

*Faith-Rooted Organizing:  
Mobilizing the Church in Service  
to the World*

January 2014

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## With so many injustices in the world, what are people of faith to do?

Faith-rooted organizing is defined and differentiated by faithfully pursuing two questions:

- How can we ensure that our organizing is shaped and guided in all ways by our faith?
- How can we organize people of faith to enable them to contribute all of their unique gifts and resources to the broader movement for justice?

Faith-rooted organizing examines and re-evaluates all of the classic components of organizing to explore the potential answers to these questions. It includes and reshapes each of the following core areas of organizing theory and practice:

- Goals: How will the world be different as a result of your organizing?
- Analysis: Where do you start from? What are the obstacles in your path? What resources do you have to address them?
- Strategies: How are you going to move from where you are to where you want to be? What special strategies will the faith community contribute to the movement?
- Recruitment: How will you motivate people to get off their couches, away from their computer and TV screens, and out the front door to join the front line of the struggle for justice in their community?
- Leadership development: How will you equip participants to discern common goals, analyze situations, and develop and implement strategies?
- Sustainability: How will you keep it all going for as long as it takes?

Faith-rooted organizing comprehensively and carefully examines all that faith brings to the table of change—from visions and dreams, to values, to scriptures and sacred texts, to symbols and rituals. Faith-rooted organizing recognizes all of the particular gifts and resources not only of individuals with faith but of the holistic spiritual communities where faith is nurtured and expressed. It is not designed to denigrate or replace other forms of organizing. It assumes a fully multisector, broad-based movement for justice, functioning like a body in which each part does what it does best. Faith-rooted organizing is designed to enable the faith “sector” to give its best to the whole.

– From the Introduction



**Alexia Salvatierra** is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. For over eleven years she was the executive director of Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice (CLUE).



**Peter Heltzel** is associate professor of systematic theology and director of the Micah Institute at New York Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Jesus and Justice*.

## Social Action Shaped by Faith

### What is “faith-rooted organizing?”

**Peter Heltzel:** We are experiencing a justice revival in the evangelical world, but very few people know what to do. Evangelical models of justice mission have typically fallen into a charity model (e.g., World Relief) or a community development model (Christian Community Development Association), but faith-rooted organizing offers a concrete and strategic alternative to Christian mission. Faith-rooted organizing gathers people for social change, tapping into the deepest energies of our faith traditions. While most ministries seek to put a bandage on the wounds of the world, faith-rooted organizing mobilizes people to transform the systems that are causing the injustice.

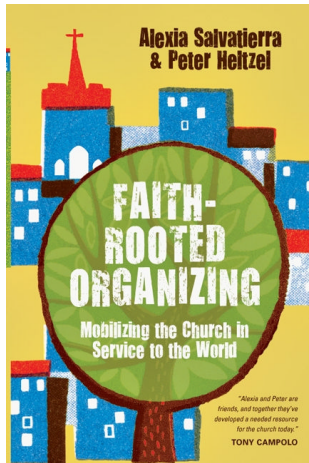
**Alexia Salvatierra:** Organizing is bringing people together to create systemic change in their communities; advocacy is a tool of organizing – using the gifts of democracy to participate in influencing public decision making. Faith-rooted organizing and biblically-based public policy advocacy engage Christians in organizing in a way that is completely guided and shaped by our faith and designed to enable us to contribute our unique gifts to the broader movement for justice.

### How did *Faith-Rooted Organizing* come about?

**Alexia:** I have been organizing faith leaders and congregations to do justice for thirty years; for the past ten years, I have focused primarily on evangelical leaders, congregations, parachurch networks and institutions. Over this time, I have seen the Holy Spirit building a movement throughout the evangelical world for “whole gospel discipleship,” which includes the full integration of justice ministry. The current challenge is that they are “all dressed up with nowhere to go;” they all want to do justice but lack models for how to do it in a way that is completely congruent with their faith. During eleven years of directing a statewide ministry in California, we built an original model for engaging people of faith in effective justice ministry that is truly faith-rooted.

### Who did you have in mind as you were putting the model together?

**Alexia:** Everywhere that I have taught and trained, participants have asked for my book. As I have lectured in academic contexts, professors have asked to use the book as a textbook. I wrote it to respond to that need. The book will give people who are trying to engage their congregation or parachurch group in justice ministry a fundamental understanding of how to do it more effectively and more faithfully. I particularly wrote it for young evangelicals



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who are more likely than their elders to have caught the wave of the Spirit around this call to justice and who tend to be passionate about effective action.

At a moment when I was really struggling with the task of writing, I realized that my heart's desire around this book was for my daughter and the young women of color that I had met through Intervarsity to have the benefit of my thirty years of lessons learned in their pursuit of meaningful ministry with the poor and oppressed. The end of each chapter is a little note to my daughter and to a particular young InterVarsity leader.

**What do each of you hope readers take away from *Faith-Rooted Organizing*?**

**Alexia:**

- Organizing and advocacy for justice is a core part of whole gospel discipleship.
- Christians are called to organize and advocate as if God is real and Jesus is risen, which is a different model for how to organize and advocate than the secular alternatives.
- Christians are called to contribute our unique gifts to the broader movement for justice in a way that has integrity and power.
- This has specific implications for how we motivate people to participate in doing justice, how we equip leaders for this purpose, how we envision our goals, how we analyze the opportunities and barriers that we face, the strategies that we use (how to minister to public decision makers in a way that is as wise as serpents and innocent as doves, etc.) and how we sustain the struggle for generations.

**Peter:**

- Jesus Christ was a faith-rooted organizer and offers a model through his own tactics and leadership formation of how we can organize today.
- Because Jesus rose from the dead on the third day, we move out in the resurrection power of God. It is vital that we have the prophetic courage to go into places of darkness and despair, and bring the light and hope of the Gospel.
- The texts, symbols and rituals of the "cultic" life of the church can be taken into the world to persuade people in power to enact more just, equitable and sustainable policies. This strategy works through tapping into folks' deep humanity with the power of moral authority.