

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION  
WEBINAR

HOW FAITH LEADERS CAN HELP AMERICA HEAL

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**Panel Discussion:**

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

GENERAL ALLEN: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. For those of you I have not had the honor of yet to meet, I'm John Allen, and I'm the president of the Brookings Institution. And it really is my sincere pleasure to welcome you to our webinar this afternoon. How Faith Leaders Can Help America Heal.

You know, following years, even decades, of partisanship and political fragmentation here in America, the topic of national unity, has felt to many like a distant memory. Even nigh on to being unattainable in the present day. And I daresay that the past five years or so, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and our nation's latest reckoning with systemic racism and massive income inequality and more, have put a fine point on such sentiments. Rarely in our history have a United States of America ever felt so far away and even, perhaps, a dis-United States of America.

It was, with this in mind, that we, at Brookings, began thinking hard on the topic of national healing and reconciliation, a topic that President Biden has made central to his administration, as well. And with many of our nation's wounds still so fresh, this topic is, indeed, quite challenging.

So questions immediately rise. What does it mean to be an American today? Can we ever again see each other as fellow citizens and neighbors, even amidst such strife and conflict? Is it right or even realistic to ask Americans to begin this painful process of reconciliation and healing? And I know that each person may very fairly have different responses to these questions.

Yet, it is our very strong belief at Brookings that we must, as we do with so many other pressing issues, create spaces to address these difficult challenges. And discuss them openly, as a society and a community. We have to do this. As always, we'll leave others to draw their conclusions, but we feel the conversation that has to be had is one that will have a lasting means of healing our divisions.

Here, faith-based communities and faith leaders are particularly essential and valuable components in every fabric of America. And while we, in this country, hold no citizen to a particular faith or creed, we do respect the role of religion. And the role that it has played in formulating and sustaining an American culture and society, and what's more, many of these communities and religious leaders

have been instrumental in pulling and keeping together the nation at its most difficult times and in immense hardship. They've been essential.

So, with that, on to today's event, and I'm very, very pleased to now introduce our special guest for the remainder of this programming, Melissa Rogers. Melissa currently serves as a special assistant to the president, executive director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Prior, she served as the director of the Center of Religion and Public Affairs at Wake Forest University Divinity School, and as a non-resident senior fellow here at Brookings, in our Governance Studies program.

Few, if any, are better suited to discussing the important role of faith-based communities and healing America. We're incredibly honored by her presence with us here this afternoon. So, in a few short moments, Melissa and I will have a conversation for about 30 minutes, and then we'll turn the floor over to Governance Studies Vice President and Program Director, Darrell West, to introduce and to moderate a phenomenal interfaith panel on many of these subjects.

And let me add that I know very well nearly everyone on this panel. And I know them as great leaders and contributors in their own faith groups. But also to a broader faith mosaic in America that promotes religious tolerance and community resilience. And I have enormous respect for each panelist, and we are so honored by your presence with us today.

So, before we move on with our program today, a quick reminder that we're very much live and on the record. And audience members are welcome to submit their questions via [events@brookings.edu](mailto:events@brookings.edu). That's [events@brookings.edu](mailto:events@brookings.edu) or Twitter via our @BrookingsGov account. @BrookingsGov.

So, let's get started. Melissa, it's so wonderful to speak with you today, and it's great to have you back. And I cannot thank you enough for all that you are doing on this front.

MS. ROGERS: Thank you so much, John.

GENERAL ALLEN: Just great to see you and have you back.

MS. ROGERS: Thank you.

GENERAL ALLEN: Let me start with a question I think that would be natural for all of us tuning in this afternoon. Tell us what your work entails. And how does that fit with President Biden's vision for building greater unity through your office?

MS. ROGERS: Great. Well, thank you so much for that very kind and generous introduction, John. It's such an honor to be back with you at Brookings. And I'm so appreciative of the leadership that you bring to Brookings, generally, and to this issue, specifically, as well as that of Darrell West and the terrific report that you all collaborated on not too long ago, producing great food for thought for all of us.

So, thank you for that. I also want to thank my dear friends, E.J. Dionne and Bill Galston of Brookings, who I've been able to collaborate with and cherish a friendship with for many years. And thanks to all the distinguished panelists. And, indeed, everybody who's joining us today. I know so many who are joining us are playing such an important role right now in helping the nation heal. So, we couldn't have a better time or a better group for conversation.

And, as you mentioned, it's a great honor to serve President Biden in this White House. We are moving forward on many fronts, including this front of working with faith and community partners to serve people in need. Which is the mission of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. And I know Brookings has a long history here, given the presence of John Dilulio, who has been associated with Brookings for many years and served as the first director of this White House office when President G.W. Bush established it, more than 20 years ago. So, that's a great history and, of course, John is a wonderful and cherished friend and partner in this work, as well.

And so, the office started, I think, over a felt need to ensure that we were doing our utmost through the White House work to not forget the really important role of civil society in all the work that we do. But, particularly, in serving people in need which brings us together across many different political and ideological and even religious divisions or differences.

So, I think G.W. Bush had the right intuition to think that we need a place where -- a front door at the White House where faith and community groups can go there and know where to knock and get some help in navigating what can be a very complex federal government. And also find a way to find others, including government, but not limited to government, that want to serve people in need.

And so that was a process that George W. Bush sought -- set out establishing this office and establishing centers for faith-based and neighborhood partnerships across the federal agencies, which I hope we'll get to talk about a little bit more later.

So, that office was established and then President Barack Obama took office and some were speculating about whether a president of a different party would continue the signature initiative of a Republican president. And, indeed, President Obama did and, of course, that was no surprise to those who know him. He got his start working on the south side of Chicago, working with faith and community groups on trying to boost economic opportunity and meet people's needs there. So, President Obama and then Vice President Biden continued that office while putting their own stamp on its practices and policies. And that work continued in important ways.

And then, just this year, President Biden returned to the White House and re-established the office, and we've been so glad to do that. It comes at such an important time, as you mention, with the COVID challenges, just to take the most prominent one. We have seen faith and community groups during this COVID challenge have to re-invent the whole way in which they serve people, especially when the crisis was particularly acute. You think about the ways that you need to run a food pantry that's very different from the way you would run a food pantry in non-COVID conditions. And we also remember, I think, all of us, the pictures that we saw of cars lined up down the highway for miles for food assistance.

