverty and meet the basic needs of all Americans.

JOURNALIST Jess Engebretson



Courtesy of Poor People's Campaign (Steve Pavvey)

Gregory Joseph Boyle

Homeboy Industries
homeboyindustries.org
Los Angeles, California

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Socioeconomic development

Father Greg Boyle is the founder of the largest gang intervention and prison reentry program in the world. During his 50 years as a Jesuit priest, he has buried more than 250 gang members. Initially, he thought that “nothing stops a bullet like a job.” More recently, he believes that gang members are wounded from childhood, and what they need is “extravagant tenderness,” the subtitle of his latest book. Fr. Greg is a mystic, drawing on Meister Eckhart, Teresa of Avila and mystics in the Buddhist, Hindu and Muslim traditions. In “G’s” view, as the “homies” call him, God only sees our unshakeable goodness, our nobility, and seeks for us to wake up to our goodness. God is not judgmental; God does not get angry; God is not dependent on our love. God is not a string-puller who saves some people from car crashes. These images of God are all human projections. Rather, God is unconditional love.

RESEARCHER Donald E. Miller



Courtesy of Homeboy Industries

Caroline Bundy

The Way Station, AIDS Alabama
aidsalabama.org/thewaystation
Birmingham, Alabama

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Health care

The current push by conservative state legislators to further stigmatize LGBTQ+ people is especially disturbing at a time when advocates say that homelessness and its corrosive effects on mental health disproportionately affect LGBTQ+ youth. That fact angers and motivates Caroline Bundy, the director of development for AIDS Alabama and the driving force behind the construction of the Way Station, a shelter with wrap-around services geared for the particular needs of homeless youth that opened in Birmingham in July 2022. The notion of grace—offering help to those who suffer as an expression of God’s unconditional love for humanity—threads through Bundy’s personal history as well as her professional life.

JOURNALIST Nick Street



Courtesy of Caroline Bundy

Samuel Chu

Hong Kong Democracy Council

hkdc.us

Los Angeles, California

RELIGION Humanism

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Samuel Chu is a community organizer and Hong Kong pro-democracy activist. The founder of the Hong Kong Democracy Council, Chu is wanted for arrest by Chinese authorities for “inciting secession” and “colluding with foreign powers” under a new national security law. He is the son of Rev. Chu Yiu-ming, cofounder of the Occupy Central civil disobedience campaign, which birthed the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. Beginning with his early career as a Presbyterian pastor, Samuel Chu’s work has consistently brought together people of faith to advance social justice causes, including the right to food, education, affordable housing and LGBTQ+ rights.

JOURNALIST Kevin Douglas Grant



Courtesy of Samuel Chu

Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom

North Park University

northpark.edu/faculty-staff-directory/michelle-clifton-soderstrom/
Chicago, Illinois

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Human rights

The United States incarcerates roughly 2 million people—more than any other country in the world. Educational opportunities inside prisons are uneven at best, and often there are none. Michelle Clifton-Soderstrom, a faculty member and administrator at North Park Theological Seminary, started Illinois’ first Master’s degree program inside a maximum security prison. She wants to abolish—or at least profoundly reform—an American prison system she sees as deeply unjust.

JOURNALIST Monique Parsons



Karl Clifton-Soderstrom

Patrisse Cullors

Black Lives Matter

blacklivesmatter.com

Los Angeles, California

RELIGION African Traditional Religions

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Patrisse Cullors is an American artist and activist and a cofounder of the Black Lives Matter movement. Cullors created the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag in 2013 and has written and spoken widely about the movement. Other topics on which Cullors advocates include prison abolition in Los Angeles and LGBTQ+ rights. She integrates ideas from critical theory, as well as social movements around the world, in her activism. Cullors, who is ordained in Ifa, incorporates spirituality into her social justice work. She is the author of *When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir*.

RESEARCHER Hebah Farrag



Courtesy of TED

Bernadette Demientieff

Gwich'in Steering Committee

ourarcticrefuge.org
Fort Yukon, Alaska

RELIGION Indigenous Religions

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

Bernadette Demientieff is executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, continuing its work with a new generation of young people. She partners with social media influencers and conservation organizations to enhance the committee's campaign to protect the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the caribou that give birth there. Demientieff says she prays every day for the coastal plain and before meetings with oil executives and the leaders of big banks as she tries to get them to divest from development projects in the refuge.

JOURNALIST Daysha Eaton



Brian Adams



Courtesy of Homeboy Industries



Courtesy of Gopal Patel



Courtesy of AJWS (Christine Han)

Top: Father Greg Boyle (right) prays with a man at Homeboy Industries, the world's largest gang intervention program. **Bottom left:** Gopal Patel meets with leaders. **Bottom right:** Ruth Messinger with Robert Bank, who succeeded Messinger as President and CEO of American Jewish World Service, during a trip to Cambodia in 2016.

Regina Evans

Regina's Door

reginasdoor.com
Oakland, California

RELIGION African Traditional Religions

AREA OF WORK Gender equity

Human trafficking is a major crisis in Oakland, where most victims forced into sexual labor are Black girls under the age of 18. Activist and abolitionist Regina Evans knows what these girls are going through; she is a survivor of sex trafficking. The Oakland native is also a playwright and costume designer who uses her creative gifts to call attention to this crisis. Several times a year, Regina hosts “Beloved: An Insistence,” during which she and volunteers build altars in areas notorious for sex trafficking. The elaborate altars provide food and personal health supplies. The design of the altars reflects Regina’s complex spirituality, including elements of her Protestant upbringing, West African spiritual traditions, the Black Divine Feminine and the power of dreams. Regina has been honored by the Obama administration, the Jefferson Awards, TIME’S UP and other organizations for her humanitarian work.

