RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR COPING,
RECOVERY, AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

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Abstract

Many factors shape the way catastrophic disaster impacts a community, including economic, social, political, cultural, and religious characteristics of the community. The role of religious factors in the disaster experience has been under-investigated, despite evidence of the influence of religious factors in all phases of the disaster cycle, including: the way the event is interpreted; the way the community recovers; and the immediate and long-term strategies that are implemented to reduce future disaster risk. This qualitative study examines the following factors among members of four distinct faith communities in the Hawaiian Islands: 1) religious narratives related to community-level disaster events; 2) level of disaster preparedness; 3) causal attribution; 4) faith-based coping mechanisms; and 5) post-disaster support. Twenty-six (26) individuals from the Bahá’í, Buddhist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), and United Methodist Church communities participated in this study, including 8 faith leaders and 18 lay members of communities in the sample. Using video as a method of elicitation, participant experiences with the 2011 Tohoku tsunami and their reactions to a simulated tsunami event directly impacting Hawai’i informed this exploration. Results suggested that religious narratives and historical figures do provide a framework for interpretation of and recovery from disaster events. Faith leaders, while reported by participants to serve as both thought leaders and resource hubs, provided less formal interpretation and direction in faith communities with less hierarchical leadership structures. Preparedness varied widely across faith communities, with members of the LDS reporting substantially greater levels of preparedness than other communities. Within-group comparisons revealed a fairly cohesive set of narratives, interpretive frameworks, and coping strategies
within each faith community, with little variance between leaders and lay members of faith communities. Comparisons among the communities in the sample revealed a diverse set of perspectives in causal attribution, as well as the level of struggle with the role of God in disaster events. Recommendations include the development of bi-directional support systems between disaster managers and faith leaders to increase disaster preparedness within faith communities, which may ultimately facilitate community-wide disaster risk reduction.
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Introduction

Communities are complex systems that operate to meet the needs of their inhabitants, with various levels of success. When disaster strikes a community, the existing systems are disrupted, often exposing system weaknesses (Burkle, 2006; UNDP, n.d.), and for some, calling into question the status quo. While the most comprehensive community-level disaster risk reduction strategies may seek to prevent or mitigate disaster risk, economic, cultural and religious barriers may inhibit full or even partial implementation of such plans (Hyndman, 2009; Prashantham, 2008; Khasalamwa, 2009).

For instance, the recommendation of buffer zone restrictions in inundation zones in American Samoa, while considered a disaster management best practice, is incompatible with local cultural and religious beliefs, and was, therefore, not a viable strategy for reducing tsunami risk in this island community (McGeehan, 2012).

Contextual factors such as socio-cultural systems and religious values and beliefs shape all phases of the disaster experience, including: the way the event is interpreted; the way the community recovers, physically, psychologically, and spiritually; and the immediate and long-term strategies that are implemented to reduce future disaster risk. The danger in using best practices established by experts in developed nations is the potential for Western, scientific, industrialized bias in the approach to disaster management, thus creating “best practices” which fail to incorporate local knowledge, values systems, beliefs, and worldviews (see Clinton, 2006; Kennedy, et al., 2008).

Implementation of such practices borders on socio-cultural and scientific hegemony, an insidious colonization of culture that will only serve to undermine, rather than leverage existing local resources, and increase, rather than reduce disaster risk. Indigenous
knowledge, socio-cultural and religious belief systems, and technology must be woven
together into disaster mitigation strategies that are both locally relevant and scientifically
sound.

While the field of disaster management has begun to incorporate cultural systems
into risk reduction strategies, religious aspects of the disaster experience have yet to be
incorporated into formal disaster management platforms. Religious and spiritual belief
systems, their values frameworks, and their associated social networks are an as yet
under-leveraged resource in the multidisciplinary disaster management community.
Religions provide the faithful with: a framework for interpreting the world; descriptions
and interpretations of historical events, sometimes through allegory; strategies for coping
with suffering; and proscriptions for behavior (see Pargament, 1997). It is natural, when
faced with disruption, for the faithful to turn to their beliefs to help understand an event,
and for guidance in discerning how to move forward. Disaster often raises existential
questions for those affected; if the cause of the event is interpreted through a religious
lens, then an understanding of the religious perspective is crucial to creating disaster risk
reduction strategies that are ultimately effective. Religious salience can no longer be
ignored as a component of the disaster experience.

In particular, religion is salient in the disaster experience through factors such as
causal attribution and support demands. Causal attribution that is religiously based can
impact disaster recovery and future hazard mitigation in various ways. A punitive
interpretation may create feelings of personal culpability and shame; a fatalistic
interpretation may create feelings of helplessness and hopelessness; an interpretation that
blames other religious groups may engender feelings of anger or righteousness. These
types of causal attributions shape the recovery process and may also inhibit investment in activities that would reduce future disaster risk. Alternatively, an interpretation of the disaster event that is based in the forces of nature or which relies on a strengths-based approach to rebuilding may create action-oriented responses that support recovery as well as facilitate hazard mitigation and disaster risk reduction. In addition to causal attribution, the expectations of support within a religious community may impact recovery. Some congregations may provide material, instrumental, and emotional support to members in the wake of disaster, thus facilitating recovery; other congregations may place support demands upon members that inhibit individual recovery. These aspects of the disaster experience have been under-investigated.

Multidisciplinary research bridging the fields of disaster management, psychology, and religion is limited.¹ This study explores these important aspects of the disaster experience, and explicates the crucial need to bridge the divide between civic and religious leaders in order to develop culturally relevant, religiously salient disaster risk reduction strategies. The Hawaiian Islands provide a unique opportunity to explore these topics from a multidisciplinary perspective given their range of disaster risks, and the Islands’ multicultural social milieu. More than 2,000 miles from the closest landmass, the Hawaiian Islands are the most geographically isolated archipelago in the world, and are at risk for a variety of natural hazards. The island of Hawai‘i, frequently referred to as The Big Island, is home to two active volcanoes, Kiluaea and Mauna Loa, and three that have been dormant for some time. The islands experience thousands of earthquakes each year,

¹ See Coyle (2008) for a discourse on the dearth of psychological research on the topics of religion and spirituality and the need for qualitative inquiry.
² “A thought leader is an individual or firm that prospects, clients, referral sources,
the majority of which are microearthquakes that cause no damage to infrastructure and are often detected by seismometers but not perceived by people (Okubo & Nakata, 2011). Thus, while earthquakes on the Big Island are very common, high magnitude quakes are relatively infrequent. Although high magnitude quakes are rare, the elevated levels of seismic activity, as well as the Islands’ position on the Pacific tectonic plate, place Hawai‘i at risk for landslide and tsunami. Further tsunami risks in Hawai‘i may occur from earthquake activity across the Pacific Ocean, as well as along the Aleutian Trench in Alaska. High levels of rainfall and risk of flash floods are also possible across the islands. Due to this broad range of hazard risks unique to the Hawaiian Islands, and as a result of recent earthquake and tsunami activity, the potential for disaster is particularly salient in communities across the islands.

In addition to its distinct cluster of geophysical and meteorological characteristics, the Hawaiian Islands are socio-culturally unique as well. The Hawaiian Islands are culturally diverse island communities, and have come to be known as the “melting pot of the Pacific” due to the unique blending of various cultures, including Native Hawaiian, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, and Portuguese, among many others. Intermarriage among these ethnic groups over the past two centuries has resulted in a unique blend of cultural and ethnic beliefs, values and practices that constitute modern Hawaiian culture (Okamura, 1995). The Islands are also home to a range of religious congregations, including various Christian, Buddhist, Bahá’í, Jewish, and Eastern faith communities. With the range of hazard risks and broad cultural and religious diversity, the Hawaiian Islands offer a useful context to explore the connection between religion, disaster recovery and disaster risk reduction.
This phenomenological study explores the religious aspects of the disaster experience among a range of faith communities across the Hawaiian Islands. The purpose of this study is to: provide insight into the ways in which religious narratives impact the disaster experience; elucidate the ways faith may foster or inhibit disaster recovery and preparedness; and offer recommendations for multi-disciplinary disaster management teams for leveraging faith-based resources in order to enhance existing disaster risk reduction strategies.

Participants in the study represented members and leaders of four faith communities, including: Bahá’í, Buddhist, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and the United Methodist Church. Through semi-structured qualitative interviews with congregation leaders and members of these faith communities, participants were asked to share their religious framework for interpreting and recovering from disaster. Participant experiences with the 2011 Tohoku tsunami and their reactions to a simulated tsunami event directly impacting Hawai’i informed this exploration. Research questions addressed the following: 1) religious narratives related to the causes of and meaning assigned to community-level disaster events; 2) level of disaster preparedness; 3) causal attribution related to the 2011 Tohoku tsunami; 4) faith-based coping mechanisms; and 5) post-disaster support demands and expectations. Results from the study begin to fill the research gap regarding the role of faith in the disaster experience, and inform recommendations for collaboration among the fields of psychology, theology, and disaster management that will leverage the resources of diverse faith communities and facilitate disaster risk reduction.
Literature Review

Toward Multidisciplinary Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction

In the past several decades, the attention of disaster managers around the world has turned to the world’s most vulnerable populations. The United Nations declared 1990-1999 the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (UN Resolution 42/169, 1987), seeking to bridge the gap between nations with high levels of technology, expertise and resources and those without. The international field of disaster management has directed concerted efforts toward these ends, but the fact remains that the majority of catastrophic disasters impact developing nations and the majority of disaster research is conducted in highly industrialized, technologically advanced, first world nations (Roy, Thakkar, & Shah, 2011; UNDP, 2007) that are steeped in Western ideologies and values systems. It is the responsibility of these nations to find ways to cross the scientific, economic, and cultural divides.

There are several challenges inherent in this undertaking. First, disaster risk reduction not only requires international collaboration, but it is fundamentally a multidisciplinary endeavor. Disaster management teams may include: urban planners, architects, and engineers; geologists, meteorologists, and oceanographers; city, state, and federal emergency response agencies; and non-governmental (NGO) aid or funding entities. However, the disciplines involved often have limited overlap in theory, terminology and outcome prioritization (see Reich & Reich, 2006 for a discourse on interdisciplinary collaboration; see also Kelly, 2010). Differences in jargon and fundamental beliefs must be negotiated in the context of the community that has been impacted, not in the limited context of the insular scientific community. This requires
engagement of local leadership to ensure that the community has a voice at the disaster management table. Ideally, communities should take a proactive approach to disaster management, and address these issues as part of their community development planning processes prior to a disaster event. It is crucial that these relationships be built, understandings negotiated, concerns prioritized, and the mechanisms for achieving outcomes articulated prior to a disaster so that action plans can be initiated without additional delay. Communities must engage in sufficient planning and training in order to mobilize resources to meet their objectives as effectively as first responders do.

Related to this first challenge is the unfortunate fact that while cultural context is noted as an important component of disaster management initiatives, more often than not, cultural liaisons or local representatives are not involved in early stages of disaster planning. That is to say, the “experts” have already defined the problems and designed strategies to address them (most often informed by research and evidence-based “best practices”). However, best practices inevitably have a Western theoretical and cultural foundation, which disaster managers then seek to adjust to the local context. The fundamental problem with this approach is that it fails to recognize local knowledge, resources, and capacities within local social-ecological systems that have the potential to reduce disaster risk via existing culturally situated mechanisms (Trickett, 2009). Furthermore, this approach, grounded in Western socio-cultural systems and epistemologies, fails to identify culturally situated barriers to disaster risk reduction best practices.

Third, it is important to note that cultural differences are not the only social-contextual factors that must be taken into account in creating effective strategies for
community-based disaster risk reduction. Socio-economic, class and educational differences often marginalize the poor, the uneducated, people of color, and recent immigrants, who are at further risk of inequality and exploitation throughout the disaster recovery process. Perhaps the most vivid example of a failure to consider these vulnerable members of a community was the unsuccessful evacuation of New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina. Disaster managers and city planners failed to account for the large number of residents without access to transportation, who were then stranded in the rising waters of the city. Resources were available that would have enabled hundreds, perhaps thousands more to escape; that a yard lined with empty school buses sat unused was glaring evidence of the failure of city managers to acknowledge the needs of all of their constituents and to actively mobilize resources to meet their needs. Consultation with community leaders would have explicated that need, and their advocacy in advance could have prevented some of the devastating impacts of that catastrophic event.

**Scientific Elitism**

While the field of disaster management has begun to acknowledge the need for collaboration with local civic and cultural leadership in developing strategies to reduce community level disaster risk, the scientific community has failed to acknowledge the critical role religious leaders have in the disaster experience. Given the limited interdisciplinary research among the fields of theology and disaster management (Gaillard & Texier, 2010), the question remains: if culture has been widely acknowledged as a vital component to disaster risk reduction, why has religion been heretofore ignored in the disaster literature? Religion, and more specifically religious interpretations of
disaster events, are often “simply dismissed as a symptom of ignorance, superstition and backwardness” (Chester, 2005, p. 319). Chester elucidates this point:

Some scientists and social scientists in describing [the 1991 eruption of] Pinatubo [a volcano in the Philippines] were extremely dismissive and mocked religious responses. Tayag et al. (1996, pp. 94–5), for instance, placed prayer in the same category of response as running around aimlessly and weeping, while Bautista (1996, pp. 157) classified religious responses as being part of a disturbed psychological condition (p. 322)

The provision of alternative scientific explanations to interpretations of disasters as “acts of God” drives this scientific elitist attitude toward non-scientific, “folk,” and religious interpretations of such events. However, since pre-industrial societies tend to have minimal exposure to geophysical or meteorological technology, it stands to reason that such societies (often developing nations) would define and respond to hazard events in terms of their historical, cultural and religious perspectives, providing explanations that are socio-culturally relevant. Dismissal of colloquial theories of disaster is not only elitist; it is scientifically and culturally hegemonic. While it may not be in the purview of geologists, volcanologists, and meteorologists to analyze the content or outcome of cultural and religious interpretations of natural hazard events, what we as social scientists must recognize is that the experience of the event is created by the people who have experienced it. Thus, whether or not one agrees with the content of the interpretation, it is an integral part of the disaster experience for the community, and therefore must be included as a legitimate factor in any attempt to increase disaster preparedness, cultivate hazard mitigation, build community resilience, and reduce disaster risk.

**Leveraging Religious Leadership**

Religious leaders are not merely gatekeepers to their congregations; they also possess unique skills, abilities, and resources, including financial and social capital
Church-based social capital has been shown to support community-level disaster recovery (Airriess, et al., 2008). By tapping into religious leadership as thought leaders\(^2\) and resource hubs, multidisciplinary disaster management teams can create resource and information-sharing networks that have access to and credibility with local communities. Furthermore, knowledge of the skills and abilities of these diverse community leaders can help to cultivate innovation in problem solving, assisting disaster management teams to consider disaster risk reduction strategies from diverse perspectives. This strengths-based approach builds trust, collaboration, and social capital within the community disaster management team, a crucial component for achieving successful outcomes. Religious leaders also play a pivotal role in the disaster response and recovery process. Religious congregations often serve as a gathering space when disaster strikes. During and after Hurricane Sandy (which hit the northeast U.S. in October-November, 2012), religious congregations served as gathering places for those seeking aid and those who wished to provide aid (M. Gorton, personal communication, January 15, 2013). In the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan (which hit the Philippines on November 8, 2013), people turned to their churches for food, shelter, and medical assistance; for instrumental support in finding lost loved ones; and for solace (Mullen, 2013). In times of distress, it was to their religious, not civic, leaders that people turned.

In addition to their role as access points to community resources, religious leaders are bi-directional information hubs, serving as resources both to their communities and to disaster managers. Faith leaders are often able to identify the specific needs of the

\(^2\) “A thought leader is an individual or firm that prospects, clients, referral sources, intermediaries and even competitors recognize as one of the foremost authorities in selected areas of specialization, resulting in its being the go-to individual or organization for said expertise.” (Prince & Rogers, 2012)
elderly; those with limited mobility; those with limited resources; those with limited language proficiency; and other members of their faith communities with special or unique needs (see Balcazar et al., 2004). Furthermore, religious leaders may be able to identify values and beliefs that might preclude engagement in some disaster risk reduction strategies. For instance, as McGeehan (2012) found in American Samoa, relocation out of buffer zones was simply not a viable option, as families would not move away from titled family lands, where their loved ones were interred. McGeehan also found that some tsunami victims did not see the value in moving homes up the mountainside; because the event was believed to be an act of God, in the minds of some community members, these mitigative efforts would not stop God’s power if He chose to punish them again. By engaging religious leaders who bring important contextual information about the fundamental framework for daily life in a community, disaster management plans can more comprehensively address the needs of the whole community. Through this strategy, disaster managers can actively endeavor to avoid marginalizing existing vulnerable groups or alienating groups who do not adhere to scientific explanations of hazard events, thus helping to reduce risk for those who retain their religious attributions as primary interpretive devices for disaster events.

**Religiosity and Disasters**

As discussed above, disaster managers can, with the help of local gatekeepers, develop educational outreach initiatives that communicate crucial hazard information in a way that is both meaningful and helpful for local residents, providing clear actions that are logical and possible given their unique needs and complex interpretive frameworks.

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3 In order to retain the essence of the arguments made by these references, multiple quotations are utilized in this section.
To this end, community planners must engage with local spiritual and religious leaders to determine the historical-religious lens through which a disaster event is (or may be) viewed, as well as the religious proscription for recovery. Religious attributions as found in Muslim and Buddhist communities, which both call for directed action, may serve as a crucial leveraging point in implementation of disaster risk reduction strategies. However, religious attribution that espouses the need only for a return to fundamental religious beliefs and practices may become a barrier to engagement in formal disaster preparedness and mitigation best practices. By employing the social capital of those in leadership positions, the community planning team may be able to simultaneously leverage coping mechanisms and resources, while developing methods to work around (without undermining) belief systems that have the potential to inhibit risk reduction initiatives. Employing the use of parallel practices (discussed below, Chester & Duncan, 2010) would enable both religiously and scientifically-based strategies to be utilized concomitantly, without risk to either approach.

**Religious Salience.**

McCombs (2010) argues the salience of religiosity in the disaster experience, for “it is in the spiritual realm that people find meaning and direction when assumptions about an orderly and reliable world need reconstructing” (p. 134). Furthermore, “faith traditions can offer a historical perspective, along with teachings and rituals designed to reassure and restore hope through crises” (Gunn, 2007, p. 936). This salience of religiosity in the disaster experience is a call to action requiring a shift toward a community-based recovery paradigm facilitated by collaboration among the fields of
psychology, theology, and disaster management. Chester (2005) makes the argument for this line of research clear:

In view of the continuing importance of religious beliefs within the worldviews of so many victims of disaster, dialogue between scientists, social scientists, theologians and members of faith communities is a potentially fruitful research frontier, as yet almost completely un-researched (p. 325, emphasis added).

While the need for such research is clear, incorporating religious beliefs into disaster management is a complex task: “One of the challenges for a theology of natural disaster is to integrate ancient cultural stories, theological reflection and modern scientific understanding in a convincing account of the cosmos” (Adeney-Risakotta, 2009, p. 237). Given the diversity of world religions, the task of reconciling each to the field of disaster management is an ambitious endeavor that must be initiated if we are to make progress in reducing community-level disaster risk.

**Theodicy.**

An examination of disaster in terms of religiosity would not be complete without attendance to theodicy. The term theodicy (in Christian and Jewish contexts) refers to “any attempt to reconcile notions of a loving and just God with the reality of human suffering” (Chester & Duncan, 2010). This concept can be extended to other religions by substituting the words “universal order” for “loving and just God” (Merli, 2010). To further this point, Chester and Duncan (2010) argue that since ancient times, religious texts, such as the Hebrew Torah and the Christian Old Testament (and I would add the Quran as well), provide a history of interpreting disasters in terms of the people’s relationship with God. As societies have made scientific and technological advances, empirical evidence has not eradicated these centuries-old belief systems. Instead, the authors argue, societies often develop “parallel practices” whereby communities
concomitantly seek to appease a deity in addition to engaging in disaster mitigative activities (see also Merli, 2010). Thus, religious interpretations and strategies for coping with disaster need not preclude scientific analysis or evidence-based disaster-risk reduction paradigms or vice versa; rather both may operate concomitantly in a complex framework for interpretation and action (see Schlehe, 2010).

**Religious Attribution.**

Perhaps one of the most salient aspects of religiosity in relation to the disaster experience is religious attribution, or “the extent to which one perceives stressful events as caused by God’s love or God’s anger” (Chan, Rhodes, & Perez, 2012, p. 178). Various cultural and religious contexts prompt different existential questions in the wake of disaster:

If the meaning of a disaster is determined by the questions we ask in the face of tragedy, we should not be surprised that people of different gender, class, education, culture, religion and socio-economic status will have different questions and different answers. (Adeney-Risakotta, 2009, p. 234).

What is most intriguing about this statement is not that people vary in their answers to the questions that arise in the wake of disaster, but that they ask different questions. The author goes on to say that “the differences are not only in the questions but also in the different moral sources to which people turn for answers” (Adeney-Risakotta, 2009, emphasis added, p. 234). This supports the “likelihood that religion acts as an antecedent to the coping process, thus shaping cognitive appraisals of the event” (Newton & McIntosh, 2008, p. 132). An examination of attributions among some of the world’s religions demonstrates the diverse theoretical and historical underpinnings of these meaning-making and coping processes. An exploration of the prominent world religions, including Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity is warranted. While still a nascent
religion, the Bahá’í community is growing throughout the Pacific, and will therefore be explored as well.