And so, that just broke everyone's heart. And I think faith and community leaders immediately sprung into action and figured out ways to serve people in those circumstances and, really, I mean, kept people's life and livelihoods together in such a crucial time. And we just cannot highlight that enough because the ingenuity that that took and the commitment and heart that that took was phenomenal. And we're still working on many problems, but I just want to really tip our hats to faith and community providers for really stepping into that gap.

Of course, now we're working on a number of challenges that are related to COVID, but not only COVID, you mentioned systemic racism and economic recovery, which continue to be huge issues as well as deep political polarization. Those are clearly some frontline challenges for all of us.

And so one thing we've done is start what's called a COVID-19 Community Corps. And if you look at the founding members of that COVID-19 Community Corps, you'll see people from the right

and the left, politically and ideologically, and various religious traditions, and people with no religious faith who have said, I want to help America get vaccinated, and I want to help America know the facts about the virus and the vaccine.

So, that has been an amazing effort already and one that we're looking forward to building upon. And I would say that there is continuing to be these centers across the various federal agencies, and I would cite partnerships of the Center of the Health and Human Services Department, for example, to work with the National League of Cities on boosting economic recovery, in part by highlighting efforts of faith and community leaders, which even though it's not well-known, faith and community leaders play a big role in helping people to get a job, the unemployed, and to help the underemployed get trained and get into better paying jobs.

FMA is making sure that faith and community organizations have the information about preparing for the upcoming hurricane season. And we just find, here again, that faith and community groups are the indispensable partners between government and people who are struggling. And so, that is very important. And over at USAID, our center there is working with faith and community partners on crises around the world, including one in Ethiopia right now to address threatening hunger and suffering. And so, all of these partnerships can be financial or non-financial, but they are very different, some very formal, some informal. But they all, I think, play a role in helping our nation heal.

I'll just mention that the other thing that I'm doing is working at the intersection of faith and public policy to just deal with some of the issues there. Sometimes helping people to understand how we try to comply with the spirit and the letter of the Constitution and making sure that we're listening to everybody. Because Joe Biden wants to be president for all Americans.

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, listening to that long list of things that you're doing, I'm trying to think when are you sleeping? But, as you well know, this is almost a 24/7 job, it really is.

MS. ROGERS: Yes.

GENERAL ALLEN: And you're doing it. Now, you just touched on something I think is really important, and I think for many Americans, when we think about the issue of reconciliation and healing, we don't automatically come to the faith dimension of reconciliation and healing. And the role of faith-based communities and faith leaders.

Now, as you pointed out properly, the Constitution's pretty clear on this matter. So, for our audience today, how should we be thinking about religion's role in American public life and the role that these communities can play in doing this? And you touched on some of this. But I think a specific explanation might be quite helpful.

MS. ROGERS: Yes. That's a great question because sometimes we find people are quite confused about what the Constitution says and even about whether an office like the one I run should exist in government.

GENERAL ALLEN: Right.

MS. ROGERS: So, the Constitution says that the government can't back religion. It can't be promoting theology and telling people that they should believe one way or the other. But it also says that people of faith have the right to express and practice their faith. And that the government needs to protect those rights.

And so, we work right there to say that it is not the government's role to promote theology or religion, but it is government's role to work with all citizens who want to be, in our office's case, helping people in need. And it would be silly and hostile to religion for the government not to work with faith and community groups in these situations. So, it's incumbent on the government to engage with everyone, including faith groups in this task.

And, of course, we have to do that in a way that treats all faiths equally, does not favor one over the other, and that also, importantly, includes people who say, I'm not a person of faith, but I want to serve people in need too. So, those are just some of the very basic rules.

Our Constitution has the separation of church and state, but that doesn't mean that government and religious groups can't talk to one another, can't work together on issues of shared concern. And we've gone over this, particularly with all these COVID vaccination sites setting up in houses of worship. And we've been encouraging government to say, you can work with houses of worship on doing this, because this is a shared public health aid.

GENERAL ALLEN: And this goes to the intersection of other two forces within your office which is -- that's a perfect example, where houses of worship really promoted community solutions.

MS. ROGERS: Exactly.

GENERAL ALLEN: I think that's the synergy that we're seeking to have here. It's really important.

MS. ROGERS: Exactly.

GENERAL ALLEN: So, let me stick a couple comments. Of course, there's no such thing as a monolithic religious community. The wonder, the marvelous dimensions of our various faiths means that we have various approaches to both the community but also their roles with the individual citizens who either attend the church or who they live with in their community. So, they can be a great force for healing, but they can also be a force for division, as well.

And as you have seen in the earliest moments of this administration, what gives you cause for hope? Or do you have cause for hope that, in fact, these religious communities can help the nation to heal our political divides, to get us back on our feet after COVID, to deal with this issue of systemic racism and the profound political polarization? Can it be a force for good? Or is this going to be a force potentially to increase the polarization?

MS. ROGERS: You know, I really do know that we face a lot of challenges. No one can close their eyes to that. And if we do, we're not going to be able to solve the problem adequately. But I have a lot of cause for hope, as well. And I think somebody that holds the job that I do just can't get away from being hopeful. Because, every day, I have people reaching out to me, including the panelists that you're going to be speaking with in a little bit, reaching out to me saying how can I help. Or here's what I'm doing. Do you think by combining our efforts, we could make this effort more than the sum of its parts? And, without fail, that happens multitudes of times every single day. And so, I'm very hopeful.

I think, to go back to COVID, we have seen everyone from National Association of Evangelicals to the multi-faith base for vaccines, pulling out all the stops to get people healthy. And building bridges across divides to do so. So, people -- and there are people in those groups who disagree with the administration about certain things. But our office has majored on the fact that we want to work with everybody including those who have serious differences with the Biden administration.

Because, again, the president wants to be president of all Americans. So, where we can agree, let's work together. And that will not only do a whole lot of good on that particular issue, but it will



build a relationship that may help us to overcome some of the differences and misunderstanding and polarization.

Also, I would mention, for example, on racial justice issues, a uniting focus has been concerns about racial disparities. And we all know that the past year has been a real revelation for many of us on racial disparities, just because of the COVID virus. But, really, those disparities abound, in economic opportunity, in education. So many other places where, just because of someone's race, they end up getting sicker and having less opportunity. And that is just wrong.

And people agree about that from many different ideological and political and religious perspectives. And that brings us together. So, for example, I think about a great opportunity that HHS just recently announced about a navigator that helps people get insurance when they don't have it. And this particular grant opportunity focuses -- asks people who are applying to tell them how they have been reaching out to underserved communities. And that's so important because we want to close these gaps and have everybody have access to quality, affordable healthcare.

