

Bridge/Work

Volume 2

Issue 1 *Send Money, Prayers, and People: The Evolving
Exchange Between Belief and Action in Global
Humanitarian Work*

Article 1

2016

Foreword

Caleb Rollins

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.valpo.edu/ilasbw>

Recommended Citation

Rollins, Caleb (2016) "Foreword," *Bridge/Work*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 1.
Available at: <http://scholar.valpo.edu/ilasbw/vol2/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bridge/Work by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.

“**S**ponsor a Child Today.” Advertisements featuring these words, alongside the photo of a child from somewhere outside the United States, sprawl across the tops of web pages, are presented by pastors in the middle of church services, and are shared by student groups on the campuses of their universities. These ads from faith-based international aid organizations target religious individuals with the hope of gathering resources for programmatic work, mostly done in the Global South. In response, thousands of Americans answer the global need they see in the ad with a donation to support humanitarian action. Global need--religious belief--humanitarian action.

Global need--religious belief--and humanitarian action. How are these related to one another, in theory and in practice? How might belief impact action—and how might action impact belief—in the evolving world of humanitarian work?

These complex questions were at the heart of the 2016 Bridge/Work Conference, hosted by the Institute for Leadership and Service at Valparaiso University, and titled “*Send Money, Prayers and People: The Evolving Exchange Between Belief and Action in Global Humanitarian Work*.” Attendees of this second annual conference explored how religious belief and value commitments shape and are shaped by humanitarian work at all levels. As an undergraduate research presenter in the 2015 Bridge/Work conference, and now the Planning Chair for the 2017 Bridge/Work Conference, I am delighted to present the proceedings of this conference as Volume 2 of *Bridge/Work: An Undergraduate journal connecting Action, Ideas, and the Meaningful Life*. The keynote address and undergraduate research presentations on the following pages prompt us to think beyond *the why* of our beliefs that lead us to humanitarian action. They oblige us to reflect on what our beliefs say about *the how* and *the who* of our international humanitarian work.

The spring conference began with a keynote address by Allison Youatt Schnable, Assistant Professor in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University Bloomington. Schnable shared the results of her research on “roughly 10,000 new nonprofit organizations set up since 1990.” These organizations represent what Schnable called “The Era of Do-it-Yourself Aid,” and use religion as *frames, networks, and modes of action* for their work. However, even with religion as a guide, Schnable warned of the peril of do-it-yourself aid organizations to “become more about satisfying Americans’ desires” than ensuring that it is “local people leading the charge.” Nowhere in her presentation did Schnable question that the leaders of do-it-yourself aid organizations want to help people. But she concluded with this: “The world needs more than warm hearts. It needs learned minds, patience, and the bigger ethical commitments that many of us find in religious traditions.”

It seems that the four student research presentations had already heeded Allison Schnable’s call that “the world needs more than warm hearts.” Their research began with this assumption and shared examples of several frames that guide *the how* and *the who* of our work.

Katie Bernabei ’16 opened by providing an example of the effective role of religion in framing humanitarian work, through her comparison of the use of the accompaniment model by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and the Roman Catholic Church. Bernabei presented accompaniment as a theologically-based model in which “both the population and the organization work together to form a solution.” Bernabei’s comparison of the work of Lutheran World Relief and Catholic Relief Services provided a concrete example of religion affecting the *how* and *the who* of humanitarian work as “the theology of each denomination has influenced the work that these humanitarian organizations are doing.”

Michelle Poindexter '19 critiqued existing frames for international development and reminded the audience of the importance of culture in international development. Poindexter opened by suggesting that existing aid models could benefit from “empowering the people of the recipient communities.” Still, through a study of household well-being in Ethiopia, Poindexter suggested that in any development work the goal should be “first and foremost to be to give greater agency to the aid recipients.” Without this frame, humanitarian aid, especially aid done by religious organizations, may unintentionally affect the culture of those who receive aid. Therefore, Poindexter concluded, religious organizations “must still adhere to the same principles of what makes aid successful.”

Lars Anderson '16 provided a secular frame for humanitarian work through his exploration of innovative space theory. Anderson began by introducing top-down and bottom-up strategies to innovative humanitarian solutions to social problems. Humanitarians can “reconcile the two worlds of humanitarian innovation” through the use of social innovation theory, which stresses the importance of participation: “If an innovative space is created impartially in the practice of participation, it is continually shaped by the beneficiary community.” In order to ensure we recognize who is participating in humanitarian action, Anderson concluded that humanitarians must continually “give or act in ways that enable the creation, but not command, of innovative spaces.”

Miranda Joebgen '16 concluded the undergraduate research presentations with a final example of the role of religion in framing social action, through her exploration of the role of Christianity in the support of apartheid in 20th century South Africa. Joebgen used the Dutch Reformed Church's (DRC) theological justification for apartheid to argue that the leaders, and not the congregation members of the DRC, shaped the beliefs of their church using Social Movement Framing. These methods of interpreting and framing life events “have the power to mobilize a large group of people to support a particular cause.” The DRC successfully mobilized people around apartheid, leading Joebgen to conclude with a stark reminder that religion and social movement framing “can be used for malicious purposes just as easily as [they] can be used for benevolent purposes.”

Although examining many different frames for global humanitarian work, the presenters seemed collectively to suggest that no matter *how* you choose to work, you must reflect on *who* is leading your work. In short, it cannot just be Americans, and their college students, sending money, prayers, and people. Local communities must have space to participate. Without local participation, all we have are warm hearts.

We hope you enjoy this second issue of *Bridge/Work*, and that the papers published within will inspire you to engage in questions of how--and with whom--you do humanitarian work.

Caleb Rollins, '15

2016 Bridge/Work Conference Panelist

2017 Bridge/Work Alumni Chair