**Buddhism.**

The fundamental concepts of Buddhism have the potential to either hinder or facilitate post-disaster recovery. Both outcomes are possible, depending on the attributional processes used to analyze the event. “Since approximately 20% of the world’s population belongs to a religion that includes a belief in karma (Pargament et al. 2001; Reichenbach 1990) it seems probable that future disasters will affect individuals who hold this belief” (Levy et al., 2008, p. 44), thus providing evidence of the need for further exploration of the Buddhist experience of disaster. Levy, Slade, & Ranasinghe (2008) begin their discussion of Buddhist beliefs and disaster recovery with a description of the existing research on the effects of attribution on post-trauma illness:

Pessimistic explanatory-style, which includes attributing a bad event to a cause that is global (will affect all aspects of one’s life), stable (will last forever), and internal (due to my own actions), predicts worse health (Massad and Hulsey 2006; Peterson et al. 1998). (p. 39).

Levy and colleagues explain these findings in terms of Buddhist beliefs: the pervasiveness of karma across all life domains (globality) and its ongoing nature through reincarnation (stability) are consistent with a pessimistic explanatory style. The belief in karma and pessimistic explanatory style were indeed predictors of worse health in Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami (Levy, Slade, & Ranasinghe, 2008). The authors reason that the predictive association they found between belief in karma and poor health could be the result of a fatalistic worldview. They also posit that the non-predictive association between belief in karma and PTSD among their population may be the result of alternative applications of the karmic belief: for some it may provide a sense of order,
balance, and comfort in times of distress, whereas for others it may engender feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

McGeehan (2012) argued that because Buddhists believe that desire for a better outcome has the potential to create more spiritual suffering (see Bhawuk, 2010), engaging in disaster risk reduction strategies in order to create a better future may contradict Buddhist efforts to minimize all desires. Furthermore, since suffering and sorrow are considered a natural part of life in the Buddhist tradition (Wilson, 2008; Kaplan & Huynh, 2008), engagement in disaster mitigation activities in order to create a safer, more comfortable life may be perceived as antithetical to the positive desire-free spiritual state which the Buddhist seeks to attain. Additionally, an “underlying belief in karma could lead to quicker acceptance of the inevitable,” (Prashantham, 2008, p. 200) which may lead to indifferent or negative attitudes toward preparedness and mitigation (Levy, Slade & Ranasinghe, 2009). However, De Silva (2006) argues that these fundamental Buddhist concepts are not proposed to hinder action, but rather to cultivate directed action (De Silva, 2006), and as such, these beliefs may actually serve to facilitate recovery from disaster.

According to De Silva (2006), the three significant Buddhist concepts – impermanence (anicca), suffering, and karma – form the framework for the Buddhist epistemology, and as such guided the way the Sri Lankan community interpreted and recovered from the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. De Silva explains that impermanence and karma are not intended to engender inaction or helplessness among Buddhists. Rather, impermanence is meant to promote acceptance of a continuously changing reality, and karma promotes active engagement in a good life that leads to positive ends.
Thus, if the concepts of karma, as well as “viriya (energy, vigour) and vāyāma (effort, endeavour)” can be harnessed as mechanisms for recovery, then the religious context can serve to facilitate better post-disaster outcomes. Additionally, Buddhism holds that suffering is a part of life; followers seek to accept this as a part of the journey in order to reduce the experience of suffering. As such, this view of suffering may help to facilitate recovery by shifting a focus from the experience of suffering to accepting it as a natural part of life, and allowing movement beyond the traumatic event. Other fundamental Buddhist practices, such as meditation (an effective coping mechanism), the giving of alms, (dana) and protective chanting (paritta) “can be seen as culturally accepted coping methods. As group activities, they also have the effect of promoting social cohesion and re-integration.” (De Silva, 2006, p. 286). All of these may serve as protective factors during the recovery process.

**Islam.**

Muslim survivors of a range of recent disaster events, including the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami (Riddell, 2007), the 2005 earthquake in Pakistan (Kalayjian, et al., 2009), the Cook Islands cyclone (Taylor, 1999), and the 2006 earthquake in Indonesia (Schlehe, 2010), reported causal attribution as a retributive message from Allah, and as a call for reform and a return to fundamentalism. Riddell (2007) describes the fatalistic interpretation of the 2004 tsunami: “Allah controls everything, and used the natural disasters to give a lesson, so that humankind does not err again. Allah is thereby seen as judging… such tests distinguish between those headed for paradise and those going to hell” (p. 168).
The fundamental stories of Muhammad, the Muslim people, and their survival of hardship provide a guidepost for recovery from disaster:

Since almost all of the chapters of the Quran begin with the statement that God is Most Compassionate and Most Merciful, believers should never feel helpless. … Based on these Quranic teachings, Sufis (Muslim mystics) have developed a conceptual framework that experiencing tragedy and trauma is a period of test and trial that affirms one’s faith, makes one humble, and purifies one’s soul. (Basit, 2007, p. 950)

These teachings form the basic interpretive framework for understanding disaster, the purpose of such hardship, and the importance of unwavering faith. Adeney-Risakotta (2009) relates a powerful story after the 2006 earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia of a family of Muslims kneeling among the rubble of their destroyed home, praising God - “Allahu Akbar! – God is Great!” (p. 226). He goes on to describe the reaction of a Javanese Muslim grandmother upon learning that her home had been destroyed:

She looked at [her son] calmly and said, ‘Let it go. Let it go.’ (Biarin. Biarin.) [She] was pasrah, i.e. submitted to the will of God. [She] believed that God did it. Therefore the only thing to do was to let it go. Don’t hang on, but trust all things into the hands of God. Her strength gave hope to the rest of the family (p. 231).

This grandmother was able to find peace in releasing it all to God.

Similar to other religious attribution systems, it seems that Muslim beliefs may hinder or foster recovery. Religious attribution of disaster as retribution may “engender excessive guilt and anxiety” (Dudley-Grant & Etheridge, 2008, p. 223), and feelings of helplessness may lead to inaction. However, as seen with the Javanese grandmother, “submitting to the will of God” may provide relief and sense of peace. This may facilitate coming to terms with a situation, and doing so would be perceived as evidence of God’s favor. (Ebadi, et al., 2009) Ebadi and colleagues go on to explain that rather than inaction, fundamental Muslim beliefs promote acceptance and, like Buddhists, directed
action toward a life that is in line with God’s will. Further exploration of the various potential effects of these attributions in different socio-cultural contexts is warranted.

**Judaism.**

The history of the Jewish people in facing centuries of trials and tribulations provides a lens through which to interpret modern disaster events. From the Old Testament accounts of Noah and the flood, to the forty years the Israelites spent in exile in the desert, to the persistent sufferings of the faithful biblical character Job, to the atrocities of the Holocaust, the stories of the Jewish people are of great suffering and survival. The struggle continues today through the ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflict. These historical and contemporary events form the framework for the interpretation of community-level loss and recovery:

Throughout Jewish history disasters struck communities, repeatedly forcing Jews to cope with catastrophe. Rabbis confronted the realities of disaster, giving comfort while offering theological responses based on the covenantal ideal of sin-retribution-and-restoration. Simply put, if the Jews obeyed the commandments, they would be protected. If a catastrophe befell them, their sins were to blame. (Pollock, 2007, p. 948)

By assigning blame for disasters to the people themselves, Biblical scholars and religious leaders were able to link causal attribution to into the historical context for hardship, that is, one of sin and retribution from a judging and all-powerful God (Cohn, 2001). Thus, the Hebrew view of suffering is “generally believed to be a judgment on the wicked and sinful, by a God who controls the fates of people and nations” (Chester & Duncan, 2010, p. 86). However, while the wrath of Yahweh could be drawn down by sin, the Jewish

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4 See Rosenman & Handelsman (1990) for an exploration of Jewish narrative and the Holocaust.
people were the people *chosen* by God; He was a loving and formidable father. His
covenant protected the people, but the people were expected to maintain their piety:

Though to some this way of coping with crisis – assigning the guilt to the victims – may seem masochistic, it proved to be a powerful *theodicy* … for the covenant preserved God’s power and his justice. Furthermore, it allowed that a change in behavior could effect a restoration; if sin brings on punishment, then repentance may lead to redemption. The covenant thus grants to human choices a determinative role in human destiny” (Cohn, 2001, p. 266).

Furthermore, the covenant “assures the faithful that they are not abandoned by God in their suffering” (Cohn, 2001, p. 270).

Thus, the Jewish experience of disaster provides a framework of both spiritual responsibility and agency for the people, and both compassion and justice from their God. This interpretation of catastrophic events has made the Jewish people resilient, drawn from the belief that even the worst circumstance can be endured, and over which the people can and will triumph. Thus, the Jewish narrative views challenges as the result of sin, but directs the faithful to rely on their belief in the sacred covenant with God, and their resilience as a people to overcome hardship. Furthermore, it allows the faithful freedom to grapple with their faith and with the prospect of tragedy in light of a loving God (*theodicy*), without compromising that relationship (Mintz, 1984). These beliefs shape the Jewish experience of disaster.

**Christianity.**

An historical Christian perspective relates suffering to the crucifixion of Christ, whereby “God is perceived as suffering vicariously with his children” (Chester & Duncan, 2010, p. 91). Additionally, in the New Testament, Jesus explains the suffering of a blind man as an opportunity for God to reveal Himself to the people through healing. However, Jesus also explains that tragic events are an indication that the people are not
adhering to God’s will (Chester & Duncan, 2010). These explanations provide the people with meaning (suffering has purpose in revealing God), support/solidarity (God suffers with his children), and direction (a proscription for leading good lives according to God’s will). Causal attributions of disaster are viewed through this scriptural lens.

However, attribution that focuses on wrongdoing may exacerbate traumatic experiences. For instance, Taylor (1999) describes the response of Christian ministers to a cyclone in the Cook Islands which the author interpreted as having a deleterious effect on recovery: “At issue [for Taylor] is the validity of using moral transgression as the cause of natural disasters and of expecting atonement, [emphasis added] when a tenable and well-attested scientific alternative explanation is available” (Taylor, 1999, p. 1). In response,

The despondent accepted the moral condemnation, and they tried to recollect the sinful behaviour for which they had to atone if they and their community were to avoid further wrath from a punishing God. They were under additional pressure to resolve the issue because the yearly sequence of cyclones had just begun, and there was the prospect of more devastation to come unless they made amends. The angry rejected the moral impositions. They were mostly islanders who had been educated abroad and were aware of alternative explanations for the calamity.5 (p. 3)

Furthermore, “leading local politicians followed suit. But they attributed the disaster specifically to the failure of the particular island community to attend Church regularly, to working on Sundays, and to paying too much attention to its burgeoning pearl-farm industry” (p. 3). McGeehan (2012) provides similar findings from the experience of the American Samoa community in the wake of the 2009 tsunami. Taylor (1999, 2001) contends that these practices compromised self-esteem, engendered feelings of blame and

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5 The various and complex implications of this final statement, while significant, are beyond the scope of this analysis.
fostered a sense of helplessness that hindered recovery, especially given that the disaster that he discusses struck at the start of the cyclone season.

It is important to note that these are the impressions of an outsider (Taylor), who is imposing what seems to be a distinctly Western, scientific, individualist interpretive framework upon this event. While the logic that punishment and blame has the possibility to elicit negative outcomes stands to reason, it may be that the socio-cultural context elicited a different reaction among the Cook Islanders. For instance, if the clerical interpretation was consistent with existing beliefs, the community may have been relieved by a return to former structure or values espoused by their pastors. However, Taylor’s general point is well made: the interpretive lens of the religious community (if punitive) may act as an impediment to recovery.

Other examples of Christian causal attribution have been shown to be more strengths-based. For instance, in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan (which devastated the Philippines in November, 2013), some victims interpreted the event as an act of God, believing “only God is strong enough to do this” (Murray, 2013, n.p.). A local Catholic priest was clear to counter this interpretation: “God is not the cause of the suffering. God cannot prevent this. This is the work of nature” (Murray, 2013, n.p.). This faith leader sought to disconnect the event from a focus of blame to one of release and acceptance. Another Christian minister describes the existential questions that may arise in the wake of disaster:

It may take a long time to come to terms with the difficulty of answering the [existential] questions [such as], ‘Why me?’ or ‘Why didn’t God save us?’ or ‘Why did I survive?’ But if he [a survivor] can say, ‘God did not do this!’ then at least his basic faith in the goodness of God can give him strength to go on. (Adeney-Risakotta, 2009, p. 231)
According to this analysis, the conclusion that God was not punishing the people enabled Christian survivors of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami to turn to God as a source of strength; if the people did not blame God for the disaster, then they could rely on that source of faith and strength that they needed in order to move on. A Christian minister in American Samoa echoed a similar interpretive framework for his own congregation in seeking to foster post-tsunami recovery (McGeehan, 2012). Here, we see that religious tradition can be leveraged in different ways, even within the same religion, to foster desired outcomes. Whether efforts toward those outcomes (e.g. increased Church attendance versus facilitation of recovery) coincide with, foster, or inhibit other disaster risk reduction strategies is a factor that may depend on other socio-cultural, political, ecological and economic factors in a given community, and is an area for future research.

Bahá’í.

Founded in 1844, the Bahá’í faith is one of the world’s youngest religions to emerge. While the history of this faith is much shorter than the other world religions, the Bahá’í faith traces its own framework through the histories of the ancient religions. In the Bahá’í view, all of the founders of the world religions, including Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, and Hinduism, are messengers of the same God, and represent various stages in the emergence of one global human civilization. As such, the stories of the Bahá’í faith include some of these foundational stories of the other world religions. Regarding the interpretation of personal struggle:

the Bahá’í writings explain that it is often in the individual’s determined and courageous struggle against physical, emotional, and mental handicaps that the greatest spiritual growth occurs, and the individual may come to view his handicaps as blessings in disguise that have, ultimately, helped him grow spiritually (“On Good and Evil,” n.d.).
The physical realm is considered but a vessel for the soul, which continues to exist after the physical death of the body. For the Bahá’í, that which happens on the physical plane does not impact the ethereal plane other than to move the soul closer to God; it is through suffering and struggle that one achieves spiritual growth and progress of the soul.

In the context of community-level disasters, the Bahá’í community believes:

the essential reason for such widespread unhappiness and terrible social conflict and crises in the world today is that humankind has turned away from true religion and spiritual principles. The only salvation in any age, Bahá’ís believe, is to turn again towards God, to accept his Manifestation for that day, and to follow his teachings (“On Good and Evil,” n.d.).

It is through this lens which religious persecution, such as that of the Bahá’í in Iran over the past thirty years, is viewed. The Bahá’í believe that breaking down religious, ethnic, cultural, social, and economic barriers is the key to eliminating global strife and forming a thriving, peaceful global civilization. It is these fundamental Bahá’í values, combined with the strong belief in the “harmony of science and religion” (“The Unity of Religion and Science,” n.d.) that provide the framework for interpreting and recovering from disaster.

The Implications of Religious Attribution

An individual’s levels of religious affiliation, religious salience, religious coping, and the impact of a traumatic event on religiosity can provide context for the role of religion in the recovery process (Trevino & Pargament, 2007). Maynard, Gorsuch, & Bjorck (2001) discuss research that examined the impact of God concept (the characteristics, or type of God in which one believes) on religious behavior:

Schaefer and Gorsuch (1992) identified eleven salient God factors: benevolent, wrathful, omni, guiding, false, stable, worthless, powerful, condemning, and caring. … The assumption here is that belief in a loving, benevolent deity will
produce different behaviors than the belief in a cruel, distant, or punishing God (p. 67).

The authors conclude that “in the end, individuals are willing to participate with, surrender and defer to a God they perceive as ‘good.’ When God appears to be untrue, worthless, or distant, individuals will trust themselves.” (p. 73). This seems an extremely individualist view of the role of God concept in coping, which is likely due to the fact that participants were American college students. However, if similar research could be conducted in various cultures, with a range of religious affiliations represented, this line of research connecting coping style and God concept could contribute much to our understanding of the role of religious belief in disaster recovery.

**Scapegoating.**

Religious attribution may also lead to scapegoating, such as: placing blame on a higher power (abdicking human responsibility for human action or inaction); placing blame on sinners other than oneself (avoiding self-blame); or placing blame on other religious groups (for their transgressions or not following the “true” God) (see Salzman, 2001 for discussion of the social implications of a threatened worldview). Politicians and government entities may also utilize religious attribution to escape responsibility for failure to attend to the needs of their most vulnerable constituents (Chester & Duncan, 2010). This argument is echoed by Ergul et al. (2010), reflecting the common use of religious discourse to avoid responsibility or failure to properly mitigate hazard in high vulnerability, high-risk communities. Thus, religious attribution via scapegoating can be utilized as a method of coping with negative emotions as well as a method of abdicating responsibility.
Religious Support and Demands

In addition to the religious framework for understanding a disaster event, the social context of the religious community may serve to support or place further demands upon members of a congregation. Religious involvement has been shown to provide social support (Chan, Rhodes, & Perez, 2012), which fosters better post-disaster outcomes (Norris et al., 2005). However, levels of received support (material and instrumental) and perceived support (belief in the availability of support) that fail to meet the needs or expectations of disaster victims can inhibit recovery (Norris et al., 2005). Furthermore, some religious communities may place support demands upon survivors. Gillard and Paton (1999) explain this phenomenon:

A religious denomination which, through overseas support (e.g., the Christian Church), can provide considerable material support may have an entirely different impact upon individuals or families than a religious organisation which, due to financial hardship, is forced to lobby its members to provide financial, material, and manual assistance following a disaster. Membership of a particular religious denomination can thus either assist coping efforts or exacerbate the situation by placing further demands upon individuals who are already heavily burdened with the demands of a disaster. (p. 2)

While this line of reasoning touches on the economic causes of such demands, the foundational beliefs and values of a religious group may also engender this type of expectation, which may impact the way such demands are perceived by members, either as an added burden or as an opportunity to engage with and provide support to other members of the community. During hurricane season in Fiji, Christian churches provided a high amount of aid and placed few demands of reciprocal contribution upon hurricane victims. In comparison to Christians, Hindu and Muslim respondents were not only less likely to receive aid, and less likely to expect to receive aid, but they were more likely to perceive that the aid they did receive was inadequate. Hindu Temples and Islamic
Mosques also placed higher demands on their members, including expectations of monetary support as well as in-kind provisions and manual labor (Gillard & Paton, 1999). In a related line of research, Todd & Allen (2010) argue the importance of examining religious congregations as mediators for engagement in social justice activities, a finding that may have implications for the types of post-disaster support these congregations provide to, expect from, and engender among their members. Examination of these factors through future research will shed light on the way engagement within the faith community affects the disaster experience.

**The Need for Multidisciplinary Collaboration in Disaster Research**

The need for multidisciplinary disaster research is clear. Perhaps the field best situated to bridge the professional and cultural divide among the fields of disaster management, psychology and religion, is community psychology. Community psychologists, in addition to local civic and religious leaders, are often missing from multidisciplinary disaster management teams. This omission may be due, in part, to a lack of understanding of the skills and qualifications of community psychologists, or to a misconception of the role psychologists can play in disaster recovery. Much of the disaster research examining psychological outcomes of disaster reflects a clinical emphasis: levels of depression, anxiety, and PTSD; coping mechanisms; and health problems (Norris, et al., 2002). Of the approximately 250 articles and book chapters reviewed by Norris and colleagues (2002), only nine percent included variables that addressed psychosocial outcomes. These findings support the idea that perhaps the disaster management field is mis- or (at best) under-informed about the type of work that psychologists, in particular community psychologists, do.
In addition to multidisciplinary collaboration, successful disaster risk reduction endeavors must also consider multiple levels of the social ecology. In order to do so, it will be necessary to take a broader view of the disaster risk reduction paradigm by seeking to include the individual in the context of the community. Bronfenbrenner’s multilevel ecological framework is a helpful tool for understanding the individual’s experience within his/her expanding social settings. This theoretical framework explores the nested systems within which the individual operates: the microsystem (e.g., his/her immediate family, work, and faith-based systems); the mesosystem (e.g., local community settings and systems); the exosystem (e.g., broader social, religious, or civic settings that influence the individual); and the macrosystem (e.g. overarching social, political, cultural and religious systems) (Bronfenbrenner, 2004). Community psychologists can be utilized as key collaborators in the disaster risk reduction endeavor, as we seek to understand contexts at all levels of the ecological system where disaster risk reduction must be implemented: individuals; families; neighborhoods; faith congregations; community organizations; communities; municipalities; and nations.

While this study does not endeavor to examine the faith-disaster dynamic at all levels of the ecological system, it does begin to broaden the rather narrow focus individual-level disaster research from psychological outcomes to include the role of faith-based systems, which have implications at micro-, macro-, meso- and exo-system levels.

**The Need to Re-Examine Our Disaster Research Methods**

In addition to broadening the scope of work to cross disciplines and ecological system levels, those who are engaged in the disaster research field must broaden the methodologies (see Coyle, 2008) used in order to gather data that will inform disaster risk
reduction endeavors. To date, much of the disaster research has been conducted in the immediate aftermath of disaster. The disadvantage of this approach is that samples are often limited and questions related to religion are often vague and/or lack sufficient depth. Beyond conducting research with less restrictive samples (i.e., only ones that have been recently hit by disaster), the methodologies used in disaster research must be examined. For instance, much of the existing research measures religiosity via frequency of attendance at religious activities, rating of importance of religion in daily life and/or coping, or frequency of prayer (Harrison, et al., 2001). These limited quantitative measures (see Coyle, 2008; Hill, 2005) do not offer insight into the ways that the religious context provides a framework for coping, nor do they suggest how these religious factors may be leveraged to reduce disaster risk. When measuring religiosity, studies have also utilized samples with limited populations such as college students (Maynard, Gorsuch, & Bjorck, 2001) or the elderly (Lawson & Thomas, 2007), which fail to provide a comprehensive understanding of the experience of the religious congregation outside of the specific worldviews of those age groups. A few examples will further elucidate these gaps in the research.