And so, those are just a couple of examples where we're finding that, even with the challenges and even noting that sometimes religion can spark division, that there are a lot of ways in which we can come together across our differences and do a lot of good together. And so that continues to inspire me each day.

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, that inspiration is going to have to carry us through some of these difficult moments. And one of the things, in my recent experience, in fact working very closely with some of the wonderful people on this panel, we were asked by the Secretary of Homeland Security what we believe could be some steps to deal with the violence against our faith communities. It is such a horrendous reality that many of our faith communities cannot practice their faith without fear for their physical safety. And, again, many of the panelists, we witnessed this personally. We've seen, of late, a spike in anti-Semitic attacks in the United States, as well as a rise in hate crimes against Muslims, against Sikhs, against the predominantly black Christian communities in the south. What, in your mind, are the kinds of policies and partnerships that we should be pursuing actively to provide protection to these precious communities to address these problems?

MS. ROGERS: You know, I want to start out by thanking you, John, for your leadership of that effort through the Department of Homeland Security. I read the report -- I actually read the report when it came out, I skimmed it, and then, during the transition, I really sat down and read every word. And as one who's done reports like that, I know that that report was not produced without incredible number of hours of work and collaboration. So, let me thank you and the panelists. Because it is a rich report that everybody should read and it contains, not only great context, but actually really actionable suggestions about what DHS and other parts of government can do.

For example, your wonderful suggestion about creating more technical assistance for those who want to apply for non-profit security grants, which are grants that are given to faith and community groups that are under some threat, like the groups that you mention. And this appropriation for this grant program is there and welcome that it's been strengthened recently, including by President Biden.

At the same time, we know that not everybody has a team of lawyers to help them produce a grant application.

GENERAL ALLEN: Sure.

MS. ROGERS: But that's not right, because some people who are the most threatened would not necessarily have that kind of assistance and experience. So, what can we do to make sure that there's more technical assistance for people that are applying for these funds that they really need. And your report is a source of great, granular, actionable items that is on many desks right now as we think about what we can do to improve in this area.

I would also cite the president signing recently the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act and the Jabara-Heyer NO HATE Act. And what this Act does, the president spoke about it when he signed it a few weeks ago, it gives us a bunch of new tools to try to prevent incidents of hate that are unlawful and also to prosecute or combat those hate crimes when they, unfortunately, do happen.

And you maybe area that Attorney General Garland released a memo just recently about the Department of Justice's early efforts to implement this law. And he talked about several things, like producing resources and coordination to combat hate crimes and hate incidents, expediting the review of hate crimes, increasing the department's language access capabilities, because we find that the reporting

of hate crimes is not nearly what it should be. And oftentimes, we find that there are language barriers. So, what can we do to overcome those barriers so that we can get the reporting and prevent hate crimes moving forward and bring justice where hate crimes have occurred?

The memo of the Attorney General also talks about restoring the role of the community relations service at the Department of Justice that I know you may be familiar with, that really plays a role in helping create community understanding and being there with the community when it's in crisis.

The other interesting point that the Attorney General made was a suggestion about creating what he called district alliances against hate. And he encouraged each U.S. Attorney's office to consider what it could do, in using its convening power, to bring together communities, law enforcement, civil rights coordinators, to talk about what the community is experiencing in terms of threats in this area and how the community could come together to respond. And so I think that's just a wonderful suggestion of a way that we can really use the convening power of government across the nation to make strides in this area, which is, as you say, quite needed.

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, the Department of Justice, I think, has really leaned hard into this issue, and the Attorney General in particular. As the panelists will remember, as we dug into this issue, as we looked at every one of these horrific, horrific acts, horrendous acts against these communities, almost invariably, the common thread that ran through them all was domestic white supremacists and extremists, white extremists.

And I'm very pleased to see that, not just in the civil community, not just in the context of the Department of Justice, but Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, has also mandated that the services are going to look inside their ranks for those same kinds of individuals who either terrorize their fellow citizens in uniform or join these organizations when they come out.

And that was in the background of every one of these horrific events targeted against our faith communities and our precious fellow Americans worshipping in their own way, just trying to worship in a manner that facilitates the security of their family and their congregations, and they suffered so terribly because of this. So, I really commend the Attorney General and Department of Justice in this regard.

Just a couple more minutes. Can I ask a quick question? What do you see, perhaps, as a potential role for think tanks in this entire area that you're talking about? Obviously, you're experiencing one right now, but is there a role for think tanks to be helping you and helping the president in this process?

MS. ROGERS: Absolutely. And I think your stewardship of your time to lead that report that you wrote for DHS, it's not -- writing the report wasn't the only thing. You held a bunch of meetings, you went out and talked to people, you used the convening power of government, but also your convening power, giving what you have done in terms of your leadership in our nation. And me just pause and say thank you for that. Because you have -- your leadership there has been tremendous and then bringing that into the Brookings leadership and combining it now is just -- packs quite a punch.

And so I think that your leadership has been instrumental and your willingness to take time to lead the kind of advisory council that you did. That's a big hunk of time. And you be willing to do that is one way that a think tank can contribute. Also I would cite the report that you and Darrell produced that has -- it also sits on my desk and I shared it with many in government who have reacted very positively to it. And the president has continued to ask for ideas, more and more ideas, to try to unify America. And that report has been very helpful to us in teeing up new ideas.

So, there are no shortage of ways that think tanks can do so, including through this conversation. And while I won't necessarily be able to stay for the full time of the panelists, I will go back, when I have a moment, to get the rest of the transcript and the audio. Because the ideas that are produced can be exceedingly helpful and help us to get outside the governmental bubble, if you will, to make sure that we are getting the best ideas possible and coming together as a nation. So, I think there's absolutely a key role for think tanks to play in unifying American.

And I especially appreciate Brookings historical role in recognizing the faith community. It's not every think tank that has really taken seriously the intersection of faith, public policy, and law. And also that has taken very seriously the faith communities' role in contributing to challenging problems. Whether it's the problem of poverty or racism, or anything else, it's not every think tank that will take these issues on. And Brookings has done it historically, and you have done it very prominently through your leadership, so I really thank you and appreciate that deeply in terms of the work that I do right now.

GENERAL ALLEN: Thank you, Melissa. I am very grateful for that. Let me ask one quick question. We just have a couple of minutes left. You, obviously, as we've said, you've got a full plate. It's early in the administration. We all acknowledge how much there is to be done. But this -- it's very clear you're getting after it. Are there some policies or models that are out there that you have seen or as you would like to, as you have the time, you have the resources that you'd like to implement that you haven't yet had the chance to embrace?