JOURNALIST Jeneé Darden



Tom Levy

Sonia Tinoco García

Latina Muslim Foundation

latinamuslimfoundation.org
San Diego, California

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Human rights

García grew up Roman Catholic in a small village outside La Paz, Baja California Sur. After meeting her husband Abu Hamza—originally from Lebanon—in Ensenada, Mexico in 1996, she converted to Islam. She was a stay-at-home mom and volunteer at local mosques in Torrance and San Diego, California—where she lived for the last 26 years—until 2014, when she founded Latina Muslim Foundation. Seeking to meet Muslim migrants’ most basic needs in Mexico, LMF provided job training, education and other services for eight years before building a shelter featuring separate men’s and women’s facilities, a prayer and wudu area, halāl food, Quran classes, food pantry and legal services near the San Ysidro border crossing. The shelter has served around 600 people since opening in March 2022.

JOURNALIST Ken Chitwood



Tom Goldtooth

Indigenous Environmental Network

ienearth.org
Bemidji, Minnesota

RELIGION Indigenous Religions

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

Tom Goldtooth, of the Diné and Dakota tribes, founded the Indigenous Environmental Network (IEN) in 1990 with other grassroots Indigenous activists. IEN’s mission includes addressing environmental and economic justice issues and building the capacity of Indigenous communities and tribal governments to protect sacred sites and natural resources. Goldtooth bases his work on traditional Indigenous spiritual relationships to Earth and community, always honoring this sacred relationship in his work with environmentalists and in meetings such as the United Nations Conference of the Parties, an annual gathering convened to address climate change. Goldtooth brings the message that all of humanity is a part of, rather than apart from, the planet and that we should behave accordingly in our approach to land use and extractive industries.

JOURNALIST Mary Annette Pember



Umar Hakim Dey

Intellect Love Mercy (ILM) Foundation

humanitarianday.com
Los Angeles, California

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Socioeconomic development

For more than 10 years, Umar Hakim Dey has organized the Intellect Love Mercy Foundation's Humanitarian Day, one of the country's largest Muslim-led charity events. It brings together nearly 800 volunteers to provide food, medical and dental services, and hygiene kits to an estimated 3,000 homeless people across California. As a grassroots organizer, Hakim has helped build bridges between the African-American Muslim community and local civic leaders, law enforcement personnel, and inter-faith groups. He is also board chair of LA Voice, which organizes congregations to advocate on social issues. Hakim consults with others looking to effect social change through his business Inkerij.

JOURNALIST Rhonda Roumani



Courtesy of ILM Foundation

Sarah James

Gwich'in Steering Committee

ourarcticrefuge.org
Fort Yukon, Alaska

RELIGION Indigenous Religions

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

Born in Fort Yukon in 1944, Neets'aai Gwich'in elder Sarah James' life has been extraordinary, straddling her peoples' transition from a nomadic, subsistence way of life to a more settled existence in a permanent community. From her home in Arctic Village, she leads the legal charge on behalf of tribes to protect the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from industrial development and extractive industries. James helped found a non-profit organization called the Gwich'in Steering Committee in 1988. The committee's goal is to educate the world about protecting the refuge. James became the organization's first spokesperson, taking its message before the US Congress and traveling the world to build a coalition of supporters.

JOURNALIST Daysha Eaton



Brian Adams

Russell Jeung

Stop AAPI Hate

stopaapihate.org
Oakland, California

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Human rights

There has been an alarming rise in reported assaults and harassment against people of Asian descent. Russell Jeung is determined to end that trend. He's a cofounder of the Stop AAPI Hate coalition. Jeung is a professor at San Francisco State and an activist in Oakland. Long before the Stop AAPI Hate campaign, he organized his neighbors, mostly Latino and Cambodian, to sue their slumlords for poor living conditions, and they won. He is also a Christian who felt motivated by his faith to respond to hatred against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. *TIME* magazine listed the coalition founders among its 100 most influential people for 2021.

JOURNALIST Heidi Shin



Courtesy of Russell Jeung

Hinaleimoana Kwai Kong Wong-Kalu

Community leader and Culture Bearer

O'ahu, Hawaii

RELIGION Indigenous Religions

AREA OF WORK Cultural empowerment

Hinaleimoana Kwai Kong Wong-Kalu, also known as Kumu Hina, is a Native Hawaiian mähū—a traditional third-gender person who occupies “a place in the middle” between male and female. She is known for her work as a kumu hula (teacher of ritual dance and chanting), as a filmmaker, and as a community leader in the field of Native Hawaiian language and cultural preservation. She teaches Native philosophy and traditions and promotes cross-cultural alliances throughout the Pacific Islands.

RESEARCHERS Richard Flory and Nick Street



Winona LaDuke

Honor the Earth

honorearth.org

Callaway, Minnesota

RELIGION Indigenous Religions

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

Winona LaDuke, a member of the White Earth Band of Ojibwe, is a longtime Indigenous environmental activist. She is director of Honor the Earth, a nonprofit organization dedicated to creating awareness of and support for Native environmental issues and developing financial and political resources for Indigenous environmental issues. Winona fought construction of an oil pipeline through Ojibwe traditional and sacred rice lands. Although the pipeline was completed, LaDuke and Honor the Earth continue advocating for Indigenous representation and participation in planning for projects that cross their lands. LaDuke advocates for creating a plan for a transition from extractive to sustainable development that relies on just economic, social and political relationships with the Earth and all humans. LaDuke shares the Ojibwe spiritual worldview of connectedness and responsibility toward the Earth and community to bring home this universal message.

