

American Evangelicalism and the Uyghur Crisis: A Call to Interfaith Advocacy

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Author's Notes

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Disclaimer: All names of Uyghurs within this thesis have been alerted to protect their identities.

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I. INTRODUCTION

“We are all human. I wish they felt my pain, my mother and fathers' pain because they also have mothers and are somebodies brother. See the humanity inside of us. Just see the humanity and don't let Uyghurs die. Because humanity is dying in Xinjiang, so we are dying. So, let's help each other as human beings. Please help us” (Iman).

This was the cry of my friend when I asked her what she would call Christians to do regarding the Uyghur crisis. As I write, Uyghur Muslims, including Kazakhs and other Turkic peoples, are being held in concentration camps in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region of China without reasonable cause. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum recently labeled the persecution of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other Turkic people a crime against humanity, emphasizing the Chinese state's systematic role (Lipes). Before being hanged by the Nazi regime for protesting the genocidal persecution of the Jews, Christian theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself” (Kandiah). Unfortunately, the American evangelical church has failed to respond to the largest incarceration based on ethnoreligious status since World War II (Keena). Consequently, the American evangelical church must learn to effectively engage in interfaith advocacy to live out the biblical mandate of loving God and loving neighbors when it comes to the Uyghur Crisis. By building relationships, understanding story, learning points of religious connection, and participating in interfaith activities with interfaith leadership, the American evangelical church can leverage resources, privilege, and power to address social justice issues through advocacy efforts. Ultimately, using the Uyghur Crisis as a case study and the lens of critical ethnography, a model for interfaith advocacy can be built.

In this thesis, I will give a brief introduction to Uyghur history and the factors that generated the modern-day Uyghur Crisis. I will then explain the research I conducted living among Uyghurs in Washington, D.C., before unpacking the case for American evangelical engagement. Lastly, I will build a model for interfaith advocacy as a channel for American evangelical engagement and demonstrate its effectiveness by contrasting it to an interfaith event I hosted, which focused on the Uyghur Crisis.

II. THE UYGHUR CRISIS

Undoubtedly, one of the most pressing social justice issues of the 21st century is the Uyghur Crisis. Mike Pompeo, United States Secretary of State proclaimed that the Uyghur Crisis is "...one of the worst human rights crises of our time; it is truly the stain of the century" (Pompeo). However, despite the imperative nature of this tragedy, the breadth of its impact, and the depth of its depravity, American evangelicals have failed to generate a meaningful response. Though a handful of Christian workers have independently sought justice as peacemakers on this issue, the reality is "[r]econciliation (and advocacy work that achieves reconciliation) cannot be done in isolation. Instead, it must be done in solidarity with people whose concerns, problems and issues have become our own" (McNeil 96). For American evangelicals to confront this human rights crisis, there must be an interfaith advocacy movement in solidarity with the oppressed Uyghur people. Unfortunately, one of the significant factors contributing to the dismal American evangelical response to the Uyghur Crisis is simply the lack of awareness. Many American evangelicals are unfamiliar with the Muslim ethnic minority group known as the Uyghurs, and if you were to ask them to google "Uyghur" they would likely misspell it. Truthfully, it was not very long ago when I sat in a classroom full of graduate students studying

International Community Development and learned about the Uyghur people for the first time. I remember the way my stomach churned as I was in total disbelief hearing the term “concentration camps” being thrown around loosely. I remember thinking to myself, “how could a human rights abuse on this scale exist in the modern world with social media and easily accessible information”? As a result of my lack of awareness and my experience with many individuals who have been unaware of the Uyghur people, this next section of my thesis will be devoted to explaining who the Uyghur people are and why this human rights tragedy is occurring.

A. A Brief History of the Uyghur people

Currently, there are approximately 1.8 million Uyghur Muslims in concentration camps in Xinjiang, China (Lipes). However, it was not always this way. The Tarim Basin (the geographic region now known as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China) has been home to Turkic people for over a thousand years. The current ethnic population in Xinjiang are a mixture of the refugees from the ancient Uyghur Empire of 744-840 and the Iranian peoples of the Tarim Basin (Drompp). These Turkic people lived in oasis cities (fertile spots in the desert) along the silk road. Many of these oasis cities are still urban centers today, such as Kashgar and Hotan. In the year 1759, a conquest was led by the Qing Dynasty of China to occupy the Tarim Basin and subsequently reign over the peoples who called the region home (Thum 3). At that point in time, there were no Uyghur people because the Turkic people living in the region had not formed a national identity, but rather belonged to the land and shared a common ancestry. However, under Chinese rule and oppression, the Uyghur identity emerged in the 1930s. My Uyghur friend Abdul used a metaphor to describe the emergence of a Uyghur national identity to me as a result of 170 years of occupation. He had me hold out my hand flat and pointed to my

fingers, counting off the names of five key oasis cities: Kashgar, Turpan, Hotan, Ürümqi, and Ghulja. Then he had me close my fist and said, “The Uyghur people” (Kaba). The Uyghur identity emerged as a way to resist assimilation and celebrate cultural heritage under oppression. Today, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is trying to completely erase the Uyghur identity and Muslim influence through sinicization—a process in which Han Chinese culture is used to erase the cultural, ethnic identity, religion, and language of the perceived Other (those who are culturally, racially or religiously different in some way). It is by this process that the modern Uyghur Crisis has emerged. However, we must ask why would China be interested in erasing the Uyghur people and consequently creating a human rights crisis in the process?

i. Why Commit Cultural Genocide?

The CCP has two main reasons for placing 1.8 million Uyghur people in concentration camps in Xinjiang. The first reason is to eliminate Uyghur culture through assimilation. Through the process of sinicization, the CCP wants to erase all active forms of Uyghur culture from the region and replace it with the Han majority culture that the CCP approves of (Uyghur Human Rights Project). In essence, the CCP is trying to assimilate the Uyghur people to the Han majority culture, and as a result is conducting cultural genocide. The principal justification for this campaign of assimilation is the pretense of combating religious extremism. In the post 9/11 era, China has increasingly cracked down on Muslim minorities in Xinjiang and elsewhere. In 2014, the CCP launched its “Strike Hard Campaign Against Extremism”, and today it is illegal for Uyghur Muslims to gather for religious holidays, pray in public, go on Haj (the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca), decorate with religious symbolism, or wear clothing that indicates religious affiliation. Any of these offenses (and many others) are more than enough to justify being sent to a concentration camp.

Creating a cheap labor force is the second primary reason Uyghurs are being placed in concentration camps. Recently, there have been protests against unfair wages in western China, while the demand for cheap labor has increased (Hernández). As a result, China has sought out a new population to extort for cheap labor. Individuals inside and outside of camps are being coerced into forced labor at unethical pay rates (Zenz). This is apparent in the textile industry as “...84 percent of China’s cotton production, including exported cotton, comes from China’s Xinjiang region” (ChinaAid). When considering the cotton production around the world, this means approximately 20% of textile products around the world are being made using forced Uyghur labor, which violates U.S. labor and import laws (Chappuis). Moreover, agricultural products such as tomatoes are a major export of the region and forced Uyghur labor is likely a major part of that industry as well (Summers).

Though assimilation utilizing sinicization and cheap labor are two significant factors creating the Uyghur crisis, they are by no means the only significant factors. They simply lay a groundwork for understanding how 1.8 million Uyghur ended up in concentration camps. At a conference I attended in the summer of 2019, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi stated that "What's happening in China is a challenge to the conscience of the world. We cannot let it go...if we don't speak out against what's happening there, we have no moral authority to speak elsewhere" (Shepherd). Consequently, the gravity of this human rights violation requires a response from American evangelicals—not only because it is implicitly evil and violates the humanity of people made in the image of God—but because the products American evangelicals are consuming are actively perpetuating the crisis (Genesis 1:27).

ii. My Research and the Uyghur Crisis

The Uyghur Crisis presents both social and environmental injustices for Christians to respond to. As an American evangelical blessed with multicultural experiences, I am passionate about seeing interfaith advocacy achieve the biblical mandate of loving God and loving neighbor. I grew up going to church on Sundays and was even involved in mid-week youth programs. However, I never knew Christianity had much to do outside of a church building until my late teen years when I truly began reading the Bible and considering what it had to say about injustices in the world around me. After I graduated from high school, I broaden my worldview by traveling to Europe and Africa. In both Europe and Africa, I met individuals of a variety of faiths and was welcomed into homes and treated as an honored guest. When I returned, my interest in other religions led me to join a class called “Encountering the World of Islam” where I learned about the Syrian Refugee Crisis. A couple of months later, I was on an airplane to do an internship with newly arrived Syrian refugees in Germany. When I began making friends with Muslim refugees, my life was forever changed. The sad truth is for many American evangelicals, Muslims are people to be feared and even hated. However, through my friendships, I found the opposite reality. I met kind, sincere people whom I came to know and love. Soon, distant human rights abuses occurring to Syrians now were occurring to friends as I saw the gunshot and shrapnel wounds on their arms, legs, and necks. This was the moment when I realized that many American evangelicals had missed the call to openly and loudly oppose injustice simply because those on the receiving end of injustice belonged to the perceived other. Thus, I began looking for ways to awaken American evangelicals to a social justice that embraces everyone made in the image of God, the Imago Dei—for American evangelicals that is everyone on earth. It is because of this calling, my relationship with a few Uyghurs in the Seattle area, and to a Uyghur activist,

Dr. Bill Clark of Peace Catalyst International, that I began my thesis research on the American evangelical response to the Uyghur Crisis.

I spent a month living among a group of four Uyghur Muslims in Virginia and was welcomed into the largest Uyghur community in the United States, where over 400 Uyghurs currently live. I conducted qualitative research in which I organized 27 interviews throughout my fieldwork, hearing testimonies from Uyghurs and thoughts from faith leaders, and government officials on the role of the American evangelical church in the Uyghur Crisis. My time gave me unfiltered access to Uyghur life in America and the realities that Uyghurs face not only locally but internationally as well. As a result, I developed an emic perspective of the Uyghur Crisis, which laid the ground for me to create a contextualized framework for interfaith advocacy that leverages American evangelicalism (the faith tradition to which I belong) to bring about change for marginalized peoples (such as Uyghur Muslims) locally and internationally.

Living among Uyghurs provided many advantages to my research. Being welcomed into the Uyghur community as an advocate, researcher, and friend allowed me to hear Uyghur testimonies and also participate in Uyghur life. One of those I interviewed stated, “I really appreciate the work you are doing because if we [had] more people like you to build a bridge between two different communities, then the people [could] work together...and the gaps between two [would] be gone. And then there [would] be no more hate” (Babe). A similar sentiment was shared by many of those I interviewed. Ultimately, I learned that Uyghur Muslims believe and desire many of the same things American evangelicals do. This made me begin to wonder if there was a way for Abrahamic faiths (Christianity, Islam, and Judaism) to work together to do advocacy work that was tangible, effective, and transformative for all involved.

