

## **“Because of God’s Ideas”: Faith and Food in Milwaukee**

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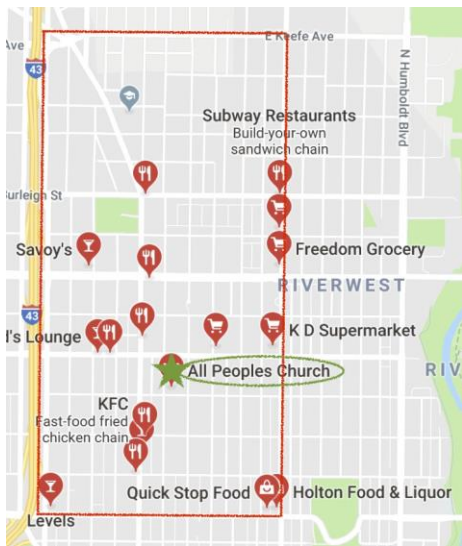
### **Abstract**

This paper’s aim is to highlight a unique example of food justice and community development in Milwaukee’s north side neighborhood of Harmabee. All Peoples Church provides free food to community residents via a weekly meal offering and food pantry. During the growing season these are supplied with fresh foods grown locally across the street in a city-owned vacant lot-turned urban farm. This paper sifts through the interrelated, yet individually unique concepts in contemporary food systems literature, as well as the notion of beloved community – a concept popularized by Dr. King – as a way to mitigate the issues of the urban crisis. Qualitative data principally facilitates this study, with some quantitative figures included in the introduction and the attached appendices document. The crux of this research project is to analyze the ways faith informs food justice work in faith-based community organizations and how community-supported agriculture acts not just as a food producer but also facilitates community connections and resilience.

**Introduction**

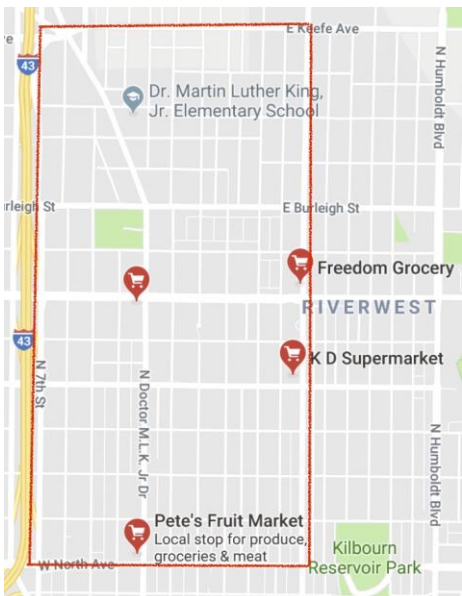
Many cities in the United States are grappling with food provision in central urban neighborhoods, while other parts of the city are rich in their ability to access the local food system – sometimes having more than one supermarket serving a given area. In contrast, many central city neighborhoods lack access sometimes to even a single major grocer. This is what

characterizes the food desert. The food desert exists in the midst of plentiful access throughout other parts of the city. Abundant access and lack thereof can be co-located very close to one another. This study focuses on one Milwaukee neighborhood: Harambee. Bounded by Keefe Avenue to the North, Holton Street to the East, North Avenue to the South, and I-43 to the West, this area exists just outside of downtown and to the immediate west of the gentrifying.



Map 1 (above) | Map 2 (below) – Source: Google Maps

Riverwest neighborhood (“North Side Harambee,” n.d.). Recently, the area just got its first supermarket – Pete’s Fruit Market – which opened two years ago off North Avenue; and Harambee is also home to numerous urban agriculture operations (Stone, 2017). This study focuses on one specific community-supported agricultural operation – All Peoples’ Church – and the uniqueness of faith-based community-supported agriculture.



All Peoples Church (APC) grows food in the

backdrop of a neighborhood that has seen disinvestment and crime grow in past decades. Throughout the city of Milwaukee as a whole, many residents still struggle with obtaining sufficient food as pointed out by Figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 in Appendix D, with many residents relying on food assistance programs (Davis, 2013, pp. 32-33). Many parts of the city still lack food access and food security, with organizations using urban farming to provide food to local residents. Harambee is a neighborhood that has an insufficient number of conventional food outlets providing *fresh organic produce* (see Maps 1 & 2 above) – Pete’s Fruit Market is the only sufficient source of these things, with price still being a barrier to access. Using qualitative methodology – interviews and field notes – APC was researched to examine the following: How faith and religion inform the food justice work in a specific neighborhood that is inadequately served by the current food system, and to investigate how the urban garden functions as a community gathering space and food source. Throughout the interviews, the central role religion, spirituality, and faith play in not just the church but in the actual growing of food became very clear. Not only this, but also another theoretical concept present in community development literature was evidenced by APC’s work, that of beloved community.