JOURNALIST Mary Annette Pember



Sarah Byrne-Martelli

Inpatient Chaplain

Massachusetts General Hospital

massgeneral.org/spiritual-care

Boston, Massachusetts

RELIGION Eastern Orthodox Christianity

AREA OF WORK Health care

Sarah Byrne-Martelli was the first female chaplain in the Russian Orthodox Church, and has since mentored other women following in her footsteps. As a hospital chaplain, she is a human touch in a sea of machines and procedures that sustains someone at the end of their life. The COVID-19 pandemic, however, brought an added level of complexity—and risk—to her job. She has cared for COVID patients when their families could not visit, because she believes that no one should die alone. More than most, she knows the existential concerns and profound regrets many people have at the end of their lives. In particular, she knows the kinds of spiritual questions they ask, which has changed the way she has chosen to live now.

JOURNALIST Heidi Shin



Courtesy of Sarah Byrne-Martelli

Konda Mason

Jubilee Justice

jubileejustice.org
Alexandria, Louisiana

RELIGION Buddhism

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

A longtime Buddhist, Konda Mason has worn many hats in her 67 years. She's been a concert promoter, band manager, filmmaker, meditation instructor, ecotourism guide and community activist. Partnering with actor Woody Harrelson, she pioneered home-delivery of organic food in Los Angeles and the city's first organic-food supermarket section. Most recently, she developed funding and support strategies for Black entrepreneurs; created a diversity component for classes at Spirit Rock Meditation Center; and started nonprofits to help Black farmers hold on to their land and a loan fund to support them. Now, transplanted from Oakland to central Louisiana, she manifests her mantra—uplift race, land, and spirit and challenge money's cultural primacy—through the daily work of planting, weeding, tilling . . . and meditation.

JOURNALIST Diane Winston



Erin Walters-Bugbee

Ruth W. Messinger

American Jewish World Service

ajws.org
New York City, New York

RELIGION Judaism

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Ruth W. Messinger is the former president and now global ambassador of American Jewish World Service (AJWS). In this role, Messinger engages rabbis and interfaith leaders to speak out on behalf of oppressed and persecuted communities worldwide. Her 18-year presidency at AJWS began after a 20-year career in public service in New York City as a City Council member and Manhattan Borough President. Under Ruth's leadership, AJWS grew exponentially—granting more than \$270 million to promote human rights in the developing world and launching campaigns to end the Darfur genocide, reform international food aid, stop violence against women and LGBTQ+ people, end land grabs and respond to natural disasters. She previously sat on the State Department's Religion and Foreign Policy Working Group and is currently a member of the World Bank's Moral Imperative Working Group on Extreme Poverty.

JOURNALIST Soumya Shankar



Courtesy of AJWS (Jeff Zorbedian)

Layli Miller-Muro

Tahirih Justice Center

tahirih.org
Washington, DC

RELIGION Baha'i

AREA OF WORK Gender equity

As a lawyer and a member of the Baha'i faith, Layli Miller-Muro believes that the pursuit of justice is a divine calling. When she was in law school in 1996, Miller-Muro successfully helped represent a young woman from Togo who was seeking asylum in the United States to avoid female genital mutilation and a forced polygamous marriage. The case ultimately changed US law to include gender-based persecution in the grounds for asylum. Miller-Muro went on to create the Tahirih Justice Center, which provides free legal defense for women fleeing human rights abuses. With five locations across the US, the Tahirih Justice Center has helped more than 27,000 women since 2001. Miller-Muro says her work is based on two key Baha'i principles: justice and the equality of women and men. She believes her purpose in life is to serve others, because, she says, "When there is suffering somewhere, there is, in fact, suffering everywhere."

JOURNALIST Kim Lawton



Pat Murphy

Interfaith Committee for Detained Immigrants

icdichicago.org
Chicago, Illinois

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Sisters Pat Murphy and JoAnn Persch (page 51) have partnered in their work advocating for immigrants and migrants for decades. Both Sisters of Mercy, they have converted empty convents into safe homes, visited immigrants inside detention centers, and pressed for legislation that brings humanity to a system where it can be lacking. Now in their 80s and 90s, these two Catholic nuns share the ways that their faith has sustained their work over time. Sister Pat, the elder of the two, has survived cancer and chemotherapy, and says keeping busy keeps her alive. She finds God in the migrants and volunteers with whom she works. “We need each other,” Pat insists. “When we’re down or low, we can draw the God out of the other people who surround us. ... Because we’re meeting God in those times. And they lift our spirits. They can make us laugh.”

JOURNALIST Heidi Shin



Cecil L. “Chip” Murray

USC Cecil Murray Center for Community Engagement

crcc.usc.edu/murraycenter
Los Angeles, California

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Socioeconomic development

Rev. Dr. Cecil “Chip” Murray is an American theologian and renowned minister, community leader, civil rights champion and interfaith icon. During his 27 years as pastor of First AME Church (FAME), Rev. Murray transformed a small congregation of 250 into an 18,000-member church with multi-million dollar community and economic development programs that brought jobs, housing and corporate investment into South Los Angeles. After retiring from FAME, Murray served as the John R. Tansey Chair of Christian Ethics in the School of Religion at the University of Southern California. Through the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture, Murray worked to ensure that African American church leaders of the Civil Rights generation pass on their years of experience, spiritual authority and political pragmatism to the next generation.

JOURNALIST Nick Street



Mai Nguyen

California Grain Campaign

farmermai.com
Berkeley, California

RELIGION Buddhism

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

Mai Nguyen is a grain farmer, activist and organizer in northern California. They are a founder of the California Grain Campaign, an initiative aimed at helping small-scale farmers build a market for diverse grains. They also founded and now manage an influential heirloom grain farm, which produces heritage grains using organic, drought-tolerant and soil-enriching methods. Nguyen opts for human and animal power over tractors, synthetic fertilizer and pesticides, and sees grain farming as a vehicle for social and environmental activism. They are also the co-director at Minnow, an organization that secures farmland tenure for California’s farmers of color while advancing Indigenous sovereignty. The Buddhist principle of interconnectedness drives Nguyen’s belief that how they treat a plot of land in California has a direct impact on the larger community: animals, people, plants and air.