III. LOVE GOD AND LOVE NEIGHBOR

At the core of the Christian moral ethic is a teaching given by Jesus when He was asked what the greatest commandment of Moses was. Jesus' response is one of the most well-known verses of the Christian faith tradition, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments" (Matthew 22:37-40). It is clear from this scripture passage that Christians have two purposes that share equal importance: to love God and love neighbor. However, on many occasions, American evangelicals have missed the mark that Jesus set. Instead, many American evangelicals have preached hate of the Other and hardened their hearts against the very people God them to love—their neighbor. This can be seen during the civil rights movement when many Christians in the South stood idly by and even supported Jim Crow Laws and segregation (See *Reconstructing the Gospel* by Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove for more information on this). For many American evangelicals, even an understanding of neighbor is itself cheapened by a localized geographic definition. American evangelicals may love the person who lives next to them who happens to look like them and believe as they do, but the person who lives in a different neighborhood who looks and believes differently they may despise. For example, in 2018 Pew Research Center found that 68% of white American evangelicals do not believe the United States has a responsibility to accept refugees who are arguably some of the most vulnerable people in the world (Hartig). This means that American evangelicals are failing to understand who is a neighbor and who is not. Moe-Lobeda, in her book *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation*, argues that for Christians "[n]eighbor-love extends beyond the human" (Moe-Lobeda 197). According to Moe-

Lobeda, Christians must extend their definition of love beyond human relationships and into creation itself. This means that American evangelicals need to begin to see that in a globalized world everyone is their neighbor and that loving neighbors means loving the world that they live in—in a globalized world, injustice elsewhere is injustice everywhere. For example, if an individual is wearing a t-shirt that was made from Chinese cotton (by forced Uyghur labor), stitched in Colombia, dyed in Vietnam and shipped using fuel from Saudi Arabia, that individual's decision to buy that shirt impacted many lives across the globe. Thus, because one can impact lives globally through the purchases they make, loving neighbor looks like loving the Chinese (Uyghur), Colombian, Vietnamese, and Saudi Arabian individuals who are part of the global supply chain.

Furthermore, to truly practice neighbor-love, American evangelicals must love the world their neighbors live in. Timothy Keller, a *New York Times* bestselling Christian author, and pastor of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City, offers this rebuke to American evangelicals who fail to love their neighbor: “If you aren't intensely concerned for the quartet of the vulnerable...the widow, the orphan, the immigrant, and the poor...it's a sign your heart is not right with God” (Keller). If 68% of white American evangelicals are failing to love refugees (immigrants), then this is a sign that the biblical mandate of loving God and loving neighbor is not being lived out. For American evangelicals to restore a biblical theology of loving God and loving neighbor that compels them into interfaith advocacy, there must be a reintegration of the sacred and secular. American evangelicals cannot separate their faith's moral ethic from the actions they commit outside of a faith setting on a Sunday. Instead, in the spirit of the Christian faith tradition, American evangelicals are temples in which God dwells seven days a week, 24 hours a day (1 Corinthians 6:19). Therefore, rather than accepting American cultural

complacencies that prolong prejudice, injustice, and hatred, American evangelicals must learn to practice love at all costs and refuse to show favoritism to those who are perceived to be easier to love (James 2:9). According to John Lederach, author of *Reconcile: Conflict Transformation for Ordinary Christians*, “Jesus embodied the art of noticing humanity. In each person he found that of God” (51). If Christians are to love as Jesus did, they must recognize that everyone is worthy of love. Choosing this love requires a boldness that extends beyond faith traditions. The implications of this love should transform the heart posture of American evangelicals regarding the Uyghur Crisis.

Firstly, American evangelicals should recognize that everyone is made in the image of God and worthy of love, not just Christians. American evangelicals should confront the dominant western ideology of islamophobia and rethink the ethnoreligious transcendence of Christianity. To do this, they must throw off the shackles of favoritism by embracing a theology that treats everyone with the same respect, love, and care. Moreover, there needs to be a recognition that perhaps why American evangelicals have not responded to the Uyghur Crisis is because Uyghurs tend to be Muslim, and evangelicals tend to not associate with Muslims. Islamophobia in the United States primarily began developing after the 9/11 terror attacks on the world trade center and the following media that painted religious extremism as Islam (Rauf 196). Mamatjan, a Uyghur friend of mine, echoed this sentiment when he stated that, “Islam is misrepresented in media...people still have a fear for Muslims” (Kashgar). Mamatjan was clear that he thought islamophobia would be a stumbling block in the American evangelical response to the Uyghur Crisis. In the book, *The Islamophobia industry: How the Right Manufactures Fear of Muslims*, Nathan Lean and John Esposito suggest that during the post 9/11 era, “Muslims became receptacles for societal anxiety, and the right wing, knowing full well the power of fear,

used the uncertain time to their advantage” (8). However, Christians should not fear Muslims if they recognize not only the Abrahamic roots of the religion but also that all people are made in the image of God. According to Rick Love, an American evangelical and president of Peace Catalyst International, “Christians who complain about the persecution of their co-believers overseas, while turning a blind eye to the Islamophobia at home” are failing to live out the biblical mandate “...to love one’s neighbor” (Johnston 170). To be Christian means to defend the right of free will which—according to the Abrahamic faith traditions—God gives to everyone. When I asked Sam Brownback, United States Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom what the role of American evangelicals is in the Uyghur Crisis he told me, “I think that it is very important that the evangelical community engage in religious persecution wherever it sticks its ugly head up around the world and that the evangelicals put forth their moral authority”. He went on to say, “I think it's particularly effective when they do it for people not of their own faith”. It is clear that as American evangelicals integrate sacred and secular practices, their faith must not merely love God and neglect the love of neighbor, which is a contradiction in terms.

A. Loving God and Neighbor through Resources, Privilege, and Power

One way in which American evangelicals can practice love of neighbor is to rethink their role in global politics. For this to happen, there needs to be a recognition that American evangelicalism is a powerful institution capable of influencing the government and both the private and public sectors through the leveraging of resources, privilege, and power. This recognition can take place by educating American evangelicals on the tenants of their faith (more on this in later sections). With power and resources comes the privilege and responsibility to make a difference. As explained by John Lewis author of *Across That Bridge: Life Lessons and a*

Vision for Change, “It is the responsibility, yet the individual choice, of each of us to use the light we have to dispel the work of darkness, because if we do not, then the power of falsehood rises” (Lewis 175). American evangelicals must recognize that their resources, privileges, and power afford them a unique opportunity to advocate on behalf of those who do not have a voice. American evangelicals should be a voice for Uyghurs locally, nationally, and internationally. Óscar Romero, the fourth Archbishop of San Salvador who died as a Christian martyr opposing injustice, concluded that “A Christian who defends unjust situations is no longer a Christian” (Campbell-Johnson). Thus, American evangelicals must refuse to defend practices that prolong injustice, which includes the misuse of resources, privilege, and power. The following three sections will explore resources, privilege, and power in the context of loving God and neighbor.

i. Resources

In the Christian faith tradition, it is believed that all things come from God and that all things return to Him (Romans 11:36). The idea that all things are a gift from God, including the earth and its resources, originates in the very first book of the Old Testament in which God places Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it (Genesis 2:15). In a sense, there is an agreement between the created and creator to steward the resources God gives. In the Christian faith tradition, this is known as Stewardship Theology, which commonly argues that “...the land belongs to God, that humans are responsible for the care of the creation, that humans are held accountable by God for how they do as caretakers, that God is concerned with the welfare of all species (not just human beings), and that God wants all of creation to be redeemed” (Cain 278). Christians who believe in this reality will recognize that what belongs to them ultimately belongs to God. Therefore, to misuse resources is not only to misrepresent the will of God but to go against it. As American evangelicals recognize the vast wealth of resources

they have (which places them among the world's wealthiest individuals), they should respond by using resources to the advantage of those who do not have them (Elkins). Having resources in and of itself is not wrong. It is rather the misuse of resources for selfish gain that is wrong. In order to live according to Christian scriptures, American evangelicals must learn to use their resources to help those who are in need such as the Uyghur people. Further, Jesus stated in a parable that how you treat the disadvantaged is how you actually treat Him (Matthew 25:40). With this in mind, it seems increasingly impossible to separate the commands to both love God and love your neighbor.

ii. Privilege

American evangelical privilege is rooted in hundreds of years of Christian history within the United States. All but three presidents have openly identified as Christian, and many used their Christianity to harness loyal voters. Today, there are Christians in nearly every government, corporate, and community institution, and it has been that way since the founding of the country. Christians and the moral ethic they represent is highly influential in the United States and can sway politics and legislation. For American evangelicals, this means they have certain privileges that others do not to advocate for change. For example, the first Muslim to be elected to the United States Congress was Keith Ellison in 2007, and the first Muslim women to be elected into the United States Congress were Ilhan Omar and Rashida Tlaib in 2018 (Connley). Without Muslim representation, Muslims lack the privilege to represent themselves and the problems they face. This is why it is so vital that American evangelicals use their privilege within the government, corporations, and communities to advocate on behalf of the Uyghur people.

Additionally, it cannot be ignored that white privilege exists among American evangelicalism. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center, 78% of American

evangelicals identify as being white (Pew Research Center). White privilege is the social, economic, and political advantages one has for merely having white skin. Thus, being a white evangelical individual means that your voice is more likely to be heard and considered before the voices of Muslims, non-white Christians, and most other groups in the United States—this is a privilege that many others do not have. American evangelicals, especially white ones, boast a privilege beyond compare in the United States. That privilege must be first realized and then acted upon. One way to do this is to advocate on the behalf of under privileged individuals such as Uyghurs. Consequently, using both religious and race privilege justly is one way in which American evangelicals can love God and love neighbor.

iii. Power

There is no logical gap in concluding that with resources and privilege comes power. American evangelicals hold an immense amount of power in the United States whether or not that power is recognized. This power can be used to love God and love neighbor, or can just as quickly be used for selfish gain. As explained by Howard Thurman author *Jesus and the Disheartened*, “It cannot be denied that too often the weight of the Christian movement has been on the side of the strong and the powerful and against the weak and oppressed” (Thurman 20). The reality is that many American evangelicals today are opposed to helping those who belong to the quartet of the vulnerable. Instead of using power to help those without it, they try to hold on to whatever power they can. According to Feldmeier, author of *Power, Service, Humility: A New Testament Ethic*, “God resists the arrogant power of human beings—and hence those who exalt themselves” (132). Using power in a way that fulfills Jesus’ commandments and the law of Moses must be the central driving force of American evangelicals when it comes to injustice and loving God and neighbor.