Faith-based urban agriculture is an understudied area in urban agriculture and food justice literature. Secular urban agriculture provides fresh food, but faith-based groups provide more than just food. As one interviewee stated: we are trying to “not just grow food, but also trying to grow people” (X. Thomas, personal communication, May 8, 2019). The ‘community’ in community-supported agriculture seems to carry more weight and importance in faith-based groups. This gap in scholarship deserves more attention since the goal of community-supported urban agriculture is not just to provide food, but to facilitate community development reflecting

the values and interests of the community being served (as cited in Blättel-Mink et al., 2016, p. 416). The methods used in this abbreviated study the best to employ. Given the social and spiritual nuances being analyzed, quantitative methodology would not be necessarily appropriate. Interviews and field notes were determined to be the best methodology to utilize. However, even though there exists a dearth of discussion with respect to faith-based food provisio, the literature on food provision in food deserts is abundant. Specifically, much scholarship has been dedicated to the interrelated, yet individually specific concepts of food access, food security, and food justice and food sovereignty.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Food Access & Food Security**

Previous research on food deserts and ways to combat them has resulted in a plethora of findings and discussion around the various conceptual theories that inform local much food work. Using the USDA’s definition, food deserts are described as “... parts of the country vapid of fresh fruit, vegetables, and other healthful whole foods, usually found in impoverished areas. This is largely due to a lack of grocery stores, farmers’ markets, and healthy food providers” (USDA Defines Food Deserts, n.d.). Although this complex web of discussion is filled with interconnected concepts, each individual component is unique and distinguishable in its own right. Here, the related ideas of food access and food security are discussed.

Food access can be considered a doubled-edged sword. As Saadeh (2015) cites in their case study of urban agriculture in North Minneapolis “The United States Department of Agriculture defines food access as the ability of the consumer to make choices about food, recognizing that low-income people may face greater barriers...” (p. 28). Essentially, access

means choice. But the mere existence of choice does not capture the entire picture. What kinds of choices? How many choices? If a community has 12 fast food outlets and not a single fresh food outlet, is that considered access? Other researchers would argue for a more complete picture that captures the underlying issues causing poor food access. Block et al. (2012) cite food scholar Alison Hope-Alkon's 2008 work that definitively states that merely adding more food outlets does not solve the underlying issues of poverty and disinvestment (p. 204). In sum, food access is determined by a variety of criteria. Food access is the ability of residents to obtain food, but related to this is the food desert – an area lacking access *to fresh, healthy* foods. Lack of access = food desert. But food access is not everything. It is the position of this author that a definition of food access includes access to healthy, fresh food. Highly related to access is the notion of food security, which, like access, is tied to underlying community characteristics.

Food security has gone through as variety changes in its definition. As Anderson and Cook (1999) describe, food security first appeared in the 1960s – it has 32 definitions between 1975 and 1991. In 1974 the World Food Conference focused in on production and quantity, which is understandable as this was around the same time global fears of overpopulation were increasingly prevalent. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century shifts in definitions for food access occurred, namely including food access as well as production as components of security. In the 1990s, food security was seen in parallel with physical health (p. 142-143). As cited by the two authors, the Life Sciences Research Office defined food security in 1990.

[Food security is] access by all peoples at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life and includes at a minimum: a) the ready availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods, and b) the assured ability to acquire acceptable foods in socially acceptable ways...(Anderson and Cook, 1999, p. 143).

Clearly, food access and food security are intertwined. Food security cannot exist without access. Meenar and Hoover (2012) offer a slightly more complete outlook on food security by describing food insecurity. “By food insecurity, we not only mean the presence of hunger, but also the lack of physical and economic access to safe and nutritious foods that meets the dietary needs and cultural preferences of people of all socioeconomic and racial backgrounds” (p. 144). This definition explicitly includes food access (physical and economic) and touches on physical health, but it also includes a race and class component, which other definitions have lacked. Mahadevan and Hoang (2016) define food security as four-fold: food availability (physical access), food accessibility (economic access), food utilization (healthiness of foodstuffs) and vulnerability (p. 182). The varying definitions of food access and food security, often coined by individual authors, can be difficult to understand given they play off of one another. This paper argues for an integrated definition of the two concepts: food security as food access (both physical and economic) and vice versa.