JOURNALIST Shaina Shealy



Eboo Patel

Interfaith America
interfaithamerica.org
Chicago, Illinois

RELIGION Islam

AREA OF WORK Religious Tolerance and Peacebuilding

Eboo Patel was raised an Ismaili, a branch of Shi'a Islam, but did not connect to his faith in a meaningful way until his mid-twenties. The revival of his interest in his own faith coincided with the beginning of Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), which he helped establish to foster interfaith understanding and leadership among young people through engagement in group service projects. Today, IFYC—which became Interfaith America in March 2022—is active on more than 600 college campuses, has worked with two Democratic presidential administrations and is collaborating with the YMCA and Habitat for Humanity on interfaith bridge-building.

JOURNALIST Kimberly Winston



Gopal Patel

Bhumi Global
bhumiglobal.org
Montclair, New Jersey

RELIGION Hinduism

AREA OF WORK Environmental justice

Gopal Patel is a leading Hindu environmental activist and the creator of a movement called Bhumi Global that seeks to activate Hindu youth in support of the Earth, and to work across faith traditions worldwide. Born in England, shaped by years of traveling the world teaching the formative Hindu text the Bhagavad Gita and now based in Montclair, N.J., Gopal combines traditional Hindu practice and a Western, Indian diaspora identity as he galvanizes a diverse community, supporting leadership development and seeking policy change. He and his allies have identified biodiversity—the variety of life on Earth—as a strategic priority that is both overlooked in the larger climate conversation and closely aligned with Hindu values.

JOURNALIST Kevin Douglas Grant



JoAnn Persch

Interfaith Committee for Detained Immigrants
icdchicago.org
Chicago, Illinois

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Sisters JoAnn Persch and Pat Murphy (page 50) have partnered in their work advocating for immigrants and migrants for decades. Both Sisters of Mercy, they have converted empty convents into safe homes, visited immigrants inside detention centers, and pressed for legislation that brings humanity to a system where it can be lacking. Now in their 80s and 90s, these two Catholic nuns share the ways that their faith has sustained their work over time. They pray every morning for people and for strength, but “it’s not like, ‘Okay, we finished with God for the day,’” Sister JoAnn says. “God is with us all the time, and we are God’s voice to the world, all of us.”

JOURNALIST Heidi Shin



Norma Pimentel

Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley

catholiccharitiesrgv.org
San Juan, Texas

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Sister Norma Pimentel is one of the nation's leading voices calling for new and more just immigration policies. As executive director of Catholic Charities of the Rio Grande Valley, she oversees several programs to help suffering families in her community. But she's best known for her compassionate work and vigorous advocacy on behalf of migrants and refugees seeking asylum in the United States. Catholic Charities operates the Humanitarian Respite Center in McAllen, which has provided services to more than 100,000 migrants since 2014. The daughter of Mexican immigrants, Pimentel sees her work as a religious obligation, and works to make the US a country that embraces and welcomes the stranger.

JOURNALIST Kim Lawton



Christina Puchalski

George Washington Institute for Spirituality and Health

gwish.smhs.gwu.edu
Washington, DC

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Health care

At a time when impersonal technology and a focus on the bottom line appear to be dominating the health care industry, a growing movement advocates that spirituality be recognized as a key element in effective patient care. A pioneer in this movement is Dr. Christina Puchalski, founder and executive director of George Washington University's Institute for Spirituality and Health—GWish. The institute asserts that spirituality, broadly defined, can be “the source of healing for many people” and “a fundamental part of treating the whole person: body, mind and spirit.” Puchalski believes the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of spiritual care. A self-described contemplative Catholic, Puchalski says her work in this field is part of her calling to extend compassion to patients, their families, and her fellow health care providers.

JOURNALIST Kim Lawton



Courtesy of Christina Puchalski

Anantanand Rambachan

Religions for Peace

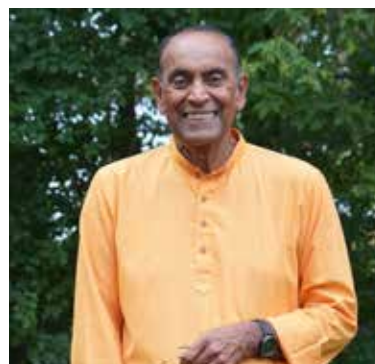
rfp.org
Minneapolis, Minnesota

RELIGION Hinduism

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Anantanand Rambachan is a professor of religion at Saint Olaf College, Minnesota. He is the author of several books, including *The Advaita Worldview: God, World and Humanity* and *A Hindu Theology of Liberation*. Rambachan has been involved in interreligious relations and dialogue for more than 25 years. He is active in the dialogue programs of the World Council of Churches, and was a Hindu guest and presenter in four General Assemblies of the World Council of Churches. He is also involved in the Pontifical Council for Interreligious and Dialogue, and the Pontifical Academy of Sciences at the Vatican. He serves as president of the board of Arigatou International NY, a global organization advocating for the rights of children and mobilizing the resources of religions to overcome violence against children. He was recently elected as co-president of Religions for Peace, the largest global interfaith network.