MS. ROGERS: Yeah, well, that list is very, very long. But I will say, just a couple -- a few things that we found that can be helpful in dealing with the polarization that the country currently faces. One is to make sure that we allow people to name their fears. And here I want to credit my colleague and friend, Pete Wehner. When E.J. and I were working on a report recently, Pete made sure that -- to say that it's so important that we recognize what people fear. Because right now, a lot of people fear on different sides. That the way that they would like to live their life is being threatened. And they see that maybe they won't be able to hold fast to their values because of threat. And that's people on all sides. Everybody's scared about what the other side might do to them if they get political power. And Pete encouraged us to think about letting people name their fears and being honest about that. And I think that it is a really helpful thing to do.

Another very helpful thing to do is just listening to people as we've already talked about and listening to people before policy decisions are made. It's very important that we call people in to tell us about their ideas, even when they may differ from some of the policies that President Biden has already announced that he is supporting, to understand why people differ and to give them their say. Because this is, you know, this is governance. This where we bring everybody in to listen to all Americans about the issues that are dear to them. And so really listening to them and, whenever possible, getting that in front of policy making, so that we can give due respect to different views. And, indeed, so we're going to learn something, and sometimes change our views. Sometimes modulate something because of what we've learned. So, I would say that and, also, I think finding ways to serve together across our differences, which brings us back to where we started. A lot of times that can be a relationship builder and, so, trying to find more opportunities for people of different faith and beliefs to

work side by side, really breaks the ice, and helps us to see the good in one another in a way that is very powerful.

So, I would say those are just three very simple things that we're focused on, and we would welcome everyone's suggestion about building greater unity in our country, because we do not have to be as divided as we are. And we are determined to make progress on this. So, I'm happy to receive everyone's ideas about this and just want to thank, again, the faith and community leaders that have joined us for really embodying this spirit of generosity and kindness and listening to one another, which we find so often. And which often goes unremarked upon and doesn't get reported on, but I see it every day and, by golly, we are very, very thankful for it and see it as a path that will help us to unify, moving forward.

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, Melissa Rogers, special assistant to the president and Executive Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. We are so fortunate, as a country, to have you serving where you are right now. Thank you for your time this afternoon. Thank you for your views and your labors, not just on behalf of our communities and our faith-based communities, but on behalf of every one of us, all Americans, to heal these divides to reconcile our communities and to do it in the manner that you are. So, we can't thank you enough for joining us, Melissa, and we wish you continued success in this important mission that you have. Thank you.

MS. ROGERS: Thank you so much, it's so appreciated, and I really wish everyone the best and look forward to staying in touch.

GENERAL ALLEN: Thank you, Melissa. And now over to Darrell West, who will run this panel this afternoon. And I'm going to tune in, so I'm looking forward to it. Thank you, Darrell. And you're muted.

MR. WEST: Sorry about that. Thank you, John and Melissa. That was a terrific conversation with lots of terrific insights. I love the idea of a COVID Community Corps, really highlights the crucial role of local organizations in moving our country forward. So, it's a great way to kick off our discussion about ways to heal America.

So, as John and Melissa pointed out, we face several challenges right now, a high level of political polarization, a loss of trust and confidence in government, a tendency to treat our comrades as

enemies. Yet, this period also represents a major learning moment for the United States. It's a time for all of us to reflect on how we got to this point and what we can do to heal our country.

And one key ingredient in reconciliation, as our previous session just indicated, is the crucial role of faith communities in that effort. Historically, our faith communities have played a very important role in bringing people together. They help individuals overcome differences. They provide a means for personal connection, and they inspire all of those in the community to do a much better job. So, we can't really deal with our divisions unless we come together in these very basic ways.

To help us understand these issues, we're delighted to have five distinguished experts with us today. Salam Al-Marayati is the President and Co-Founder of the Muslim Public Affairs Council. Reverend Cassandra Bledsoe is the Immediate Past National Chaplain of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives. Richard Coll is the Executive Director of the Department of Justice, Peace, and Human Development of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Nathan Diamond is the Executive Director of the Orthodox Union Advocacy Center. And Reverend Randy Vaughn is the Senior Pastor of Mount Sinai Baptist Church.

And if you have any questions for our panelists, I would encourage you to email them to us at [events@brookings.edu](mailto:events@brookings.edu) or to Tweet @BrookingsGov. I also want to thank David Weinberg, John Kenning, Jr., and Cary and Michael Saks for their generous support of this project.

So, I want to start with a question for each of our panelists. And we'll just go down the list here. How do each of you see the issue of societal divisions, and what is your organization doing to heal the country? And Salam, let's start with you.

MR. AL-MARAYATI: Thank you. Thank you, Darrell, and thank you for Brookings in convening these wonderful people I'm very honored to be with. I'm very privileged to be with this prestigious group. I think the problem and the answer lie in religion. The problem is religious nationalism when religion is used as fuel to push a political ideological agenda. But it has nothing to do with religion. It has do with power. It has to do with supremacy.

And, therefore, the answer lies in religion. Because the way I believe all of our religions have been founded; they've been founded on the basis of human equality. That God's will is diversity. God's will is pluralism. And it's not His will, it's something that's good for us.

So, our work together, with Randy, with Cassandra, with Nathan, and I'm glad to meet Richard, is based on that cornerstone of faith, of human equality, and religious pluralism as the answer to this problem of supremacy that has been fueled by religious nationalism. And I believe that religious nationalism is now the major threat to all of our religions. Not secularism. Secularism is actually the avenue by which all religions can flourish equally. So, we need to rethink how we approach this problem from the standpoint of religion to begin with.

MR. WEST: And Salam, what is your organization doing to heal the country?

MR. AL-MARAYATI: Well, we do much. The fact that we engage one another is one very important part of the agenda for Muslim Public Affairs Council, for all American Muslim organizations is to be known, to engage. The Koran tells us repel evil with that which is good and better, so that the one with whom there is hostility will become as if he is your closest and warmest friend.

So, we work on a social agenda. We don't need to convert one another to our religion or to even our ideology. But we need to convert people from opposition to coalition. From enmity to friendship. And we have programs throughout the country -- for example, we have something called Mustard Seed. And in the Koran, in the Bible, it talks about how, no matter how little something is, if God wants to bring it to life, it will come to life. And so every small act of compassion can make a world of difference. And that's our Mustard Seed program.

MR. WEST: A great idea. Cassandra, your thoughts on our divisions and what is your organization doing to heal the country?