Moreover, apart from physical power, Christians believe in spiritual power that comes from God. In the words of Bryant Myers author of *Walking With the Poor: Principles and Practices of Transformational Development*, “[Christians] have power—by virtue of being made in the image of God—and thus are empowered as human agents by God and by virtue of having been adopted into the only kingdom that stands the test of time” (93). Therefore, aligning the use of power with the will of God, which is to love all people equally, should be another driving force for American evangelicals. One way to use power justly is to leverage it for the benefit of those who have little power such as Uyghurs, minorities and the poor; with power comes the ability to advocate for those who do not have any. In the case of the Uyghur Crisis, this offers a unique opportunity for American evangelicals to join the cry for justice. Using the Uyghur Crisis as a case study, we can examine the implication of loving God and loving neighbor by leveraging resources, privilege, and power.

IV. AMERICAN EVANGELICALS AND INTERFAITH ADVOCACY

For many Uyghur Americans and those Uyghurs living outside of Xinjiang, “the Chinese government even takes away happiness” (Alkar). For Uyghurs, the injustices being perpetrated in their homeland reaches far beyond China and into the hearts and minds of Uyghurs abroad. In some sense, there are those who are within physical prisons in Xinjiang and those who are within mental, emotional, and spiritual prisons abroad. No one has escaped the immense pain and suffering inflicted by the CCP. I encountered this reality on one particular morning during my fieldwork in Washington, D.C. That morning, I learned that my Uyghur friend Miryam’s mother passed away in Turkey as a refugee. Like many other Uyghurs living in the United States, Miryam had been separated from family with little to no contact since 2017. Following the news

of Miryam's mothers passing, I became aware of funeral preparations for that day. Not long afterward, I was walking up a set of stairs to a third-floor apartment room in the heart of Fairfax, Virginia. As I entered the apartment, I found myself in a room surrounded by young men and women. No parents, grandparents, or older relatives were present—it felt as though the room was full of orphans. I most distinctly remember hearing the pained wailing of Miryam in that cramped apartment room full of 40 young Uyghurs without parents or relatives to comfort them. There were prayers offered and honor given, but there was no closure for a daughter without her mother. That night I wrote this poem to help me process the tragedy of a child mourning for her mother:

On the third floor of the apartment complex, you will see a pile of shoes: some large, some small. Their owners, prisoners of consciousness, not of the flesh but mind. Tortured souls scattered across the floor and room, laced with lament and bound by despair. If you listen, you will hear wailing.

From white walls, you will hear unanswered prayers echo, but if you close your eyes, she will speak to you. Three years of conversations will be given to you in a moment, and in a moment, a life of conversation will be taken from you. When you open your eyes, prayers will be answered, but you will demand they remain echoes from the white walls. You will plead to her fading memories, "Do not take my happiness from me", but she will. You will run to the pile of shoes on the third floor and desperately search for her pair, but you will never find them. Instead, you will find answered prayers and demand they remain echoes from white walls.

If you listen, you will hear wailing. (Blay)

Every Uyghur I have met or have come into contact with has a relative or friend who has been placed in the concentration camps. When I asked Kuzzat Altay, the president of the Uyghur American Association, what he believed the role of American evangelicals was in the Uyghur Crisis he responded:

“If Jesus comes today, I do think that His number one priority would be saving lives. Just ask what Jesus would do. Jesus would save lives. Jesus would not care if Uyghurs were Muslim, if Uyghurs were gay, if Uyghurs were anything, Jesus would focus on saving lives. Do we agree on that as a Muslim, a human, and a Christian? We all believe in that.

What Jesus would do. Jesus would save lives. (Altay)

The Uyghur Crisis presents an opportunity for American evangelicals to participate in the biblical mandate of loving God and loving neighbor through interfaith advocacy—or as Kuzzat Altay puts it, doing what Jesus would do. The working definition I will use for interfaith advocacy is any form of advocacy that requires interfaith partnership or one faith to advocate against injustices occurring to another faith. Others, such as my Uyghur friends, have defined interfaith advocacy as the act of simply embracing the shared ancestry and brotherhood of the Abrahamic faiths. However, most notably, interfaith advocacy is an audaciously humble act of unity in a fearful and frightened world.

Historically, American evangelicals have not always embraced the call to social justice efforts. Over the last 100 years, there has been a substantial debate within the American church on whether the principles of evangelism are more important than the principles of social justice. Only within the last 20 to 30 years, have the spiritual practices of social justice become mainstream within some American evangelical church communities (Hoang and Johnson). Within this embrace, there has been a recognition that social justice is a form of evangelism and

should not be ignored or seen as secular. The Old Testament book of Psalms, referred to in the Quran and part of the Jewish Tanakh, speaks of a God that opposes injustice and defends the oppressed and destitute. According to Sadiq, a visiting professor at Wheaton College, “The Psalmist cannot stand the sustained injustice he sees in society and appeals to the just God to intervene...” (Sadiq 312). The book of Psalms describes God as, "defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror" (Psalm 10:18). This God invites American evangelicals to participate in loving Himself and loving neighbor by defending the oppressed through interfaith advocacy. This means that American evangelicals are called to love oppressed Uyghurs so that perhaps the CCP will never again strike terror. Further, “[t]he book of Psalms has full potential for playing a vital role in initiating dialogue and for building bridges between Christians and Muslims (and Jews)” (Sadiq 316). Not only are Christians compelled to love by Jesus the cornerstone of their faith—the one they are called to imitate, but also by the Psalmist whom the Abrahamic faiths unanimously accept as a messenger and prophet of God (Psalms 118:22, Ephesians 5:1-2). Regardless of Abrahamic faith traditions, the God of Abraham calls adherents to stand against oppression by openly opposing it. In the case of interfaith advocacy, this means working together with those who believe differently to achieve a unified vision of justice.

American evangelicals must not only learn to respect other Abrahamic faiths and understand that God does not show partiality, but also understand that Abrahamic faith traditions share many similarities that compel them to build peace (Deuteronomy 10:17). Today, “[i]t seems more common to experience division due to faith these days, rather than connection. However, once the opportunity for dialogue and developing a deeper understanding of beyond past stereotypes is achieved, it is possible to find commonalities and reason to feel linked to

others” (Holland & Walker 20). Through the process of interfaith dialogue and advocacy, those of the Abrahamic faith traditions can learn to work together to promote justice and peace for all. For example, Augustine, an early Church father in an expository of chapter 29 of the Book of Jeremiah, stated that “The Israelites were to learn obedience through pursuing the welfare of Babylon and through forming a common life with pagans and oppressors...” (Sherlock 445). Israelites learned to live among and care for those who believed and looked different than them. Today that means American evangelicals should learn to love their Muslim and Jewish neighbors both locally and internationally. This call to love means, “Christians are no longer in control; rather than retreat into gated communities of like-minded people, [they] are called to seek the welfare of the city which [they] share with others” (Sherlock 445). American evangelicals need to love their Muslim and Jewish neighbors just as God has commanded them. In a globalized world, neighbors are not merely those who live in geographic immediacy but those who live around the world. Miroslav Volf, author of *Exclusion and Embrace*, made a profound critique of Christianity when he stated, “In situations of conflict Christians often find themselves accomplices in war, rather than agents of peace...[a]s [Christians] keep the vision of God’s future alive, [they] need to reach out across the firing lines and join hands with [their] brothers and sisters on the other side” (54). For American evangelicals to truly love God, it begins with them rejecting the natural tendency to be an accomplice of conflict by doing what the Word of God says, which is to love their neighbor regardless of the faith, race, or ethnicity they belong to (James 1:22). American evangelicals can do this by using their resources, privilege, and power to engage in interfaith advocacy that is tangible, effective, and transformative. The call to love surpasses cultural expectations and political polarization and requires American evangelicals to resist conformity to the world (Romans 12:2). Pope Francis said this concerning dealing with

vulnerable people; it “is an invitation to recover some of those essential dimensions of our Christian existence and our humanity that risk being overlooked in a prosperous society” (Francis). The question remains, will American evangelicals take this invitation to fulfill the biblical mandate of loving God and loving neighbor and engage in interfaith advocacy? The following section is a model for interfaith advocacy, which can be used to create networks of advocacy between Abrahamic faith traditions to achieve a more just social order that reflects the biblical mandate of loving God and loving neighbor.

A. Model for Interfaith Advocacy

American evangelicals can engage with local and international issues, including the Uyghur Crisis, through interfaith advocacy. The inevitability of an increasingly pluralistic American society has forced the hand of religious congregants and leaders to rethink the biblical mandate of loving God and loving neighbor. As a result, some American evangelicals have turned inwardly and participated in insular communities. These American evangelicals are often hesitant to join anything with “interfaith” in the title (Thompson). However, more and more American evangelicals are learning to love all peoples rather than just those of likeness and commonality. Building a model of interfaith advocacy creates an avenue in which American evangelicals can learn to participate in and practice justice for the perceived other, including those of other Abrahamic faiths. According to Grafton in *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, “Having awareness of, encounter with, and sensitivity to other religious communities, individuals, or families must guide and counsel the *how* of Christian...ministry today” (319). Learning to participate in an environment of advocacy with other religious communities is a skillset needed by American evangelicals in a religiously plural America. In the words of

Zubayra Shamseden, Uyghur activist, and Chinese Outreach Coordinator at Uyghur Human Rights Project during a personal interview, “There are lots of ways Christians can engage with Muslims and work together. [It] would be fantastic and...also bring lots of hope for the Uyghurs” (Shamseden). The following section develops a model for interfaith advocacy, which suggests four key components; building relationships, understanding story, learning points of religious connection, and participating in interfaith activities with interfaith leadership. Through each section, I will share examples from an interfaith event I conducted for the Uyghur people in the Seattle area, which acted as a field test for this model (the full summary of that event is attached in Appendix: A).

i. Building Relationships

Relationships are the starting point of interfaith advocacy. It is out of friendship, shared meals, and long conversations that interfaith movements begin to blossom, and a shared vision of justice is pursued. Unknowingly or knowingly, many individuals gravitate to relationships with those who share a similar set of core beliefs as they do. When individuals encounter those whom they sense do not share similar core beliefs, they often choose to pursue relationships elsewhere. For example, this is why at a school cafeteria, students who are interested in the same things, look similar, or are participating in similar activities will sit with each other at lunch (Weber). Humans naturally form cliques or depend on tribalism to create an identity or culture to belong to. However, a globalized world places us in a pluralistic American society which is full of different belief systems, each one as unique as the next. This historically new reality accelerated by the technological revolution challenges the very nature of human instinct—to cling to what is

familiar, safe, and comfortable. Nevertheless, it is within this new reality that the need to build relational bridges between Abrahamic faiths is so essential.