One study examined the way individuals conceptualize God (e.g., benevolent, wrathful, guiding, etc.) and its relationship to religious coping style (collaborative, self-directing, deferring, or surrender), but utilized threat, loss, or challenge scenarios rather than disaster as a context for coping. However, the study did not consider underlying religious narratives, and the sample was predominantly Caucasian (68.2%) and Christian (84.5%) college students (Maynard, Gorsuch, & Bjorck, 2001). Another study conducted with low-income, African-American, female survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita
examined religiosity as a protective factor for post-disaster mental health outcomes, but religiosity was measured using only two Likert-scale items reporting importance of religion and frequency of religious attendance (Chan, Rhodes, & Perez, 2011).

Other studies have examined: prayer (Mitchell, 2003) or spirituality (Ebadi, et al., 2009) as post-disaster coping mechanisms; causal attribution and disaster recovery (Levy, Slade, & Ranasinghe, 2009); and religious beliefs, coping appraisals and image of God in disaster recovery (Newton & McIntosh, 2008), but these studies did not address the links to disaster risk reduction. Some literature in the fields of psychology and religion address: the convergence between the fields of religion and psychology (see Paloutzian & Park, 2005); religion and meaning-making (Park, 2005; Exline & Rose, 2005); religion and coping (Pargament, Ano, & Wachholtz, 2005); the complementary meaning-making and facilitative processes of psychology and religion (see Pargament, 1997); and the clinical or spiritual strategies related to disaster recovery (McCombs, 2010); but these likewise did not provide a link to disaster risk reduction or hazard mitigation. Kalayjian, Moore, & Richmond (2010) begin to do so by incorporating information dissemination into their Bio-Psychosocial and Spiritual Model of disaster recovery, and McCombs, et al. (2008) have endeavored to build the bridge between the faith, psychology, and disaster management communities by creating a framework for training and collaboration among these disciplines.

While I have presented evidence above to support my assertion that the field of disaster management is missing a critical part of the disaster risk reduction equation by failing to leverage the resources of religious leaders and their congregations, in order to tap into these resources, it is crucial to gather information on how to effectively engage
religious leaders in this process. In order to better understand the contextual factors that impact the disaster experience, methods that allow participants to describe their experiences and the meanings they ascribe to them may be more useful in identifying congregation-specific religious factors that can be utilized by disaster managers to engage these communities, increase community resilience and reduce disaster risk. The use of less-restrictive samples through the inclusion of individuals and communities that have not recently experienced disaster will also allow for a broader sampling frame and less reactive disaster-related research endeavors that simply focus on psychological outcomes.

**Addressing the Research Gap**

The fields of disaster management, religion, and psychology would be strengthened from a collaborative process that investigates the ways communities engage in the places where people seek assistance immediately following disaster events, namely their religious congregations. Specifically, the field would benefit from additional research that: 1) examines the way faith plays a role in the disaster experience; 2) incorporates methods of inquiry that allow for the collection of richer contextual information than that afforded by surveys; and 3) begins to build bridges among the disciplines in communities before disaster strikes. Collaborative research endeavors must move away from the reactive disaster response model to proactively engage with religious leaders to build resilience and reduce disaster risk in culturally and religiously diverse communities. In order to be able to conduct disaster research in communities that are not currently recovering from disaster, we need to utilize a wider range of methodologies to access factors relevant in the disaster experience (particularly in
communities that may not have had a recent disaster but that are at risk for one). Two of these methodologies include use of narratives and video elicitation.

**Religious Narrative.**

Narrative, or “the organized interpretation of a sequence of events” helps us to understand and order the world in a logical manner and “involves attributing agency to the characters and inferring causal links between the events” (Murray, 2008, p. 113). The use of narrative, has been employed by a range of fields including history, anthropology, education, and psychology, as a method for describing and explaining the experiences of a person or group (Creswell, 2007). Historical and cultural narratives are the stories of a people that provide a framework for understanding the world, their role in it, expectations for behavior, desired characteristics, the qualities of a good life, procedures for the attainment of goals, modes of interaction with one another, and all the other socio-cultural factors that form the framework of community life. As Howard (1991) explains, “A culture can be thought of as a community of individuals who see their world in a particular manner – who share their particular interpretations as central to the meaning of their lives and actions” (p. 190). A community may be defined by culture, ethnicity, religion, or by some other common characteristic, such as the inhabitants of a particular geographical area. This shared history, and the narrative that evolves from it, provides a framework for thought and action in the present, as well as how action in the present might manifest in the future. Furthermore, in the Hawaiian Islands, the use of narrative, or mo’olelo, is a culturally embedded method of weaving history together with one’s own experience (J. Osorio, personal communication, January 9, 2013). As such, the use of religious narrative as an interpretive framework is a logical and natural mechanism for
better understanding the role of religion in the disaster experience, especially in the context of the Hawaiian Islands.

Narrative has already been incorporated across many fields of psychology: as an ecological approach to educational psychology in practice (Annan, Priestly & Phillipson, 2006); and “within clinical and health psychology, narrative is used to understand how people make meaning of events that challenge one’s believes about the self and the world, e.g. the diagnosis of an illness or the experience of a traumatic event” (Burnell, Hunt, & Coleman, 2009, p. 91). In these fields, narrative has been used as a tool for creating change or for alleviating symptoms of dysfunction; changing the existing narrative is a means for changing outcomes. It is clear that narratives, or the stories we are told or that we tell ourselves, help to shape our view of the world, our place in it, and the actions we may or may not take. Gockel (2013) elucidates why narrative is particularly helpful for exploring religion: “Because narrative research centers on exploring the process by which meaning is constructed, it is ideally suited for exploring how people create and transform meaning through spiritual and religious frameworks, practices, and experiences” (p. 193, emphasis added).

One of the primary advantages of utilizing qualitative methods such as narrative in the study of religion is that it provides opportunities for different types of information related to faith-based experiences to emerge than would be elicited using quantitative methods (Gockel, 2013). When seeking to understand catastrophic disaster, often termed “acts of God,” the religious narratives we use to make meaning of these events are crucial to our understanding of the event and the way we go about recovering from such events. Since different faiths rely on divergent narratives to explain their world, these narratives
may lead to differing interpretations, coping mechanisms, and strategies for recovery. It is also important to note that specific faith groups may employ more than one set of narratives to describe or interpret a particular phenomenon, and members of the same faith group may employ different or even disparate narrative interpretations of the same event. Thus, an exploration of religious narratives and their role in the disaster experience is warranted.

**Video Elicitation.**

Without the recent experience of a disaster event to serve as a basis for interviewing, a stimulus must be utilized to prompt recall of previous disaster experiences or exposure. A number of fields, including psychology, education, and medicine have utilized video as a tool for priming feelings or cognitions of interest. Sometimes referred to as elicitation or stimulated recall, this methodology utilizes video to prompt the participant’s recall of a particular event, as well as the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors associated with that event (Lyle, 2003). An advantage of using this methodology is that the real-world context presented in audio-visual format is a more evocative mechanism for accessing participant recall than written or oral elicitation techniques, as “images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness that do words” as well as “a different kind of information” (Harper, 2002, p. 13) in interpreting and making meaning of the events depicted in the images. Video elicitation has been used previously in disaster research as a way to stimulate recall of disaster events (Horne & Sayre, 1996). For example, Horne & Sayre (1996) used video clips depicting a couple’s experiences and behaviors in the aftermath of a disaster event as a way to prompt participants’ own thoughts and behaviors.
Video of the 2011 Tohoku tsunami as a form of elicitation of the disaster experience is salient for communities in Hawai‘i because this event impacted the Hawaiian Islands. Communities in the Hawaiian Islands in tsunami inundation zones were evacuated, and some coastal areas were damaged by the waves. Additionally, with a large Japanese and Japanese-American population across Hawai‘i, many were affected indirectly by the catastrophic damage and loss of life in Japan. The event was at the forefront of local news media in the weeks and months following the event, with many local businesses displaying signs of support for the victims of the tsunami. Fundraising efforts to support the victims were also common across islands. The Tohoku event was both devastating and recent, and served as a way to prime thoughts about that disaster exposure and/or experience. Given the need for disaster research in communities that are not currently recovering from disaster, the use of video is a practical method for elicitation of disaster-related thoughts and behaviors.

Summary

The need for collaboration among the scientific, disaster management, and theological communities is clear. As Gillard and Paton assert, “Because some 95% of the population actively practices one of these religions [Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam], religious organisations are well placed to provide disaster education, plan and implement mitigation programmes, and disperse aid” (p. 6; see also Wisner, 2010). Religious beliefs and rituals do not preclude or necessarily interfere with attempts at hazard mitigation. The scientific and religious frameworks for understanding the event and activities geared toward disaster risk reduction are not mutually exclusive, but are rather “parallel practices” (Chester et al., 2008) that make up a repertoire of beliefs,
perceptions, and actions, any of which may be utilized throughout the disaster experience, including disaster preparedness, mitigation and recovery. Thus, the type of God in which one believes and the causal attribution one assigns to a traumatic event have the potential to support or inhibit recovery and either facilitate or hinder engagement in disaster risk reduction strategies.

There is a clear opportunity to access faith communities for preparedness and mitigation outreach initiatives. Instead of replacing religious beliefs with scientific processes, “such knowledge [can be] aimed at minimizing fear of the unknown and used to empower people by giving them an understanding of the natural disaster” (Kalayjian, Moore, & Richmond 2010, p. 67), which can be incorporated into their existing socio-cultural and religious framework. In order to do so, we must begin to employ disaster research methods that will allow us to fill the gaps in our understanding. Pro-active research endeavors that engage communities that have already experienced disaster or are at risk for experiencing disaster will enable us to access more representative community samples. Video elicitation can be utilized as a method to assist recall of previous disaster experiences, and narratives can describe the contextual factors that provide the framework for interpretation and action before, during, and after disaster events.

**The Present Study**

The present study examines the role of religious factors in the way communities interpret, cope with, and recover from disaster. The following research questions seek to gain a deeper understanding of the role that religious narratives, coping strategies, and support systems play in the disaster experience:
1) What do religious narratives tell the faithful about why disasters happen?

2) How do religious narratives influence disaster preparedness?

3) How do religious narratives shape the causal attribution assigned to community-level disaster events?

4) What do religious narratives tell the faithful about how to cope?

5) How do religious narratives shape expectations related to post-disaster support?

The purpose of this study is to:

- Contribute to filling the gap in knowledge of the role of religious narratives in the disaster experience;

- Offer insight into the way religious narratives shape: the interpretation of disaster events; the coping process; and recovery from disaster;

- Elucidate potential commonalities and disparities among the narratives and coping processes of religious communities;

- Identify the ways religious narratives may foster or constrain the implementation of disaster risk reduction efforts; and

- Contribute to the development of post-disaster recovery strategies that are congruent with fundamental religious values and belief systems, which may lead to more effective collaboration between disaster managers and community resource hubs.

While the international community has recognized the need for cultural relevance in disaster management, they have yet to address the religious underpinnings of belief, meaning-making, coping, and support in disaster recovery. The call to action is clear: in order to develop effective, community-based disaster risk reduction strategies that are
relevant in the arenas in which people find meaning, multicultural, multidisciplinary
disaster management teams must broaden their scope to address the impact of religious
interpretations on disaster risk reduction. In an effort to address this gap in knowledge
and practice, this study explores the role of religion in the disaster experience in an area
with a unique cluster of disaster vulnerabilities, the culturally and religiously diverse
communities of the Hawaiian Islands. The experiences of these communities may then be
extended to religiously and culturally diverse communities in disaster-prone areas
globally.

The Hawaiian Islands: Setting the Context for the Current Study

As the most geographically isolated archipelago in the world, formed from
volcanic activity, the Hawaiian Islands are at risk of impact by a broad range of natural
hazards, including: volcanic activity, earthquake, landslide, tsunami, flashfloods, and
hurricane activity. The islands are also at risk for tsunamis generated across the Pacific
Ocean and from the Aleutian Trench in Alaska. In the past several years, distant
earthquakes have generated tsunamis that have threatened to hit the Hawaiian Islands,
prompting tsunami warnings, coastal evacuations and causing damage in some areas of
the islands. These events include the 2010 Chile earthquake (M8.8); the 2011 Tohoku
earthquake (M9.0); and the 2012 Canadian quake (M7.7). The massive earthquake and
tsunami that hit Tohoku, Japan in 2011 prompted evacuations and damage across the
islands, and is therefore salient as a disaster event for the inhabitants of Hawai‘i.

Further, the Hawaiian Islands are among the most culturally diverse areas in the
United States. Inhabitants of the Islands report membership in one or more of the

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6 Earthquake magnitudes as reported by the United States Geological Survey (USGS):
http://earthquake.usgs.gov
following cultural/ethnic groups: Native Hawaiian, Filipino, Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Samoan, Tongan, Guamanian, Marshallese, Chuukese, Pohnpeian, Kosraean, Palauan, Yapese, other Micronesian or other Pacific Islanders, Portuguese, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, African American, and Caucasian (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Over the past several centuries, many of these distinct ethnic groups have intermarried, and many inhabitants of the islands represent a blend of several of these cultural groups. In addition to the great cultural diversity in Hawai‘i, there are a number of religious groups represented, including: Buddhism, Judaism, Bahá’í, Shintoism, Taoism, Hinduism, and many denominations of Christianity, including Mormon, Catholic, Pentecostal, Baptist, Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, Assembly of God, Church of Christ, and others. In addition, an examination of the Native Hawaiian epistemology of disaster is warranted. It is important to acknowledge fundamental Native Hawaiian beliefs about the natural world, as this cultural framework forms the backdrop for many of the inhabitants of the Hawaiian Islands, and is a contextual factor common across all of the religious congregations.

The Native Hawaiian interpretation of catastrophic natural events is grounded in the indigenous cultural and religious belief systems of the Kānaka Maoli (the Native Hawaiian people). As a polytheistic society, there are many gods who govern different aspects of Hawaiian life. The polytheistic system of belief includes the crucial role of the kahuna pule (keeper/teacher of prayer), who serves as an intermediary between the people and the gods. There are many narratives that weave together the cultural and

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7 While it is beyond the scope of this study to incorporate all of these religious communities, a range of religious communities will be included in this study sample, including Buddhism, Bahá’í, and Christianity.
religious beliefs of the Hawaiian people with their origins. Pele, the Goddess of Fire, is perhaps one of the most prominent of the gods, and is directly linked to the interpretation of seismic events. According to Hawaiian narratives, Pele is a fierce and strong warrior. In anger, she can generate earthquakes by stomping her feet and initiate volcanic eruptions by digging in the ground with her magic stick (paoa). In ancient times, Pele often quarreled with her older sister, Namakaokaha`i, the goddess of the sea. The chronological progression of volcanic activity across the islands (Kaua`i being the oldest of the islands, and the Big Island the youngest with currently active volcanoes) is explained through a story of Pele’s flight from her sister, seeking refuge through the creation of each of the Hawaiian Islands. Pele’s spirit is said to rest in Halema`uma`u Crater on the active volcano Kilauea, an interpretation that explains the ongoing volcanic activity there (USGS, 2010).

The narratives hold that the Hawaiian people are bound to the earth and the sky, and are expected to maintain harmony and protect the land and the resources given to their stewardship. The relationship is reciprocal: the land provides for and sustains the people, and the people must protect and respect the land (Kamahele, 2000). Disruption of this harmony can be seen in the physical and spiritual world, and must be ameliorated by bringing the world back into balance (lokahi). These interpretations preclude neither religious nor scientific explanations; rather they may be held concomitantly, the ongoing parallel practices of those who live in the Hawaiian Islands (see Chester & Duncan, 2010). This rich sociocultural and religious diversity found in the Hawaiian Islands, and their location in an area of unique disaster risk, make the island communities ideal for further exploration of the disaster experiences of those who live here.
Method

Participants

Participants in this study included key informants from (4) religious communities across the Hawaiian Islands. These communities have been selected for their religious, geographic, and demographic diversity. Faith communities sampled included members of the Bahá’í, Buddhist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS) and United Methodist Church communities.8 The Bahá’í community was selected based on its focus on the duality between religion and science and the implications this may have for the way this community interprets community-wide disaster. Participants from the Buddhist community represent three distinct Buddhist traditions, including: Hongwanji, Soka Gakkai, and Soto Zen. These schools of Buddhism represent a broad range of Buddhist beliefs and were chosen in order to elicit the common themes among these Buddhist sects. Buddhism was selected for inclusion in this study based on the equivocal results from previous disaster research (discussed above) as well as its prevalence in communities across the Hawaiian Islands. The Latter Day Saints and Methodist communities represent two divergent sects of Christianity that were selected for their common religious foundation but divergent approaches to disaster management. Both of these Christian communities were also sampled in order to provide comparative data between communities with the same foundational texts, i.e., the Christian Bible, but divergent foci and fundamental community values. McGeehan (2012) found that the focus on preparedness of the LDS community provided a framework for disaster

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8 See Appendix D for a brief overview of the history and values of each of these faith communities, supplemented by information shared by participants when providing context to their responses to interview questions.
interpretation and recovery after the 2009 tsunami in American Samoa. As such, the LDS community and another Christian community without this specific focus on preparedness, the Methodist community, were included in the sample. Participants from each of the four faith communities did not necessarily all belong to the same local congregation of their faith community, but from congregations across O‘ahu and Kaua`i.

Twelve (12) key informants served as referral sources for this project and assisted in the identification and recruitment of potential participants. While the initial recruitment strategy would have utilized faith leaders as the primary referral sources for members of their own local faith congregations, due to insufficient referrals, the pool of informants to serve as referral sources was expanded. As such, participants were recruited from various congregations of the four faith communities across O‘ahu and Kaua`i. Potential participants were selected based on their perceived representativeness of the beliefs of their faith community according to referral sources, and were also selected to represent a range of ages, ethnicities, and both genders. Sixty individuals were referred for participation in this study. All 60 were contacted in person or via telephone, email or Facebook by the researcher after initial contact was made by the referral source to determine interest in participation. Twenty-two of these referrals did not respond to researcher attempts to contact. Three declined to participate after being contacted. Five were interested in participating but were unable to participate because their schedules did not permit. An additional four were referred but did not meet participation criteria (were not present in the Hawaiian Islands at the time of the 2011 Tohoku tsunami).
Table 1
Referrals and Outcomes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Referral Sources</th>
<th>Referred</th>
<th>Participated</th>
<th>Did Not Respond</th>
<th>Declined to Participate</th>
<th>Scheduling Conflict</th>
<th>Did Not Meet Eligibility Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baha'i</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A total of 26 individuals consented to participate and completed an interview. An equal number of women (n=13) and men (n=13) participated. Of these 26, eight of the participants currently held or at some point in the past had held a leadership role in their faith communities. The remaining 18 were lay members of their respective faith communities. See Table 2 for a breakdown of these demographics by community. Figure 1 displays the age distribution of participants. Figure 2 displays the ethnicities of participants. It is important to note that participants may indicate more than one ethnicity, and as such, the percentage of ethnicities sums to greater than 100%. Participants were equally distributed among urban (n=9), suburban (n=9), and rural (n=8) geographic areas on the islands of O'ahu and Kaua‘i.

Table 2
Participant Characteristics by Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community</th>
<th>Faith Leaders</th>
<th>Lay Persons</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Methodist</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baha'i</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddhist</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (N=26)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 1: Age distribution of participants. This figure displays the age distribution of all participants (N=26).

Figure 2: Participant ethnicities. This figure displays the ethnicities of all participants (N=26). *Percentages sum to more than 100%, as participants may indicate more than one ethnicity.

Confidentiality

The personal identities of religious leaders and congregation members have been kept confidential; participants are identified only by their congregational group (i.e., Buddhist, Baha’i, etc.). Individual responses have also been kept confidential, though
aggregate information has been utilized to establish themes across participants. Identifying information such as names, titles, and professional affiliations have not been attached to digital voice recordings or transcriptions of these recordings, or documented in any published report of this study.

**Measures**

Individual interviews with faith leaders and congregation members were semi-structured. All participants responded to six sets of questions (see Appendix A), and viewed two short, 2-3 minute video clips. The six sets of questions addressed the following topic areas: 1) disaster experiences and disaster preparedness; 2) faith narratives (including coping strategies); 3) post-disaster support and demands; 4) the Tohoku tsunami; 5) a simulated tsunami in the Hawaiian Islands; and 6) wrap-up questions revisiting narratives addressed earlier in the interview and demographic questions. Initially, faith leaders were to be asked questions that would reflect their specific role in the community as a leader. However, after further examination, a decision was made to ask the same congregation-level preparedness questions of lay members of the community as well, in order to determine if perceptions between leaders and lay members differed. As such, the only questions asked of faith leaders that differed from those asked of lay participants were related to faith leaders’ interpretations of the 2011 Tohoku tsunami for their community.

Initially, all participants were asked to discuss: their direct experience with disaster events; their religion’s narratives, characters, or stories that explain why disasters and other tragedies occur; the coping strategies these narratives recommend for recovering from disaster events or other similar tragedies; and their level of preparedness.
Participants then viewed two short, 2-3 minute video clips depicting the 2011 Tohoku tsunami and a simulated tsunami in the Hawaiian Islands. Follow-up questions to the Tohoku video addressed: participants’ interpretation of the tsunami’s cause; their experiences during/after the event; assistance provided or received; resources within their faith communities that facilitate coping; and disaster preparedness or mitigation strategies employed. Faith leaders were asked to describe the way they interpreted the event for their communities, and their experiences in a leadership role during times of disaster. Follow-up questions to the simulated tsunami in Hawai’i addressed: congregational support demands and expectations; and faith-based coping mechanisms after such an event. The final set of questions addressed demographic questions and returned to the question posed at the beginning of the interview, to determine if, over the course of the interview and after viewing the videos, additional religious narratives related to disaster emerged. At times questions not included in, but relevant to the themes and topics addressed in the initial interview protocol (Appendix A) emerged and required prompts for additional information.