MS. BLEDSOE: Well, I agree with Salam that the root cause of everything is God. Good and evil. If you read our Bible, our Bible instructs us, it teaches us that these are the days, the last days, and these are the days that we are living. So, in that, how do we get along with one another, respect one another? And how do we live peacefully in these days?

The organization that I'm speaking for is the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives. At the forefront of that is police reform. We have been at the table. We've had many community meetings via Zoom and webinars, training. But, in addition to that, beyond looking to look at diversity only at race and whether it's police/community relations, we must embrace the diversity of thought. And the diversity of thought goes across every religion, every nationality, and every age.



And that is what we're looking to do is to bring in -- as General Allen said, the great thinkers are not only embracing the diversity of thought for being able to have everyone listen, talk, and understand.

MR. WEST: Thank you. Richard, your thoughts on our divisions and what is the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops doing?

MR. COLL: Well, thank you very much, Darrell. Let me start by joining in thanking Brookings for bringing us together. I'm just so grateful to be with these wonderful, distinguished individuals to be able to share our thoughts. And, indeed, one of the things that has struck me so far is how much we do have in common as members of a faith community here in the United States. And how wonderful it is to be able to have this kind of dialogue.

I was re-reading Fratelli Tutti, Pope Francis' most recent encyclical, in anticipation of our conversation. One of the things that struck me is the centrality of interfaith dialogue and how Pope Francis challenges the faith communities of all of religious denominations to work together in seeking the transcendent truth. And what is that transcendent truth? I think it's already been very well-stated. The common humanity that we share as brothers and sisters, our human dignity that we need recognize and honor, and our commitment to human rights and universal development in equality that will be our way of honoring God's call to us.

And which is a call that we share with all faiths and, indeed, with people of no faith, as well. And that common humanity, that recognition of our brotherhood and sisterhood, I think leads to some of the suggestions that we've already heard. The importance of dialogue. And here I want to commend Melissa Rogers for her role in the administration in fostering that dialogue. Whether we agree or whether we disagree with all elements of policy, to dialogue, which is built on mutual respect, and on listening is such an important part of how we will heal our society and, indeed, our world.

And I think we start with listening, we continue with dialogue, and we build towards action, towards common action that we can take together to address the pressing problems that we face as a society. As one example, many of you know we have the Catholic Campaign for Human Development which invests in community-based organizations across the country that are directed towards alleviating the consequences of poverty and really empowering community leaders to be able to

champion their interest as they best recognize them, in recognition that they're the ones who have the best understanding of what their communities need.

Many of those organizations are based on faith communities that are non-Catholic, non-Christian, and we welcome collaborating with those communities as we do, indeed, with purely secular communities. So, I think that this conversation and some of the suggestions is the path forward that we can offer. And we can be servants and, hopefully, serve as models of the kind of dialogue and collaboration that can truly heal our culture.

MR. WEST: Well, that is definitely inspiring. Nathan, I'd love to get your thoughts on how you see the divisions and also what your center is working on.

MR. DIAMENT: Thank you. And I will also add my thanks to Brookings and General Allen and all of you putting this important discussion together and how honored I am to be with my colleagues. I'll save us some time by associating myself with the remarks that have been made so far and say amen to the fundamental points -- the fundamental thing that, perhaps, the great faiths represented here had to contribute to this is the recognition that each human being is created in the image of God.

I think that, if I may, the core of the divisions, of the divisiveness that we have in the United States currently -- I'm going to quote a more secular source, if you will, and that would be Franklin Roosevelt's famous Four Freedoms speech which was illustrated by Norman Rockwell. And as we emerge, hopefully, from this year and a half of the most intense period of the pandemic, I think a lot of the fuel for divisions in this country were people having great fear. And as that famous address talked about - what society needs to deliver for people is a freedom from fear and a freedom from want. And both of those things were really catalyzed in people's lives in very real ways by the dislocations and the disruptions of the pandemic.

But the role that they can play, which Melissa already referenced in the opening presentation and others have, as well, is just the engine of the faith communities to try and give people solace and comfort in the face of fear and, actually, also help them with their material wants through good works of charity. And to pick up on what Richard said toward the end that what we see, what our organization has done, and what I know the other major faith groups engage in, is service to people in

need and very often in coalition with people from other communities. And that is not only alleviating those fears, but it's also building community and breaking down divisions in a very significant and important way.

And so, some people were scratching their heads a few weeks ago when my organization or Flax Jewish organization launched a campaign to raise funds to purchase oxygen concentrators for India, which is in much deeper throes of the COVID crisis than we are, thank God, in the United States right now. But, from the perspective of our community, every life is precious, and now that we're in a position to try to help beyond our community, where are you going to do that?

And I think, just as a last point, that this is also tied into the unique promise that the United States has made since its founding, which underlies religious freedom and the ability for many -- people of many different faiths to flourish in this country.

Perhaps the best articulated, or one of the best articulations of it was by George Washington in his letter to the Jewish community of Newport, Rhode Island, in which he talked about the United States not giving -- give to bigotry no sanction is his most famous line, made more famous now thanks to Hamilton, is that Washington also quoted the phrase, "Every person should be able to sit under his own vine and fig tree and none shall make him afraid."

And in quoting that verse in his letter, Washington, at the outset of this country, was setting out the promise which has taken a lot of work, and we're still working on realizing it, obviously, but was setting out the promise that freedom of religion is reliant upon a freedom from fear and is also reliant on a freedom from want. And the engine that allows society to build itself and bring all those things together, so everyone can enjoy freedom of religion, can enjoy freedom from want, and enjoy freedom from fear, is a virtuous circle, if you will.

MR. WEST: Absolutely. If we could make progress on any of those, that would certainly make a big difference. Randy, I want to bring you into the conversation and get your thoughts on how you see the divisions and also what your congregation is doing. We're not hearing you. Are you muted?

MR. VAUGHN: Thank you. Sorry about that. I'm probably not so capable with technology, but here I am. Thank you, Darrell, for hosting this meeting and salute certainly to Darrell and

Melissa. Again, it's good selling my colleagues that we work together over the country and at various situations of disenchantment, hurt, pain. And then we're able to put together a report that has already been referred to.

When I was asked to be part of this panel, I didn't know who would be my colleagues or fellow spokespersons, and it was in fear that I took this opportunity or this engagement. I was quite relieved when I found out that it was Nathan, it was Salam, it was Cassandra, good to meet you, Richard. I'm more comfortable; we've all been in discussions.