JOURNALIST Soumya Shankar



Mary Catherine Redmond

Sister of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

sistersofthepresentation.org
New York City, New York

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Health care

Sr. Mary Catherine Redmond, a Sister of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, is one of many Catholic sisters nationally and internationally on the front lines responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. Redmond, who grew up in an Irish-American Catholic family in Kingston, N.Y., is chief physician assistant at North Central Bronx, a public facility in the New York City borough of the Bronx. Her decades-long service has been undergirded by a commitment to social justice. Redmond and her colleagues have responded to the COVID-19 crisis “regardless of race, ethnicity, economic station,” knowing that “all lives mattered.” Redmond’s experiences have affirmed her passionate, core belief as a Catholic sister: We are “all in one,” and Jesus’ ministry is a call for people to recognize that basic truth.

JOURNALIST Chris Herlinger



Courtesy of Sunita Viswanath

Erin Walters-Bugbee



Mary Annette Pember

Top: Sunita Viswanath (right) protests for racial justice during the pandemic.

Bottom left: Konda Mason works to restore and accelerate Black land ownership and climate resilient farming in the rural South. **Bottom right:** Anton Treuer works to preserve the Ojibwe language.

Walter Ritte, Jr.

‘Āina Momona
kaainamomona.org
Moloka‘i, Hawaii

RELIGION Indigenous Religions
AREA OF WORK Cultural empowerment

Walter Ritte, Jr. is a Native Hawaiian activist and educator from Ho‘olehua, Moloka‘i, Hawai‘i. He began his activism as one of the “Kaho‘olawe Nine,” a group of activists who were the first to land on the island of Kaho‘olawe in January 1976 in opposition to the military bombing that was then taking place on the island. Ritte, along with Richard Sawyer, occupied and stayed hidden on the island for 35 days, an act which led to his arrest and brief imprisonment. The island was eventually returned to the State of Hawai‘i. Ritte remains an activist, focusing his work in opposition to overdevelopment and GMOs and in support of Native folkways and agricultural practices.

RESEARCHERS Richard Flory and Nick Street



Nikia S. Robert

Abolitionist Sanctuary
nikiasrobert.com
Long Beach, California

RELIGION Protestant
AREA OF WORK Gender equity

Rev. Dr. Nikia S. Robert once thought she would pastor an African Methodist Episcopal church, but now has a calling to build a faith-based abolitionist movement that centers Black women. Her journey has been personal, social and academic. At the end of 2020, when she defended her dissertation—*Breaking the Law When the Law Breaks Us: A Womanist Theological Approach to Public Policy and Criminal Justice Advocacy for the Black Church*—her advisors challenged her to bring her thesis to life. The result is the Abolitionist Sanctuary nonprofit organization. Personal experience motivated Robert’s pivot. She grew up in the A.M.E. church, known for its abolitionist work against slavery, but witnessed her brother shipped off to prison by the time he turned 22. Her mother, despite suffering from the forced shame of Black single parenthood, used her ingenuity to protect and provide for her family.

JOURNALIST Kiratiana Freelon



Alexia Salvatierra

Fuller Theological Seminary
alexiasalvatierra.com
Los Angeles, California

RELIGION Protestant
AREA OF WORK Human rights

Currently the academic dean of the Centro Latino and associate professor of mission and global transformation at Fuller Theological Seminary, Rev. Alexia Salvatierra is a Lutheran pastor with more than 35 years of experience in church-based community development programs, community organizing and legislative advocacy. Alexia coordinates the Welcoming Congregations/Guardian Angels Network for the Southwest California Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She cofounded the national Evangelical Immigration Table, a broad coalition of evangelical leaders and institutions advocating for immigration reform. She is co-author of *Faith-Rooted Organizing: Mobilizing the Church in Service to the World* and *Buried Seeds: Learning from the Vibrant Resilience of Marginalized Christian Communities*.

RESEARCHER Arpi Miller



Mary Scullion

Project Home

projecthome.org
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

RELIGION Catholic

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Sr. Mary Scullion heads Philadelphia's Project HOME, one of the most prominent anti-homelessness organizations in the United States. Scullion has been a frontline advocate for those experiencing homelessness for four decades. Under her leadership, what began as a city emergency shelter more than 30 years ago has grown into a respected organization that operates 900 housing units and runs job and educational projects. Project HOME also operates a neighborhood wellness and health center. Though publicly honored by *TIME* magazine, Georgetown University, the University of Pennsylvania and other institutions, Scullion, a Philadelphia native who grew up in an Irish-American Catholic family, has never lost her sense of underlying mission and purpose. Scullion says those on the street are "a prophetic presence" calling American society to a radical transformation of values and spirituality.

JOURNALIST Chris Herlinger



Sabrina Sojourner

Shaliakh Tzibur and Community Chaplain

sabrinasojourner.net
Washington, DC

RELIGION Judaism

AREA OF WORK Religious tolerance and Peacebuilding

Sabrina Sojourner has been leading services, teaching and cultivating curiosity within Judaism for 20 years. She has been a featured speaker, scholar-in-residence and faculty member at synagogues, conferences, retreats and Shabbatons across the country. As the spiritual leader for Revitz House, she leads services, teaches on a variety of topics, prepares the young and the elder young for bar/bat mitzvah, and tends to life-cycle, spiritual and chaplain services for the campus and for unaffiliated Jewish families wherever she is needed. In 2018, she launched Training the Heart to Listen, a conversational approach to diversity, equity and inclusion. Based on Jewish values, the design invites participants to use their spirituality, the sacredness of their community and the values of their faith tradition for this important, and often difficult, discussion.