The challenge that many American evangelicals face today is to practice love in a pluralistic society. To live out the biblical mandate for loving God and loving neighbor through interfaith advocacy, American evangelicals need to build relationships with those around them who believe differently. Such relationships can alter the hearts and minds of individuals, so they are more kind, accepting, understanding, forgiving, generous, less judgmental, and less prejudiced. Moreover, interfaith relationships create space for people to learn to work through differences and find ways to communicate respectfully without judgment and disrespect (Holland & Walker 20). When I interviewed a Uyghur friend of mine and asked him how Christians might advocate for Muslims, he answered, “People should stand up against injustice. I always talk to my friends who are Christian about this. If Christians stand up for this, it will be great for humanity. People will no longer see religion in conflicts. Islam versus Christians, Jews versus Christians, Jews versus Islam. They will see them come together for humanity” (Hotan). From my Uyghur friend's personal experience, interfaith relationships, and friendships are the cornerstones for seeing humanity come together and stand against injustice. When I hosted an interfaith advocacy event titled *Cultural Genocide and the Uyghur People: A Call to Action* on a Thursday night in a mega-church located in the Seattle area, I made sure that the main speakers were two Uyghur friends of mine. Both of them had little experience in public speaking and were nervous about sharing their testimonies. However, because of our friendship and the time I took to get to know them, they were willing to travel from the east coast to the west coast to talk to a room full of American evangelicals, Muslims, Jews, and Secularists about the plight of the

Uyghurs. Without a relationship, none of this would have been possible. According to Ijaz's in an article titled, *Forty Years of Interfaith Experience in the Greater Toronto Area*:

Building positive relationships among diverse individuals and groups entails openness to learning about each other and respecting the differences of others. Learning about another religion can reduce the discomfort and mistrust a person may feel with respect to the other faith tradition, clarify misconceptions, and eliminate negative stereotypes and prejudices. It enables the individual to enter more deeply into the way of thinking and experiencing the world by members of the other religion, and it creates awareness of similarities and differences between their own and the other faith. (Ijaz 188-189)

Relationships require a consistent effort to maintain and grow, but the positive benefits of forming interfaith relationships are clear. In my case, because of my interfaith relationships, two of my friends were willing to fly across the nation to speak to a room full of people they had never met. Relationships are the cornerstone of interfaith advocacy. When the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019 which called the president to impose sanctions and export restrictions on China and Chinese officials passed both the House and Senate, it was a direct result of interfaith advocacy groups who formed relationships and brought the issue before both representatives and senators in unity. As a result, the bipartisan bill passed 407 to 1 in the House. In this case, Christians, Catholics, Jews, Muslims, and Secularists successfully came together to defend justice, and this was only possible by the formation of relationships. Therefore, building relationships between Abrahamic faith members is a fundamental aspect of interfaith advocacy.

ii. Understanding Story

The second aspect of the proposed model for interfaith advocacy is understanding story. Story and relationship are closely linked, but not the same. Understanding story is part of taking a relationship to its full potential and seeing its ultimate benefit. The reason understanding story is distinctly separate from building relationships is because individuals may form weak relationships with people they come into contact with every day, and understanding story is incompatible with weak relationships. Weak relationships are often referred to as acquaintanceships. Within acquaintanceships, individuals may form a relationship with someone but never truly understand their story. For example, individuals often spend upwards of 40 plus hours working alongside coworkers but rarely understand them on a personal level. Thus, understanding story is an intentional practice. There are two essential aspects of understanding story. The first aspect is listening, and the second is lamenting.

1. Listening

Intentionally understanding story requires individuals to take time to listen to the story that others have to tell. According to Bryant, author of the article *The Art of Active Listening*, “As individuals, we all have many stories about our lives, which are best expressed in our own words. The way someone uses language, and describes an event, or their feelings, conveys much more than the bare facts” (51). To truly understand the reality that someone is experiencing or facing, individuals must strive to understand the story that others have to share. Facts and newspaper headlines will never help us understand the injustices others are facing if we do not let words become flesh and bone. The only way to do this is by listening, and to truly listen, you must first build relationships and then seek to understanding story.

The power of understanding story goes far beyond contextualizing injustice. It also has the power to move people from inaction to advocacy. Relationships are powerful in the sense that they connect individuals to others and allow needs to be understood more clearly. However, listening to the story others have to share and sharing stories requires a vulnerability that results in trust and empathy (Brown). Both trust and empathy are deep emotions that move people to a place of advocacy and copowerment (empowering people while standing and working alongside them to achieve a mutually beneficial result) (Inslee). However, frequently people can be moved to action before they truly understand the story that someone is telling and miss the real needs that are being expressed. That is why listening is an essential aspect of understanding story.

2. Lament

Once individuals have listened to the story others have to share, they can begin the most essential aspect of understanding story—sitting in a place of lament. Although listening is important, if it does not move the listener to a place of deep empathy and comradeship, then it holds no weight in terms of interfaith advocacy. The practice of lament is rooted in the Judeo-Christian ethic. The Old Testament of the Bible has a whole book devoted to lamenting, aptly titled Lamentations. It is in the spiritual discipline of lament that individuals learn to step into the shoes of the other and experience the pain, sorrow, and grief that mere facts fail to express. In an American society that teaches individuals to hide negative emotions, lament can be a difficult practice to learn (Hofstede). For example, every American knows that the answer to the question, “How are you?”, is the response, “I’m doing good”, or some similar variation. Americans are uncomfortable with negative emotions and perhaps even uncomfortable with the practice of lament when it comes to understanding story. This is simply a misunderstanding of the process

of lament. According to Katongole & Rice, authors of *Reconciling All Things*, “Lament is not despair or a cry into a void. Lament is a cry directed to God” (89). Lament is not a practice of hopelessness but a process of hopefulness. It is a cry that recognizes that there must be something better out there and that there must be a new way. Lamenting with others is truly the process in which individuals allow understanding the story of others to impact how they live. It is in understanding that transformation begins to occur, and individuals begin to see how they might begin to make a difference.

When I was living with Uyghur friends in the D.C. area, I went through a deep process of lament. I remember the night my Uyghur friend Abdulqadir shared his story with me. I had been careful to spend the majority of my fieldwork month living in Washington, D.C., simply befriending Uyghurs and learning from them before asking them to share about the profound personal pain and trauma they had experienced. However, nothing prepared me for the experience of a friend explaining the loss of countless family members, the details of torture they had endured, and the pain of losing contact with everyone and everything they once held dearly. I remember tears welling up in my eyes as he explained to me what had happened to him, and I remember the following days of not knowing what to say other than “I am so sorry”, and “I will do what I can with what I have to help you”. However, my lament was not without hope. I began to see how my friend Abdulqadir might find peace and how reconciliation could be sought out despite the onerous measure of suffering he had experienced. In the depths of lament, I saw who Abdulqadir was, and whom he might become if his story was heard and our friendship endured. Lament gave me hope for what was to come rather than despair from what had already been.

Understanding story is what informs the direction and application of advocacy. Without story, there is no way to be an advocate. According to Scholefield, “In dialogue we tell our

stories and we listen to the other. As we hear the others' stories, so our story is potentially transformed" (70). The power of understanding story through lament is the transformation of the heart and soul to action through advocacy. When individuals understand the story others are sharing, the indifference of ignorance and the orthodoxy of otherness is dismantled. In the words of my Uyghur Friend Marpu, we realize that participating in and practicing justice "...is not a liberal or conservative thing, [it] is [a] every human being who opposes the oppression of another human being [thing]" (Ghulja). During the event I hosted in Seattle, I simply asked my Uyghur friends to share their story. Each one of them had twenty minutes during the night to express to the audience what had happened to them. It was within those crucial moments that the audience connected to the Uyghur cause. It was clear that the most powerful moment of the interfaith advocacy event was listening and lamenting with the Uyghurs who came to share. Understanding story unites people together and transforms the heart. That is why it is an essential aspect of interfaith advocacy that should be practiced diligently.

iii. Learning Points of Religious Connection

The third aspect of the proposed model for interfaith advocacy is learning points of religious connection. As individuals build relationships and understand the story others are sharing, they will come into contact with different belief systems that directly oppose their own. Today, it is no surprise to see that religious differences are the root cause of many conflicts in our world. Whether it is conflict Syria, Myanmar/Bangladesh, or Israel/Palestine, religious differences play a crucial role in the "why" behind many wars and armed conflicts. However, it does not need to be this way when it comes to Abrahamic faiths. Growing up as an American evangelical, I was taught that Muslims, Jews, Catholics, and even adherents of other

denominations of Protestantism were radically different from me. Although in some fundamental ways this is true—such as when considering differences regarding the path to salvation between Abrahamic faiths—the reality is Abrahamic faiths are remarkably similar. For example, each faith is monotheistic, shares the same creation story, shares nearly all of the same prophets, and Abraham plays a central role. As a result of this, there are many ways in which Christians, Jews, and Muslims can find similarities in their faiths rather than differences. Many Abrahamic faith adherents will even find that they were told the same faith stories growing up with only slight variation.

In the case of interfaith advocacy, there are considerable benefits in understanding the intrinsically linked narratives of the Abrahamic faiths. The most useful of which in the context of interfaith advocacy is understanding that each Abrahamic faith believes in a God who defends the oppressed from the injustice of the oppressor. One way to understand this point of religious connection is to learn from a text that is widely accepted among each of the Abrahamic faiths. This can be done by examining the book of Psalms, which is openly accepted by both the Christian and Jewish traditions and partially accepted by the Muslim tradition. Yousad Sadiq, visiting professor at Wheaton College, published an article in *Evangelical Quarterly* that highlights the Psalms as a means to building bridges between Christians and Muslims (and I argue even Jews). In that article, he states that:

The Qur'an views the Psalms of David as revealed by God; the hadith speaks highly of the Psalms, and the engagement of medieval Muslim scholars with the Psalms shows the significance they saw in them. The intertextuality between the Qur'an and the Psalms is useful when looking at the Psalms as an agent for bridge-building" between Christians, Muslims and Jews. (Sadiq 314)

Seeing that the book of Psalms can be used to build bridges between the Abrahamic faiths reveals that learning points of religious connection can significantly contribute to participation in interfaith advocacy when it comes to moving people towards action. For example, merely quoting a section from Psalms such as this, “[t]urn from evil and do good; then you will dwell in the land forever. For the LORD loves the just and will not forsake his faithful ones. Wrongdoers will be completely destroyed; the offspring of the wicked will perish” compels Abrahamic faith adherents to seek justice and do good (Psalm 37:27-28). Using a common language and biblical justice motifs can move people from inaction because of perceived differences to interfaith advocacy.