I'm reminded of one thing, and that is from the National Anthem we so solemnly (audio skip). It ends in a question. At the end, our National Anthem says, "Does that Star-Spangled Banner yet wave over the land of the free and the home of the brave." What a question. What insight I think it really calls for, because it suggests that that the Star - Spangled Banner can, at some point, not wave. And another flag would fly over what we call this United States of America.

I wish I had all of your insights before I began to ponder this question placed before us. I pondered the question, and I'm glad that I did. It says how faith leaders can help America heal. How faith leaders help America heal. And when I study, go to the dictionary and look up the word heal, that means to make whole. To make whole. It's just not giving a piece of bread or (inaudible) to the sick, but actually to make whole our problem.

That raises the question in my mind, again. Has America ever been whole? Has it ever been (audio skip)? One of the greatest problems that America has had and has never dealt with or gave (inaudible), is America dealing with color. That has been a problem. It's still a problem.

We've come through this past year -- I need not remind you, problems that we have had here in America just dealing with color. I thought to suggest to us is that if we had the time, that we could, actually, before we start trying to heal, is really diagnose the problem. We've been throwing a lot of symptoms around. But what is the real problem? What's wrong? Maybe you know, and I have not been told. But I think that for us, at some point and at some future date, if it so be, we could put our minds together and let's see if as doctors, we can really decide the problem. Because if we work solving the problem from our own perspectives -- someone said that the camel was made by a committee that came

together to design a horse. And, as a result, we could find ourselves really tackling a whole lot of symptoms but never touching the problem.

And so, I would hope that we can eventually find our ways there. It might remind you of problems. Polarization is really killing America right now. Political polarization right now -- how to get the Democrats and the Republicans to come to the agreement on whether we're going to drink cold water or warm water. I don't know. It a problem, it's a vote. It's a 51-49 split. It's almost un-American to think this -- that we have come, that because one group is in favor of one thing and another group -- and, but we'll see, even now, old laws that we thought we had overcome like Jim Crow. Jim is still growing.

Now as the craziness that of going back to recount votes that have been voted, so that certain people will not be able to vote. Georgia. You can't go to the polls and vote on a Sunday morning. Pews to the polls. And if you do go, don't get thirsty, because no one can give you a glass of water. That is a sick mirror. And so, how do we propose, or can we propose, as leaders, come to such massive subject?

Darrell, I know you're listening and God knows we love working with you. But whatever influence that you may have, Randy Vaughn takes this subject serious. Not just for a public discussion or national anything. But it's larger than that, and I say to us because, again, we've come -- we've all learned how to work together. We've learned how to put our Bible, our own personal faith book, not aside, but before us. But we know to work with Salam, Koran. We don't put our books in front of us because we know we got to work with Nathan and the Torah, the Jewish books. We've learned how to put that on the side, excuse me. So that we work together. And I'm sure, Richard, you're the same. But at the same time, until we are able to come together, to know what the true diagnosis is, and how it is that if we can get to the problem, we can currently resolve some of the system -- symptoms, we find taking on in America.

The great question is, I deliberately said that I pastor the Mount Sinai Church, Port Arthur, Texas, and thank God for 38 years there. But I've served our national convention in many ways, even as ambassador to many of the foreign countries that fought with religious leaders. Israel to the Vatican, sir, for Council of Churches in Geneva. I've done all of that. It's not important what I've done. It's what I'm doing.

We decided that we would lead the National Convention into the American Red Cross to deal with disaster management. And the main thing about that was black people for years have been treated as victims. Everywhere it occurs, you're rushed up in for the poor, black and brown. Well, what we decided to do was go to the table and say, here we come, we want to be volunteers. And someone said, what do you all do. I say, with eight million people, we can do what we want. And, as a result, we were accepted with (audio skip) power and status into the national (inaudible) and, as of this date, those organizations are working together in that area.

Locally, we've teamed up with southern Baptist churches and other churches to participate with (inaudible) dollars on the table. Not just (audio skip) working together to common cause.

Last thing I would say that this is, be not plagued by religious invite. I just -- Christians and Muslim, Christians and Jew. But Christians and Christians. The language has been changed. Strong words like evangelism has now become political. And so we really don't know where to stand until we diagnose what the real problem is. Thank you for the opportunity.

MR. WEST: Okay, thank you. And I agree, that question of wholeness or, perhaps, more aptly, the lack of wholeness, is certainly fundamental in all these discussions. So, Salam, I want to come back to you. What kinds of changes have the potential to generate healing, and how can faith communities be helpful in doing that?

MR. AL-MARAYATI: Well, I think that there are two fundamental concerns to Nathan's point about the four freedoms that FDR mentioned, the freedom from fear freedom from want, freedom of speech, freedom of worship. And coming together, we work on those freedoms. So, it's important for all of us to be seen together working collectively for whoever is harmed, regardless of their religious background.

And we did that -- we came together working on this committee that was convened by General Allen and his leadership in securing houses of worship. And we went to San Diego, where a synagogue was attacked and people were killed. And ten miles down the road, Randy and I were there, and the same man had attacked the mosque. So, this attack on us is common. So, going through that work of developing a security model -- how to make houses of worship secure, so people don't fear going into a mosque or a synagogue or a church or a temple -- where they can convene. That fundamental

security is critical in the work between our faith-based organizations and our government through the work of Melissa Rogers and the Faith-Based office.

And working on affordable housing. I mean, in L.A., we have a terrible homelessness problem. Because there's no affordable housing there. And now tents are coming to our doorstep, people who are homeless. And so what do we as people of faith have to do? We have everything to do with that problem. So, dealing with the fundamental fears of people, dealing with poverty together, going through the pain together, I think would do a lot in bringing us forward.

The last thing I want to say for us as Muslims, this week there was a family that was attacked in Canada, which brings us to this notion that our problems are not so much south of the border. Our problems are north of the border, as well. And there's a transnational, white supremacist movement that is infecting America. And our government has to take this problem seriously as the General eloquently articulated in his remarks -- he, himself is taking this issue as a priority and so is Brookings, so I appreciate that. But I believe there's a lot to do now on that issue.

So, on the one hand we have this problem; on the other hand, today is an historic day for us as American Muslims, because the first American Muslim judge has been appointed and confirmed by the U.S. Senate now to serve on the federal bench. And so, it gives us hope. And I think we have to stress on the hope, stress on these great people that we have assembled in

working together to come up with solutions. But understand, that even though God has allowed us to have different religions, there's still one message. And that is to believe in God, to believe in the human family, and then go and do the good work.

MR. WEST: Yes, that is an important step forward, getting someone on the bench. So congratulations on that. Cassandra, what kinds of changes are you looking for?