JOURNALIST Diane Winston



Rachel Sumekh

Swipe Out Hunger

swipehunger.org
Los Angeles, California

RELIGION Judaism

AREA OF WORK Socioeconomic development

Rachel Sumekh is the founder of Swipe Out Hunger, a leading non-profit addressing hunger among college students. Sumekh's work has been recognized by the Obama administration and the New York Times and landed her on Forbes' 30 Under 30 list. Sumekh and a few friends started Swipe Out Hunger in 2010 as a college project at UCLA. Their innovative approach allows university students to donate the unused funds from their meal plans to food-insecure peers. The State of California adopted legislation authored by the organization to address college student hunger, and put more than \$20 million behind it. This legislation has since been replicated in New Jersey and introduced in Maryland and Pennsylvania. Rachel serves on the board of her spiritual community, IKAR. She credits her upbringing as the child of Iranian Jewish immigrants for her intersectional perspective on doing good in the world.

RESEARCHER Hebah Farrag



Andi and Al Tauber

Emmaus Ministries
Chicago, Illinois

RELIGION Protestant

AREA OF WORK Gender equity

Married singer-songwriters Al and Andi Tauber spent close to two decades working at Emmaus Ministries in Chicago, an ecumenical street ministry that serves men who prostitute themselves out as a means to survive poverty and homelessness. As part of their years-long “ministry of presence,” the Taubers interviewed Emmaus clients about their lives and turned the stories into songs. They performed their creation, a musical they called “Stories from the Streets,” at churches and seminaries around the country, building empathy for the men they served and raising awareness about the ministry. The Taubers lost their jobs in early 2020 when Emmaus Ministries downsized its staff; the couple plans to start a nonprofit music school for refugees, building off a weekly program they lead at their Mennonite church, Living Water Community Church in Chicago.

JOURNALIST Monique Parsons



Anton Treuer

Bemidji State University
www.bemidjistate.edu
Bemidji, Minnesota

RELIGION Indigenous Religions

AREA OF WORK Cultural empowerment

Anton Treuer is a professor of Ojibwe language at Bemidji State University and is very active in the language’s preservation and revitalization. He is also a leader in the traditional Ojibwe medicine lodge, through which he has committed his life to the support and care of Ojibwe people seeking the healing power of the Great Medicine Lodge. His life experience of commitment to leadership in the lodge underscores how language is tied to spirituality and perception. The relationship between body and spirit, central to the embrace of the ineffable, dynamic nature of life, occupies the heart of Ojibwe worldview, a view in which the body is merely temporary housing for the soul.

JOURNALIST Mary Annette Pember



Sunita Viswanath

Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus
sadhana.org
New York City, New York

RELIGION Hinduism

AREA OF WORK Human rights

Sunita Viswanath is an Indian-American activist and cofounder of Sadhana: Coalition of Progressive Hindus. She was born in Chennai, grew up in England, and now lives in Brooklyn. She also cofounded the organization Women for Afghan Women and edited the essay collection *Women for Afghan Women: Shattering Myths and Claiming the Future*. Through Sadhana, she works to align Hinduism with modern racial and social justice commitments in the US and abroad. Sadhana’s work includes organizing regular satsang gatherings and establishing the country’s first sanctuary Hindu temple for undocumented immigrants, at Shaanti Bhavan Mandir in Queens. Viswanath was honored by the White House in 2015 as a “Champion of Change.”

JOURNALIST Krithika Varagur



Scott Warren and Emily Saunders

No More Deaths
nomoredeaths.org
Ajo, Arizona

RELIGION Humanism
AREA OF WORK Human rights

Scott Warren and Emily Saunders are part of a network of more than 200 humanitarian aid volunteers who leave jugs of water and easy-open-cans of beans in the desert in an effort to reduce the number of migrants and asylum seekers who die on their journey crossing the border. The remains of more than 3,000 migrants have been recovered in Southern Arizona in the last two decades—as of May 2020, Scott had participated in 23 body recoveries. Neither Scott nor Emily identifies with an organized religion, but their spirituality guides them to volunteer to try and prevent more deaths and recover the remains of those who have died. The legality of border humanitarian aid was tested in federal court when federal authorities cracked down on volunteers in 2018. After Scott’s trial, border volunteers say they feel there is more legal certainty that the aid they provide is a protected expression of their spirituality.

JOURNALIST Jude Joffe-Block



Caroline Yongue

The Center for End of Life Transitions
ceolt.org
Asheville, North Carolina

RELIGION Buddhism
AREA OF WORK Health care

Caroline Yongue is a lay minister and monastic in the Soto Zen Buddhist tradition. For the past 25 years, she has worked to open up conversations around death and dying in order to reduce the fear and anxiety associated with this transition. Caroline’s work in this area began when a member of her own sangha (religious community) died; the sangha’s teacher asked Caroline to study Buddhist traditions surrounding death so that the sangha could learn how to properly care for the body. Since then, Caroline has spent much of her time designing and leading classes for people of all ages and faith traditions. More recently, Caroline developed North Carolina’s first conservation burial ground, the Carolina Memorial Sanctuary. By offering environmentally friendly burial services in a natural landscape, the sanctuary works to “hold a compassionate space for all beings.”

JOURNALIST Jess Engebretson



“There’s a oneness we have with each other and creation that is expressed in the language. Changing the ceremony and doing it in English would lose a lot of the nuanced meaning and some of the spiritual force. I really believe that the language is a powerful tool to keep us recognizable to our ancestors.”

Anton Treuer



USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture

MISSION The USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC) advances the understanding of religion and society, and supports faith and community leaders in becoming full partners in the work of positive social change.

CRCC's unique team consists of scholars, journalists and faith leaders. Our core work is in two related areas: We conduct empirical research on religious, cultural and social change in the US and globally; and we make this knowledge applicable and available through media, reports, public events, and training and mentoring programs.

CRCC hosts various institutes that help leaders realize their potential and transform their organization so that they can have a more effective and sustained impact on community health and wellbeing. CRCC also provides consulting and evaluation work to philanthropy, business, public officials and elected leadership to enhance their engagement with faith communities on social issues.