### **Food Sovereignty & Food Justice**

Food justice and food sovereignty, although related, are more distinct from one another. This is mainly because of their origins. Food sovereignty can be traced back to the peasant movement La Via Campesina, focused at increased peasant control over food provision in the midst of neoliberal market encroachment on their food growing practices. This concept has a seven-fold definition according to La Via Campesina: 1) food as a human right, 2) the right to land, 3) environmental sustainability, 4) food self-sufficiency, 5) end of hunger, 6) right to peace and 7) agency over food-related decisions and decision-making processes (as cited in Saadeh, 2012, p. 31). This is a very specific theoretical concept with multiple facets oriented towards

low-income people. Food sovereignty is more so focused on large-scale foundational change that re-orientes food systems from a producer-to-consumer, market-based model to a more egalitarian consumers-as-producers type of model that is less tied to the private market. This concept emphasizes local control over production and food decision making processes and is described by Paul Nicholson as “an alternative to neoliberal policies...the right of citizens to determine food and agricultural policies, and to decide what and how to produce and who produces (11)” (as cited in Saadeh, 2012, p. 31). Although food sovereignty is more transformational, this and food justice are similar in calling for changes in food system structure to a more local and ethical system.

Food justice’s origins are somewhat parallel to the environmental justice movement. Saadeh (2012) cites esteemed food justice scholars Robert Gottlieb and Anupama Joshi’s “Food, Health, and the Environment,” which outlines food justice as encompassing growing food locally, promoting environmental sustainability, economic development, access to healthy foodstuffs, appropriate cooking of food, nutrition and relief from hunger and systemic oppression (p. 29). The main unique identifier of food justice, and the central parallel to food sovereignty is that they both aim to combat systemic oppression. As Alkon (2012) notes, black people have been largely excluded from the emerging green economy. She emphasizes the dangers of ignoring the importance of race in a racially stratified context – in this case West Oakland, a very segregated city. There is a tendency to view food as a basic and shared part of life. Yet, cultural differences abound and one group of people’s notion of ‘fresh food’ food may not be appropriate for another. Alkon also points to the lack of low-income access to the green economy’s resources, calling out the lack of local organic food in communities of color. Alkon’s view of

food justice boils down to promoting black spaces and fulfillment of needs within the black community by combatting historical inequities and racism still present in the modern food system, all while promoting environmental sustainability (Alkon, 2012, pp. 94-122). Food justice differs from sovereignty mainly due to the fact that the latter is rooted in the specific context of peasant farmer movements in the Global South. Translating this to the developed Global North is difficult, given that resistance in the Global South was to the North’s neoliberal encroachment into peasant farms. The main objectives of food sovereignty get lost in countries already committed to neoliberalism, such as the U.S. Food justice, on the other hand, seeks to “work around the larger food system in small ways to provide communities food access” (Clendenning et al., 2015, pp. 165-170). How, though, are these concepts implemented and employed in the real world? Community-supported agriculture has proven to be an effective way to do this, especially in urbanized areas.

### **Community-Supported Agriculture**

Community-supported agriculture in urban areas can be a highly effective method to enhance food security/access, food sovereignty and food justice. This is a localized version of food production that aims to do what the name suggests: support communities by growing food that community wishes to produce. Community-supported agriculture “showcases a social practice in which producers and consumers joining together to realize agricultural production and supply (as cited in Blättel-Mink et al., 2016, p. 415). What is unique about this practice is that it has an anti-neoliberal goal of de-commodification of foodstuffs. The harvesting and distribution of food are not predetermined by market forces, but by individual and collective needs. What is also different about community-supported agriculture (CSA) is the *community* participation



aspect of it – transforming the food system from a producer-to-consumer model to a producer-as-consumer model whereby members of a CSA operation produce and consume the foodstuffs grown. Lastly, solidarity is key in CSA operations. Participants of CSAs emphasize a ‘we are all in this together’ approach that localizes and grounds their food system in the community and place within which they exist (Blättel-Mink et al., 2016, pp. 418-419). Next, we examine the importance of faith-based community organizations and the emergence of spirituality in alternative food production practices such as CSA.

### **Faith-Based Food Production**

Food provision is an essential and a basic element of being able to live. In the midst of plenty and abundance there exists, even in the wealthy nations of the Global North, a serious absence of healthy and fresh food – especially in urban neighborhoods. Over-excessive consumption persists juxtaposed to inadequate food quantity and quality. As Whitey Sanford (2014) argues, “Our choices about what we eat and how we grow our food are not sustainable nor are they equitable. Any by us, I mean those of us who populate the Global North and have the means to make choices...” (p. 977). The crux of it is this: our food system is broken and it will be harder to fix the longer we stay entrenched in the current norm. Religion calls out the failings and vulnerabilities in our food system in ways that name them explicitly: greed, desire and gluttony equate to consumption, waste and excess in our food production and consumption practices. Religion also emphasizes an acceptance of limits – something neoliberal food systems seek to always push – limits of the environment and limits of capitalism itself. Religion can offer ways to visualize the global food crisis – stating it as a crisis of human conscience and something

within our own control (Sanford, 2014, pp. 986-989). Other literature emphasizes the linkages between faith and food.