Data collection consisted of qualitative interviews, archival data and observations. Interviews were conducted in person or via teleconference and were recorded with an Olympus DS-40 Digital Voice Recorder. All interviews were conducted in English in a place convenient to the participant. Topics for interviews varied slightly based on the historical narratives of different religious congregations. For example, given the ongoing history in the Bahá’í community of religious persecution, the concept of community-level disaster was expanded to include religious persecution. In order to limit the potential for interview questions to shape and/or bias the content of memory recall (see Lyle, 2003), a
semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol was used. As such, additional prompts were at times necessary to explore participants’ reactions and experiences thoroughly. These emergent questions were relevant to the themes and topics addressed in the initial interview protocol. The goal of this line of interviewing was to understand more fully the way that religious narratives, values, and beliefs impact: the interpretation of disaster events; the coping strategies employed by various religious groups; and the impact these narratives and coping strategies have on engagement in disaster risk reduction. Archival data gathered from congregations included a brief review of religious texts as well as existing disaster management and response plans, if any. Observational data was collected from congregations related to documenting the presence of disaster preparedness kits and supplies.

**Procedure**

**Recruitment Strategy.**

Congregation leaders and lay participants were referred by trusted members of the local community who served as liaisons for this project. In some instances, congregation leaders and lay participants served as referral sources for other participants from their faith communities. Referral sources were informed that eligibility criteria required that participants were present in the Hawaiian Islands during the time of the March 11, 2011 Tohoku tsunami. Referral sources were provided with a brief introduction of the primary investigator and an overview of the project (Appendix B) that was used when approaching potential participants. The overview informed potential participants of my research interests, the purpose of the study, the reasons feedback from religious leaders and members of their communities were valuable to the study, and the applied use of
research outcomes. I asked referral sources to provide the names and contact information of individuals who met eligibility criteria and might be interested in learning more about my study and had given their consent to be contacted by me.

Once initial introductions to referral sources were made, snowball sampling was used to identify members of the congregations who might be interested in participating in an individual interview. Snowball sampling was utilized in order to gain access to members of the community who reflected the core of the religious group’s narratives, beliefs, and interpretive framework. Referral sources were also informed that potential participants should represent diversity in age, gender, and ethnicity. With the permission of referral sources and potential participants, I contacted congregation members by phone, email, or Facebook. I introduced myself, explained who referred them to me and described my research interests. I described how their experience would contribute to my research, and asked if they would be willing to participate in an interview. To be eligible for the study, participants had to have been present in the Hawaiian Islands at the time of the Tohoku tsunami, March 11, 2011. Those who met eligibility criteria and agreed to participate were asked to sign a participant consent form (Appendix C). All interviews were conducted at a time and in a place convenient to the participant. Two interviews were conducted via GoogleHangout, which allowed for real-time video conferencing and screen-sharing to enable participants to view the videos.

**Interview Protocol.**

After consent to participate was obtained, participants were asked a screening question to determine their level of exposure to disaster (i.e., whether they or any

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9 While referral sources were informed of eligibility criteria, some individuals who were referred did not meet that criteria.
member of their immediate family had been impacted by a disaster event). Participants were then asked to describe the narratives of their religious congregation related to the causal attribution of disaster events and the proscribed processes for recovery that these narratives offer. After the initial round of questions, participants then viewed two short, 2-3 minute video clips, and responded to questions after each clip. In order to minimize the possibility of psychological distress, both videos portrayed tsunami waves and structural damage only, with no inclusion of people or animals in the tsunami waves for either video clip.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topics of disaster, participants’ potential personal experiences with the Tohoku tsunami, and the destructive nature of the images in the video prompts, it was possible that participants might become distressed during the interview. Participants were fully informed of the topics to be covered prior to signing the consent form and were informed that they were free to withdraw from the interview at any time. Only one participant became upset during the interview process, and it was related to a recent death of a close friend, rather than topics addressed in the interview. I used my professional discretion as a trained counselor and allowed the participant to decide whether or not to continue the interview. The participant wished to continue and expressed gratitude for the support offered.

**Video Elicitation.**

Video elicitation was utilized as a mechanism to evoke participants’ experiences and memories of 2011 Tohoku tsunami and to prompt thoughts regarding a similar potential event in the Hawaiian Islands. Both of the videos were composed of publically available clips of these events retrieved from YouTube. After viewing a three-minute
video clip depicting footage of the 2011 tsunami, participants responded to a series of questions related to their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during and after that event; the perspectives offered by their religious leadership; and their congregation’s reaction to the event. Leaders were asked about the way they interpreted the 2011 tsunami for their congregations; the types of questions the event raised for the members of their congregations; and any actions taken after the event related to disaster preparedness or mitigation.

Next, participants viewed a video clip portraying a simulated tsunami event in the Hawaiian Islands. Videos of local newscasters were spliced together with videos from the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, thus simulating a destructive tsunami event hitting the Hawaiian Islands. Participants then responded to another series of questions related to the expectations of support within their religious community after an event similar to the one simulated in this video clip. Questions addressed: the type of assistance they would expect to provide to and/or receive from their congregations; and faith-based resources they would turn to for support in coping or finding meaning after such an event. Participants were then asked again to discuss any characters, narratives, or stories in their faith that relate to why disasters happen or how to cope with them, which may have been elicited throughout the interview process and/or after the viewing of the tsunami videos. At the end of each interview, participants were asked demographic questions regarding their age and ethnicity.

Data Analysis

Upon completion, interviews were transcribed to a digital word file. Digital voice recordings were then destroyed. Data were coded using Nvivo10 qualitative coding
software. Open and axial coding was conducted with attention to the organizing religious themes identified by the researcher prior to data collection, as well as emergent themes that arose naturally through the responses of the participants (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Archival and observational data were used to provide context for the thick description obtained through the qualitative interviewing process, as well as to serve as a basis for fact checking and triangulation of data sources. Triangulation provides opportunities for various perspectives and multiple data sources to be compared regarding a specific topic, allowing for confirming or disconfirming evidence to emerge (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). A negative case, or one that does not fit the pattern that has emerged, can serve as a rich source of data and help to provide a comprehensive description of a phenomenon (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Analysis utilized both triangulation and the search for negative cases.

**Reliability and Validity.**

To ensure scientific rigor, strategies for maintaining reliability and validity were employed. Throughout the interviewing process, verification, a form of in vivo member checking, was continuously conducted to ensure clarity of participant responses (Morse, et al., 2002). Verification is a technique that the interviewer employs during the interview to summarize the responses of the participant and request clarification or correction from the participant in order to accurately capture that which the participant wishes to communicate.

Once interviews were transcribed, transcription checks were performed to ensure accuracy. While inter-rater reliability in coding was not possible with the primary investigator as the only coder, a codebook was developed in order to ensure consistency
throughout the coding process. As discussed above, triangulation of data sources was performed across participants as well as with archival data to allow for a comprehensive exploration of the narratives provided by members of the same congregation, and allowed for various interpretations of the same archival texts or narratives to emerge. Participants’ religious narratives regarding disaster were compared with the narratives provided by other members of their congregations, and cross-checked to related archival passages of religious texts, if references to these texts were provided.

Additionally, member checking was utilized to establish the credibility of the data (Lewis, 2009) and to validate the themes that emerged from the data (Creswell, 2007). Through member checking, one participant from each faith was consulted regarding the themes that emerged from the data in that particular community. These participants either offered or agreed upon request after completing an interview to be consulted during data analysis to provide a member check and had demonstrated during the interview a broad array of knowledge and perspectives on her/his faith community. Participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback that confirmed or disconfirmed these themes or to provide additional themes that did not emerge from the data but that members felt may have been missed. Member checking was also utilized to clarify inconsistencies in feedback provided by different members of the same faith community. It is important to note that faith communities do not always have monolithic understandings of religious concepts. Contradictions that did arise within faith communities are addressed in the Discussion section, below.
Results

The results section addresses the five areas of interest proposed at the outset of the study: 1) religious narratives related to the causes of and meaning assigned to community-level disaster events; 2) level of disaster preparedness; 3) causal attribution related to the 2011 Tohoku tsunami; 4) faith-based coping mechanisms; and 5) post-disaster support demands and expectations, as well as 6) cultural considerations. In each of the five areas of interest, faith communities are listed alphabetically, and specific themes that arose from the data are discussed within each faith community. The responses of faith leaders are not separated from those of lay members of the faith community, as interview questions were the same for all participants and responses did not differ substantially.

Faith Communities Included in the Sample

Members of four faith communities were included in this study, including: Bahá’í, Buddhist, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS, also known as Mormon), and the United Methodist Church. A brief overview of each faith community and its fundamental values is provided in Appendix D to provide context for the themes that emerged from the data. Participants, both leaders and lay members of each faith community are members of the same religious community (e.g., Buddhist, Bahá’í, LDS or Methodist), but are not necessarily from the same local congregations within that faith community.

10 The overview of each community includes information provided by participants regarding the histories and fundamental values of their faith. While outside the scope of the present study, the information is included in Appendix D to provide context for the results that emerged from the study.
**Religious Narratives**

Through early interviews with members of the Bahá’í and Buddhist communities, it became apparent that the terminology “religious narratives” was, perhaps, a Judeo-Christian linguistic nuance that did not make sense in the same way in other faith epistemologies. As such, the study’s inquiry into religious narratives was expanded to include “characters” and historical figures as a way to broaden the scope of the faith-based system for interpretation of life events. The terms characters and historical figures are both being used, so as to avoid assigning a literary or historical value to or questioning the legitimacy of the persons or stories described by participants. Additionally, as noted above, given the ongoing history in the Bahá’í community of religious persecution, the concept of community-level disaster was expanded to include religious persecution. It is also important to note that the questions related to religious narratives were asked at both the beginning and the end of each interview in order to determine if exposure to the disaster videos elicited additional or different narratives than at the beginning of the interview based on participants’ free recall. While a few participants did recall an additional narrative(s) or figure(s) at the end of the interview, none differed from those provided by other members of their respective faith communities. Finally, it is important to note that the narratives described by participants reflect their personal interpretations of these stories, and may not reflect the interpretive framework used by all members of their respective faith communities, or that espoused by theological scholars.
Bahá’í.

Narratives and lessons.

“Trust in God but tie your camel tight.”

Many Bahá’í participants shared a favorite lesson from Muhammad when explaining the Bahá’í perspective on the interplay between faith and directed action.

“There’s this saying that I love that says, trust in God but tie your camel tight. So, do everything you can, and [also] trust in God.” Another participant explained the origin of this saying:

“This is a very cliché Middle Eastern thing but... the term is, ‘you have to tie your camel tight’. And so, I guess the story goes, there was a guy who had all encompassing faith in God, that God was there for him and that God was all loving, and he lived his life in a way where he didn’t worry about anything. He just knew that God would take care of him, and in the end everything would be okay. He wasn’t a very wealthy person so, at one point, he lost his camel, and that for him was a huge tragedy because, without his camel he couldn’t bring his things to market, so he was devastated. And he went to the central figure of the faith and he said, ‘how would this happen?’... and the leader’s response was ‘God is good and he loves you but, you have to tie your camel tight.’”

This narrative arose multiple times as a way to express that both faith and action are necessary in order to be prepared and to respond to an ever-changing world. One must have faith in God, and one must also act to create positive outcomes for oneself and the community. This focus on service to the community arose as a primary value in the Bahá’í faith.

Work to change the cause, not the symptom.

Another participant shared a story that further elucidates the Bahá’í emphasis on the fundamental importance of being of service to others and creating effective change in an unjust world:
“There is a very nice story about somebody who had a dream about an important figure of the Bahá’í faith. His name was Shoghi Effendi, and he was married to a woman, [who] was given the Bahá’í name of Ruhi [Rúhíyyih Khánum, which] means spirit. And somebody had a dream once about her that there was a flood, and people were drowning in that flood, and this person being me or you, was trying to pull these people out of that flood, and, he looked up at this Rúhíyyih Khánum, and realized, Rúhíyyih Khánum was busy doing something else. So that person was really shocked. ‘How is it that the Bahá’í, with, you know, such lofty humanitarian ideals, is not doing anything?’ So, he turned to [her], and said, ‘Rúhíyyih Khánum, how come you’re not doing anything, how come you’re not saving these people?’ And, the reply she had was, ‘I’m building a dam to stop the flood’.”

For the Bahá’í, it is not enough to simply have faith; it is not enough to even simply act on behalf of others. One must act to change the systems that perpetuate ongoing suffering. These narratives provide a framework for both directed action and faith in God. In relation to disaster events, this means a focus on changing systems that put people at risk: “Bad things happen for us to grow, and, [we] grow by learning from them. Well, like if a tsunami comes and wipes out the entire islands then we should better plan the next structure for where we live.” These stories reaffirm the focus on personal and communal growth. Bahá’ís are to learn lessons from hardship, and make different choices in the future to achieve better outcomes for individuals and their communities.

*Fire and gold. From crisis to victory.*

This theme emerged as a framework for understanding hardship. In regard to the persecutions Bahá’ís today continue to face, one participant shared:

“But in a way, I mean, you always turn inward to your own faith, and these types of persecutions actually, strengthen you. There is a saying from, prophet Bahá’u'lláh that says, ‘in fire we test the gold, and with gold we test our servants’. So fire really tests you because it makes you stronger. So all the persecutions always made us stronger.”
Thus, challenge, hardship, and persecution are viewed as opportunities to grow stronger, to develop the strength and other characteristics that the individual will need to thrive in the next life. These challenges can also be transformed into success.

“The history of the Baha’i faith is replete with that type of heroism [martyrdom, imprisonment], but we are also told that we move from crisis to victory. So this is one of the tenets of the Baha’i faith, that crisis is really necessary in order for us to achieve victory, the same way that there is the fire and gold [described above]. So there has to be crisis and victory, otherwise, we won’t move anywhere, we won’t go anywhere.”

Overcoming hardship is a fundamental part of the Bahá’í epistemology and shapes the way members of the faith understand community-level disaster.

**Characters and historical figures.**

**Bahá’u’lláh.**

The life of Bahá’u’lláh was cited as a model for enduring hardship and yet seeking always to serve others. Bahá’u’lláh and his family suffered incredible hardship. They were impoverished, imprisoned, tortured and exiled, but still he held his faith and continued his calling as a servant for others:

“Bahá’u’lláh came from a very, very wealthy noble family. His father was a minister in the court of the Shah. They were very rich, amongst the richest. His wife was amongst another very rich, rich family. He preferred a very simple way of life. He and his wife were known as the ‘father of the poor’ and the ‘mother of consolation.’ All the poor always knew they could come to him and his family to be treated with kindness, to be given food, to be given money.”

Bahá’u’lláh, the most recent manifestation or prophet of God, is viewed as a Bahá’í role model. Bahá’u’lláh, however, spoke of his son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, as “the master,” and one to whom others should turn as a model for life.
'Abdu'l-Bahá.

'Abdu'l-Bahá (a name that means “servant of Baha”) is revered as a paragon of the Bahá’í faith.

“'Abdu'l-Bahá is regarded as a perfect exemplar, how we should strive to be. And he was a servant ‘til his last breath. Constantly. A quote that he said was, ‘where there is love, nothing is too much trouble, and there is always time.’ And I firmly believe that and he’s a really amazing figure. He would give his clothes away, he would give everything away. He wouldn’t keep anything. And this was a man who had suffered, who had watched his father be poisoned and beaten and imprisoned and lost his own family members, and nothing stopped him from serving... we’re always encouraged to be of service.”

“'Abdu'l-Bahá basically was in prison from the time he was nine years old... until the time when he was about sixty-something. And never did it get him down. He lived with mostly nothing, but he was always happy, he was always giving away all his stuff to people that needed it more than him. The funniest story is when a homeless man didn’t have pants, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá asked him why didn’t he have pants. The homeless man said, ‘well I don’t have any money for pants’ so, ‘Abdu'l-Bahá stepped to the side of the street, took off his pants, and gave it to him.”

'Abdu'l-Bahá is regarded as someone who overcame incredible suffering and yet found a way to have meaning in life despite terrible conditions. Imprisoned for most of his life, 'Abdu'l-Bahá rose above his circumstances to serve others, to create change, and to be prepared to navigate potential hardship in the future. One participant shared a story of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, who, fearing famine after the onset of World War I, built granaries to feed the people of Acca and the surrounding areas in Israel. He also ensured the community’s survival through the restoration of aqueducts to bring clean water into the city. Another participant goes on to explain how there are many stories such as this in the Bahá’í faith:

“There is [sic] so many stories like that where the Bahá’ís have done that and planned and prepared and been well ahead of the game. I think everything the Baha’i faith is doing right now is to be prepared. Our whole purpose of doing the things we are doing is to be prepared, is to spiritually develop individually, to build our communities and to be able to be of service to the wider community, for all its ills. I mean we just know that things aren’t gonna get any easier, they’re
getting a whole lot harder and I think we are trying to put ourselves in a position where we can be of help, for anything and everything that happens.”

This desire to be of service and to be prepared shapes the way members of the Bahá’í community view disaster preparedness and recovery, discussed in greater depth below.

**Shoghi Effendi.**

Shoghi Effendi, the grandson of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, was charged with guiding the Bahá’í community upon his grandfather’s passing. One participant explained that Effendi’s courage to carry this burden as such a young man “confirmed who I am and what I’m capable of.” Participants reflected that stories such as this give them courage, strength, “and freedom, yeah, no fear” in the face of hardship. Shoghi Effendi, like his grandfather and great-grandfather, was a man who bore an incredible burden, but his life offers lessons about perseverance. These experiences shape the fundamental values of the Bahá’í faith, and continue to shape their view of personal and community-level catastrophe.

“In general the central figures of the Baha’i faith were put through a lot of hardship. They were persecuted and, you know some were martyred and some were put into dungeons with big chains over their shoulders. So, they were put through a lot of hardship and suffering, and I think that the spiritual principles underline what they went through and what that meant, is similar to what we talked about in regards to you know natural destruction like, it’s within the sphere of the will of God that these things can happen in this world.”

It is how this faith community responds to tragedy, persecution and hardship from which the faithful draw lessons for life.

**Buddhist.**

Members of the Buddhist community did not provide faith-based narratives related to disasters. One participant shared the following in explanation:
“That’s kinda difficult for me to answer, because when I think of stories and fables, I usually associate it with Christianity and the Bible, and the Buddhism that I’ve practiced is not really based on that, but on this universal law of cause and effect.”

All of the members of the Buddhist community, regardless of Buddhist school of thought, discussed this universal law. Additionally, all members spoke of “lessons” to be sought. As such, the lessons that emerged from the data as relevant to the disaster experience for members of the Buddhist faith will be discussed. One narrative from the life of Shakyamuni Buddha is also discussed.

**Narratives and Lessons.**

*“Buddhism is reason.” / The universal law of cause and effect.*

Many Buddhist participants discussed the harmony between Buddhism and science. One Soka Gakkai (SGI) participant shared from the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, “Buddhism is reason.” Several Buddhists shared that their faith is more harmonious with a scientific explanation for the world than perhaps some other faith communities for the very fact that it is based in a universal law, rather than upon the existence of a deity that is at least on some level unknowable. However, it is important to note that there is also an element of the spiritual combined with the elements of science in the Buddhist faith. The law of cause and effect is based, as one participant described, “on the universal operation of causality that encompasses both seen and unseen phenomenon.” As such, Buddhism and science are complementary rather than opposed. As one participant explained, the universal law of cause and effect is viewed similarly to the law of gravity: both of these laws govern the way the universe operates. Everything that happens, all circumstances encountered in life, including one’s family, job, living
situation, etc. is seen to be the result of this law of cause and effect. These causes and their effects can carry across lifetimes:

“The person, the individual, their life is eternal, so they have many lifetimes, and causes can happen through your actions, through your thoughts, and through your words, and so, every single moment is like a cause and effect. And so all of those causes are in the person’s eternal life and stored in like a karmic storehouse. [For the] effects of each cause to come out, there needs to be the right circumstances.”

This foundational belief in the law of cause and effect frames the interpretation of all life events: each and every circumstance or event is the effect of some past cause. When these past causes manifest as effects in the present, it is understood as the individual’s karma acting in his or her life.

*Karma.*

Participants’ explanations of karma varied somewhat from school-to-school. While a loose secular definition of karma might be “what goes around comes around” or “what you put into the world comes back to you,” Buddhist participants’ explanations of karma were far more nuanced. Members of the Soka Gakkai (SGI) congregation viewed karma as an ongoing effort for improvement and growth. An event interpreted as negative might be acknowledged as the result of a previous action or “cause” engaged in by the individual. However, rather than retrospective blame for this “cause,” members of the SGI community viewed such an event as an opportunity to transform positive karma for the future. Additionally, members of the SGI community spoke of the power of prayer to influence the karma of a loved one who has passed on to the next life. The SGI interpretation of karma is inherently positive and future-oriented.

Karma actually entails a kind of radical freedom. If you are, essentially, a product of everything you have thought, said, and done, then with each new thought, deed, and action you are creating new karma. … That is why it is imperative to practice Buddhism with the spirit of ‘from this moment on,’ generating positive wisdom
from deep within life, in order to stop making negative causes and start making positive ones. … Indeed, the key question for Buddhists is not *What have you done?* But *What are you doing right now?* (Hochswender, 2006, italics in original, p. 203).