MS. BLEDSOE: I am looking in as a Christian, as a believer. Now Christianity we say, by his stripes we are here. Many of us preach sermons and believe truly, if we could just touch the hem of His garment. But all of us believe, in every faith, that we must love one another.

The change that I'm looking for is, for those of who have professed to know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, that we will step forward with love and not hate. And that the world will see our

love for every single person on Earth. We will not be able to say out of our mouths and be double-minded. True change comes, not only just by professing Jesus Christ is your Lord and Savior. Being able to act upon that, out of your heart, that is truly changed for Salam, for Richard, for Nathan, for Randy, for you, Darrell, and for the rest of the world to say that we are Christian and that they know us, our love. That we are believers in God, and they know us all for our love. That we would put down our weapons and study war no more. If that change could come, with absolute respect and love for one another, then it will be well with my soul.

MR. WEST: Thank you. Richard, what kind of changes are you looking for that you think have a potential to generate healing, and how can faith communities help you with those ideas?

MR. COLL: Thank you, Darrell. I'd like to go back to the Fratelli Tutti and some of the work that the USCCB were trying to do to implement that. And we have a new program that we are developing called the Civilize It program. And the goal, as it's described, is to build a better kind of politics. And it builds on so many of the wonderful statements that my fellow panelists have already articulated so well. Really, important centrality of human dignity -- the importance once again of listening. Listening with attention and not just with our ideological predispositions. Of conversing and entering into dialogue with mutual respect and, dare we say it, with mutual love, which is, I think, what all of our religious traditions call us to do.

And then to see common avenues of action that we can implement. I think when we started thinking about this Civilize It program, we thought wouldn't this be a (audio skip) program to roll out with our colleagues in Congress, with members of the faith community that serve the public good in government.

But I think now we realize that we, as physicians, need to heal ourselves first. We need to apply some of the lessons of this program internally, in our own faith community. And I'll speak for our own Catholic community as an example of a place where dialogue and respect and healing need to take place. And we think that the result of this Civilize It program, which is a methodological solution, that we will lead to practical implementations.

We will recall, once again, our common brotherhood and sisterhood as children of God, and we will recognize that we live with creative tension (audio skip) God. And that recognizes the point



very beautifully made previously, that diversity is a great gift. And diversity will lead to creative tension which (audio skip) honor in a mutually respectful way, will generate solutions and outcomes that will far transcend what any one of us or any one of our communities alone could have achieved.

So, I'm hopeful that this methodology will be useful and welcome the opportunity to share in further detail offline in any way that would be helpful.

MR. WEST: That does sound promising. Thank you. Nathan, what kind of changes do you think have a potential to generate healing?

MR. DIAMENT: I think I want to pick up again on a word that Richard used, which is the word diversity. Which is much talked about in American society right now. And suggest that -- and, again, I think there's a role for faith-informed knowledge to play in generating healing in society is that the faith, the great faiths, as has been said, including Judaism, puts a real positive affirming value on diversity.

There's a passage in the Talmud that talks about the fact that when God created the world, God created, initially, one human being, Adam. And then Eve. But all of the human race descends from this one initial creation. And the Talmud remarks to say, look how great God is in compared to a king, a mortal human being. If a king would mint coins from a single mold, all the coins would look the same. But God has created an entire species of humanity from one original mold, namely Adam, and we all look different, let alone have different thoughts and different passions and emotions and everything else that makes us individual.

And it's putting a real affirmative, faith-based value, if you will, on God's creation of diversity. And while in the social science context or the political context right now, diversity right now is talked about in the sense of making sure we have different perspectives around the table and different representations around the table and that's important. That lens on diversity is not necessarily one that gives diversity that kind of, I think, affirmational, aspirational meaning in the same sense. Because it's more in the political sphere, I think it has more to do with, you know, is the pie getting sliced up in an equitable way.

Which, again, is very important and very fundamental in our society. There is a great inequity. The pie does need to be divided in an equitable way. But that's a very -- that relates to the

freedom from want, right. That's a very almost utilitarian understanding of why should we care about diversity, why should we care about representation et cetera.

But I think what the faith communities can bring to the conversation and that leads to an important component of the healing that we are talking about today is this affirmational, aspirational value that we're all created in the image of God and God deliberately created us all quite, quite differently. And that that has this aspirational value which, if society as whole would be more embracing of, that that would have a more healing effect and minimize the focus on the divisions rather than the commonality.

MR. WEST: Thank you. So, Randy, I want to get your thoughts on the changes that you think would make the greatest difference. And then we're going to go audience questions, and people can send their questions to [events@brookings.edu](mailto:events@brookings.edu). So, Randy your thoughts.

MR. VAUGHN: I want to give you back some time. I work every day in prayer as a (inaudible) chronicle that I believe is an answer for (inaudible). If my people call by my name, that is God speaking. Humble themselves and seek my face, an important word, and turn their wicked way. And I would hear from heaven. Give their sin, heal the land.

MR. WEST: Great. That is powerful. So, lots of questions from the audience. So, I'm going to throw these questions out. Any of our panelists who want to jump in and answer them, feel free to do so. So, the first question is how does one address the reality that many people seem to value their political opinions over the teachings of their faith? Any of you who want to comment on that?

MR. VAUGHN: Can you repeat that Darrell?

MR. WEST: How does one address the reality that many people value their political opinions over the teachings of their faith?

MR. AL-MARAYATI: Well, I think -- oh, go ahead, Richard.

MR. COLL: No, please, you go.

MR. AL-MARAYATI: No, no, no.

MR. WEST: You guys are both way too polite.

MR. COLL: I'll be very brief to allow time. I comes back to a point Nathan in Fratelli Tutti, I think, which is that we have lost contact with the transcendent truth of all religions. And to that end, the

encyclical point itself, until we recover that as a result of interfaith dialogue, we will always be burdened by in the inability through purely political means to achieve the common good. So, I think that the way the challenge is on us as members of the faith communities, to recall that transcendent truth in unison and to honor it by our actions and our commitment to it.

MR. WEST: And Salam, you wanted to comment.

MR. AL-MARAYATI: Yeah, just as an example. I mean there are teachings of the faith that change throughout time. I remember a time when in our community, music was considered forbidden. And even going to a church or a synagogue was considered, not deviating from the faith but really pushing it on the brink. And look at us now. We have Muslim hip hop artists and so many other forms of music in our community.