Moreover, the common theme of justice for the oppressed found in the Book of Psalms can even unify Abrahamic faith adherents to similar causes of justice, such as the Uyghur Crisis. The following Psalms can be used in conjunction with Surahs as a comparison between Biblical lament passages and the Qur’anic ones: Psalm 1 and Surah 1, Psalm 22 and Surah 22, Psalm 23 and Surah 23, Psalm 78 and Surah 78, Psalm 82, and Surah 82, Psalm 84 and Surah 84, Psalm 88 and Surah 88, Psalm 112 and Surah 112, Psalm 114 and Surah 114. Each instance offers an opportunity for interfaith dialogue and a shared understanding of the Abrahamic faiths.

Many Uyghur friends I interviewed worried that without an understanding of religious connection, Islamophobia would prevent Christians from engaging in interfaith advocacy. This fear may be justified as many Christians I know fear Islam and Muslims. However, according to Imam Rauf, a prolific Muslims writer, “By learning about each other, we see that we have many important beliefs in common” and understand that our faiths are not the root of our tensions but misunderstandings are (Rauf 196). This is why

learning points of religious connection is a significant aspect of interfaith advocacy. Without a common understanding of Abrahamic faiths, there is no way to move to a unified vision of justice that embraces the tenants of faith rather than ignoring them. In a joint letter signed by 138 interfaith religious leaders, it was decided that there is a common theme between Christianity and Islam, "...love of the One God, and love of the neighbor" (Thompson). When individuals understand the common justice narrative found among Abrahamic faiths exemplified in the book of Psalms, they can embrace their faith and the faith of others as they participate in social justice movements together.

During the event I hosted in Seattle, I made sure that every speaker welcomed all the Abrahamic faiths equally. Rather than focusing on faith differences, speakers drew attention to the justice tenants of faith that each group shared. Within that space, speakers were freely able to draw on their faith to make a case for interfaith advocacy and how the Abrahamic faiths might come together to pursue justice regarding the Uyghur Crisis. The benefit of learning points of religious connection is that it allows individuals to embrace their faith as the "why" behind their advocacy rather than dismissing it. Within interfaith advocacy, this is essential if advocacy efforts are to truly move people from inaction to action because faith is the driving force behind many of the decisions people make (Pew Research Center 8). Thus, learning points of religious connection is an essential aspect of my model of interfaith advocacy.

iv. Participating in Interfaith Activities with Interfaith Leadership

The fourth and final step of the proposed model of interfaith advocacy is participating in interfaith activities with interfaith leadership. This step is where individuals move from building

relationships, understanding story, and learning points of religious connection towards actually participating in interfaith advocacy events. Within this step, individuals take what they learned and experienced from the previous three steps and begin to indeed do interfaith advocacy. Although other steps can be done in smaller interpersonal settings or through research, participating in interfaith activities with interfaith leadership cannot be done in isolation or without community. This step requires individuals to step up to the challenge of interfaith advocacy work. Individuals can do this by becoming interfaith leaders and or participating in interfaith activities that will engage congregants effectively and move them towards action. The following section is broken into two parts, one focusing on the importance of interfaith leadership and the other focusing on the importance of interfaith activities.

1. Interfaith Leadership

Interfaith advocacy does not occur without interfaith leadership that engages the community they shepherd. In a sense, although interfaith advocacy can have a grassroots approach, because of the nature of religious authority, religious leaders need to lead the way. According to Helene Ijaz, a Roman Catholic who has been a consultant and mediator in the areas of cross-cultural, interracial, and interfaith relations since 2000, “To extend relationships between individuals successfully to relationships between faith communities, there must be buy-in and commitment by persons in leadership positions” (186). Any form of justice work must be done with effective leadership that can engage a diverse group of people with practical, actionable steps. In the case of interfaith advocacy, the call to effective leadership is no different. Interfaith advocacy requires leaders who can engage people whoever they are, unite people wherever they are, and empower people whenever they are. This is essential for advocacy work

between those of the Abrahamic faiths. The tendency will always be for faith groups to cling to likeness and homogenize rather than form networks of embrace, inclusion, and discussion. Moreover, for interfaith leaders, there may be a temptation to remove religion from the conversation in hopes of avoiding confrontation and hard conversations. However as previously discussed in the model for interfaith advocacy, there must be an embrace of the sacred texts rather than a push to secularization because "for those who embrace a divine agenda for social justice and reconciliation, their Scriptures contain 'the seeds of radical, dramatic, critical evaluation of and action against an unjust social order'" (Deyong 12). Within the holy texts of Abrahamic faiths, one can find laws and commandments that usher in an order of peace for all and seek justice for the oppressed (Hebrews 12:24, Isaiah 26:12). To ignore this would be to ignore the very reason that justice must come down to earth. An article in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*, states that the most effective leaders "appeal to [their] followers' sense of values and are able to get them to see a higher vision and to encourage them to exert themselves in the service of achieving that vision" (Herold et al. 347). Thus, effective interfaith leaders should appeal to the ethos of religion to move followers towards justice and advocacy work. They can do this by building relationships, understanding story, and learning points of religious connection with those of other Abrahamic faiths.

Furthermore, effective interfaith leaders should lead by example, showing that everyone can make a difference. In the American evangelical world, there seems to be a paralysis onset by a flurry of humanitarian crises that seem too big to address. However, good leaders know that "[w]e do not need to be world leaders, leaders of an organization, or even the head of a family...[e]ach of us can make a significant contribution to positive change in ourselves, our relationships, and in any organization or culture in which we take part" (Quinn 3). Thus,

effective interfaith leadership empowers individuals to lead positively impactful lives by not thinking of themselves as useless but as essential parts of the advocacy network achieving change in the world around them (1 Corinthians 12:27).

For example, during my fieldwork in Washington D.C., I had the opportunity to spend time with Bob Fu, the president of ChinaAid and a worker in the field of interfaith advocacy. His leadership has fostered a community of interfaith workers that are building relationships with one another and pursuing justice together. Fu always respected my ideas and even made time to meet with me multiple times despite his incredibly busy schedule meeting with government officials, including the vice president and others. As a direct result of Fu's work, both religious and governmental institutions have worked together on a variety of interfaith projects. It is interfaith leadership similar to Bob Fu's that both drives the future of interfaith advocacy movements and creates opportunities for people to participate in interfaith advocacy. That is why it is so vital that interfaith advocacy movements involve competent interfaith leadership.

2. Interfaith activities

Interfaith activities are an incredibly important aspect of the model of interfaith advocacy. Without creating a space for people of different belief systems to meet, it is unlikely that two unlikely individuals will become friends, let alone unify over a shared vision of justice. This is why interfaith leaders must create safe spaces for congregants to meet people of different Abrahamic faiths. A good interfaith leader is someone "...with the vision, knowledge base, and skill set to nurture understanding and cooperation among people who orient around religion differently" (Patel 76). Interfaith activities are how interfaith leaders can nurture relationships between Abrahamic faith members. Interfaith activities do not have to be complicated, simply

sharing a meal with someone different is sometimes the most effective way to dismantle misunderstandings and prejudice. The type of interfaith activity generally does not matter so long as it is welcoming, leveling, and embracing.

2.1 Welcoming

Any time that there is an interfaith activity, it is incredibly important that the individuals participating in the activity feel welcomed. Whether its Christians entering a mosque for the first time, Muslims entering a synagogue for the first time, or Jews entering a church for the first time, the space must be welcoming and inviting. Entering the house of another faith may be a daunting event that causes anxiety and fear for individuals. Moreover, merely having to converse with someone of another faith may trigger anxiety, fear, and bring out prejudice. The first time that I entered a mosque, I remember being full of anxiety. I questioned if Christians should even enter places of worship that belong to other faiths. However, I was welcomed cheerfully by those inside the walls and chaperoned by a Muslim woman who made me feel at home. It is essential that whatever context an interfaith activity occurs in be welcoming and inviting to those who are participating, because attendees must feel safe in order to open their hearts and minds to new ideas and people.

2.2 Leveling

It is also essential that any interfaith activity is leveling. This means that no one faith should hold power over the other. An interfaith activity should take place in a space that welcomes an equal input from all the faiths present. No one faith should be elevated above another as representing a more virtuous morality or ethic of justice. Sometimes this means

hosting an interfaith activity on common ground depending on how interfaith leadership anticipates congregants may react to entering a house of faith different from their own. Interfaith events do not require all attendees to view all Abrahamic faiths as equally valid. Moreover, being passionate about one's faith does not disqualify individuals from respecting the validity of another's faith practice and choice to pursue that faith. Regardless, interfaith leadership should make every effort to make sure all voices can be heard and are valued.

2.3 Embracing

Interfaith activities must also be embracing. This means that they should create a space for individuals to embrace their faith rather than disregarding it to avoid conflict. Interfaith activities must value the different faiths which drive the moral and ethical framework of individuals by creating a space in which each faith can be embraced by its adherents. Moreover, individuals must also embrace the notion that there is something to learn morally and ethically from every faith and holy book. Even if individuals struggle to embrace other faiths, they should regard the words of Miroslav Volf, author of *Exclusion and Embrace*, “there is no imaginable deed that should take a person outside our will to embrace him, because there is no imaginable deed that can take a person out of God's will to embrace humanity...” (Volf). Embrace in the Christian tradition is exemplified by the scripture parable of the prodigal son. In that parable, a son takes his father's inheritance and squanders it on wild living (Luke 15:11–32). When the son has nothing left, he returns home, hoping his father will show mercy and treat him as a servant. However, when the father sees his son still far off, he runs and embraces him in his arm: further, he throws a feast to celebrate. This is the embrace that the God of the Christian faith offers to those who seek Him. Similarly, Abrahamic faith followers should offer an embrace to all,

regardless of what they may practice or believe. In order to love God and love neighbor, there must be an embrace of all during interfaith advocacy events.

When I hosted the *Cultural Genocide* event calling people to advocacy, I saw how Abrahamic faiths could genuinely work together if there is mutual respect and buy-in by leadership and a space for an interfaith activity to occur. In the context of my interfaith event, attendees shared a meal, heard from Christians, Muslims, and Secularists, and participated in prayer together. The event itself was organized by a group of Uyghur advocates, including Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Secularists (more on this event attached in the Appendix: A). With buy-in by each faith community, the effectiveness of the event was amplified, and everyone left feeling called to fight for the justice of the oppressed. Without an event with interfaith activities and interfaith leadership, there would be little room for building relationships, understanding story, and learning points of religious connection. That is why interfaith activities and interfaith leadership are both the destination and the starting place of interfaith advocacy. In one sense, interfaith activities with interfaith leadership are a direct result of building relationships, understanding story, and learning points of religious connection. In another sense, building relationships, understanding story, and learning points of religious connection are a direct result of interfaith activities and interfaith leadership. Thus, it makes sense that the process of interfaith advocacy is somewhat cyclical. As it occurs, people will come into contact with their perceived other and learn to advocate for them by living out the biblical mandate of loving God and loving people.