Not only does food serve various functions in different religions, but numerous religions also have philosophies of caring for the poor and vulnerable. Faith-based organizations “have social and cultural capital that make them adept at engaging in social justice work” (Ligrani and Niewolny, 2016, p. 2). One of the main themes to come out of Ligrani and Niewolny’s 2016 study of faith-based community food work was the notion of participants being called to serve – seeing food work as an extension of their faith and their spirituality (p. 8). Community-supported agriculture is seen as a spiritual activity that serves one’s community. As Blättel-Mink et al. (2016) describe, emphasis is placed emotion and empathy, taking care of the land and nature (God’s creation). An alternative value system informs these faith-based community food operations that is focused on individuals. Instead of focusing on the big-picture (the systemic failures of the food system) the faith-based perspective focused on individual circumstance and improvement – small actions having big impacts (2016, p. 419). This ties into a key theoretical framework that informs much of these groups, although perhaps not explicitly. Much faith-based food work can be viewed as being grounded in beloved community, a concept popularized by Martin Luther King Jr.

### **Beloved Community**

In reference to the issues present in U.S. society at the time, Dr. King spoke about the creation of a new type of community, which called for communalism and nurturing of people – a beloved community. As Jensen and King (2017) state in their examination of King’s espousal of this new notion of community rooted in love, appreciation, caring and respect.

What he embraced was...a society of friends, a colloquy of equals, a practice of concern, caring a giving – in which each person had standing, each stone in place, none rejected, in a rising tumult of aspiring mutuality. Obviously King’s construct of community has a strikingly religious edge and aura...His notion of beloved community implicated ambiguous cleavage between two cities, terrestrial and celestial, between two referents, real and ideal (pp. 16-17).

This essentially boils down to striving for a society in which all people can exist freely, free from alienation and interconnected to one another. Constantly striving for utopia, knowing that it will never be ‘reached,’ as there is always room for improvement. King even calls out food disparities in the U.S., stating “Let us be dissatisfied until every [person] can have food and material resources for his body...” (as cited in Jensen and King, 2017, p. 19). Although popularized by Dr. King, Howard Thurman was instrumental in developing the notion of a beloved community, along with American philosopher Josiah Royce. The two repeatedly emphasized loyalty, the working out of disagreements and a harmony that transcends all people and backgrounds. This concept of beloved community boils down to uniting diverse people in common experiences – experience that overrule competing individual ideologies (Jensen and King, 2017, pp. 19-22). Highly integral to this is the notion of trust – for without trust community cannot truly exist. Cindy Johal (2001), in her study of faith-based community organizations in British Columbia highlighted four common themes in establishing trust and community in faith-based organizations: 1) building relationships, 2) conversations and a sense of belonging, 3) leading by example and 4) participants being invested in and caring about growth in membership and program development. Several sub-themes emerged from her study such as: feeling welcomed, friendliness, trust, belonging, conversations and feeling comfortable (pp. 55-56). These are crucial in community development, and community is an essential and

indispensible component of *community*-supported agriculture. Such practices are abundant in Milwaukee, a city that is no stranger to food deserts and the setting of this research project.

### **The Milwaukee Context**

The city of Milwaukee is no stranger to food deserts or food insecurity. Food security is linked very closely to other community characteristics and individual circumstances. As Kirkpatrick (2011) notes housing circumstances – the price of housing for a family or individual as a percentage of total income – often determine food security. If too much income needs to be spent on housing, very little can be spent on healthy organic and nutritious foodstuffs (p. n/a). Kirckpatrick and Tarasuk discovered, household food insecurity was inversely associated with income – the more money someone makes, the more secure they are in their food access and choices. If a household spends 30% or more of their income had higher odds for food insecurity (Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk, 2011, p. 287). In Milwaukee in 2013 60.3% of respondents to a door-to-door community survey done y the Social Development Commission reported as being served by food stamps, and 14.3% of household respondents reported as having “sometimes enough food” in the same year, with 8% of children forgoing breakfast 4-6 days per week [See Appendix D] (Davis, 2013, pp. 32-33). Related to this is the fact that that 52.1% of respondents said they struggle with providing a down payment or security deposit for housing needs [see Appendix D] (Davis, 2013, p. 50). The neighborhood setting of this study is Harambee, a north side community. Today, 8 in 10 residents are Black, and 1 in 10 is Latino (Urban Anthropology, Inc., n.d., p. 16). Being a majority, minority neighborhood, culturally appropriate food is critical in this area. As shown by the maps in the introduction of this paper, food outlets abound, but the community only recently has gained access to a fresh food supermarket in September 2017

(Stone, 2017, p. n/a). Although this is a step to pulling this neighborhood out the food desert, there still exists a lack of economic access, as price can be a persistent barrier. Urban agriculture can play a significant role here, and as Julson (2019) notes, Milwaukee is a city rich in urban farming history and expertise (p. n/a). Building more outlets simply is not enough, although it is a step in the right direction. This is the gap that community-supported agriculture and food justice seeks to fill, by working around the current food system to provide food to those who need it most. CSA produces healthy, organic food in a hyper local way that promotes food system change. This is where All Peoples Church fits in.

