

Mutual Aid & Faith Institutions

INTRODUCTIONS

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“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self preservation, and that is an act of political warfare.”

Audre Lorde, A Burst of Light



Mutual aid is collective coordination to meet each other's needs, usually from an awareness that the systems we have in place are not going to meet them. Those systems, in fact, have often created the crisis, or are making things worse.

Dean Spade, *Mutual Aid: Building Solidarity During this Crisis (and the Next)*. NY: Verso, 2020, 7.

3 key elements of mutual aid, according to Dean Spade

1.

“Mutual Aid projects work to meet survival needs and build shared understanding about why people do not have what they need.”

2.

“Mutual Aid projects mobilize people, expand solidarity and build movements.”

3.

“Mutual Aid Projects are participatory, solving problems through collective action rather than waiting for saviors.”

Food donations organized by the Somali
Mosque Association, Summer 2020



Photo Courtesy of Mohamud Mohamed

A Minnesota Transform workshop with Minnesota Youth Story Squad at George Floyd Square



Photo Credit: Ben Hovland. Photo Courtesy of Minnesota Youth Story Squad

Grocery and meal delivery organized by
Uadeeg Bulshadaada



Photo Courtesy of Mohamed Sharif

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Photo Courtesy of Mohamed Sharif

Ladies Aid Society
Pilgrim Baptist Church



St. Paul c.1915. COPYRIGHT © 2013 Minnesota Historical
Society. Photo courtesy of History for the Future

Outside the
Urban League, c. 1985

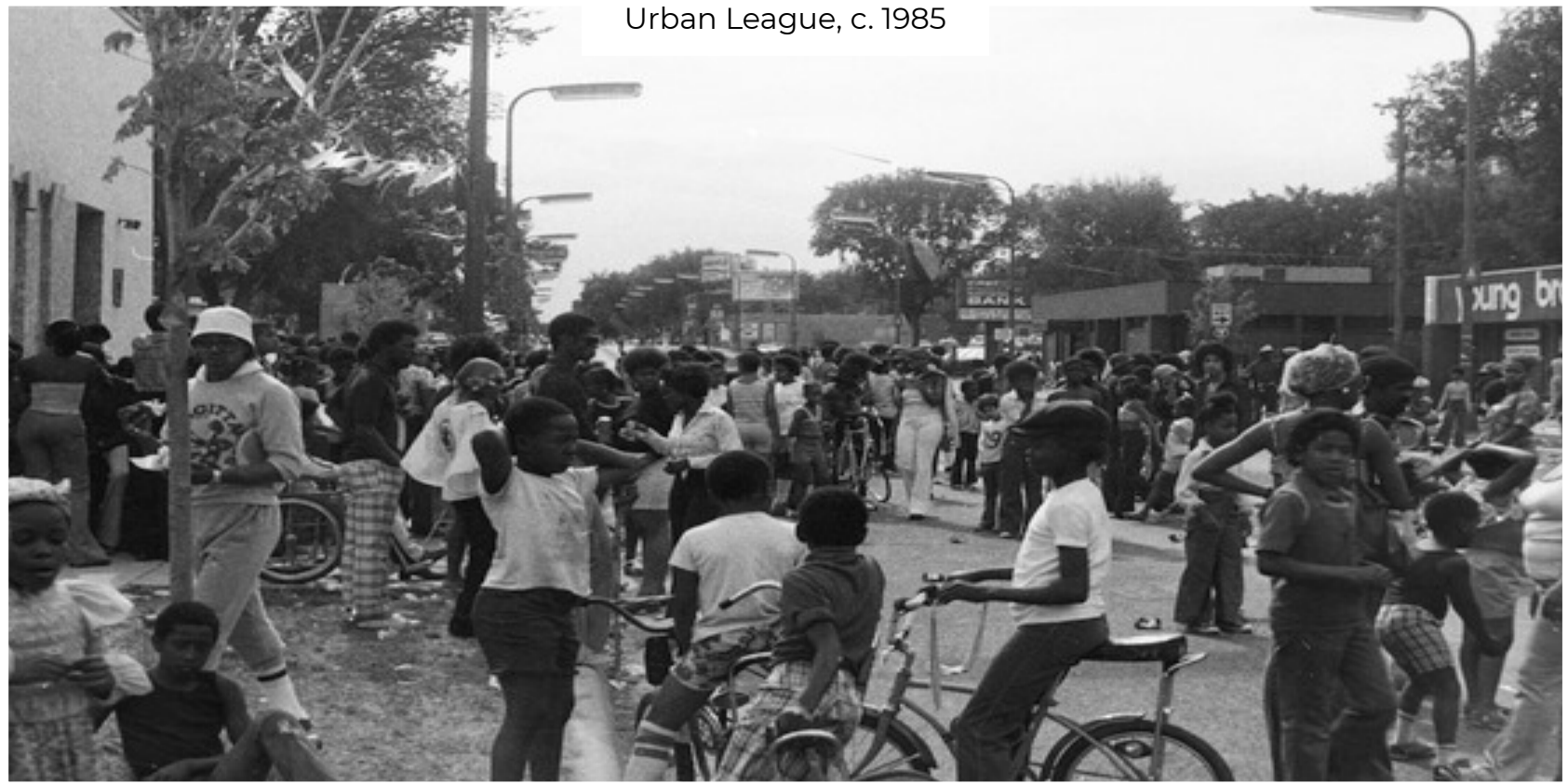


Photo by Charles Chamblis, Copyright Minnesota
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WHAT DOES MUTUAL AID LOOK LIKE TO YOU?