B. The American evangelical Response to the Uyghur Crisis

The proposed model for interfaith advocacy creates an opportunity for American evangelicals to engage with the Uyghur Crisis through interfaith advocacy. The following section suggests five practical interfaith advocacy responses in conjunction with the proposed model: practicing loving God and loving neighbor, advocating on social media, contacting local representatives and senators, changing consumption habits, and hosting interfaith advocacy events. All of these responses should model a Christian ethic of loving God and loving people. Furthermore, each practice leverages resources, privilege, and power already prevalent in the American evangelical church. Please note that the following sections should be considered in conjunction with the model of interfaith advocacy, but do not constitute a roadmap for doing interfaith advocacy, nor are the suggested practices applicable to all contexts and effective at all times. When engaging in interfaith advocacy, please follow the steps of the model of interfaith advocacy and develop practices that best fit the context of the community and crisis.

i. Practicing Loving God and Loving Neighbor

It is crucial for American evangelicals not to forget the practice of love when it comes to the Uyghur Crisis. In times of crisis response, it may be easy to forget why one should respond—especially when a crisis may appear distant. As discussed previously in the section “Love God and Love Neighbor”, a globalized world forces Christians to consider their role in global crises and conflict. When it comes to the Uyghur Crisis, American evangelicals must not forget their response comes from the practice of love. In a personal interview I conducted with Adrian Zenz, a Senior Fellow in China Studies at the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation and arguably the most prominent name in Uyghur advocacy related issues, Zenz stated:

The best thing that any Christian can do at any time is to love their neighbor. That would also be the thing that the evangelical Christians can do in the Uyghur situation. You show love by caring and knowing. The Uyghurs are very traumatized. They feel really blessed if anyone reaches out to them, just listens; listening can be one thing. But also attending coming to events and befriending people. I mean, I know people who do it and it is very powerful. This can be done in all kinds of different ways. Spending time, or one can be very creative about how they do, but one just has to actually engage and find Uyghurs.

(Zenz)

The American evangelical response to the Uyghur Crisis should first begin with embracing the Judeo-Christian ethic of love. Without love as the foundation for engagement, it is unlikely that American evangelicals will participate in advocacy for the Uyghur cause. The call for American evangelicals, as reflected by Jesus, is to love the outcast, the foreigner, and the Samaritan. Thus, advocacy rooted in love should be the foundation for American evangelical engagement in any crisis. Marjorie Thompson, in her book *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* suggests that “Life in Christ is different from the patterns of the world we know so well. In place of degradation and abuse, it means reverence and respect for all of life. Instead of politics of power, it embodies humble and joyful service. In place of retribution and revenge, it offers forgiveness and reconciliation” (15). When American evangelicals accept the invitation to love as Christ did, their response to crises around the world will be radically altered as they pursue justice and mercy at all costs. The following four suggested actions—advocating on social media, contacting local representatives and senators, changing consumption habits, and hosting interfaith advocacy events—are a result of what it looks like to love God and love neighbor amid the Uyghur Crisis.

ii. Advocating on Social Media

Undoubtedly, one of the easiest ways to advocate today is through social media. Social media is a powerful platform and has been essential in bringing about awareness regarding the Uyghur Crisis. For example, in November of 2019, a woman used the social media platform TikTok to make a viral video about the Uyghurs that reached millions (Rosenblatt). The reality is that one of the most considerable felt needs among the Uyghur community is getting the Uyghur Crisis before the public eye. In an interview I did in the home of a Uyghur mother over dinner, she concluded that “Nobody knows us” and that she felt the Uyghur Crisis had been swept under the rug (Urumqi). Thus, one of the most accessible forms of advocacy that American evangelicals can do is use social media platforms to bring awareness to the Uyghur Crisis. Simply posting an article or an educational video can bring people out of ignorance and into awareness. As a result of constant developments regarding the Uyghur Crisis, I suggest that those who are engaging in interfaith advocacy join the mailing list of the Uyghur Human Rights Project and regularly check the website *uhrp.org* for the latest updates and fact-checked information. From there, individuals can repost news articles on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, TikTok and Instagram.

Additionally, the current COVID-19 Crisis presents an opportunity for American evangelicals to increase social media advocacy efforts for Uyghurs who are at risk for contracting the virus due to inhumane conditions inside of camps. Given individuals short attention spans, there is a real danger that we will neglect the Uyghur Crisis to simply focus on the virus. Now more than ever, individuals need to recognize that vulnerable populations such as the Uyghurs in Xinjiang are most at risk of an outbreak. COVID-19 is not only a pandemic but a human rights issue. As more people are home, close to cell phones, and on social media, there

should be a push for Uyghur advocacy efforts. It is essential to recognize that the sharing information related to the Uyghur Crisis is meeting a felt need of the Uyghur community—awareness.

iii. Contacting Local Representatives and Senators

Another effective form of interfaith advocacy is contacting local representatives and senators. One way in which individuals can do this is by asking them to support any current and future legislation that will pass sanctions on China for its grotesque human rights abuses of the Uyghur people. At the publication of this thesis, the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019 has been passed by the house and senate, which is excellent news for the Uyghur cause. However, the fight for legislation directly calling out China and international beneficiaries is far from over. Future bills will likely be introduced, and the Uyghur Human Rights Policy Act of 2019 has not been adopted yet. Thus, American evangelicals should continue to reach out to both local representatives and senators and ask them to support any bill that supports both Uyghur Americans and Uyghurs abroad. This can be done by phone, email, or letter. *Saveuighur.org* is a useful resource that will immediately put individuals in contact with representatives and senators by simply having them fill out some basic information. Surprisingly, members of congress listen to and consider the desires of their constituents. The goal of contacting representatives and senators is to bring about awareness in congress regarding the Uyghur Crisis so that legislation may be passed that holds China accountable and provides a voice and relief for Uyghurs globally.

iv. Changing Consumption Habits

One tangible way to take a stance against China's policy against Uyghurs is to change consumption habits. This requires American evangelicals to be conscious of what they are consuming and where it comes from. In a recent research piece published by the Australian Strategic Policy Institute titled “Uyghurs for Sale”, it was found that “...factories across China are using forced Uyghur labor under a state-sponsored labor transfer scheme that is tainting the global supply chain” (Xu et. al. 3). This means countless “Made in China” items that the average American consumer purchases are potentially being made with forced slave labor. As of the publication of this thesis, at least 83 companies are profiting from the forced labor of Uyghurs:

Abercrombie & Fitch, Acer, Adidas, Alstom, Amazon, Apple, ASUS, BAIC Motor, BMW, Bombardier, Bosch, BYD, Calvin Klein, Candy, Carter’s, Cerruti 1881, Changan Automobile, Cisco, CRRC, Dell, Electrolux, Fila, Founder Group, GAC Group (automobiles), Gap, Geely Auto, General Electric, General Motors, Google, H&M, Haier, Hart Schaffner Marx, Hisense, Hitachi, HP, HTC, Huawei, iFlyTek, Jack & Jones, Jaguar, Japan Display Inc., L.L.Bean, Lacoste, Land Rover, Lenovo, LG, Li-Ning, Marks & Spencer, Mayor, Meizu, Mercedes-Benz, MG, Microsoft, Mitsubishi, Mitsumi, Nike, Nintendo, Nokia, The North Face, Oculus, Oppo, Panasonic, Polo Ralph Lauren, Puma, Roewe, SAIC Motor, Samsung, SGMW, Sharp, Siemens, Skechers, Sony, TDK, Tommy Hilfiger, Toshiba, Tsinghua Tongfang, Uniqlo, Victoria’s Secret, Vivo, Volkswagen, Xiaomi, Zara, Zegna, ZTE. (Morgret)

Now is the time for American evangelicals to take a stance and hold ground against organizations that are directly perpetuating the human rights abuses occurring to Uyghurs in Xinjiang. In the words of Julie Clawson, author of *Everyday Justice: The Global Impact of Our*

Daily Choices, “If we purchase items made by underpaid and abused workers, we participate in their exploitation” (133). American evangelicals must be conscious of how they shop and avoid products from companies directly implicated in the forced labor of Uyghurs. As consumers, American evangelicals have the power to transform the global supply chain by demanding products made ethically and sustainably and by refusing to purchase products that are not. This requires mindfulness that is aware of what is exploitative and what is a fair exchange (Palmer 16). Changing consumption habits is a tangible way to advocate on behalf of Uyghurs.

v. Hosting Interfaith Advocacy Events

A transformative way to practice interfaith advocacy is to participate in interfaith advocacy events. American evangelicals can learn multiple ways in which they can engage in the Uyghur Crisis within an interfaith advocacy event that models the proposed interfaith advocacy model. Further, American evangelicals can put faces to those of other Abrahamic faiths and perhaps even Uyghurs. In the interfaith advocacy model, I suggest three principles of an interfaith event—welcoming, leveling, and embracing. Each of these principles should be considered as American evangelicals contemplate hosting events. An interfaith event should not cause anxiety, tension, or fear for a hosting congregation but hope. Thus, effective interfaith events must be done in conjunction with effective interfaith leadership. American evangelical leaders should practice building relationships, understanding story, and learning points of religious connection with those of other faiths before they welcome their whole congregation to do so. The beginning of an interfaith movement is connection. Thus, a great place for American evangelical leaders and congregants to start is merely sending emails to mosques and synagogues in the area and setting up a time to meet over a meal or coffee. From there, it can be decided if an interfaith event would be beneficial and if there should be an advocacy agenda behind it. If this

thesis has sparked any interest in hosting an interfaith event for Uyghurs, please consider contacting me.¹

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Uyghur Crisis is one of the most pressing issues of the 21st century. At the writing of this thesis, it is estimated that 1.8 million individuals are locked in concentration camps, and many others have been coerced into forced labor camps. The biblical mandate of loving God and loving neighbor should drive the response of American evangelicals as they address world crises like the Uyghur Crisis. By leveraging resources, privilege, and power, American evangelicals can effectively respond to crises around the world, namely the Uyghur Crisis. In this thesis, I developed a model for interfaith advocacy that suggested four principles, building relationships, understanding story, learning points of religious connection, and participating in interfaith activities with interfaith leadership. American evangelicals can use this model to be better equipped to engage in issues related to interfaith matters and work alongside other faiths in the process. In the case of the Uyghur Crisis, I suggest five practices American evangelicals can participate in, practicing loving God and loving neighbor, advocating on social media, contacting local representatives and senators, changing consumption habits, and hosting interfaith advocacy events. As American evangelicals engage the Uyghur Crisis, they should never forget the Christian ethic that drives them to do so. If American evangelicals embrace their love of God and neighbor by participating in interfaith advocacy, justice will abound, hope will restore the brokenhearted, and peace will prevail.