Current Initiatives

Spiritual Exemplars Project

Developing Thriving Congregations

American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute

Transforming the American Sangha

Economic Empowerment

Compelling Preaching

Critical Conversations

"Spiritual Exemplars: A Global Project on Engaged Spirituality" is funded by the John Templeton Foundation and Templeton Religion Trust. Opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of these organizations.

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Spiritual Exemplar Life Story Interview Guide

The following contains selected questions from the project's interview guide, adapted from Northwestern University's The Study of Lives Research Group. It may be useful to journalists beyond the life of the project.

Read the full guide at crcc.usc.edu/life-story

This is an interview about the story of your life. I am interested in hearing your story, including parts of the past as you remember them and the future as you imagine it. The story is selective; it does not include everything that has ever happened to you. Instead, I will ask you to focus on a few key things in your life—a few key scenes, characters, and ideas. There are no right or wrong answers to my questions. Instead, your task is simply to tell me about some of the most important things that have happened in your life, illustrated with examples from your work.

Life Chapters

Please begin by thinking about your life and the evolution of who you are and the work you do today, as if it were a book or novel. Imagine that the book has a table of contents containing the titles of the main chapters in the story. To begin here, please describe briefly what the main chapters in the book might be. Please give each chapter a title, tell me just a little bit about what each chapter is about.

Now that you have described the overall plot outline for your life, I want us to think about the work you've done and built over time and the work you continue to do as it evolves in the future. I would like you to focus on key moments, lessons, triggers, set-backs or catapults in your life or work.

Positive Childhood Memory

Let's begin with an early memory—from childhood or your teen-aged years—that stands out as especially positive in some way. Please describe this good memory in detail. What happened, where and when, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling? How has this positive memory translated into the person you are today?

What influenced the way you thought: a strong family subculture, faith tradition, cultural context or school?

Did you experience any significant turning points or pivotal moments in that period of life?

Was there a trigger, a mentor, a particular experience that catapulted you into your work?

Negative Childhood Memory

Research into historic spiritual exemplars, such as Mother Teresa or Gandhi, points to experiences of childhood adversity or life trauma that weighed as a heavy influence in their life and work. Is there an early memory—from childhood or your teen-aged years—that stands out as especially negative in some way? How did this impact the person you are today and the work that you do?

Did you feel you lived a life of struggle or one of privilege?

High Point

Describe a scene, episode, or moment in your life that stands out as an especially positive experience. This might be the high point of your entire life, or else an especially happy, joyous, exciting or wonderful moment in the story. What happened, when and where, who was involved, and what were you thinking and feeling?

Is there someone or set of people whom you admire or who sustain you? Nourish your soul? Your go-to people?

Do you find sustenance in your work and the people you interact with daily? If you could hold on to one memory, a visual snapshot, something someone in your program once said to you, what would it be?

What do you hope that people gain through your work? What are you proudest of?

Low Point

Thinking back over your entire life, please identify a scene that stands out as a low point, if not the low point in your life story.

Have you ever felt like giving up, that what is being requested is almost insurmountable? Can you recall a moment when you were done with it? Or when you thought you were making an impact, and all your preconceived conceptions were shattered in a moment? How did you cope? Did something or someone pull you out of it? Did you learn something from it?

Has your work ever led you to grapple with burnout or a crisis of faith? How has the work either ruptured, deepened or transformed your religious beliefs or spirituality?

Coping Mechanisms/Toolkit/Sustenance

Everyone has a toolkit of some sort for coping (sometimes through vice, sometimes through inspired practice). What has been your toolkit for dealing with these challenges, the daily grind and emotional taxation, as well as the larger existential or programmatic challenges of doing this work? Contemplative practices; writing (both for self and others); prayer; reading; nature; coffee/wine; mentors/models; family/friends; mantras/faith symbols/stories/quotes?

What does an average day look like for you, from the time you wake up until you sleep? Do you have a regimented daily practice?

Do you take time to remove yourself entirely from the “on the ground” work for renewal, retreat or other forms of work? What happens during those shifts or breaks? How do you feel? What questions tend to arise for you?

Are there institutions in your life apart from the work itself that sustain you?

In what ways does your meditation, prayer, sacred text (if mentioned) somehow allow you to move above the fray? Invigorate the substance of your work?

Turning Point

Please identify a particular episode in your life story that you now see as a turning point in your life.

What are some of the internal conflicts you face? Things that tug at you, pull you in different directions? Things you really struggle with moving past? What is one difficult choice you have made that stands out in your mind?

Religious, Spiritual, or Mystical Experience

Many people report that they have had experiences in their lives where they felt a sense of the transcendent or sacred, a sense of God or some almighty or ultimate force, or a feeling of oneness with nature, the world, or the universe. Can you describe an episode or moment in which you felt something like this? Have you had any moments of ecstasy? Or a sort of inexplicable/mystical experience of joy, gratitude, understanding, inspiration through the work or outside of it?

Additional probing(s) on faith tradition

Please describe in a nutshell your religious beliefs and values, if indeed these are important to you. Whether you are religious or not, please describe your overall

ethical or moral approach to life.

What is your spirituality, faith tradition or institutions impact on your life and work? Would you say spirituality, religion, spiritual practice or spiritual institutions have provided the call, the inspiration, the symbolic framework, the renewal, the support of your person or your project? Why or why not?

Challenges

What you do is obviously taxing on some levels, as well as renewing or inspiring. What are the stressors that have come along with this work? Big, ongoing stressors as well as daily challenges? What have you learned through the struggles?

Are there other sacrifices you have had to make to do this work? Relationships, life opportunities, choices? Do you regret them? Ruminates on them?