The prevalent interpretation of karma among participants was either present or future-oriented, rather than retrospective.

Members of the Soka Gakkai (SGI) believe that chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo is a method for transforming an individual’s karma: “You can transform your karma; you can tap into what was that fundamental cause that you made for your life to be in this situation, and transform that cause.” Part of that transformation is a prospective, rather than a retrospective orientation:

“It’s not so much of dwelling on a guilt or what did I do but, on, kind of like bringing forth the potential that Nam Myoho Renge Kyo is, that you can transform that and you can transform your destiny basically. No matter what your situation, you can transform it into one of hope.”

Members of the Hongwanji community focused primarily on the “lesson” that could be learned from an event. There was an acknowledgement that karma might play a role in unfortunate circumstances, but personal blame was not a factor in this interpretation. The lesson was to be sought so that the individual could identify an opportunity for growth, which would result in positive karma moving forward. This opportunity for growth, while intentional, was less directed toward actively creating good karma than the members of the SGI community. Members of the Zen community focused on the positive aspects of accepting the nature of the world as it is, and seeking to create a positive impact in their own lives and the lives of others. One member of the Zen Buddhist community reported that she did not believe in karma: “I just can’t believe that something else is… determining my fate.” This participant acknowledged that her career as a scientist likely
impacted her view of karma. For this participant, the concept of karma was more of an
overarching principle related to living a good life, rather than specific actions that have
negative or positive, one-to-one effects in a person’s life.

Members of all three Buddhist schools indicated a perception that more traditional
Japanese members of the Buddhist faith might employ a more literal interpretation of
karma, wherein misdeeds are revisited upon an individual via karmic retribution. None of
the participants reflected this as their own interpretation. In addition to personal karma,
members of the Buddhist faith spoke of the karmic relationship between people, or
between people and the environment/nature. Thus, karma is not only a reflection of an
individual’s actions and evolution over the course of many lifetimes. The karmic
relationship bears a responsibility to both others and the world. In light of eternal life, one
can impact another’s karma in the next life (i.e., after death) through prayer and/or
chanting. Thus, one can send positive karma on to a loved one who has passed, which
also allows an individual to stay connected even after death.

_Impermanence._

Members of the Buddhist community spoke of the nature of the world as
impermanent. According to participants, within the Buddhist faith is a recognition that
the world is always changing. This understanding of impermanence fosters a sense of
peaceful detachment from the material world and that which happens within one’s life
experience. Because the world is characterized by impermanence, no one can know what
the future will hold. Impermanence also precludes the need to understand why something
has happened. It has happened because existence is defined by change. This participant
explains: “They really don’t know what’s happen in next moment, so we never say ‘oh
who or why,’ because impermanence, the place we live is always changing.”

Impermanence shapes the way Buddhists understand the world around them.

**Acceptance.**

In addition to an understanding that the world is impermanent, Buddhist participants spoke of the importance of acceptance of the world as it is. Acceptance is an active part of the way members of the Buddhist faith understand and respond to events in the world. Once one can accept that an event has occurred, the realization that it is in the past and cannot be changed serves as a catalyst for moving forward. After acceptance, the individual can begin to seek the lesson to be learned from the event. Seeking the lesson or finding meaning in an unfortunate event allows the individual take action to create a better outcome in the future (i.e., improve or create positive karma).

**Interdependence.**

Another of the fundamental values of the Buddhist faith reported by participants is interdependence. Buddhists view all beings as interconnected with one another, with flora and fauna, and with the earth. This foundational value arises from the experience of Shakyamuni Buddha, of whom many Buddhist participants spoke. As a young man, the Buddha left his family and all of his belongings “to seek the truth of life.” After six years of living an extraordinarily ascetic life, nearly dying of starvation, he returned to a village and drank from the river. A villager gave him food, and he sat under a Bodhi tree and ate. As he sat beneath the tree, he learned an important lesson, that all things are interdependent. The river quenched his thirst, the villager fed him, the tree gave him shade. One participant explained that Shakyamuni Buddha sought freedom and independence from “passion or greed or anger” through a life of deprivation, but what he
learned was that he could not achieve true freedom or enlightenment through independence, but rather through the realization of and respect for the interdependence of all things. It is important to note that Shakyamuni Buddha stressed a harmonious relationship with nature, for the tree gave him shade and the water refreshed him. This interdependence with all of nature shapes the Buddhist interpretation of disaster events.

**Characters and historical figures.**

According to one participant, “The major figures in Buddhism for us are folks that came about during times of turmoil.” As such, the heroes of Buddhism are its founding fathers.

*Buddha.*

Shakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, was cited repeatedly by participants as a life that demonstrated how one should live. He was a social reformer who sought to use himself as a vehicle for social change through personal transformation. He sought to eliminate hardship and suffering for all. Shakyamuni Buddha understood hardship on a personal level, as one participant explained:

“Buddha, he persevered through a lot. And you know lived without any kind of want or desires right? And just lived a very rough life. And essentially he was saying that pain that you feel is a part of life and that is kind of what drives everything, and that lack of any kind of desire is kind of the life you’re trying to strive for.”

Buddhism holds that suffering is a part of life. Buddhists seek to create a life that minimizes desire. This detachment from the physical world as well as detachment from emotional, psychological, and spiritual desires allow the individual to overcome suffering and draw closer to enlightenment. One participant shared that this goal of detachment is
at odds with individualist society, but that it is still a goal to reduce “opulence” and live more simply.

*Nichiren Daishonin.*

Nichiren Daishonin, was a 13\textsuperscript{th} century Japanese reformist priest who sought to alleviate suffering and find a path to enlightenment for all. Through his study of the Lotus Sutra, he deciphered the nam myoho renge kyo practice that is at the heart of Nichiren Buddhism. Nichiren Buddhists (among them, the SGI community) “pray to bring out the Buddha within our lives.” Each person has the capacity for Buddhahood, and Nichiren Daishonin’s life showed how one could contribute to the goal of human revolution, as one participant explained:

“So I think by their example, the best way of dealing with disasters or turmoil is to use that to better yourself by bettering others. How do you help other people during that?”

Nichiren Buddhists seek to transform the self and society by cultivating happiness and achieving the potential of each and every individual. Through Nichiren Buddhism, enlightenment is possible for all.

*Shinran Shonin.*

Shinran Shonin, the founder of Hongwanji Buddhism, was a controversial figure in the late twelfth and early thirteenth century who was stripped of his status as a pureland monk and exiled to a frigid region of Japan. One participant shared how Shinran Shonin’s life is a model for all Buddhists:

“[After being defrocked and exiled] he said, ‘I’m neither priest nor lay person’… but that gave him strength to go on. Why? Remember I spoke earlier about finding a third way, not either/or … [but instead] break through that [limited/dichotomous way of thinking]. [He said] ‘I’m neither priest nor lay, so

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\textsuperscript{11} See also “Life of Nichiren.” (n.d.).
actually I’m both priest and lay person.’ So, he still wore his robes, yet he openly married and had kids. He took a very bad situation and actually made it better. Because of him, most of the Buddhist denominations now in Japan, the priests can marry. Shinran Shonin was very open and it freed up things so you don’t have to, be so aesthetic, and everything.”

The life of Shinran Shonin showcases the Buddhist values of adaptability, acceptance, and detachment. It encourages exploration so that the individual is able to expand his/her vision of hardship to find a way out of an otherwise untenable situation.

_Dogen Zenji._

Dogen Zenji founded the school of Soto Zen Buddhism in Japan in the thirteenth century. He sought to free himself from the constraints of the ego; he sought true enlightenment, the liberation of body and mind, through the practice of meditation, or zazen. Dogen Zenji sought to provide assistance to others in achieving enlightenment, despite his own struggle to do so, as this participant describes:

“[Dogen Zenji said] ‘Even though I do not find Enlightenment myself, still I must help others.’ Even as we’re all weak, we’re all fallible, we’re all very fragile … but it doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t keep working.”

The Zen practitioner seeks enlightenment of all, and seeks to serve others in their journey toward Buddhahood. Zenji’s life speaks to ultimate selflessness in seeking enlightenment and liberation.

**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.**

_Narratives and lessons._

For many LDS, the stories in _The Book of Mormon_ are relatable, and therefore an invaluable part of the faith journey:

“That’s how I came to know that God is real and found a lot of comfort in stories that felt like it was exactly what I was going through. Not that I have ever been out hunting and my bow broke and I didn’t know what to do, but there are a
hundred analogies you could pick through that, where it felt applicable to my life.”

The Bible, too, is seen as a source of hope: “Nothing’s impossible, as far as the church goes… the Lord has performed so many miracles. He’s cured, made blind man see. He made the leper clean, even raised the dead. So nothing is impossible.”

*Prophecies of “Latter Days.”*

All of the Members of the LDS community spoke of the prophecies of the “latter days,” and the disasters and calamities that will foretell the second coming of Christ. Members cited prophecies from the Old Testament (the book of Daniel) and the New Testament (the book of Matthew and the Book of Revelations). One participant explained the meaning of these prophecies:

“They use a lot of imagery about what will happen during the latter days or right before the second coming of Christ. So consistently these prophets of old, both in the Old Testament and New Testament talk about the same thing. It’s happening because before Christ comes, the Earth needs to be cleansed of all wickedness. That’s the bulk of why all of these things will happen. The second coming of Christ is foretold that He will come by means of fire to cleanse the earth, not to baptize the earth. And at this time when he comes a second time yeah he’s gonna come in power and glory. Not as a poor, humble, meek mild, little homeless kid. So that’s the main purpose why all of these things will happen. And to get into all these things, I mean hoo thunder, lightning, hurricanes, tsunamis, but the one that’s really scary is Christ said that the earth will experience something that it has never ever experienced before. That the tribulations will be the greatest that the earth has ever experienced, even worse than Sodom and Gomorrah [a story in the Old Testament where God punished the wicked]. Even worse than the flood where only eight souls were saved [the story of Noah and the ark].”

It is these prophecies foretelling the end days that drive the LDS paradigm of preparedness (discussed in greater depth below), as this participant shares:

“And the pattern is always this. Seven years of plenty, seven years of famine right? So it’s not like He’s not preparing us, he has been preparing us and warning us from way back. Prepare, get your three-month food supply, get out of debt. Raise your kids right, get em ready for what’s up and coming.”
Preparedness is part of the basic framework of the LDS faith community, and shapes their view of the disaster experience.

**Characters and historical figures.**

Members of the LDS community spoke of many characters and historical figures who served as models of perseverance through difficulty with unwavering faith in God.

*Noah.*

Many members of the LDS community spoke of Noah (from the Old Testament of the Bible) as a character who listened to the Lord and obeyed, despite being given a seemingly insurmountable task: to build an enormous ark and fill it with a male and female of every species. Once complete, he and his family should board the ark, as they alone would be saved when God sent a flood to cleanse the earth of the wicked, those who had turned away from God, breaking the Lord’s commandments, and ignoring God’s messages to repent.

“Noah was commanded to get two [of every]… species. And because he feared the Lord, he was very obedient. And he know if you didn’t listen to the Lord then something drastic would happen, he would lose his family.”

Noah was faithful and obedient, despite being ridiculed by his friends and family. The lessons of this story are multiple: not only should one be obedient to God, but one must also be prepared:

“[Noah] listened to God telling him to prepare. And so with that I mean, in preparing for natural disasters, we have a living prophet\(^\text{12}\) today and God guides His church through him to help us be prepared for things to come.”

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\(^{12}\) The living prophet is the leader of the international Latter Day Saints community, as described in the brief overview of the community, above.
The story of Noah and the flood also makes clear that there are consequences for those who do not follow the will of God. Those who were wicked were warned, and when they did not repent, they were punished (destroyed). Many participants likened this “cleansing” to baptism, a Christian sacrament that represents the cleansing of the soul of original sin, and marks the entry of the individual into the Christian faith community. Participants also drew direct connections between warnings of the flood in the time of Noah and warnings of impending disasters that will be “signs of the times” in the modern world. Noah was a prophet, and those who did not heed his warning were not spared; in modern times, the LDS faithful are to follow the direction of the living prophet and prepare their families for such calamities as prophesied.

*Job.*

Members of the LDS community also cited Job (also from the Old Testament of the Bible) as a faithful follower of the Lord who was put through incredible hardship, yet had unyielding faith in God. Job was a blessed man who was suddenly put through a series of tests, physical ailments, and loss of loved ones.

“Job was put through so many challenges and tribulations. He had so much happen to him that he could have gave up and said ‘oh I’m just gonna… kill my own self,’ but he didn’t. He believed God will pull him through and he’ll come out the victor on the other side.”

“Job faced all kinds of adversity and disasters and for him it seems to have been a trial of his faith to see if he would still be faithful to God.”

The story of Job tells believers that perseverance and faith will enable an individual to survive and surmount any obstacle. The trials and tribulations set before Job are understood as intentional tests of faith, so that in understanding hardship and suffering, one can better appreciate all of the blessings God has to offer.
*Jesus Christ.*

Members of the LDS community also turned to the life of Jesus Christ to understand the meaning of hardship and how to cope with it:

“I think the prime example is Jesus Christ. He’s the one we look to as an example… he’s like the epitome of everything good, you know? And how did he cope? He kept on saying, ‘I’m going to do what’s right. I’m going to fulfill my mission and there’s a purpose for why I’m doing this.’ And even though we don’t have the same purpose that Christ does, we have a purpose in his plan, you know. And so if we want to fulfill that purpose, there’s gonna be some rough spots along the way, they are gonna be some things that we suffer, but there’s also gonna be a grand reward. Not only after this life, but there’s the peace and confidence and assurance in this life that comes from knowing, ‘I’m trying to do what my father in heaven wants me to do, what I was sent to earth to do.’”

For members of the LDS community, understanding that “suffering is a part of this mortal existence” helps to alleviate the burden of hardship. Knowing that all is part of God’s plan helps to lessen that suffering. In addition to that faith in God’s plan, it is important to remember one’s primary role of service to others in the LDS community. To live lives in the image of Christ, one must bear the burden of suffering and always seek to lessen the suffering of others as well.

*Joseph Smith.*

Members of the LDS community turned to the faith’s founder, Joseph Smith, as a source of inspiration for dealing with hardship. Smith was persecuted for his faith, beaten, imprisoned, and eventually killed. One participant shared a prayer from Joseph Smith, recorded in *Doctrine and Covenants*:

“I think it’s section one hundred and twenty one, and he says ‘Oh God where art thou, and where’s the pavilion that coverth my hiding place? How long shall thy hand be stayed and that pure eye behold, from the eternal heavens the wrongs of your people’ or something like that. And God’s response is ‘thine adversity and thine affliction shall be but a small moment. And if you endure well, God will exult thee on high.’ And he actually refers to Job. He says, ‘You are not yet as Job. Your friends haven’t betrayed you.’ And He goes down this whole list, ‘if all
these things happen to you, if the jaws of hell gave their mouth open after you; if your child is torn from your side crying, ‘why can’t I stay, why can’t you stay?’; if this happens…’ It goes on and on. ‘Know that all these things shall be for your experience and for your good.’ That all the things that we suffer, God is able to turn them into… something that will enable us to grow and learn and be better, at some time, somehow.”

The writings of Joseph Smith directly address the hardships one might endure, and they assert that the meaning behind such suffering is to allow the individual to grow.

Nephi.

Many members of the LDS community spoke of “the families in the Americas” and the hardships they had to endure before, during, and after the arduous journey from Jerusalem to what is now the Americas. This journey begins with a man by the name of Lehi being warned by God of the destruction of Jerusalem and commanded to journey to a distant land with his family. Two of his sons were rebellious and questioned their father, and threatened to kill their brother, Nephi. Nephi, however, had unfailing faith, and supported his father in this exodus. The family endured many hardships during the journey, but persevered together.

“There were a lot of things that were unknown and potentially a lot of risk and a lot of confusion and maybe anxiety about whatever was happening in their life. And anger, oh there’s anger. But there’s a lot of God’s hand in helping [the family navigate] the situation.”

Nephi too speaks of the value to be found in struggle:

“Nephi in the Book of Mormon talks about how if there was no opposition in all things then there would be no opportunity to grow. There would be no good, there’d be no evil. No light and dark, no sweet and bitter. You know? And so God allows bad things to happen because without bad things we would not be able to comprehend the good.”
The story of Nephi supports some of the foundational values of the LDS faith: the importance of families; the value in overcoming hardship; and the need for faith in God through all things.

**United Methodist Church.**

Members of the United Methodist Church cited stories from the Old and New Testaments of the Bible in their interpretation of disaster.

**Narratives and lessons.**

Members of the UMC spoke of lessons that could be learned through the books of both the Old and new Testaments. Many of these lessons are told through the lives of the characters and historical figures discussed below. Other participants loosely referenced the parables shared by Jesus as lessons for understanding God’s power and love in the lives of individuals. One participant spoke of the Acts of the Apostles, stories in the New Testament of the daily lives of the disciples of Jesus, their struggles, and the miracles that can happen when one has faith. This book chronicles the early days of the Christian Church after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This was a time of great trials for early Christians, who were being persecuted by the Roman authorities. Many of the early Christian leaders, including Christ’s original Apostles, were martyred, some by crucifixion.¹³ The Acts tell of disciples being filled with the Holy Spirit (the final part of

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¹³ This summary of the life of early Christians is as reported by participants in this study. A member check revealed the following alternative explanation: “Most biblical scholarship agrees that the persecution of early Christians was not widespread but rather in select groupings that were not that popular. Exceptions are of course the experience of Christians under Nero and stories like Perpetua. The persecution narratives were told over and over to inspire but actual persecution was not that common.” Despite the equivocality of its historical accuracy, the perspectives of participants are included because they reflect a common lay interpretation of the early life of Christians, rather than a perspective steeped in extensive theological inquiry.
the Holy Trinity, including God Himself and His son made flesh, Jesus Christ). These narratives are seen as a way to reveal the work of God in the lives of the people, from the time of Christ through modern times.

**Characters and historical figures.**

*Noah.*

A prominent narrative reported by members of the UMC was the story of Noah and the great flood in the Old Testament. The story is the same as that reported by members of the LDS community: God told Noah to erect an ark to hold two of every species. God then sent a flood to cleanse the earth of wickedness. Some members of the community were clear that this view of a “vengeful, wrathful God” was not a view held by most Methodists; the focus is instead on the God of the New Testament, “where it’s following the example that Jesus gives us which is being compassionate and helping each other; not pointing a finger of blame but being helpful and supportive.” However, for some members of the UMC community, disasters can also serve as a reminder to draw closer to God’s will. Members also cited the return of the dove Noah sent forth from the ark to determine if the waters had receded. The image of the dove with the olive branch is seen as an image of hope and of God’s fulfilled promise to protect Noah and his family. Noah’s faith in God is also a model for faithful living: Noah believed in God, fulfilled the task set before him and had faith that God would see them through the challenges.

*Moses and the parting of the Red Sea.*

Several members of the UMC community spoke of God’s parting of the Red Sea. The Old Testament details the persecution of the Hebrews (Israelites) by the Egyptian pharaoh. God sent a series of plagues to punish the pharaoh and the Egyptian people, and
eventually the pharaoh released the Israelites. As the Israelites made their exodus from Egypt, the pharaoh sent an army after the people, trapping them at the edge of the Red Sea. Moses extended his hand over the sea; God sent a wind that parted the sea, creating a channel of dry land in the middle of the sea, through which the Israelites made their escape. When the Egyptian army pursued them, the walls of the sea crashed down upon the army, washing them away and ensuring the safety of God’s people. The story tells of the power of God to protect His faithful people against all odds, and the punishment that can be dealt to those who are wicked.

*Sodom and Gomorrah.*

Another narrative that tells of the power of God, and his capacity for wrath and destruction is the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. This Old Testament story tells of the wickedness of the people who lived in the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. God threatened to destroy the cities unless righteous people could be found within them. When the righteous could not be found, God destroyed the cities. It is important to note that while this narrative was mentioned as evidence of God’s capacity for wrath and destruction, participants emphasized that the modern view of God’s role in their lives was not one of wrath or control, but rather of free will, guidance, and loving mercy:

“We’re given free will as human beings, and we make our own decisions and God is there with us, maybe to help guide us, maybe to help us pick up the pieces, but God doesn’t stop us from doing something. We have to ask for God’s help and then use that influence or the idea of that to change our own behavior.”

For members of the UMC, while the God of the New Testament retains the power to destroy in anger, He chooses to guide with free will rather than punish with destruction.
Job.

Many members of the UMC spoke of Job in the Old Testament as a model for perseverance (as did the members of the LDS community). Participants from the UMC described Job as a man who is beset with affliction but has unwavering faith in God. Job is questioned by friends and family, who believe he must have sinned to have brought these afflictions upon him. Job’s faith does not falter even in the face of such accusation and doubt. He is praised as a paragon of perseverance and faith. Job is perhaps the epitome of what it means to struggle as a human being with the reality of terrible events happening to good, righteous people. Participants spoke of how the story of Job speaks to the confusion and doubt that perhaps one is not faithful enough, is not praying enough, or is in some way failing to be faithful in the way God desires if terrible things continue to happen in an individual’s life. For most of the members of the UMC faith community, the answer to the question is having faith that while one might not understand, God has a plan, and as long as the individual remains faithful, s/he will be cared for by God. This struggle with theodicy and its role in the interpretation of disaster events is discussed in greater detail below.

Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was cited as the ultimate guide to living a good life. “In a time of social upheaval, Jesus was a prophet” who was persecuted and martyred. He lived the simple life of an itinerant preacher, offering parables to help the faithful understand God’s love and giving examples of the types of lives He wished for them to live. Jesus performed miracles, healing the sick and the lame, giving sight to the blind, and even raising others from the dead. He welcomed outcasts into His community, and
lived a life of service to others. The story of Jesus’ life was not simply about His miracles or His resurrection. It was a dangerous time for Jesus and His followers. Even His Apostles experienced doubt. On the eve of Christ’s crucifixion, Simon Peter (one of Christ’s closest friends, Apostle, and early leader of the Christian church) denied that Jesus was the Son of God three times. The days between His death and resurrection were filled with uncertainty. As this participant explains, “I think there’s something really important about being able to live into Holy Saturday … after good Friday, once we realize Jesus died yesterday, he certainly hasn’t risen, and we don’t know what tomorrow holds.” The stories of the life of Jesus and His followers show the modern faithful that it is natural to experience doubt, that sins are forgivable, and that redemption is possible for all. For the members of the UMC, there is an understanding that life will sometimes be difficult, but that hope and faith in God are sources of strength to persevere through hardship.

**Disaster Experience and Preparedness**

Figure 3 and Table 3 display disaster experience and preparedness of participants in this study. Sixteen of the twenty-six participants (62%) reported that either they or a member of their immediate family had been directly impacted by disaster. Of these sixteen, 82% (n=13) of these disaster experiences were storm-related (hurricanes and typhoons). The remaining eighteen percent of disaster victims reported experience with religious persecution (n=1), the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States (n=1), and the 2009 tsunami in Samoa (n=1; a second participant who had direct experience with storms also had immediate family impacted by the 2009 tsunami in Samoa). In general those who had experience with frequent storms across the Pacific
Islands were likely to be prepared in the event of storm – filling bathtubs with water, having flashlights and some canned food and a first aid kit on hand. Beyond that, the level of larger-scale disaster preparedness was minimal, except in the LDS community. Most participants were aware of disaster preparedness trainings available in their communities through the American Red Cross or local civil authorities, but few had attended any. None were aware of disaster preparedness or educational outreach initiatives in their faith communities, except the LDS community, which has an ongoing focus on preparedness.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3.png}
\caption{Disaster experiences and preparedness across all communities. This figure illustrates the level of disaster experience and preparedness of participants in all four sample communities.}
\end{figure}

\begin{table}
\centering
\caption{Participant Preparedness by Community}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Community & Disaster Experience & Disaster Plan & Disaster Kit & Disaster Supplies \\
\hline
Bahá’í \( n=8 \) & 5 (63%) & 1 (13%) & 0 (0%) & 7 (88%) \\
Buddhist \( n=6 \) & 1 (17%) & 0 (0%) & 1 (17%) & 3 (50%) \\
Latter Day Saints \( n=6 \) & 6 (100%) & 5 (83%) & 4 (67%) & 6 (100%) \\
Methodist \( n=6 \) & 4 (67%) & 5 (83%) & 4 (67%) & 5 (83%) \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}
Bahá’í.

One member of the Bahá’í community had a garden and would be able to self-sustain for a short amount of time in the event of a longer-term community-level impact from disaster. However, this member also expected that in the event of such a disaster, members of the Bahá’í community would seek refuge at his home, and all supplies available would be shared among any and all seeking refuge. The purpose of sustainably growing food was not necessarily for long-term disaster survival for himself and his family, and the expectation was that the family would not hoard supplies while others went hungry. Anything that was available would be shared, and during long-term recovery, the family would teach others to grow food as well. While some level of preparedness is encouraged, members of the Bahá’í faith were clear that seeking to prepare for a long-term recovery from a catastrophic event was not part of the Bahá’í ideology that seeks unity of all and service to others as paramount.

“You won’t find a Baha’i home that has stock house of food. You know, it’s just not part of the mentality. We’re not here to protect our own lives. … In my interpretation of the Baha’i faith, I would not be able to be in my house with food, if my neighbor were hungry.”

“The Universal House of Justice said to make sure you have provisions for one week or two weeks, but anything more than that, is unnecessary. I mean should a calamity, really a severe calamity hits, and the entire planet is suffering, I couldn’t be ‘oh, I’m gonna make myself survive.’ It’s gonna be impossible. Other than that, you can make a little bit of provision for yourself, but to go to extremes to think that ‘oh, you’ll be the only one that will be surviving, nobody else will survive,’ to me it’s kind of a little bit selfish, right? You have enough for a couple of days, and what you have you’ll probably share with your friends anyway. So what is the sense in just, amassing all of that? The same thing goes with wealth, you know. We are not supposed to amass wealth, we are supposed to share wealth.”

The notion that extremes of wealth and poverty must be eliminated still holds in the post-disaster scenario. One cannot stand by while another goes hungry. Furthermore, the
suffering that one might endure will only help to prepare her/him for the next life. Death is not to be feared, for death in this life is really birth into the next life, where one will be reunited with loved ones, and the content of one’s character will be his/her defining feature. The faith is both introspective and prospective; it is directed toward evolution of self, and service to others by seeking to change existing systems that are perpetuating inequality, for the betterment of the global community.

So while the Bahá’í community may not espouse the need for disaster preparedness such as comprehensive disaster preparedness kits, a fundamental value of the Bahá’í faith is learning from the past in order to make choices that will lead to a better future on a personal and societal level. In regards to disaster management, this value supports efforts toward disaster mitigation in order to decrease the impact of a natural disaster on the human population as well as the planet. This might include development of more wind- or earthquake-resistant structures, or responsible development or preservation of land, air and water resources.

“There are things that are tragic that are gonna happen, but yeah we do need to prepare, we can’t just be careless because ‘God loves us, and in the end we’re gonna go to a better place anyway.’ It’s like, you have to be prepared because we do understand that, God designed things these ways. But do I feel like I should prepare myself better for something like that tsunami or some sort of tragedy, but not because I felt like God would take care of everything or I’d be in a better place anyways, it was more because I felt like, if a tsunami happens to that degree, even if you were well prepared, there was no time, people didn’t even hear the warning, like what could you have actually put together that was gonna help you? So, no, I’m not prepared for that.”

So while there is an awareness that people should be prepared for hardship, there is also a belief that there are things that are outside of human control, and one cannot have a contingency plan for something on such a massive scale as a destructive tsunami or earthquake. What one does have is to be shared, and then as a community, people are to
work together to meet the communal needs of all in the immediate aftermath, rather than seeking one’s own safety and wellbeing first and foremost. If it is possible to reduce the impact of a catastrophic event, such measures should be taken. This fundamental value of the Bahá’í faith is a key leveraging point for disaster risk reduction, discussed in greater depth below.

**Buddhist.**

Of the four faith communities, members of the Buddhist community were the least prepared for a disaster scenario. Only one person had a disaster plan; one had a disaster kit;¹⁴ and only three had the supplies they would need to put together in a hurry if evacuation was necessary. The Buddhist view of disaster was one of acceptance. The belief that the world is constantly in flux (impermanence), and the emphasis on accepting the world as it is create an atmosphere that is not overly concerned with preparedness. As one Buddhist shared, “Whatever happens happens. Why try to run when it would be pandemonium? I mean we’re really like that.” None of the participants, including the sensei who participated, were aware of any type of disaster response plan at their temples or Buddhist community centers. However, one participant reported that a leader of her Buddhist community reached out to ensure her safety during the evacuation for the Tohoku tsunami. Another Buddhist sensei expressed a desire to provide disaster preparedness education to his temple community:

> “I would hope that at least one of our temples, they could see this one [elicitation video] that you just showed me… because this is… it’s better than any damn Dharma talk I can give regarding it. If you see it, it hits you. … because business as usual, it hasn’t worked [in increasing preparedness or reducing risk].”

¹⁴ Two different participants: one had a disaster plan, another had a disaster kit.
It seems that while the Buddhist values of impermanence and acceptance may lead to a passive approach to disaster preparedness, there are some in the Buddhist community who believe a shift toward active engagement in disaster preparedness may be needed.

**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.**

*Preparedness.*

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints is built on a foundation of preparedness. The community owns farms and orchards; operates processing and packaging plants; and maintains its own storage facilities and shipping operations. Aside from jobs that require specialized training, all of these foodstuffs are planted, harvested and processed through the volunteer power of members of the LDS community across the country, and at its headquarters in Salt Lake City, Utah. Products range from flours, grains, cereals and legumes, to meat and dairy products, to jams, jellies and condiments, to canned goods and a range of household items. All of these products are packed in shipping containers and distributed worldwide to line the shelves of storehouses in LDS communities around the world. Other items that cannot be manufactured by the LDS community are also made available, including toothbrushes and other types of household goods. These storehouses are open and available to all members of local communities, both members of the LDS church and non-members alike. Individuals and families can purchase large quantities of food and other household items at low prices on a weekly basis. Additionally, the LDS community is poised to provide immediate assistance to communities impacted by disaster, and will even mobilize resources to areas projected to be impacted by a severe event, for instance, sending trucks loaded with disaster supplies.
en route to an area about to be hit by a hurricane. The LDS community also provides humanitarian assistance worldwide:

“[We are always] working very closely with the local Red Crosses around the world. So at times when our church feels it wouldn’t be that efficient or helpful to send a plane full of wheat, they’ll make a huge donation to the local Red Cross in Hungary or Africa or wherever.”

All of this is funded through monies collected through tithing as well as a monthly fast offering (fasting for up to two meals and contributing the money that would have been spent on those meals to the church). Separate humanitarian and perpetual education funds provide funding for disaster relief efforts and those in need of assistance in funding their education, respectively.¹⁵

The international LDS headquarters in Salt Lake City releases educational materials on preparedness as well. Two pamphlets were distributed in 2007, dealing with Family Home Storage and Family Finances, respectively. The *Family Home Storage* pamphlet lists four priorities to “prepare for adversity”: 1) a three-month supply of food consisting of items the family eats on a regular basis; 2) drinking water; 3) a financial reserve created by saving a little bit of money each week; and 4) a longer-term food storage supply consisting of items that can be stored for up to thirty years such as wheat, rice, and beans. (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 2007b). The pamphlet entitled *Family Finances* provides guidance regarding financial matters and includes the following recommendations: 1) paying LDS church tithes and offerings; 2) avoiding and/or reducing debt; 3) using a budget (a budget worksheet is provided on the back of the pamphlet); 4) saving to create a financial reserve; and 5) teaching members of the

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¹⁵ An additional missionary fund helps to support young men and women who are serving their missionary years, though youth are expected to save to help support themselves during their years as a missionary.
family about frugal living and in the importance of both savings and education. (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 2007a). A more in-depth guide for family finances was distributed in 1992 and again in 2006, which provides more information, including both a debt elimination calendar and a budgeting worksheet (Ashton, 1992/2006).

Members of the LDS community are taught to expect “seven years of plenty, seven years of famine.” The motto often quoted is “store what you eat, eat what you store” in order to ensure continual cycling of stored goods. In addition to providing for LDS families in a time of disaster, be it personal disaster such as the loss of a job, or community-wide disaster, the three-month supply of food in LDS homes ensures that the storehouse goods will be available to help other members of the community in the case of a community-wide disaster event. If possible, members of the LDS community are encouraged to store a one-year supply of goods to sustain their families after a catastrophic event. The members of the LDS community in Hawai‘i acknowledged that due to limited space, with many families living in smaller homes or apartments, in Hawai‘i it is less feasible to maintain a one-year supply of food and water for a family. As such, members of the LDS community locally are strongly encouraged to have a portable 72-hour kit, including food, water, important documents, clothing, first aid supplies and any necessary medications for each member of a family. One leader indicated that the 72-hour kits are “compulsory” but that a one-week supply is strongly encouraged. One participant had the full one-year supply of food, water, and medical supplies, as well as generators and an all-hazards contingency plan.

One local ward (the term for a congregation in the LDS community) is currently distributing fifty pounds of vacuum-sealed rice to each family in the ward accompanied
by an explicit emergency plan with contact information and instructions to ensure families will be able to take care of themselves in the event of disaster. Each ward has a disaster plan, including plans for preparedness, evacuation and recovery. Families are expected to have their own emergency evacuation plans, and to practice them regularly.

“They’ve drilled in us to really educate our kids about the same thing.” Individuals are to rotate the items in their 72-hour disaster kits and longer-term disaster storage to ensure freshness of food, efficacy of medications, and that all other items are in proper working order (i.e., batteries, radio, etc.). Members are also encouraged to have “cash on hand and items to barter” in case of a longer-term disaster recovery situation.

Members reflected that in regards to preparedness, faith in God and personal action must go hand-in-hand. “You do all you can and just leave the rest to the Lord … that’s where our faith really comes in you know? So for the members of the LDS community, one must act to be prepared; faith then bridges the divide between what they can do, and what God will do to handle the rest.

When questioned as to whether anything had changed for the community after the 2011 Tohoku tsunami, one participant responded:

Participant: Nope it’s the same old same old. Exercise the faith, continue to do good works, repent, right? And keep in mind that twice a year we always receive instructions by means of satellite. It’s called our General Conference of the church. So we listen to our church leaders to see what we should be doing for those six months. It’s always the same old same old. Take care of your family, yeah? Help your neighbors. Prepare the kids to serve a mission, right? Get married and have a happy family, happy life. Oh yeah same old same old.

Interviewer: So your level of preparedness is so high that there doesn’t need to be anything changed or different after an event like this?
Participant: Nothing new.
Another participant confirmed this: “All the doctrine of the church is already, we hear it all the time. So I suppose some things would be revisited but it wouldn’t be like there’d be a new message on that day [that a disaster event happened].” For the members of the LDS church, preparedness is a way of life.

**Finances: Tithing, savings, and debt elimination.**

The value of preparedness goes beyond being disaster-ready. It is a fundamental part of the Mormon way of life. The community seeks to prepare its members to be able to sustain their families in the event of a personal tragedy – the loss of a job or a loved one that could leave the family without sufficient funds or the capacity to sustain itself. As such, members are encouraged not only to contribute ten-percent of their income to tithing, but to reduce or eliminate debt, and create a savings fund in case of personal emergency.

“Since I was little I was taught to be prepared, to have a first aid kit on hand, in the household you know? If you go shopping then buy a little extra, and that’s for the food storage. ‘Cause you never know when something’s gonna happen. And it often times did happen. And luckily we had food to get us by.”

When asked about the Church’s perspective on financial matters, including tithing, one participant shared:

“You pay your ten percent to the Lord, because ten percent, well look at life and what the Lord has given you. And if you’re only giving him ten percent… that’s a small favor to pay Him for all that He’s given you in life. But if you wanna be successful, you might say materialistically, besides that ten percent, you save ten percent. And so if you start this habit early in life, and I think the tithing thing kind of forces you into budgeting. And not just not going out and buying toys and extending credit and all of that kind of stuff, you gotta live closer to a budget, and that you’ll be able to save that ten percent so that when you become my age… you have stashed enough to supplement social security, because social security in your case might not be there.”
Here, it becomes clear how the LDS faith is a way of life, not simply a set of religious beliefs. The values of the LDS faith community form the foundation for all aspects of members’ lives, providing a framework for successful living that will enable members to be prepared for anything that may come their way.

**United Methodist Church.**

Two-thirds of the participants from the United Methodist Church had direct experience with disaster. Five out of six had a disaster plan and disaster supplies available, while four out of six had actual disaster kits prepared. Members of this community were prepared to evacuate, had evacuation plans, and were aware of disaster preparedness outreach education conducted by their civil community leaders. For members of this community, disaster preparedness was not theoretical, it was practical. Nearly all had evacuated during recent tsunami warnings in the Hawaiian Islands. Members spoke of reaching out to vulnerable members of the community who might have difficulty evacuating, such as the elderly, as well as those without family who might not have a safe place to wait during an evacuation. One member spoke of inter-faith efforts to increase community readiness:

“I been [sic] trying to push for a natural disaster area [an evacuation area and emergency shelter] in our community. We had some meetings at [name redacted] Church, with representation from the Buddhist church, the Mormon church, the Catholic church, and the Methodist church. Just so then we could get some common ground about what can we do and how we need to get to work together. I belong to [name of community] committee, that may help us to do this, I’m gonna push for that natural disaster holding area. For all of us.”

Members of the United Methodist Church were disaster aware, prepared, and ready to respond, and were either actively seeking or were open to additional community-level disaster risk reduction strategies, resources and supports.
Causal Attribution of Community-Wide Disaster Events

The 2011 Tohoku tsunami.

After viewing a video depicting the 2011 Tohoku tsunami, participants were asked to discuss their beliefs about the cause of the event. One hundred percent (100%) of participants attributed the cause of the 2011 Tohoku tsunami to a natural, geophysical event that happens on the Earth. None of the participants indicated that they blamed God for the event (n=20; this question was not applicable to members of the Buddhist communities interviewed, who do not believe in a higher power). However, several participants provided faith-related interpretations that were relevant to the event but not causal. One member of the Methodist community indicated that the event was a sign from God, that people are “neglecting duties;” for this participant, the event could be seen as a “call to come back to God,” though God did not cause the event. One member of the Bahá’í faith indicated that the event shows us that we are helpless in the face of nature, and that we should turn to God. One member of the Buddhist faith indicated that the event could be seen as an indication that people are not in harmony with nature, and that we must acknowledge that “we cannot control the nature.” Finally, one hundred percent of the LDS community (n=6) indicated that the event was a “sign of the times,” a topic that would arise as the primary theme among members of the LDS community when questioned about disaster events in general.

Members of several faith communities made a clear distinction between the earthquake that precipitated the tsunami that hit Tohoku, Japan, and the nuclear disaster that evolved upon the tsunami’s impact. Each of the participants who made this distinction noted that while the earthquake and tsunami were part of the natural cycle of
the earth, the nuclear power plant failure was acknowledged as a catastrophic event that occurred as a result of human action (or inaction). A Bahá’í participant explained this distinction:

“Why do I think it happened? Shifts in the earth’s crust, displaced water… But it makes you want to ask the people at that nuclear plant when they said, ‘we were ready for a tsunami or an earthquake, but not both.’ It’s like, aww didn’t it occur that that’s how they come, as together? That logic doesn’t hold, fella.”

This participant locates the nuclear disaster as firmly within the responsibility of humankind, and as separate from the natural disaster event. The following sections describe the interpretations of the cause of the 2011 Tohoku tsunami provided by participants from the various faith communities in this sample. The issue of theodicy, or the struggle to reconcile a good, loving, compassionate God (universal order) with terrible tragedy, is included in each section below.

**Bahá’í.**

**Science and religion.**

The Bahá’í faith espouses the harmony between science and religion. As such, natural disasters are seen as just that, natural events with scientific causes. However, a scientific explanation does not preclude spiritual implications:

“When I think of natural disasters, these are the things that science in many ways can explain, and it happens for a reason from a scientific standpoint. I think that it doesn’t necessarily always have to be, that if the natural disaster happens, that it was some sort of divine manifestation, but I think that, with that said, all things are interconnected. So, if a natural disaster happens, it does have spiritual implications. When disasters happen, they tend to bring you closer to God, and they tend to be times that you turn to God, and you turn to spiritual principles, like community and oneness.”

Thus, while disasters may be natural in origin, there is an irrefutable tie between religion and science in the Bahá’í epistemology:
“Religion begins to lack a grounding in reality when science is not also part of the picture. And science without religion lacks humility and compassion and a sense of the miraculous.”

“Science has to…confirm religious faith and religious faith has to buffer what we do with our scientific knowledge.”

Within this duality of science and religion, disasters and other complex events can be explained scientifically, but there is also a divine component which is unknowable, as this participant explained: “God can be found in everything, whether or not that is within our capacity to understand or interpret.”

**Theodicy.**

Discussion about the spiritual implications of disaster events naturally led to the topic of theodicy.

Interviewer: Does an event like [the 2011 Tohoku tsunami] bring up questions for you about your faith? Or does your faith help to understand why something like this happened?

Participant: No. … At the base of asking a question, ‘why did this happen?’ is the assumption that God being powerful should have stopped it. You have to change your understanding [that] God isn’t here to prevent suffering. In some cases it’s a good thing, ‘cause it helps us grow. In other cases, it helps mankind grow. But from God’s point of view, a death in this world is a birth into that world. It’s an event of joy, not an event of sorrow. Bahá’u’lláh uses an analogy to describe death. He said, ‘your cage is open and you fly free.’ How bad can this be?

This view of suffering is central to the Bahá’í view of disaster and tragedy. Suffering promotes spiritual growth, and death is a joyful passing into what the Bahá’í consider the true reality. Paired with the duality between religion and science, this view of suffering leads Bahá’ís to view disasters as natural parts of the universal order:

“I don’t necessarily think that natural disasters are something that God sends down, but I think that God created the universe, and within the universe there are laws which are scientific, and things happen within those laws. It’s not necessarily that God is deciding this is going to happen, but it’s all within his will.”
In the Bahá’í view, God created the laws of the universe, and therefore it is all within His will, but tragedies and disasters are not necessarily punishment or warnings. The way Bahá’ís reconcile His goodness with disaster is through their lens of the necessary tests of life, of the opportunities for individual and community growth that can arise from such situations:

“I could never presume to know why a disaster happened. I wouldn’t want to be in a position of judgment to know why. I mean we hear stories through [other] faiths of things like God’s wrath but I would never presume to say, ‘oh the hurricane happened because God was mad’ or anything like that. There’s always very strong scientific reasons for why disasters happen, and, if there is some kind of spiritual reason for them, I don’t know it. The best we can do is try to help those people who have suffered from it and try to keep life moving forward.”

This future orientation, this focus on movement “from crisis to victory” shapes the way disasters are interpreted, and ultimately, how members of the Bahá’í faith set about the recovery process. Disasters can serve as opportunities for evolution of both the individual and society.