### **Methodology**

The central aim of this abbreviated research study is to investigate the role that neighborhood faith-based groups play in solving the failures of the conventional food system through community-supported agriculture. More specifically, this project consists of two central research questions: 1) what is the interplay between faith/religion and food justice in faith-based urban agricultural operations? 2) How do community gardens – in this case the Darius Simmons Garden at APC in Harambee – function as a community gathering place providing not just food but community social development as well, enhancing the communities they serve with food and social resources? The principle hypothesis at the outset of this investigation is that faith informs food justice by adding a supernatural, beyond-human element to food work that is rooted in religion and belief in God and that the work done by these groups – using All Peoples Church as an example – falls in line with the concept of beloved community.

The methods behind this research study consist mostly of qualitative investigation. This was deemed to be the most appropriate method for a variety of reasons, one of which is that faith

is a complex and nuanced concept. Quantitative data is best at investigating and finding out empirical truths, and although numbers are a key component of social research, there are certain areas where numbers either should be juxtaposed to qualitative data or relying entirely on qualitative datasets. Some researchers favor the latter approach as they view the social world as too complex, nuanced and diverse to be understood purely with numeric findings (Greener, 2011, p. 56). For these reasons, qualitative methods were principally employed. However, numeric data figures obtained from secondary sources contextualize the food work done by APC – providing a backdrop outlining the food desert and the need for food justice and improved food security/access. This information was included in the preceding sections above. Additionally, it was made clear to APC that this was an academic research study. Research activities were not covert in nature. Overt research was conducted in order to be transparent and ethical throughout the research process (Greener, 2011, pp. 142-156). The transparency of the research process provided a good working relationship between the researcher and the researched. Specifically, qualitative data consisted of interviews, field notes and the church’s website.

### **Data & Data Collection**

In-person interviews, with the exception of one phone interview, provided a rich set of data on subject such as the extent of the food work done by All Peoples Church (APC), their urban agriculture operations, connections to other faith-based entities and urban farming organizations as well as other emergent themes. Interviews are most appropriate because they provide a descriptive narrative, which is a useful tool to observe and see food justice play out in the real world (Dixon, 2013, p. n/a). In addition to this, field notes were taken during a volunteer session at a weekly meal offering put on by APC every Wednesday. This gave insight into the

day-to-day operations of the church as well as how many people utilize the meal offering and associated bible study. Along with the meal offering and attached bible study, the church also hosts a community food pantry the same. Field notes from a Wednesday meal offering/food pantry supplemented interview data. The church's website, along with interview data and field notes, were coded in order to flesh out common themes and concepts present in interviews, field notes and the official website of APC. A small amount of supplemental quantitative data, which was employed in the first half of this paper, was used to contextualize the findings coming out of the qualitative investigation.

Three in-person interviews were conducted using snowball sampling. An initial phone call was made to All Peoples Church in February to make an introduction. From this phone call, the church's office manager pointed me to Pastor Lindsay, the new pastor at APC. After setting up a phone call with Pastor Lindsay, I scheduled a time for us to meet at APC in Harambee to make face-to-face introductions. Throughout these various phone calls, it was make clear that this was for a student research project, ensuring openness and transparency throughout the entirety of the research project. Upon arriving at APC, I met with Pastor Lindsay and we talked briefly before she put me to work serving food. The observations from this experience are included in the findings in the next section and in the attached appendices. Pastor Lindsay then facilitated the next contact and the first person to be interviewed – Susan, a longtime volunteer with the church and the go-to woman for the garden and garden-related programming. From the interview with Susan, she connected me with Pastor Tommy, who is a longtime staff member at APC and the church's Neighborhood Minister. He then facilitated the third and final interview with Xavier, the Youth Minister, who gave insight as to the youth programs and overarching

motives of the church’s food work in the neighborhood. Interviews, field notes and the APC website were coded establishing initial open codes and further summarizing these into axial codes and eventually a core concept – these will be discussed in the findings section of this paper. All of this was conducted in 2019 at All Peoples Church in the Harambee neighborhood of Milwaukee’s north side.

### **Limitations**

A few limitations exist when conducting qualitative research, namely time. Time was a limiting factor in being able to secure interview dates and times. Since the Church is only open on three weekdays out of each week – Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday – and only open until 2:00 PM those days, scheduling conflicts abounded between the myself and the staff at APC. The time allotted for the research project was also a limitation in that it pressured timeliness over some more thorough investigation. Another limiting factor was the fact that this study was conducted during the off-season. In order to gain a better understanding of the food work done by All Peoples, this study would ideally have been conducted during the growing season to get a picture of the community involvement and participation in the garden and how much of the garden’s produce goes to the meal offering and food pantry. In the future, a research study like thus would have had more interviews. However, this research study sought to overcome these challenges by including actual experiences during a volunteering session at APC and in-depth interviews with APC staff. The data obtained from these investigations is rich and highly informative, attempting to mitigate the limitations outlined above.