Do people outside of your work understand what you do and why? How do you relate to others: are you an insider or outsider within your world of work? When you step out of work? How does that work for or against you in both contexts?

Looking back over your entire life, please identify and describe what you now consider to be the greatest single challenge you have faced in your life.

Future Script

If you think about the next chapter of your work, what would it look like?

Do you see yourself stepping away from it at some point? Where would you live? What would you do?

If you could do anything different now in your work or life, what would it be? Are there any practices or habits you wish you could develop but that you’ve found it hard to do?

If you could talk to yourself when you first began your work (or somebody else just starting out), what would you say, or what advice would you give?

Reflection

Looking back over your entire life story, do you discern a central theme? I’m wondering if you might reflect about what this interview has been like for you: what were your thoughts and feelings during the interview? How do you think this interview affected you?

Any other comments or things we missed? Anything you would advise we change in the interview (in terms of order, content, style)?

“Spirituality and meditation are good,
but it must have an expression in the world.”

— Swami Agnivesh



Courtesy of ILM Foundation

Stephanie Saldaña



Patti Fortlage

Top: Umar Hakim Dey organizes 800 volunteers and two dozen organizations to aid people experiencing homelessness in Southern California. **Bottom left:** No action is too small for Father Jacques Mourad, who believes God is captured best in simplicity. After being arrested and tortured by ISIS, he lived at a monastery in Iraq. He has since returned to Syria, where he was elected archbishop of Homs. **Bottom right:** Villagers in rural Malawi have increased their production of maize through Ida Puliwa's Othakarhaka Foundation, which translates as "passing on the kindness."

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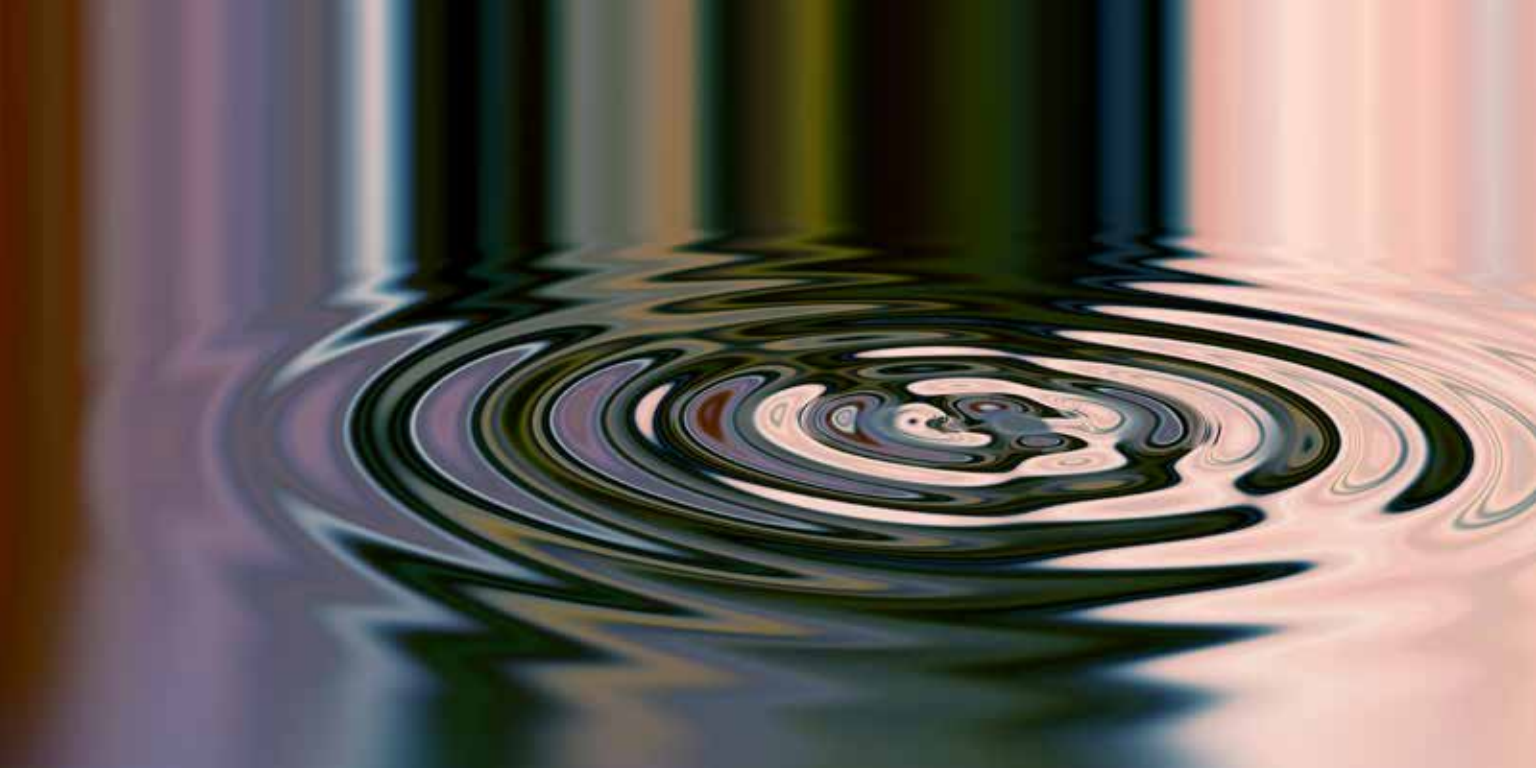


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“At the heart of exemplars are a number of values, including compassion, empathy, selflessness, hope, tolerance, courage and humility. These are individuals who live for others, not themselves or their own happiness. And yet joy and a sense of purpose permeate their lives.”

— Don Miller



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