**Disaster as a catalyst for transformation.**

While there may not be a spiritual *purpose* for the event occurring, disaster can be seen as an opportunity for personal and societal transformation. “Disasters can in some ways, bring out the better in humanity. Disasters are tests for both the individual and the community, and in some cases, they help us turn towards the spiritual implications, they help us turn to God.” For instance, one participant explained that achieving detachment from the material world may be difficult when ensconced in a comfortable lifestyle. When disaster strikes, it may provide an opportunity to detach from materialism. This view is a way to transform loss into opportunity for spiritual growth. Disaster also serves as a catalyst for social transformation. “There is a sense of hope that this is a catalyst for
something, that this happened for a reason, and how can we learn from it and how can we move forward. There’s always that direction of looking forward.” Rather than seeking to understand the cause of such a catastrophic event, the Bahá’í seek the lesson that will lead to change, as this participant explained:

“I don’t know that ‘why’ is a question we would ask ourselves. I don’t know if that’s the question. The question would be, ‘bad stuff happens, either natural or not natural, how do we respond to this?’ It is the way human beings respond to something that revolutionizes the way they have always lived. So [in viewing the Bahá’í history of persecution and martyrdom], it wasn’t necessarily the why [it was happening], but, during all of that, the stories that tell how the Bahá’í people responded, is really what Baha’is would look at. So for instance, let’s say there’s a tsunami in Indonesia. The Baha’i response to that would not be, ‘oh that happened because God was trying to punish people’ or any of that. But the Baha’i response would be, ‘is there a way that any human suffering could have been alleviated, we couldn’t have stopped the tsunami, but how could we have alleviated human suffering in that?’ So, and this really comes to a really fundamental, principle in the Baha’i faith that has to do with justice. The fact that if there had been greater capacity or warning in an impacted area would have reduced the human impact, that’s an injustice… that we have places in the world that there are these extremes. So a Baha’i response to that would be, ‘quick let’s go help alleviate the suffering, is there a way to keep that from happening again?’… And there’s always a search in the Baha’i community, at all levels, to see if there can’t be a way to eliminate the extremes of wealth and poverty. So why are we not putting resources towards more equitable, you know breaking down the social and political and economic barriers that would lead to that unity and reduce that inequality.”

In the Bahá’í view, the fact that the majority of catastrophic disasters occur in developing nations is not coincidental. It is a function of social, economic, and political inequality on a global scale. As such, we must view such events as catalysts, as opportunities for growth and evolution as a people. We must accept that God is involved in ways that are beyond our understanding as an individual or as a people, but this does not preclude our individual and collective responsibility to act for the betterment of humanity and the world. In addition to opportunities for growth, events such as this provide opportunity for
increased collaboration, service to others, and forward movement in efforts to reduce inequality and suffering and achieve global unity.

**Buddhism.**

The Buddhist view of causality regarding the 2011 Tohoku tsunami is rooted in their belief in the universal law of cause and effect. This view is also shaped by the belief that there is no higher power that is creating, directing, or controlling the universe (i.e., God). When asked how their Buddhist faith helped them to understand the event, one participant shared: “I don’t think it helps understand it but it helps more to... cope with it I guess.” Another shared: “I think [Buddhism] doesn’t speak too much about, why it happens, it’s more about, how you deal with struggles in your life.” For Buddhism, the way an individual responds to events is more important than the events themselves.

**Acceptance.**

The fundamental value of acceptance also shapes the way the Buddhist community interprets catastrophic events. When asked if an event such as the tsunami raises spiritual questions for members of the Buddhist community, one participant responded, “No they just kind of accept it as just the way it is.” Several members of the community explained that one should not judge the natural human tendency to want to blame or to be angry, but that the search to find meaning in a difficult event enables the Buddhist practitioner to be centered again, and to identify ways that one is able to engage to create a better future and to move forward. One participant shared that the immediate response of the Buddhist community is prayer and service to others:

“It’s never viewed like, it’s our fault for, you know bringing this about, it’s kind of like, again there’s no guilt in this Buddhism. So it’s always like, what can we do to encourage one person, what can we do to help them reveal their potential, their state of happiness, even in this situation that seems so grief and bleak...
never to kind of like, dwell on why did this happen or what did we do, why did this happen but... You know I mean there is the concept of cause and effect and so, when we make a cause [make an action or impact], toward nature, there is obviously an effect, but it’s never like, ‘oh my gosh ‘cause we’ve been treating nature so badly, you know this is why this happened,’ but, it’s always ‘how can I take this and create value out of it?’”

For the Buddhist community, there is no blame, there is no culpability, and there is no guilt. Acceptance helped Buddhists to release the negative emotions precipitated by the sheer enormity of the destruction of the Tohoku tsunami: “There’s a Japanese phrase, namu fukashigi ko, which means ‘I give up to the inconceivable,’ I just, I cannot grasp this.” One sensei reported that for Buddhists, “It’s okay to not understand.” By letting go of the attempt to understand, by “giving up to the inconceivable,” Buddhists are able to turn toward recovery.

**Impermanence.**

The Buddhist understanding of impermanence complements the emphasis on acceptance. One must accept that the world is constantly changing, that life is suffering, and one will never be completely comfortable, as this participant described:

“Well just from the Buddhist paradigm, everything is impermanent, everything is in flux. They usually say ‘life is suffering.’ The Sanskrit word I think is dukkha, which can be translated as, ‘always uncomfortable.’ Imagine a wheel, say a wheel like this [drawing in the air], and we want to have the center like that, put the axle right? But imagine that the wheel- the axle is always off-center, so we always getting a bumpy and wobbly kind of ride, we’re always uncomfortable, life is always like this. And Japanese they say, ichinen, ‘one time.’ One time I will breathe out, but not back in. And that could be any time. So you live with the sense that, ‘I ain’t here forever.’ And many of them are very, you know philosophical about it, accepting, but also, it still hurts. You can understand, okay life isn’t permanent and all that, but if someone I love and care about perishes or gets very sick, of course they feel it. So they do have this mindset of well, after all that’s just how it is.”

Rather than a pessimistic view of life as impermanent, for these members of the Buddhist community, it seems that the acceptance of impermanence leads to a more peaceful, more
detached life that reduces suffering and allows for a positive, future orientation. Several participants shared that they believed this approach helps to facilitate recovery by increasing resilience, as Buddhists actively practice “dealing with things as they come” and adapting to the constantly changing nature of the world.

“Seek the lesson.”

In addition to accepting the world as it is, members of the Buddhist faith consistently spoke of directed effort to “seek the lesson” or to “search for the meaning” in all things, including disaster. Here, the idea of causality may appear a bit obscured. All members of the Buddhist community were emphatic that the cause of the Tohoku tsunami would not be tied to collective karma of the people of Japan. The cause of the event was interpreted as something that was part of the cycles of nature and the universal world order. While participants reported that the link between human action and nature would not be made regarding the cause of the tsunami, several participants did, however, suggest that the lesson that could be learned from the catastrophic event was that humans may be out of balance or need to find “harmony” with nature. One member of the Buddhist community noted that a similar event had happened in Japan approximately 700 years prior, and felt that it happened again because “we didn’t learn from teachings,” meaning that we as humans had not learned the lessons we were meant to learn in the time since the last event. This participant believed this time, “we learn that lesson, we cannot control [nature].” Other members of the Buddhist community differentiated between an uncontrollable, rapid-onset natural disaster, such as an earthquake, and a slow-onset disaster with catastrophic implications, such as global warming and sea level rise. In the case of global warming, the collective actions of the human population
(specifically industrialized nations such as the United States) are responsible for that disaster, which has an impact on the collective karma of the global community.

**Transformation.**

Both Zen and Soka Gakkai (SGI) participants spoke of the need for and the capacity to “break through” the limitations of average human thought to create real transformation. As one participant shared, “it’s definitely the impossible into possible formula. What you can’t even imagine, what our mind puts limitations on to really show wow, with this practice you can transform something you thought you couldn’t.” This is a deliberate and mindful act of transforming a disastrous situation into one that has a positive, hopeful outcome. This ongoing transformation is the mechanism of human revolution. “Human revolution is the inner transformation, of the individual, and, their transformation can change their society, their environment, their surroundings, again because everything’s so connected.”

**Theodicy.**

The question of theodicy, or how terrible things can happen in light of a loving God, is not a question that arises in a faith community like Buddhism that does not believe in one higher power or omnipotent deity. Instead of searching for the reason a disaster could happen, Buddhists focused on identifying a lesson that could be learned from the event. “They are not looking for the answer ‘why’ because it’s happened already. So it’s like you say, they try to recover by themself.” There was no sense that the tsunami had been sent as a punishment, as there is no higher power that is controlling the world in the Buddhist faith. As one participant shared,

“Buddha is only trying to save us. They don’t punish us, they wanna get us out of this karmic mess that we’re in. And it’s not- ‘oh you see we’re a bad person, now
a deity is gonna send this wave and demolish you and your family’… No. No it… it sounds trite but you know, shit happens. It’s not all ‘gee boy God was pissed off with me.’"

While the absence of belief in a higher power may make the issue of theodicy seem glaringly moot, the possibility of Buddhists grappling with a catastrophic event of this magnitude remained. One sensei did discuss his experience with a member of his temple who was struggling with a diagnosis of cancer. This member of the temple, reflecting back on her own karma, did struggle with the question why:

“[She asked] ‘why this happen to me?’ And all I could do is… put down my head. There is no answer… and it’s an eternal question, why do we suffer? Really, all of these things we talk about, karma and all of that, really we don’t know. That’s very scary. And very humbling.”

Each of the participants from the Buddhist community indeed marveled at the scope of the 2011 Tohoku tsunami and the terrible impact on those effected, but none raised the question “why” the tsunami happened. Part of the Buddhist worldview was simply accepting that which is. Absence of belief in a higher power was not the only reason theodicy was not an issue for Buddhist participants. It was not simply that having no higher power precluded the asking of the question; it was that the question was not raised at all because of the basic Buddhist epistemology. For the Buddhist community, acceptance precludes doubt; there is nothing to doubt, because the world simply is as it is, good, bad and everything in between.

**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.**

Members of the LDS community unequivocally believed that the 2011 Tohoku tsunami was a “sign of the times.” It was seen as an affirmation of the calamities prophesied in the Bible and *The Book of Mormon*. The prophecies say that “in the days
leading to the second coming of Jesus Christ there would be an increasing number of
natural disasters, wars, calamities in general.” Furthermore, according to one participant,

“There are scriptures that talk about in the last days the sea will heave itself
beyond its bounds, and cities will be swallowed up, things like that. And it was
like wow, that sounds like a perfect description of what just happened, you know?
And that’s what I remember, this has been prophesied that things like this would
happen. And here it has, you know?”

Many spoke of the event as a wake-up call, or a warning from God that the people of the
Earth need to repent and bring their lives into alignment with God’s will. As noted above,
the LDS believe that Christ will come again “by fire and glory to cleanse the earth.” It is
important to note that none believed the Japanese people themselves were being punished
for wickedness, but that “it could have happened anywhere” and was seen as a warning to
all the people of the earth. These prophecies formed a framework for understanding this
type of catastrophic disaster, as well as confirmation of their faith’s beliefs, as the
fulfillment of ancient prophecy. Some members of the LDS community, while
confirming the event as a sign of the times, did not feel it was a punishment from God.
God is believed to be omnipotent and omniscient, while people are not meant to
understand all that God does (or allows to happen). This incapacity to understand the
mind or work of God led to the topic of theodicy.

Theodicy.

Members of the LDS community spoke of God as all-powerful; God controls the
earth and it is beyond human capacity to understand why certain things happen. Some
viewed the act of questioning God as sacrilegious. Many spoke of personal hardship and
community disaster in light of a loving God who seeks to strengthen His people and teach
them valuable lessons: “I know that it’s for a reason, to make me learn a lesson and to
help become stronger and more brave, and to handle things that come.” It seems that members of the LDS community do not struggle with the issue of theodicy the way other Christian communities might, given their belief in the prophecies of the latter days. For the LDS, the reason of why such terrible things happen simply does not come up; events such as the tsunami are happening because God said it would be so. The questioning of why would be tantamount to questioning God, or expecting to understand the mysteries of the world the way that God does, mysteries which are unknowable to humankind. That events such as the 2011 Tohoku tsunami are happening is confirmation of the prophecy that such events will happen on the earth, and that these events should be seen as a sign of the end times, a sign that the Lord’s second coming is imminent.

One participant shared an experience in which he grappled with theodicy during his time as a missionary. Someone asked him how a loving God could allow the heinous abuse of children:

Participant: This woman said to me, ‘If an innocent child can kneel in his or her room when they hear the footsteps coming down the hallway and pray: ‘dear God please don’t let this happen again,’ and God doesn’t step in and do something, then there is not a God. If he loved that child He would protect him,’ you know I thought, wow.

Interviewer: How does your faith respond to something like that?

Participant: That things like that are just completely unfair and cruel and wrong if you only have the view of this world and this mortal life. There’s no reconciling that. It’s just terrible. But this life isn’t it, you know? There can only be a loving God that lets that kind of thing happen if there’s a whole lot more world than what we see just here and now.

For members of the LDS community, the struggle of theodicy is resolved by the belief that this human life is just a small part of a greater eternal life. For the LDS, this belief enables members to cope with tragedy because it views pain and suffering as a temporary
part of life. Furthermore, “the eternal blessings far outweigh any good or bad we experience here, and these blessings are available to everybody, no matter what they go through in this life.” Acceptance of suffering as a part of this brief mortal life enables members of the LDS to carry on in the face of extreme hardship.

United Methodist Church.

Members of the United Methodist Church viewed the cause of the 2011 Tohoku tsunami as an unpredictable but natural event that could happen on the Earth. The event was not viewed as a punishment, and was not viewed to be aimed at the people of Japan. As one participant explained:

“I don’t think the Methodist view of things at all would be that ‘oh, God is angry and you are sinners, we’re sending the big waters over you.’ No, I don’t think at all you would hear that from the pulpit of the Methodist Church.”

It is important to note that while participants in this study did not reflect the type of punitive perspective just described, one participant indicated that some Methodist preachers in more conservative communities might provide this type of punitive interpretation for their congregations as a reflection of an orientation toward the Old Testament interpretations. For the participants in this study, however, the perspective is less vengeful: “my God has a lot more things to contend with than try to make us suffer.” However, several members of the UMC community believed the event could be interpreted as a “call from God that we have to come together and believe in Him.” One participant discussed his understanding of the Bible in modern days:

“To me when I read those things in the Bible, there was a lesson to be learned for the degree of information they may have had at that time, and how people wanted to explain God’s power, God’s wrath, God’s love and all that. I say that’s something very different. It was a teaching moment and style. And for me personally, I cannot hold God responsible for the bad things. But I will pray for those who need the help and support, the comfort and the sense of somebody else
cares and is walking the walk with me. And I try to do that when and where I can, but I don’t want blame God for what goes on. It just doesn’t compute with me.”

This disconnect between a loving God and a world that can be terrible led naturally to the concept of theodicy.

*Theodicy.*

Some members of the community referred to the Bible prophecy of the second coming of Jesus:

“They say that this is a sign of the Lord’s coming. You know because it’s all written in the Bible, there’s gonna be earthquakes, tornado and all those things… it’s coming…”

This participant went on to say that while the Bible prophesizes these occurrences, she struggled to reconcile this with her concept of a loving God:

“But... is it coming from God? Are people neglecting the things that we’re supposed to be doing? I mean I’m not really sure if that’s God’s will… because I know God is loving. So all these things they said that it’s a sign that God is coming because of a lot of people not believing in God anymore so we can repent, people can repent, whatever our sins are… but I’m not really sure if this is a punishment from God.”

Here the issue of theodicy, while not acknowledged as such, naturally arose in the response of the participant. She reported what she had been taught and reflected her own uncertainty of how this could be true if God is also benevolent and all loving. Another participant shared his perspective on the struggle with theodicy:

“I think Job is probably a classic example, I mean that entire book is about the question of theodicy, ‘why do bad things happen?’ I think that there are many different responses to that… people will point out and say… you know ‘Job got through it only because of his faith and so, therefore, in our experience of disaster, if we only have more faith, we’ll get through this.’ But that leaves me to ask… ‘what if we don’t have that much faith? Or if things don’t change and we don’t recover from this disaster, what does that mean for us? Or even the question of why disaster? What does that say about our faith, does it mean we didn’t pray hard enough? And this disaster still happened, then what does that say about our relationship with God? And God’s relationship to us?’”
This participant goes on to say that struggling with these types of questions is something that has been done over the millennia:

“The scriptures of Isaiah and Micah, they’re asking the question you know, ‘who are we as a people? And why are we where we’re at? And so let’s wrestle with our faith in God.’ And I think that comes from an ancient, Jewish tradition of you know, wrestling with God, asking those questions amidst the chaos of the world.”

Thus, while for some, the question of theodicy may be interpreted as a symptom of wavering faith, for others it is a part of the process of navigating the realities of the world as a person of faith, a tradition borne by many of the prophets and heroes of ancient times.

**Faith-Based Coping Mechanisms**

Participants in all communities were asked to discuss what their faith narratives, characters, and historical figures tell them about how to cope with disaster and other such tragedy. Proscription for coping was extended beyond disaster to personal tragedy, as participants were better able to respond when not limited to coping mechanisms solely related to recovery from disaster events. Before examining the coping mechanisms of each community, a look at an unexpected outcome to emerge from the data.

**Viktor Frankl.**

An interesting and unexpected theme that emerged was the reliance of religious leaders on the work of Viktor Frankl when assisting the faithful in interpreting and coping with disaster. Three faith leaders from the Buddhist and Methodist communities spontaneously and directly cited the work of Viktor Frankl as a resource when providing aid and comfort during times of hardship. Frankl’s *Man’s Search for Meaning* (1959) details the development of his prominent theory during his time as a prisoner in the Nazi
concentration camp at Auschwitz. Logotherapy addresses the existential dilemmas that arise when faced with unimaginable circumstances, and seeks to find meaning despite terrible conditions:

A man who becomes conscious of the responsibility he bears toward a human being who affectionately waits for him, or to an unfinished work, will never be able to throw away his life. He knows the ‘why’ for his existence and will be able to bear almost any ‘how.’16 (Frankl, 1959, p. 101).

This theme is discussed in the Buddhist and Methodist communities, where it emerged.

**Bahá’í.**

**Prayer.**

In the Bahá’í faith, prayer is seen as a way to cope when faced with difficult times. When asked about the way she coped with the news of the 2011 Tohoku tsunami, one participant shared: “I prayed immediately, and then we just, we leave it with God.” Another participant explained the role of prayer:

“Especially in a situation like a natural disaster where the innocent are hurt, it can feel very helpless and completely out of your control, the idea in those situations is to turn to guidance from God. And so you seek peace in Him. … It's very difficult when we can’t control things, and the only way to surrender that stress and that needing to control is to give it over to God, put it in God’s hands.”

The Bahá’í community encourages active engagement with and faith in God. Active engagement included prayer, meditation, and seeking ways to assist locally. Prayer is considered an active process, as the Bahá’í community believes in the power of prayer for those in the next life. One participant shared that the message from the Bahá’í community was: “Let’s pray for the souls of those that have gone, because one of the ways that souls progress in the next world is by prayers from this world.” Thus, prayer is

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16 Frankl borrows here from Nietzsche (1889).
both a coping mechanism for the individual and an active way to contribute to the spiritual welfare of others.

**Acceptance of suffering as an opportunity for growth.**

Members of the Bahá’í faith spoke of the importance of acceptance when faced with hardship. “Because suffering is seen as a way to transform and to grow, there’s almost a peacefulness that comes with [hardship] because [its role as a catalyst for transformation is] a fundamental belief of the Bahá’í faith.” In the Bahá’í faith, suffering is viewed as an opportunity to develop spiritually and to draw closer to God.

**Interviewer:** What does the Baha’i faith tell you about how you overcome “crisis”? What are the mechanisms for reaching “victory”?

**Participant:** Well, perseverance. We have to persevere. We have to endure, okay. Bahá’u’lláh says, “my calamity is my providence, outwardly it is fire and vengeance, inwardly it is light and mercy.” So when we draw upon those things, it helps us.

Through prayer, meditation, efforts toward detachment from the material world, and service to others, the Bahá’í build strength to overcome the tests of this life. Participants reported that a Bahá’í seeks a life of simplicity that is spiritually grounded and directed towards growth and service to others. S/he then uses lessons learned from challenges to grow spiritually and personally, which enables the individual to triumph over adversity, or move from crisis to victory.

Participants spoke of two books in particular in the Bahá’í faith that directly address coping with hardship, *The Hidden Words of Bahá’u’lláh* (Bahá’u’lláh, 1985, reprint) and *Fire and Gold: Benefitting from Life’s Tests* (Kurzius, 2007). One participant explained that one of the prayers in *The Hidden Words* speaks to the need to be content when undergoing hardship or misfortune: “‘O Son of Spirit! Ask not of Me that which we
desire not for thee, then be content with what We have ordained for thy sake, for this is that which profiteth thee, if therewith thou dost content thyself.’” This prayer helped the participant to be at peace with a difficult experience for the knowledge that it was for his highest good. *Fire and Gold* is a compilation of writings on the “tests and difficulties” that a person may face in this life. This resource for Bahá’ís addresses how one can move from “crisis to victory” and transform a test into an opportunity for growth. One participant shared that there are even prayers in the Bahá’í faith to receive tests in order to stimulate spiritual growth. In light of this perspective on tests and suffering, disaster and tragedy are seen as terrible losses, but there is a focus on finding a lesson within the experience. This provides a framework that is mindful of the tragedy but also focused on the opportunity for growth and the awareness that there is a space into which one can move afterwards. This action-oriented approach then serves as a mechanism for coping and recovery.