### **Results & Findings**

#### **All Peoples’ Website**



All Peoples Church’s website lists food justice as a central component of their work. Their website references the bible as a key component informing their Wednesday programming: “The prophet Isaiah calls out to God’s people to ‘come and eat!’ Isaiah invites us to ‘Seek God where God is to be found.’ This passage inspires the ministries we provide” (“All Peoples Church,” n.d.). Because food justice is mentioned outright on the church’s website, APC’s food work is analyzed through this theoretical lens. The website also emphasizes inclusivity and welcoming all people from all sorts backgrounds and identifies APC as the location of Saint Vincent DePaul’s separate meal offerings in addition to their own Wednesday programming. The church’s calendar lists the weekly food pantry and community lunch offering every Wednesday, KWTS – Kids Working To Succeed – on Saturday and various high school youth groups and community worship services (“All Peoples Church,” n.d.). The website was visited and explored prior to meeting APC staff and volunteers in-person.

### **Field Notes**

Field note observations were highly informative. About thirty-to-thirty-five residents showed up for the meal offering in the afternoon. Food offered at the meal serving included a range of options such as fried chicken and deviled eggs, garden salad, deserts and fruit. Because there were not enough of certain items, frozen pizzas were also made along with hotdogs and sausages. Due to a high number of people showing up, this extra food had to be made and added to the offering, but each person walked away with at least one, and for many, two plates of food. After the meal offering is the voluntary bible study, where residents discuss their faith with APC staff [see Appendix C for complete field notes]. After this, more people arrived to take part in the food pantry. What makes this food pantry stand out is that APC staff asks residents what they

would like out of the options that they have as opposed to giving them a pre-allotted bag of food. They also try to provide as many options as possible with the donations they have. They will supply the pantry, as well as the meal offering with produce grown from the nearby urban garden during the growing season, but this visit was during the off season. The pantry is stocked with certain frozen protein items such as chicken, fish, turkey, bacon, sausage, and eggs. Additional items include pasta, corn, beans, soup, coffee, cereal, rice, canned veggies and other staples. People are asked: “which would you prefer?” and are then at liberty to pick, as opposed to other pantries that have more of a ‘take it or leave it’ approach. Families are given more than individuals and each person leaves with about 2-4 bags of food, depending on their specific needs. Along with the field notes, interviews proved insightful as to the motivations behind the food work at All Peoples Church.

### **Interviews**

The first interview conducted was with Susan, Garden Educator & Ministry House volunteer with APC. She is involved with the garden activities and helps coordinate the planting and harvesting of crops. She has taken the lead on the food pantry as well. Not only is Susan embedded in food work, but also she is involved in housing – purchasing and restoring six properties and renting them out to community members and members of the congregation at APC at a reduced, below-market rate. This allows folks to stay in the neighborhood that otherwise could not, and as Kirckpatrick and Tarasuk (2011) have pointed out, housing circumstances play a significant role determining food security. Susan later facilitated an interview with Pastor Tommy, who was the second to be interviewed. He serves as the Neighborhood Minister for APC and is also heavily involved in the food work done at the

church. His central motivations behind the work done at APC are faith-driven and he identifies soul food and the quality of food as being important tenets for the meal offering. He describes the bible study as an extension of nurturing the soul in conjunction with the soul food. APC is deliberate about providing food for the mind, body and spirit, but also household necessities like toiletries – something other food pantries do not traditionally do. Pastor Tommy then made a connection with Xavier, the Youth Minister who has been involved with APC since he was about seven/eight years old. Xavier leads the youth outreach programs and he serves as the Director of KWTS – Kids Working To Succeed, a program unique to APC. Out of these interviews, as well as the website and field notes, came a plethora of emergent themes and concepts that point to food justice and beloved community as central informative concepts that facilitate the food work and community development work done by All Peoples.

### **Coding Results**

Codes from the website and field notes included a variety of topics and subject areas. The axial codes to come out of the website and the field note observation included: providing a welcoming environment, soul food, food justice, friendliness, service to one’s community and faith and religious teachings. These codes were also prevalent in the interview process. From the three interviews conducted, two in-person and one over the phone, initial open codes included safety, community support, volunteering, challenges, resistance, faith, religion, food justice, urban farming and food access/security. These codes were then lumped into the axial categories of community development, issues and challenges, faith, food provision and food deserts. These codes were all analyzed and distilled into a core conceptual emergent theme: there exists connections between faith, food provision and urban agriculture in a fresh food desert, and how

faith and urban agriculture promoted community development and food justice. Intersecting themes observed in the literature review process emerged from the data obtained, highlighting beloved community and food justice as integral concepts that speak to the faith and religious belief of those at All Peoples Church.