In this activity we will ask everyone to brainstorm what mutual aid looks like to you. Use the slides below to take notes on your group, and feel free to look through the quotes in the rest of the slide show for ideas.

We will collect these definitions to be used as part of the History for the Future exhibition on mutual aid. Please include your groups names if you would like them to be attributed to you.

- What does Mutual Aid look like?
- What distinguishes mutual aid from Charity work?
- How has mutual aid looked in the past, and what will distinguish it in the future?
- Is mutual aid an inherently radical practice?

Notes from Room 1: Kylie, Michael, Rebekah, Shawn, Abdulhalim, Andrea

What is mutual aid?

Redistribution of wealth, community based, equal,

Associated with times of crisis

Crisis is an ongoing thing, not just pandemic, especially under capitalism and white supremacy

What is distinguishing mutual aid from charity?

Grassroots, mutual interest in each others' success,

Charity as someone else telling you what you need

Mutual aid more community informed

Reciprocal relationship

Charity has a level of performativity, looking like you care while still exploiting everyone else

Mutual in past largely defined by The Panthers

Also post wall street, you can see moments of crisis/times of crisis throughout different eras

Room 1 continues

Acknowledgement that the system won't do what it's supposed to

Mutual aid has been around throughout history, between poor communities, Black, Brown, immigrant and refugee communities, and Native

Future - intriguing and terrifying

Surveillance is more prevalent and easier than ever. How to leverage communications in a way that protects us, is this possible even dangerous to bring phone to protests?

Technology like videos has started very impactful movements, but there's also risk of harm and policing from these

Question of whether or not to include faces. Especially youth.

Unsure if caring for each other will look like what it has in the past

Is system broken to point of need for totally bypassing existing systems?

Room 1 continues:

Cooperation and strengths, building on strengths that communities have, not top down approach

Is mutual aid inherently radical?

Yal i missed our last sentences: add on if you want!!!

- **What does Mutual Aid look like?**

1. The future, during the pandemic and minneapolis uprising, folks relying on one another, churches distributing, street medics, less reliance on the government
2. Since the beginning of time, and for the next generation
3. Radical open endedness, mutual important concept, heritages have been doing mutual aid, later generations participating in individualistic ideas, religious groups doing work
4. Mutuality rejects notions of white supremacy
5. Mutual aid is innate in a lot of our cultures, rejection of consumerism and capitalism, leveraging success of themselves over the group
6. Mutual aid can be used for good and bad, it's counter to capitalism

- **What distinguishes mutual aid from Charity work?**

1. Charity is a western term, colonial term
2. Focuses on the top down rather than grassroots
3. Assumes what communities need rather than letting them center their experiences
4. Creates barriers in accessing charity

1. What is mutual aid?
 - a. Multi-directional
 - b. Ongoing
 - c. Making a lasting, structural change (not an individual, one-time gift)
2. Charity
 - a. An old term
 - b. Doing something to help someone else
 - c. Care facility started by 11 women to support Norwegian bachelor farmers (but maybe this is also mutual aid because it is ongoing. Mutuality of people coming together with a common purpose.)
3. How will it look in the future?
 - a. Needs are evolving
 - b. It's an ongoing issue we confront time and time again
 - c. We will push to make country more accountable, push for structural change
4. YES

BREAKOUT ROOM 4

Mutual aid societies for immigrants have been about building a safety net when needs aren't addressed by government etc.

Different from charity work is that charity exists in a corporate/nonprofit space -- relies on state power

Mutual aid provides for people left behind by institutions

Charity involves separation from community. Mutual aid involves direct, personal connection to community.

Mutual aid radical because it goes against American individualism and neoliberal capitalism

Shouldn't be radical because it's basic community organizing principle but it is active defiance in our context

BREAKOUT ROOM 5

Room 6: Clara, Sarah, Josh (and Amber!)

- What does Mutual Aid look like?
 - Housing for all (no exceptions) ; Money distributed without strings attached,
- What distinguishes mutual aid from Charity work?
 - Institutionalizing mutual aid detracts from reciprocity; thinking through the directions/flows of mutual aid as opposed to charity work.
 - Charity as a way to hoard and protect wealth (tax breaks, DAFs, etc.)
 - Charity= not nimble/flexible/etc. Mutual aid = inherently responsive
- How has mutual aid looked in the past, and what will distinguish it in the future?
 - Resisting institutionalization.
- Is mutual aid an inherently radical practice?
 - Yes, it's working outside of the capitalist system and can't be tied to profitability at all

SOLIDARITY OR CHARITY?

