

CONFERENCE REPORT
FAITH & SOCIETY WEBINAR SERIES [EP. 1]: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE
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Introduction

Dr. Azza Karam, Father Deacon Andrew Bennett, and Rabbi Bob Kaplan discussed in this episode of the Faith and Society Webinar how people of faith and faith-based institutions benefit and strengthen the fabric of society.

Dr. Azza Karam

Dr. Karam serves as the Secretary General of Religions for Peace. She discussed the historical role of religious institutions as service providers and their relevance and importance in society today as the majority of society. Additionally, religion's role in Europe, although on the outskirts of society, affects thought and behavior for the people substantially. She pointed out that the oldest social service providers are religious institutions such as schools, hospitals, and clinics. In terms of humanitarian crises, like the COVID-19 pandemic, religious institutions were the first to respond. Religion is part of various engagements in world politics, society, culture, and services.

Father Deacon Andrew Bennet

Father Deacon Andrew Bennet of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and Program Director of the Religious Freedom and Faith Community Engagement said that religion helps individuals know who they are in relation to others and the community. Faith communities come from a deeply personal understanding of individual identity. He explained that in North America and Europe, there is a tendency to view religion as a private matter, which he believes is theologically and historically inaccurate. Human beings cannot organize their private and public lives separately. He directly stated, “we have an inherent desire to know what is beyond us: Who am I? Who am I in relation to others, the community, the world? Who am I in relationship to God/or other transcendent belief?”. Thus, faith communities act according to their deeper, personal understanding of identity in relation to belief, and they are motivated to do good.

Rabbi Bab Kaplan

Rabbi Bob Kaplan is the founding Director of The Center for Community Leadership, formally known as CAUSE–NY. Kaplan addressed that within an interfaith community effective leadership is necessary, yet they need to make their role in the conversation relevant through educated policy and provide both a religious and non-religious moral voice. He stated that individuals play a profound role in conversation. He further explained that faith establishes a platform and pathway for problem-solving to create a more equitable society.