### **Beloved Community & APC**

Interview data pointed to food justice as being a secondary component to the purpose of the Darius Simmons Garden at All Peoples Church. All (three) interview participants mentioned security and safety as being primary purposes of the garden space and kids as being central to that. Each of the people interviewed had previously worked either with at-risk youth or done youth ministry work in their lifetimes. One interview participant mentioned that the garden plays a large role in fostering community friendship and social networks, that in-turn enhances community connectedness and safety. Another called the community (staff, volunteers and congregation members) at All Peoples "like a family" and that the principle motive of the programming at APC is rooted in "not just growing food but also trying to grow people" (X. Thomas, personal communication, May 8, 2019). Rarely does APC turn anybody away who is seeking food and assistance, only in certain instances when people were combative and/or intoxicated has anyone ever been asked to leave. And even so, those same people come back in a different headspace, returning to APC for food and spiritual growth. This is directly in line with beloved community and confirms the initial hypothesis proposed in the methods section of this paper.

As evidenced by Jensen & King (2017), beloved community is focused on acceptance and inclusion of a diversity of peoples. Beloved community is characterized by love, social

networks, friendship and understanding (Inwood, 2009). As evidenced by their partnerships with schools and the KWTS program, All Peoples tries to instill similar notions of interdependence, love, social networks and community connectedness, instilling – whether knowingly or not – the concept of beloved community in its congregation, Harambee residents and other Milwaukee residents they come in contact with. As stated by one participant, the garden tries to improve the safety and social connections within the neighborhood.

It’s running a garden so the children have a safe place to be. And that is primary, even over food justice that is primary, giving them good tools to live lives that are long and healthy[...]the secondary would be the food justice because, you know, we take care of our children first, what they eat isn’t going to help them in they’re getting in trouble and in the wrong places (S. Holty, personal communication, April 11, 2019).

This fits very much in line with beloved community. Taking care of people and their personalities first, regardless of background or current life situation. This acts to build robust community relationships that knit the social fabric of the neighborhood together and ground residents into a collective understanding of their lives. Related to this, is the theory of food justice that actively informs APC’s food work.

### **Food Justice & APC**

Food justice, as outlined in the literature of this paper, is rooted in repairing the failings of the conventional food system, cooking appropriate food, access to healthy and nutritious foodstuffs and combatting systemic oppression (Saadeh, 2016, p. 29). All Peoples Church seeks to promote food justice by providing soul food that is organic and healthy, promoting dietary improvements in the community and healthy living by the way of community-supported agriculture. The church’s website even explicitly mentions the words “food justice” (“All

Peoples Church,” n.d.) as a motivator for the work they do. Interview respondents highlighted hunger relief and reduction of poverty as a motivator for the food justice work done at APC, something food justice calls on advocates to actively do. Food justice seeks to repair past inequities and abuses faced by people of color in the conventional food system of mono-crop agriculture and large-scale industrial food production and distribution. The private market has largely failed poor people and poor people of color in particular (Clendenning, et al., 2015, p.170). Another central tenet of food justice is culturally appropriate food, allowing people to eat what they desire in a healthy, accessible and appropriate way. APC’s provision of soul food does just and the food pantry also aims to be more just and appropriate in serving the community’s needs. Not only do they allow people using the food pantry to shop around for what they would like most, but they also allow youth in the community to decide what types of produce they want to grow in the garden. This gives residents a degree of agency and control over their food system that they would otherwise be lacking if they relied entirely on the conventional food system. In order for APC to have as big of an impact in the neighborhood, “everything we grow at the [...] Darius Simmons Garden, is given away for free” (S. Holty, personal communication, April 11, 2019). Free healthy, organic food is the epitome of accessible. And the fact that it is distributed in conjunction with food obtained from the conventional food system points to APC’s food work as being in line with food justice’s working in small ways to increase access and security. By seeking to reduce hunger and poverty and combat Harambee’s fresh food desert, APC works to instill food justice in the community, but with their own spiritual twist with a version of food justice that is grounded in religious belief and spiritual teaching.

### **The Role of Faith**

What truly separates All Peoples Church’s food work from that of ‘secular urban agriculture’ operations is that it is grounded and informed deeply by religious belief, which reinforces the commitment that volunteers, staff and community members have to the garden and the food pantry. Each participant in the interviews mentioned that they got into this work because something was missing, or that God was specifically calling on them to serve their community in this way. Participants gave varying answers to the question ‘how did you get into this kind of work?’ ranging from “God led me here” to referencing “God’s ideas” and God’s plan. One participant even went so far as to describe the food justice work as “standing in the middle of that [food desert] to try and provide food that will sustain a family,” referencing a Bible passage about teaching a man to fish – in this case, teaching people to provide for themselves and each other (X. Thomas, personal communication, May 8, 2019). What stands out about All Peoples Church’s garden, meal offering and food pantry is that there is a supernatural connotation to it. APC staff view the work they do as a direct and necessary extension of their faith and religious belief. Growing food and feeding people is seen as vital to their spiritual practice and something that God is calling them to do and a vital component of being a good steward of God’s creation (both people and nature).