- Why is it that the same acts, within the same community, are portrayed as charity when orchestrated by a religious institution, but as mutual aid when organized by grassroots organizations?
- Is there a difference between these two practices?
- What is lost through the individualization of being charitable?
- What are potential harms of only participating in care through charity?



But I think for us, making those connections is part of really identifying and involving ‘What does solidarity look like for our community?’ And it's not a turning inward, it's a reaching out and connecting and standing with.

Dave Snyder, Managing Director,
Jewish Community Action



*We are commanded in the Qur'an to “**hold fast to the rope of Allah (God) and do not become divided**” we understand this as a divine mandate that charges us with the well being of our neighbor, to care for each other is to care for God the Most High. This is mutual aid to me*

Mohamed Sharif, Executive Director
UAdeeg/Dar Al-Farooq



There were instances of grassroots networks, being able to tap into some of the more mainstream institutions. And I know that for me, as I would send out my daily message, and like, direct our volunteers, I was, I tried to make sure I was finding opportunities that, that were connected with the grassroots, and not just like the official, sanctioned nonprofit, industrial, you know, opportunities. And, and, and again, just like knowing some of the people that were working around the clock, like, and risking things and sacrificing things, it was really tremendous and intense. And that was, that's not something that like an institution can or should claim that was like, that's like something that community did.

**Dave Snyder, Managing Director,
Jewish Community Action**



*The Prophet peace and blessings be upon him says in an authentic hadith “If anyone relieves a Muslim believer from one of the hardships of this worldly life, Allah will relieve him of one of the hardships of the Day of Resurrection. If anyone makes it easy for the one who is indebted to him (while finding it difficult to repay), Allah will make it easy for him in this worldly life and in the Hereafter. Allah helps His slave as long as he helps his brother.” Our salvation is contingent on our service and support to humanity, **we live mutual aid. every. single. day.***

Mohamed Sharif, Executive Director
UAdeeg/Dar Al-Farooq



*“Charity” is a framework that often means rich people giving a little bit to poor people to make themselves look better in the **eyes of God** or other people. Usually there are lots of strings attached to what they give... This means that charity is often a strategy for controlling poor people.*

“What is Mutual Aid?”
Big Door Brigade



“In short, many who are most in need of care as a result of COVID-19 also needed care prior to the pandemic.... ‘Particular’ forms of suffering had to become ‘universal’ in order to become worthy and deserving of a collective social response.”

Alexia Arani, “Mutual Aid and Its Ambivalences: Lessons from Sick and Disabled Trans and Queer People of Color”, *Feminist Studies* 46 (no. 3) 2020

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The problem with care attached to fellow feeling or sympathy is that all too often it means that care is reserved for those deemed worthy.

Hobart and Kneese, “Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times”, *Social Text* 142 (no. 1) March 2020



*Charity relies on neoliberal discourses of moral obligation and individual character. Solidarity, however, relies on working with communities and asking them what they need rather than making paternalistic assumptions. Instead of following neoliberal, colonialist development models around innovation and the mining of hope, **mutual aid offers space for true collaboration.***

Hobart and Kneese, "Radical Care: Survival Strategies for Uncertain Times", *Social Text* 142 (no. 1) March 2020

OUR PROJECT

The goal of this project is to center on the histories of mutual aid within faith institutions in the Twin Cities, and how these histories have led religious institutions to be able to provide increased material support during this crucial moment of increasing despair and hardship due to the pandemic. The needs for housing, food, education, health resources have been there before the pandemic and will be after. What can we learn from these structures of care that are already in place and implement them into our daily lives?

We are collecting oral history interviews with organizers engaging in mutual aid projects from both within and outside of faith institutions to further unpack the intersections of these two groups and how they worked together consistently in the summer of 2020. We are also seeking out and collecting photos and other documentation of mutual aid practices from the past year.

We hope to use these materials to create a variety of spaces for the work of our communities to be recorded and memorialized, including a digital site and accompanying zine, a podcast, and permanent site markers.

OUR PROJECT

If you are interested in being interviewed, future updates on our work, and other ways to get involved, please email us or visit our website at <https://z.umn.edu/faith-and-mutual-aid>

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Thank You!

I will not shoot myself
In the head, and I will not shoot myself
In the back, and I will not hang myself
With a trashbag, and if I do,
I promise you, I will not do it
In a police car while handcuffed
Or in the jail cell of a town
I only know the name of
Because I have to drive through it
To get home. Yes, I may be at risk,
But I promise you, I trust the maggots
Who live beneath the floorboards
Of my house to do what they must
To any carcass more than I trust
An officer of the law of the land
To shut my eyes like a man
Of God might, or to cover me with a sheet
So clean my mother could have used it

To tuck me in. When I kill me, I will
Do it the same way most Americans do,
I promise you: cigarette smoke
Or a piece of meat on which I choke
Or so broke I freeze
In one of these winters we keep
Calling worst. I promise if you hear
Of me dead anywhere near
A cop, then that cop killed me. He took
Me from us and left my body, which is,
No matter what we've been taught,
Greater than the settlement
A city can pay a mother to stop crying,
And more beautiful than the new bullet
Fished from the folds of my brain.

Jericho Brown, "Bullet Points"
from *The Tradition*