So, when a person says my political opinions or personal opinions, any opinion, for that matter, is not aligned with the teachings of my faith, I would say, I think you need to rethink what the teachings for your faith are. And look at what Richard said, that the truth that the truth that comes, the transcendent truth that comes from the faith.

Which are, again, are common and simple. It's mercy, compassion, justice, human dignity, freedom. These are the truths that come from all of our faiths.

MR. WEST: Okay, thank you. We have two questions that are related. So, I'm going to provide both of them and ask for your comments. The first one is how do we seek unity and reconciliation with justice, and With Justice was capitalized, for those who have been excluded and oppressed. And then the second question which relates to this is, do you see examples of congregations of people of color and white congregations forming significant partnerships to deal with this issue of healing and reconciliation. Any of you, if you'd like to comment on that.

MR. VAUGN: I think we're seeing daily diverse congregations and congregations of color coming together to work on various needs of their own particular community. One of the things that we would like to see more of, that is, of course, today there are many blacks who attend the white church, happily. Unfortunately, that's a one-way street. We're not seeing whites coming over to black churches. Therein, again, we see a problem, but from the standpoint, congregations working together, black and white and/or -- I think we're doing a good job of that.

Now, my fear is, I think age-old word like humanism kind of slips in, because humanism, from its basic understanding, is man being predominant and leaving God out. And because of that, we are beginning to -- people wanting credits for themselves, man's sake, and not so much as for glory. I won't make it -- want me to preach some more?

MR. WEST: That was very good. Cassandra, any thoughts on your part on this or any examples of white and non-white congregations coming together in meaningful partnerships?

MS. BLEDSOE: Yes. One of the things that I wanted to say is that I heard some time ago that a doctor told me I was preached. And in his sermon, he said, God can do anything he wants to do. But God cannot be second. And I see through COVID that many of us came to the realization that we had placed our political views, our race, our location, and our beliefs first, before God. In every religion, no matter who you are, every faith says that God is first.

And in that time that we spent alone in our home, we were all forced to go to the internet. And that internet opened our world. So, many of us did not come to the houses of worship to the building, many of us went to the houses of worship through the internet. And you saw people from every faith, every nationality, white and black, Hispanic, people who were Asian, all come together on one accord, in unity, for prayer, for help, to assist with the COVID vaccination, to lend a hand to people who were hungry, to reach out to those who were homeless, to bring a meal to those who had no meal, if we talk about the marginalized.

And so, the beauty, if you could say in the midst of that all, is that once we were forced not to go to the building, we were able to put aside many of our boundaries and come together for the good of mankind.

MR. WEST: Perfect. Now here is a great question. Some of you might have thoughts on this. How might we involve young people in the rebuilding process? And I'm just curious if you think it has to take a different approach or different tactics to reach young people as opposed to older individuals.

MR. AL-MARAYATI: Well, I feel like we're not going to come to a resolution unless we do involve young people, because it is about the future. And each of us, again, I think all the faiths preach to us the need to build for the future. And so, we have to accommodate young people in terms of

culture, in terms of thinking, in terms of even speech. But, at the end of the day, I believe young people want to be involved in any movement for social justice. And that's central to our faith. We cannot have truth and reconciliation without justice. And young people are tired of religions that are more insular, are just becoming more and more isolated. And, in fact, become irrelevant. They want to be relevant in society. I believe there's still a search for God and spirituality among young people, even if they don't belong to any organized religion.

MR. WEST: Nathan, any thoughts from you in terms of how to reach young people?

MR. DIAMENT: I would just note that within the Jewish community, one of the interesting -- the Pew Research Center, just a few weeks ago brought out a major demographic survey of the Jewish community, like they've done for other faith communities. And it happened to show that the orthodox segment, the more traditional segment of the Jewish community, is actually the youngest segment now in the United States. That a third of American Jews, under the age of 20 or so, self-identify as orthodox.

And I think, in the case of the Jewish community, and I suspect the case, my colleagues can correct me if I'm wrong, in other communities, younger people are looking for authenticity, as much as anything else, and the faith communities that are able to engage younger folks with an authentic voice rooted in a faith, and, again, as we've discussed for the past while -- and a component of that is recognizing the dignity of difference can help draw them into this enterprise as well.

MR. WEST: Yeah, that's a great point. I agree with that emphasis on authenticity. That is really important to young people. I'm going to try for one more question. Someone has asked, what efforts are being made by progressive religious leaders to reach out to evangelicals on this topic of healing and reconciliation. A second part of that is, have evangelical leaders been receptive to having this kind of dialogue?

MR. MARAYATI: In fact, I was just at two evangelical churches in the past two weeks. And that's part of our program. We should not stereotype one another. We're all victims of stereotyping, but we also are culprits of stereotyping. There's this notion of each of our religions being monolithic and definitely for Christians, it's not monolithic. And for evangelical churches, there are many that want to engage, want to open up, want to have dialogue about these issues.

So, I was in Phoenix, Arizona and Orange County where we had people come together and there was, I have to say, it was very inspirational, and we need to do more of that and include them in this movement, this coalition that we have formed here. So, I believe that the voice of any religion is not represented by a single person, other than -- in some religions, there is that religious hierarchy in terms of theology. But in terms of community sentiment, in terms of opinion, we have to speak directly to them, rather than have the media or any other political vehicle speak for them.

MR. COLL: Yes, I want to strongly affirm that. I think that's absolutely right. The USCCB, along with a couple of Catholic organizations, is a member of an organization called the Circle of Protection, which is a group of over 20 Christian denominations, including the evangelicals, who are very (inaudible) and contribute greatly to the work of the Circle, which concentrates on anti-poverty programs and making sure that those in need, the marginalized communities, are being effectively ministered to by the government and by society as a whole.

And I think that comes back to the point made previously by other members of the panel. If we can avoid doctrinal controversy and focus on the core values of mutual support and assistance, I think we'll find common cause with many members of the faith community and certainly the evangelicals, I think, would be very happy to participate in that project as well.

MR. WEST: Perfect. Well, I think we're going to make that the benediction on this discussion. But I do want to thank Salam, Cassandra, Richard, Nathan, and Randy. All of you had terrific insights into this. I like the emphasis on the importance of listening to other people and engaging in dialogue as a way to facilitate healing and reconciliation.

And those of you who are interested in the paper John Allen and I wrote, you can find that on the Brookings website at Brookings.edu. It's our plans and some of our ideas on how to promote healing and reconciliation. So, thank you very much. We appreciate the audience tuning in. And, again, thank you to the panelists for taking the time to contribute your thoughts on this important topic. Thank you very much.

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