In reference to a pollination pot program where residents put out native flowers on their porches to encourage bees to return to the neighborhood and pollinate the crops, one participant specifically referenced God as calling on all of us to be good stewards of our land, and the garden as a key component of that (S, Holty, personal communication, April 11, 2019). Not only this, but they see the larger community work as an extension of their faith as well. KWTS is a program, which pays kids to do work in the garden and also teaches them work skills for future

employment. This extends the feeling of ownership of the garden not just to adults but to the youth in the community as well, promoting generational turnover. The Youth Minister started out as a youth in the congregation and has since grown to instill that same inspiration and commitment he felt in the youth of today. Staff and volunteers view this community development work as God working through them. Although this stands in stark contrast to the secular urban agriculture scene, the church knits itself into this community as well, partnering with other neighborhood urban farming operations. Yet still, faith seems to be the main driver here with APC boasting partnerships with 18 different churches for its food pantry program. Faith and religious belief serves as the central motivator for APC’s food justice work. When asked about the connections between faith and food/food justice, one participant’s answer stood out.

...when we come to a need to be fed in the Bible, Jesus never skips over it lightly. The feeding of the 5,000 with the loaves and fish. We can be mesmerized by the, whether you want to call it a miracle or magic of it. But really the point was: first, before we talk anymore or do anything else, let's get them fed or let's get them healed or let's get them resurrected or, you know, you know what I mean? If there's a physical there, first care for the physical needs. And so I really, really like that one a lot. And that's really where my focus tends to be in, um, first feed. And then we will keep working on faith (S. Holty, personal communication, April 11, 2019).

Another participant stated that it is critical to view “food with the same faith as when you drop down on your knees and pray” (X. Thomas, personal communication, May 8, 2019). Much like Sanford (2014) said, “faith-based perspectives provide alternate criteria to both evaluate the food we eat and how it was produced...” (978). The connection between faith and being fed is clear – they are inseparable in the eyes of those at APC. It is this connection that separates All Peoples’ food work from the other secular food work done across the city.



## **Discussion & Conclusion**

When combating food access/security in food deserts, looking for strategies to fight food insecurity, malnutrition and to at the same time enhance community social networks and community resilience, city leaders should try to get out of the conventional food system way of thinking. Although conventional food outlets have value and serve a purpose in food deserts, what is really needed is broad access/security to food; this cannot always be accomplished by adding supermarkets or even farmers markets for that matter. As Alison Hope-Alkon (2012) notes, Black people are often excluded from organic/green spaces due to lack of culturally appropriate food provided, or the more overt omnipresence of white people (pp. 94-122). Cities should consider and utilize the existing social capital and community relationships that are present in churches and other faith-based institutions. These groups can not only provide food via vacant lots – like what All Peoples has done – but through providing food in such and accessible and grassroots way also invest in and make communities more resilient socially and spiritually. By having the attachment of faith and religious belief as a motivator, these groups’ volunteers have more of a feeling of investment in the work and in the communities they serve, as opposed to other urban farms which may or may not struggle with volunteer turnover.

To return back to the central research questions of this paper: faith informs food justice by motivating its implementation and development through religious teaching and belief, and it informs beloved community by espousing the same concepts of love, kinship, acceptance of a diversity of people and harmony. As one interview participant noted, “Faith keeps everything rolling” (T. Kirk, personal communication, April 24, 2019). The actual physical garden space serves not just as a food-producing space, but also as an outdoor classroom, neighborhood and a

coalescing point where the community comes together in support of a common goal: feeding themselves nutritious food they get to choose and grow. All Peoples, through its faith-embedded model of sustainable local food system and urban agriculture, fosters food justice and beloved community in Harambee, providing fresh food, education, spiritual growth and healing, food security/access and community resilience. This is an area in urban agriculture and food justice research that deserves more investigation. While the benefits to urban agriculture and food justice are known, less is known about the impact and role faith and religious belief plays in these activities that take place in faith-based religious organizations. It is the position of this paper that more research is done on the subject of faith-based community-supported agriculture, specifically, what the reactions, perceptions and feelings are of those who use the services in neighborhoods considered to be fresh food deserts. The uniqueness of faith-based community-supported agriculture merits further research and discussion as to its role in urbanized communities that have suffered over decades of disinvestment and lack of food security and access. Religion can inform food justice in critical ways that promote changes to how society views food, shifting its perception as a commodity to a right of all peoples.

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