Appendix A: Cultural Genocide and the Uyghur people: A Call to Action and Case Study

The most rewarding aspect of writing this thesis was hosting an interfaith advocacy night educating people on the Uyghur Crisis and calling them into awareness and action. The following section is the summary of an event that I organized at Overlake Christian Church in the fall of 2019. This event acted as a field-test for the model of interfaith advocacy I developed based on research that I conducted during my month-long fieldwork venture in the Washington D.C. area. In other words, this event resulted from 27 interviews with Uyghur activists, faith leaders, and government officials, countless hours of research, and from time working alongside and learning from Bill Clark, a peacemaker in the Seattle area who has been participating in interfaith work since the 1980s. My hope is that this summary will give greater context to my model for interfaith advocacy and perhaps provide an example of the process an interfaith event requires.

Brainstorming

After returning from the field, I was quite confident that the research I had conducted required a project to assist it. Luckily, I had been working with Dr. Bill Clark, a Uyghur activist in the Seattle area prior to my research and fieldwork activities. Dr. Clark is the one who inspired me to study Uyghur related issues for my fieldwork in the first place. He is also an interfaith activist with decades of experience and expertise, and his help was incredibly beneficial for the interfaith event I hosted.

The first mentions of an interfaith event at an evangelical church focusing on the Uyghur Crisis came out of a coffee meeting I had with Dr. Clark. He mentioned to me that he was successfully able to engage with both the Jewish and Muslim communities in the area but had yet been successful at hosting an interfaith event in a Christian community. He asked me if I would

be willing to host an event at the church I attended, and if I was willing to take the lead. I knew this would be a useful place for me to test my model for interfaith advocacy. Moreover, the issue was close to my heart—thus, I gladly agreed.

Engaging the Church

During my fieldwork, I formed relationships with Uyghurs both locally and nationally and began understanding story and building points of religious connection. Further, Dr. Clark was well connected in the Muslim and Jewish community and knew just about every Uyghur living in the Seattle area. As a result, he had formed an interfaith Uyghur activist group that he invited me to join. Being a part of this interfaith leadership group allowed me to have insights into interfaith advocacy that I would not have had otherwise. However, this interfaith leadership group did not allow me access to the American evangelical community. Thus, my job was to form a bridge between the work of the Uyghur activist group and the mission of the church. I began by first having coffee with several individuals involved in leadership at Overlake Christian Church. I began by explaining the Uyghur cause to them and the pressing nature of the issue. I was ready to answer questions and concerns that they presented to me. Moreover, at this time, I increasingly began advocating on social media, calling local representatives and senators, and changing my consumption habits, all to bring about more awareness to the Uyghur Crisis. As a result of these efforts, people in the American evangelical community I belonged to became aware of the Uyghur Crisis, and the leadership at Overlake Christian Church agreed that I could host an interfaith night as long as I spearheaded the operation.

Building Relationships

Preparing for an interfaith involves first building relationships. Relationships are the cornerstones that generate opportunities to host interfaith nights. In the context of the interfaith night I hosted, the key relationships were to the local church, an interfaith advocacy group, and the national Uyghur community. As I prepared for the event, I asked a Uyghur friend of mine from Virginia if he would be willing to fly out to the west coast and speak at the event. He was willing and invited a friend of his to join. Working with and building relationships with the local church allowed me to ask if they would be willing to pay for the plane tickets, which they happily did. Moreover, relationships with the Uyghur advocacy group gave me access to useful resources as I prepared and even a grant to cover food for the event.

Understanding Story

After listening to hours of personal testimonies from Uyghurs living in America, I knew that the most significant aspect of the interfaith night was going to be sharing testimonies. I asked that each of the two Uyghur speakers come with a 20-minute-long story to share about their life and what happened to them. The most central part of the interfaith event was that people heard firsthand stories of what it is like to be a Uyghur. As a result of me understanding the story of my Uyghur friends, I knew it was essential that others understood as well. It was the understanding of story that would move people to action and capture the hearts of the audience. Thus, I added a lament section to the event in which people would sit and contemplate the pain that the Uyghurs were experiencing. Moreover, Dr. Clark and Dr. Darren Byler both prepared presentations to provide context to the greater story of the Uyghur Crisis by summarizing what was happening, why it was happening, and what people could do about it.

Learning Points of Religious Connection

It was tricky navigating an interfaith advocacy event within the context of an evangelical church. During the event, I knew it would be essential to communicate that all faiths and belief systems were welcome and to provide representation from other faiths on the speaking platform. Thus, as I welcomed people to the event, I made sure to recognize that vast diversity of beliefs in the room and the shared vision of justice when it comes to the Uyghur Crisis. Moreover, I asked a pastor at Overlake Christian Church to lead a prayer that would embrace the justice elements of the Abrahamic faiths present in the room. The prayer invited people to pray as comfortable in their faith tradition and welcomed people of different faiths to come together in prayer. This element ended up being one of the most powerful aspects of the night.

Participating in Interfaith Activities with Interfaith Leadership


The day of the event was a trying day and yet brought love and hope to the hearts of many. All the moving parts came together as I trusted the team that I had assembled. Even two women from Northwest University volunteered their time as part of the final project for a class. In attendance were 75 individuals ranging from local congregant members to international visitors and Chinese church members. The event itself provided food for attendees but was also advertised as a potluck. Because of that, there was plenty of food to go around including some traditional Uyghur dishes Uyghur friends had created. Sharing food is a spiritual experience in the Abrahamic faiths and is a useful tool in building bridges between faith traditions. After people had shared meals, I welcomed everyone to the event and introduced Dr. Clark to give a presentation introducing the Uyghur Crisis. Following Dr. Clark's presentation was the story of two Uyghur men who moved many to tears. One of the Uyghur men, a talented pianist, played a song on the

piano for everyone to hear. I then invited a Uyghur woman to share about a photo exhibit that she had brought to the event as a visual aid. Following the visual aid, Dr. Clark did a presentation on the importance of lament. Then Dr. Byler gave a call to action inviting the audience to take a few steps such as advocating on social media, contacting local representatives and senators, changing consumption habits, and hosting interfaith advocacy events. At the end of the event, a pastor from Overlake Christian Church led the attendees in a prayer that welcomed all faith traditions and Secularists to join. As people left, there was a collection of emails for follow up and space for people to lament and think about their role in the crisis, whether that was, practicing loving God and loving neighbor, advocating on social media, contacting local representatives and senators, changing consumption habits, or hosting interfaith advocacy events. Overall, the event engaged 75 individuals and educated them on the Uyghur Crisis. The following Sunday, the speaking pastor at Overlake Christian Church shared in front of 2,000 people about the event and the Uyghur Crisis. This goes to show that a small event can have a substantial effect on the community around it. Without an interfaith event, the pastor would have likely never shared about the issue, and people would have remained in ignorance. The event itself was a success, and it indeed showed the effectiveness of my model for interfaith advocacy.

The following graphic was used for marketing the interfaith advocacy night:

CULTURAL GENOCIDE

and the Uyghur People: **A CALL TO ACTION**



THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 14
6:30 - 9:00 PM

OVERLAKE CHRISTIAN CHURCH - MSM ROOM
RSVP - [OCUIGHURNIGHT.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/occuighurnight)
POTLUCK DINNER (BRING A DISH TO SHARE)

9900 Willows Rd, Redmond, WA 98052

Currently, there are over **ONE MILLION** Uyghur's in concentration camps in China being submitted to brainwashing and inhuman treatment. Learn more at this interfaith night devoted to understanding and action.

Appendix B: Example Event Timeline

12:00 pm	Pick up Imran and Kaisar from Seatac airport
3:50 pm	Arrive at Overlake and grab materials
4:00 pm	Gabriella & Amanda Arrives to volunteer with the event prep tables and general event space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Fill the cooler with ice for drinks</i> • <i>Grab cart from Dawn's office</i> • <i>Grab Silverware and plates from Drew's cage</i> • <i>Grab resource print outs to place on tables</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Darren's Flyer</i> ○ <i>Email Collection List</i> ○ <i>Event Agenda</i> ○ <i>Directions up Stairs</i>
5:30 pm	Volunteers arrive and help prep-tables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Derek Arrives around 5:30 pm to run AV</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Walk Derek Through night (Give him Bill's Powerpoint)</i> • <i>Tyler to arrive at 6:00 pm: go over photography</i>
5:30 pm	Food pick up from Mediterranean Kitchen
6:00 pm	Pray for the night and go over agenda
6:15 pm	All Food is prepped and ready to go
6:15 pm	Amanda and Gabriella in place to welcome and collect emails

6:20 pm	Kaisar in place playing piano during dinner from 6:20 - 7:00 pm
6:30 pm	<p>Welcome everyone to the event</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Invite them to sit with some people they may not know</i> • <i>No photography or recording</i> • <i>Invite them to look at photography exhibit showcasing Uyghur scholars</i>
7:00 pm	<p>Welcome everyone and let everyone know the event is beginning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>No photography or recording</i> • <i>Discuss the diversity in the room and the interfaith nature of this event, bipartisan nature</i> • <i>Invite Dr. Bill Clark to introduce the Uyghur powerpoint</i>
7:05 pm	Dr. Bill Clark presents powerpoint
7:20 pm	Introduce Imran and Kaisar and the impact these young men have had on your life
7:30 pm	<p>Imran's story (20 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Write it out, make sure it is 20 minutes long</i> • <i>The goal of the evening is to influence the hearts and minds of our audience to inform and move them to action</i>
7:50 pm	<p>Kaisar's story (20 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Write it out, make sure it is 20 minutes long</i> • <i>The goal of the evening is to influence the hearts and minds of our audience to inform and move them to action</i>
8:10pm	Turnisa Shares about Photo Exhibit
8:15pm	Dr. Bill Clark Lament as a gateway for hope
8:25pm	2 mins of Holy Silence

8:30 pm	Call to Action: Darren Byler <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Email List (Get email sign up sheet)</i>
8:50 pm	Time of prayer
9:00 pm	End and thank you. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Email list in back of room with Amanda and Gabriella
9:30 pm	CLEAN UP

Appendix C: Example Host Notes

5:30 pm	<p>Talk with volunteers and those speaking that night</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run through the order of the night • Hand out copies of the event agenda • <i>Make sure Derek Arrives around 5:30 pm to run AV</i> • <i>Ask Tyler to arrive at 6:00 pm and go over photography</i>
5:15 pm	<p>Send girls to pick up food from Mediterranean Kitchen</p>
6:00 pm	<p>Pray for the night and go over Schedule</p>
6:15 pm	<p>All Food is prepped and ready to go</p>
6:15 pm	<p>Make sure Amanda and Gabriella in place to welcome</p>
6:15 pm	<p>Chat with Kaisar and make sure he is in place for playing piano</p> <p>Kaisar in place playing piano during dinner from 6:20 - 7:00 pm</p>
6:30 pm	<p>Welcome everyone to the event</p> <p>Thank you everyone for coming out tonight. We welcome you with open arms into this night of learning, eating, knowing and caring in regard to Uyghurs. I will be your MC tonight. My name is Josh Blay and I am a graduate student at Northwest University and have been studying evangelicalism and how it relates to the Uyghur Crisis which you will learn about tonight. Please grab some food and find yourself a seat. There are many Uyghurs tonight who will be sitting at tables, please get to know them!</p> <p>A couple notes for the night</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sit at a table with people you may not know! This is an interfaith night which means theres people from a vast diversity of backgrounds and all are welcome here tonight.</i> • <i>We are asking that there be no photography or recording of the event tonight. We have a photographer volunteering today to capture these moments but for the safety of speakers we ask that you respect this rule.</i> • <i>Tonight we also have photography exhibit showcasing Uyghur scholars brought to us by Turnisa from Vancouver, Canada, feel free to take a look at that during dinner or after the event ends tonight.</i>
<p>7:00 pm</p>	<p>I would like to begin this night with a quote from a Uyghur friend of mine:</p> <p>“We are all human. I wish they felt my pain, my mother and fathers' pain because, they also have mothers and are somebodies' brother. See the humanity inside of us. Just see the humanity and don't let Uyghurs die. Because Humanity is dying in Xinjiang, so we are dying. So, let's help each other as human beings. Please help us”. This was the cry of my friend when I asked her what she would call Christians to do in regard to the Uyghur crisis and in this room I recognize a vast diversity, Jewish friends, Muslims Friends, Secular and atheist friends and I think this is call is to all of us and you are welcome here tonight. Tonight will undoubtedly be a night of learning the raw reality of what is happening in China to Uyghurs. We will hear testimonies of those impacted. We will hear from two professors one from Northwest University and another from University of Washington who have focused their research efforts in this area. We will hear a lot of information that will be disturbing and leave us feeling sick. We will learn the reality of the statement my friend Muhammed made “The Chinese government even takes away our happiness”. Tonight, is about listening and learning and taking that sick feeling in our stomachs and moving towards action. Tonight we will sit with <i>Dietrich Bonhoeffer</i> a famous theologian who was hanged by the Nazi regime for protesting the genocidal persecution of the Jews yet before dying he left us with a statement that pulls out of complacency when injustice rises around us...“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless.</p> <p>Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.”. And tonight, we will grapple with this statement made by my Uyghur friend Mamtjan “I believe justice will prevail. The only matter is the problem of time and how we will respond to it.”</p> <p>So without further ado, I introduce to you Dr. Bill Clark, a man who lived and worked in China with Uyghurs for 10 years before moving to Kazakhstan in 1996, Northwest Regional Director of Peace Catalyst International, Professor at Northwest University, and a peacemaker who has worked alongside of Muslims since 1985.</p>

7:05 pm	Dr. Bill Clark presents PowerPoint on Uyghur people
7:20 pm	<p>Thank you so much, Bill!</p> <p>The next speaker I get to introduce to you is my dear friend Imran. This summer, I spent a month living with Imran and some other amazing Uyghur friends on the east coast. I had never known it was possible to drink a liter of tea a day until I received the hospitality of Imran. Imran is an amazing man with an amazing story. What Imran is sharing today requires bravery and undoubtedly causes pain, so please join me in welcoming Imran.</p>
7:25 pm	<p>Imran's story (20 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Write it out, make sure it is 20 minutes long</i> • <i>Watch a Ted Talk</i> • <i>The goal of the evening is to influence the hearts and minds of our audience to inform and move them to action</i>
7:45 pm	<p>Thank you so Much Imran</p> <p>The next speaker I get to introduce to you is Kaiser. Kaiser is a Yale Graduate, and an accomplished musician as you could tell during our dinner time, I was not able to meet him until today, but I know that on the east coast he is well known among the Uyghur community and his creativity and ability to promote the Uyghur arts through music and more has inspired many. Please help me welcome Kaiser.</p>
7:50 pm	<p>Kaiser's story (20 mins)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Write it out, make sure it is 20 minutes long</i> • <i>Watch a Ted Talk</i> • <i>The goal of the evening is to influence the hearts and minds of our audience to inform and move them to action</i>
8:10 pm	I now welcome Turnisa,

	Turnisa traveled from Vancouver, Canada to be with us today and share about the mass incarceration and disappearance of Uyghur scholars in Xinjiang (East Turkestan)
8:15 pm	Dr. Bill Clark Lament as a gateway for hope Next, I will invite Dr. Bill Clark back up for teaching on Lament.
8:25 pm	2 mins of holy silence
8:30 pm	We've learned and heard testimonies of the incredible tragedy happening in China to the Uyghur people. We've seen the faces of those affected and listened to professors summarize the reality. We have sat lament and pondered the suffering and allowed it to hit our hearts. We've sat in silence before God to honor those who are in concentration camps and to hear from God. Now we must move to action. Our next speaker is Darren Byler, Darren Byler is a postdoctoral researcher at the Center for Asian Studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder, where he studies the technology and politics of urban life in Chinese Central Asia and around the world. His writing has appeared in Logic, Guardian, and ChinaFile among other publications. Please welcome Darren Byler as he gives us a call to action.
8:50 pm	Time of Prayer <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Table discussion and prayer with those around
9:00 pm	Thank you so much, everyone, for coming out. In the back, you will notice Gabriella and Amanda. She is holding an email sign-up sheet if you are interested in learning more or attending any Uyghur related events in the Seattle area! Thank you, Overlake Christian Church, for hosting this event. Thank you to our Uyghur friends for being brave and sharing. Now go and tell everyone you know. Tell your friends and family at the thanksgiving table. Share about it on social media. Contact your representative. The time is now! I will again leave you with a quote from my friend Mamatjan.

	<p>I believe justice will prevail. The only matter is the problem of time and how we will respond to it.”</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p>END</p>
<p>9:30 pm</p>	<p>CLEAN UP</p>

Appendix D: FAQ When Preparing an Interfaith Advocacy Night

1. How do I host an event?

Hosting an event begins with finding a cause to stand for. It may look like advocating for homeless youth in your city, advocating for a remodel of a community center, or advocating against police brutality that disproportionately affects black Americans in your neighborhood.

Whatever it is, the cause should be something members of your community are impacted by or can stand for. After you have your cause, contact local churches, mosques, and synagogues—exchange emails, have coffee, build relationships, understand story, learn points of religious connection. Then, participate in interfaith activities with interfaith leadership. Choose a welcoming, leveling, and embracing environment for the event to take place in. Make sure there is equal representation among the event speakers and hosts. Invite the community to join you. Sharing a meal is a great place to start. Embrace the Judeo-Christian and Muslim ethic of hospitality. Make sure to do everything out of love. Do not worry about the number of people who attend. Grassroots movements begin small and then grow and grow. Repeat events as necessary to achieve social justice in your community and elsewhere.

2. Do I have to be sensitive to other faiths?

It is essential to make sure everyone feels welcome in the room. Begin an event by assuring that everyone is welcome regardless of faith. Further, remind individuals that they should embrace their faith when it comes to doing advocacy work. It is faith that drives the call to justice. Individuals should not shy from their faith but be free to draw on it for inspiration, passion, and creativity.

3. What If I do not have a place to host an event?

You can host an event anywhere. It can happen on the street, at a park, or in a house. Just make sure that the environment is welcoming, leveling, and embracing.

4. What if a speaker says something I do not agree with?

This will happen. Doing interfaith advocacy work means that disagreements are inevitable. However, disagreements do not have to generate negative conflict. Once you learn points of religious connection, you will find that there are many places of agreement between Abrahamic faiths. The Old Testament book of Psalms, referred to in the Quran and part of the Jewish Tanakh, speaks of a God that opposes injustice and defends the oppressed and destitute. Always come back to where the Abrahamic faiths connect rather than disconnect if there is conflict. It is perfectly fine to embrace one's faith and share from that experience. Moreover, it is encouraged. If you find yourself disagreeing, remind yourself that you can still find agreement on many things.

5. What if there is a rude audience member?

One way to eliminate rude audience members is to avoid questions during the interfaith advocacy event. Instead of taking questions, interfaith leadership can hang around after an event and speak with individuals one on one. If you choose not to take questions, announce that people can find speakers and hosts after the event for follow up questions.

6. How should the room or space be set up?

I recommend setting up space so that individuals can sit at round tables or in a circle. Sitting in a circle generates a feeling of connection, community, and participation. Sitting in lines can generate feels of lecture and non-participation. However, if a circle setting is not possible a theater style setting will suffice.

7. How should I organize the night?

An event can be divided into six parts, shared meal/mingle time, welcome, introduction to cause, story from individual directly impacted or equivalent, call to action, and conclusion.

8. Who should speak at the event?

There must be representation from the interfaith community present at the event. Interfaith leaders should be welcomed to speak and given the opportunity. A timeline for the event can be planned out in advance where speakers are selected for different topics and sections of the event.

9. Should there be prayer?

Please embrace the faith that you follow! Honest worship and prayer are far better than the dishonest withholding of it. Fellow Abrahamic faith members will greatly appreciate your prayers.

10. How long should the event be?

A good standard for an event is 90 minutes. Devote 30 minutes for food and mingling on the front end, and an hour to content on the back end.

11. How should I follow up with event attendees?

An easy way to follow up with attendees is through email. You can have attendees sign in and write their contact information on a check-in sheet at the beginning of the event. Following up is as easy as sending a thank you email with some practical and actionable steps.

12. How do I find an interfaith network?

Reach out to local houses of faith. Chances are there may already be an interfaith gathering in your community. If there is not already one, it is time for you to start one. Begin by networking and building relationships. Additionally please feel free to contact bill.clark@peace-catalyst.net or

Joshua.p.blay@gmail.com if you are interested in hosting an interfaith advocacy night for Uyghurs.

Note

1. At the writing of this thesis, Bill Clark, Northwest Regional Director of Peace Catalyst International, is at the forefront of interfaith advocacy events for Uyghurs. If this thesis has sparked any interest in hosting an interfaith event for Uyghurs, please consider emailing Bill Clark at the following address bill.clark@peace-catalyst.net. Moreover, please consider reaching out to me Joshua.p.blay@gmail.com, and I can help individuals in preparing for an interfaith event by providing resources and support (view the appendix of this thesis for provided resources).

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