*Serve.*

Many members of the Bahá’í community spoke of service as a core value of the faith. The role of servant is seen as “the highest station that one can attain,” as evidenced by the life of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. This focus on service to others can serve as a coping mechanism: “then you realize you try to help other people. That’s your job. You quickly forget your own disaster, and you get past it, you go on.” Thus, service to others can be a catalyst for healing in one’s own life, the lives of others, and the broader community, for the Bahá’í have “a twofold purpose, to transform yourself and transform society.” While the goal is not necessarily self-restoration, through service to others, you are restored.

The lives of Bahá’u’lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá provide models of service and perseverance
through suffering that Bahá’ís can turn to during times of hardship for inspiration and courage.

*View of life and death.*

For the Bahá’í, the prospect of death is not to be feared. As described earlier, this earthly existence is seen as a formative time for our souls, like the fetus in the womb of the mother, so that when we reach the next world, we will have all the things we need to survive. While the embryo grows physically in the womb, the individual grows spiritually in this world.

“The reason religions always emphasize a spiritual, you know, existence, is because we gonna need those spiritual forces, in the next world in order to grow. ‘Cause those will be our tools. Hands and feet and eyes and ears will not be our tools, our tools will be our spiritual capacity.”

For the Bahá’í, then, suffering is a natural part of life, but more than that, it has divine, and individual purpose.

“The purpose of suffering is to both help you develop all of those spiritual characteristics. The next is to bring you closer to God, to help you to turn towards God. This world is simply for us to develop our spiritual qualities for the next world, and suffering is one thing that helps us do that.”

Because of this view of life on earth as a pre-cursor to the next life, which is considered the true reality, death is not to be feared. One participant described the execution of the National Spiritual Assembly of Iran. The Local Spiritual Assembly stepped forward to take the open places on the National Spiritual Assembly, and they too were executed.

“That kind of courage doesn’t come from making a [political] point. It comes from knowing that, it’s the right thing to do, that death isn’t the worst thing that can happen to you. Life here is very very short anyway so, the difference between 80 years and 40 years, is really the twinkling of an eye, compared to your existence which is forever. So doing the right thing is more important than living.”
Facing death for their faith is something Bahá’ís have done over the past two centuries, and they continue to do so fearlessly today. For the Bahá’í, death is not an ending but a transition into the next life. Suffering and death, therefore, are not only experiences that should not be lamented, but are indicators of progress on this earthly plane, and passage onto the next, both of which are to be celebrated. In the words of Bahá’u’lláh, “I have made death a messenger of joy to thee.” This view of personal grief and loss shapes the interpretation of loss within the disaster context as well as the framework for recovery in the Bahá’í faith.

**Buddhist.**

**Acceptance.**

The Buddhist approach to coping is based on the values addressed in the sections above: acceptance that the world is constantly in flux (impermanence); and suffering as a part of life. Rather than a passive acceptance, this is paired with an active approach to creating positive outcomes. Several participants mentioned that sometimes acceptance is difficult to cultivate: “because that’s the most hard thing, to accept the reality of the moment, I believe.” It requires a mindful and directed approach to evaluating suffering and detaching from it emotionally. For Buddhists, another strategy for coping is “living in the suffering together. The Buddhist teaching give me a power to live with suffering because I accept the reality. Coping is more like overcoming [it], because we cannot change the reality and we cannot ease the suffering.” Thus, when there are situations in which one cannot change the cause of the suffering, one must not compound suffering with guilt or worry over its immutability. Rather, one must find a space of peace within uncertainty or uncomfortable circumstances.
Karma and detachment.

A few members of the Buddhist community spoke of the opportunity, in the wake of unfortunate events, to improve their karma:

“There might be some interpretation where it’s like, this is my karma, something bad happened because of something I did in the past, but then I think that emphasis is more on, how can I use that to improve my karma.”

This emphasis on improving karma, rather than dwelling on the bad karma that may have precipitated the hardship, provides an action-oriented future focus that facilitates recovery. Within this effort to improve karma, however, there is also an effort to detach from the outcome. Over-attachment to a specific outcome can create additional expectation and potential for suffering, so while the Buddhist will seek to detach from the negative karma that may have precipitated hardship, find meaning in the event or learn from it, and create opportunities to move forward, there is an acknowledgement that one must be detached from all stages of the process. As one participant shared, one is to avoid extremes and “find the middle pass” or “middle way.” This middle way means remaining detached from both positive and negative outcomes. It does not, however, preclude directed action.

“Turning poison into medicine.”

Members of the SGI community talked about the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin regarding difficult or negative events. His perspective on disaster, and on all things, is one of transformation. As the President of the global SGI community, Daisaku Ikeda explained after the Tohoku event:

Even if we should meet with disasters and calamities, it cannot destroy our hearts. Nothing can destroy the treasures of the heart. Every adversity is but a trial for us

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to overcome so that we can attain eternal happiness. Nichiren Buddhism, our practice of faith in the Mystic Law enables us to transform all poison into medicine without fail. (Ikeda, 2012, p. 7)

While there is a focus on transformation and moving forward, there is also an acceptance that for some, the experience may be different, and that one should not judge another since Buddhism is such a personal faith or philosophy. In this way, there is a realization that for some individuals or situations, “it’s okay to leave it alone” and that action may not always be the only answer. However, there are some things for which we as a people bear responsibility, and as such, we are obligated to act. The example given in this instance was the ongoing disaster at the Fukushima nuclear power facility: “Fukushima, we cannot all leave it like that.” This could be seen as an opportunity for human revolution, to change the social structures that created the nuclear disaster, and indeed we bear the responsibility to do so.

**Prayer, chanting, and/or meditation.**

Members of the Buddhist community spoke of prayer, chanting and/or meditation as a method of coping with hardship. These practices provide both comfort and also serve as a catalyst for action: “Prayer is not a feeble consolation. It is powerful, unyielding, and must be manifested in action. And action must be backed up by prayer” (Kasahara, 2006, as cited by Hochswender, 2006).

“The main practice of chanting or meditation is tapping into the potential within you, and how to use struggles to change poison into medicine. So you learn about how to take a bad situation and use that to better your life. Another big part of it is dialogue with others [about their struggles]… developing compassion, so through helping other people, you’re helping yourself too.”

In the Buddhist tradition, prayers can impact a lost loved one’s positive karma in the next life, by influencing their birth into the best possible circumstances in the next life. This
ongoing connectedness may serve as a coping mechanism when struggling with grief or loss. “You may not be able to physically get up and do something, in that normal way that people think you can do something. But it’s through your prayer that you can tap into, the situation or the person’s life.” Through prayer, Buddhists can move from a place of helplessness to one of action. Thus, the Buddhist approach to coping is both personal and social. It is a framework for personal and communal recovery based in active engagement in the transformation of hardship into renewal. Chanting, prayer or meditation may also help facilitate acceptance. As one participant shared, a member of the Buddhist community might pray, “Namu Amida Butsu, I surrender to Amida Buddha,” as a way to facilitate acceptance and recovery.

*Viktor Frankl.*

Two of the Buddhist sensei who participated in this study spoke of using Frankl’s logotherapy when assisting the faithful in meaning-making. As one Buddhist leader explained, “I have learned that usually a lot of people when they come, they don’t wanna hear something Buddhist, okay.” As such, he uses an eclectic approach to supporting the faithful, drawing from the work of others from various faiths and/or fields when seeking to offer a paradigm for recovery from hardship. One to whom he often turns is Frankl, who “literally went through hell” (referring to Frankl’s experience in Auschwitz). Both of the sensei who mentioned Frankl’s work explained that since the existential theory may be difficult for some in their communities to understand, they instead use the theory as a guiding framework for helping the faithful navigate difficult life experiences and turn toward the future.
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

“We are placed on this earth to be tested.”

In the face of hardship, tests, or disaster, the LDS faithful must exercise their faith, pray, serve others, and take responsibility to be as prepared as possible, both spiritually and physically, for any test that might come. Many members of the LDS community spoke of disasters in light of the purpose of life on earth:

“You have to have faith in order to resolve or try to overcome, basically disaster. Disasters are gonna happen. And normally we are placed on earth to be tested anyhow. We’re here to be tested and so you need to keep the faith, continually pray for protection. And have the faith and resolve and take any actions you can take to save yourself, not just spiritually but physically. … We go through life, we get tested and basically our scriptures says, the Lord will not tempt you more than you can overcome. You have the power.”

“So I personally view trial and tribulation as a character builder, as my road to perfection, because the only way that I can reach that attribute is by means of trial and tribulation. That’s the only way.”

Thus, the perspective on disaster may be shifted from a lens of hardship, to one of opportunity or even blessing from God. An important distinction here is that faith alone is insufficient. One must also take responsibility for oneself: “I was taught you can totally depend on God of course, you want Him to be there for you, but you have to do things yourself as well.” Personal or communal disasters are seen as opportunities to learn the lessons God seeks to teach, to grow stronger, and to show unwavering faith. One must always seek to be obedient to God, to live in the way that God commands, to be repentant for the times when one fails to do so, and to be grateful for the blessings God has bestowed. This view of life’s tests incorporates an active reframing of hardship, and provides a framework for action, which serve as coping mechanisms for the LDS community.
Prayer.

Members of the LDS church all spoke of prayer as a primary method of coping with hardship and tragedy.

“You gotta leave things in the Lord’s hand. The Lord knows when it’s your time basically. He knows what you can do and what you have… things to do in your future. And so I believe that if you try to endure to the end so to speak, and do your best to do whatever calling you might have in the church or in your work, or in your community, and you live right, you’re gonna die right, and you gonna be able to someday enter into His presence.”

Prayer and service to others are essential components to entering the Kingdom of Heaven. “They say pray often, doesn’t have to be just pray at night or pray in the morning. They pray always basically. Then you can overcome the difficulties of life through prayer.” One bishop discussed his experience counseling members of his community, and the two questions he asks: “‘when did this situation develop?’ and ‘when did you stop praying?’ And it’s about the same time. ‘Cause they’ve given up basically.”

He then spoke of “Footprints in the Sand,” a popular Christian image depicting Jesus walking beside an individual who sees only one set of footprints at the most challenging points in his life, and believes the Lord abandoned him during those times of hardship. “It’s not just that He left you out in the cold, it’s then that He’s carrying you, to take off your load.” The faithful are reminded that the Lord is always with them, and all they need to do is remember to pray to feel His strength and fortitude to cope with any hardship or challenge. For the LDS community, faith and action go hand in hand. Prayer is a mechanism of comfort and hope but also of empowerment and directed action.

Compassionate service to the community.

Many members of the LDS faith community spoke of “compassionate service” to others. In addition to prayer, the faithful must actively engage in good works. Many
reported the emphasis on service to others because “we will be judged by our good works.”

“I do believe that every individual has an individual plan of salvation, and every individual’s plan is very unique according to that person’s good works or bad works, because throughout the whole scriptures it says we will be judged according to our works, not our faith. Faith without works is dead.”

Participants from the LDS community spoke of coping through action – to physically or spiritually or emotionally support in whatever way they could. Members also spoke of finding strength through one another’s stories of struggle and triumph. Hearing the stories of others who had seen God’s blessings manifest in their own lives strengthened members’ resolve to contribute their income to the tithing system, to resist the desires of “the natural man” and to continue to engage in compassionate service. These experiences were believed to make members more resilient, as individuals and as a community.

_Eternal life._

The LDS belief in eternal life serves as a way to cope in the wake of loss. For the LDS faith, Jesus Christ has gone before to “prepare a place” in the Kingdom of Heaven. The LDS view of death is not one of mournfulness. Rather, the passing of a good person (as judged by the Lord) is a joyful movement into eternal life, where one will be reunited with loved ones and live in the Kingdom of God forever.

Participant: Let’s say that as prepared as I am and as hopefully good natured and service-oriented as I am, let’s say that I’m driving along Hau‘ula and the wave takes me and I’m dead. Guess what? I just became an angel. Right on. Right on. Hoo!

Interviewer: So in that respect, death is not looked at as a sorrowful thing.

Participant: Well of course not.
Another participant shared a line of a song called “Come, Come, You Saints” which was particularly comforting when dealing with loss of a loved one: “and should we die before our journey is through, happy day, all is well.” The belief that a loved one has already been “taken home to God” is a great comfort, for the loved one is in God’s care. This view of eternal life and the belief that “families are forever” (i.e., families will be reunited in the Kingdom of Heaven) shape the view of death for members of the LDS faith. Death is merely a temporary separation from a loved one; their reunion is ensured, and they will spend eternity together. This mortal life is but a fraction of the life to be spent with God in Heaven.

*Turn to the scriptures.*

Many members of the LDS community spoke of their reliance on their primary holy books as a source of comfort and guidance. Among these are the Bible, *The Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price,* and *Doctrine and Covenants.* These indexed volumes are a ready reference for seeking guidance or comfort in all times of distress. One participant shared a favorite passage that provided comfort: “Look into me in every thought; doubt not, fear not.” Through these historical texts and modern resources like the monthly magazine, *Ensign,* and the records of the bi-annual General Conference proceedings, one can find guidance and support when faced with challenges. Describing a painting of an angel watching over Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, another participant spoke of the comfort that comes with knowing that the Lord is both watching over each of us, and that he too understands our struggles.
United Methodist Church.

Members of the United Methodist Church spoke of relying on their faith to cope in times of disaster and hardship. “Just don’t lose faith even though disaster comes.” For members of the UMC, the presence of God was felt in all things. “God is always with me in the good, the bad, the mysterious.” Participants spoke of seeing God in all things, but did not believe God was necessarily causing the bad or the good to happen. When misfortune struck, they looked to God for strength, but did not believe hardship was a result of God’s punishment or abandonment. Participants were also grateful to God in times of joy. Participants found God in all things: “Don’t lose your faith, don’t lose hope because, God is always there for us whenever we need him in crisis, in non-crisis.”

“Turn it over to God.”

Members of the UMC community spoke of turning their worries and concerns over to God when they felt “stuck” or helpless:

“You know if it’s a disaster I think some people get kind of stuck for a little bit and they can’t move forward yet, they’re just feeling helpless and I think then they might just turn it over to God… until they feel strong enough to then move forward.”

One participant spoke of three different ways for using religion as a coping strategy: those who turn everything over to God; those who turn nothing over to God; and those who turn their problems over to God but also seek to take action on their own in addition to relying on God’s help. This participant felt that the Methodist community is one that recommends the third, both faith and action. “You present your problems to God… but you also take action; you don’t just sit back and say ‘oh God I’ll handle it.’” For the members of the UMC, faith in action is not only a call to service; it is a coping
mechanism. Working together with God, the faithful can accomplish more. Sometimes, turning it over God means allowing God to work through others on your behalf:

“I think the community, either the overall community on this island, in the neighborhood, or the community of the church membership, I think can help them because they can support the person while they’re feeling like they can’t do anything and they’re helpless and they’re hopeless. [The community] would help support them, they would be in effect God’s arms to help lift the person up. And in essence they’re turning things over to God if they’re at the point where they can’t take on part of the load themselves. Turning it over to God could be God through the other people.”

Those who had direct disaster experience spoke of seeing the work of God through others: “So people came and offered food and stuff like that so I think… I find God in the in the kindness of people and how we treat one another during those times.”

**Prayer.**

Participants from the UMC spoke of their reliance on prayer in times of difficulty or uncertainty. Prayer was a coping mechanism in both the big and small things in life:

“You use God in your life to cope with that problem. And whether you pray that the surgeons are good at their job and could remove the tumor or you pray that the person will be strong enough to go through the treatment in a way that the family will be able to come away from that if the person dies and still maintains their self. I think you still rely on God in the same way, it’s just in a smaller arena than a disaster.”

For members of the United Methodist Church, prayer was another way to work with God. It was both a source of comfort and of active engagement with God.

**Search for meaning in the Scriptures.**

The pastor of the United Methodist Church spoke of the importance of acknowledging the humanity within struggle, indeed acknowledging that one’s faith might falter is important to the process of meaning-making and recovery.

“In the Scriptures we draw on [the Book of] Lamentations, you say ‘it’s okay to lament and to lament in whatever way you need to, even if it’s anger or
frustration, hatred toward God’… to say that’s okay. It’s okay to be angry. I would be clear to say that God did not do this… but that anger needs to come out. You can’t get to hope and liberation until you’ve sat with the reality of what has occurred. The grief needs to be expressed… and only then can you begin the work of rebuilding, both human lives, and our material lives.”

Another participant spoke of finding comfort in the Psalms, citing “yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.” For this participant, the reminder that even in the darkest hours of one’s life, s/he need not be afraid because the Lord is with each of us.

_Viktor Frankl._

The Methodist pastor explained that in seeking to make sense of catastrophic disaster or personal tragedy, he turns to the work of Viktor Frankl for “pastoral care insight” when helping the faithful find meaning:

“I remember trying to approach that sermon [after the 2011 Tohoku tsunami] from this place of logotherapy, helping folks find meaning, trying to move people away from seeing God as the vindictive, omnipotent, all-powerful God. And to help people see that actually… there’s more power to be found in the meekness of God… that God walks with us through suffering, that God was present in the tsunami, in 2011… but was not the *cause* of the tsunami [emphasis communicated by participant]. And I think people need to hear that. Because, in our consciousness it arises, ‘why did God do this?’ God didn’t do this, and people need to be reminded of that. And to hear from a religious leader, is powerful.”

This pastor views meaning making as a sacred task as a faith leader, and as a responsibility to help the congregation navigate a way through the suffering from a perspective of hope and rebirth, rather than anger and resentment in order to move forward.

**Post-Disaster Support**

None of the participants in any of the faith communities indicated that they would be expected to provide anything to their faith community that was beyond their personal
capacity to contribute. That is to say, no monetary contributions to the faith community would be demanded from any member of any community, though communities varied on level of expectation of contribution. Expectations of support received from the faith community varied across the communities. The Bahá’í expectation was that people would be actively providing service to the community, but there was a clear distinction that there would be no judgment upon those who did not engage in providing service.

Members of the Buddhist community expected that their communities would support them if they needed help, but none of the Buddhist temples had formal plans for disaster response. All members of the LDS community discussed their ongoing, formal structure for support (discussed in greater depth below). The Methodist community loosely expected that people would help each other, but this assistance was less formal and more tied to family and community relationships than relationships within the faith community per se. Members of all communities expressed concern about Hawai’i’s isolation, and the possible inability to receive supplies if the ports and airports (all near the shorelines) were damaged or destroyed. Members of all communities indicated that in the wake of the 2011 Tohoku event, their faith communities were encouraged to pray or meditate, and voluntary special collections were taken up to aid the victims of the event.

Members of all four faith communities indicated that they expected their leaders to provide spiritual and emotional support; to act as a communication hub to local communities from national and international leadership bodies; and to provide instrumental and material support to those in need in the community. Those with personal disaster experience talked about the kindness and generosity of those in their own and in surrounding communities. They talked of restaurants opening their doors and feeding
people free of charge, and of interfaith collaborations to feed and shelter those affected. They talked of caring for each other, of actively seeking to help those who were vulnerable, including the elderly, those with disabilities, and those who were on their own without families to care for them. Specific expectations within each faith community are detailed below.

**Bahá’í.**

*Support expectations.*

Expectations of the type of support members would receive from the Bahá’í community included meeting essential needs. Members noted that Bahá’í in Hawai’i with family in the islands would likely turn to family first, but that the faith community would support members if needed. Members showed specific concern for those without family in the islands, and expressed that these members would be looked after to ensure that their safety and other needs were met. Members of the Bahá’í community focused less on the support they would receive and more on the support they would provide. The focus on service to others was prominent regarding post-disaster support expectations. To some extent, this may reflect the leadership structure of the faith community.

“The local spiritual assemblies are conduit of the administration of the community itself. The intention is that it’s actually the community that is doing all of these things, and the Local Spiritual Assembly is the administrative body that helps to organize, it helps to facilitate that action, but the Local Spiritual Assembly isn’t actually of course the one carrying out all these actions.”

The focus is on providing as much support to the community as possible. Members expect that if they have needs of their own, that the community will provide food, shelter, emotional and any other type of support needed.
Support demands.

That service to others is of paramount importance in the Bahá’í faith is expressed well by this participant: “If I’m not dead, I’m probably still helping.” One participant shared his experience during previous tsunami evacuations, and his expectation that he would provide food and shelter for evacuees from his community:

“About an hour into this all the [community name] Baha’i’s will be here. They were in the last one. Soon as those things [tsunami sirens] go off, they load up and come. They called the last time and said, ‘Uncle [a term of respect and endearment in Hawaiian culture], can we come?’ ‘Hey of course! We’re expecting you! You know? We’re preparing the meal, come!’ I know we’re okay here. But boy are there gonna be a lot of people to help after it’s all over. Okay organize, wade in.”

“We would be helping each other out, the ones who live where the tsunami hadn’t touched would probably be hosting as many families as they could in their home.”

“My kids and I would definitely be involved in something that was helping with relief, without question. And being there for people, comfort, provide food, cook, clean up, whatever was needed, whoever needed help. Without question.”

Based on the core value of unity, it is not surprising that participants indicated that while they would seek to provide food, shelter, supplies, and any other kind of support other members of the Bahá’í community needed, that this assistance would not be focused solely on members of the faith community, but anyone in need.

“So you’re gonna have to figure out how you’re gonna help. I would think most Baha’i’s would be at that same mode of operation. And then after the event… there’d be some here, there would be home base and the rest would organize, move into the community. We’d try to do what could be done. You’re gonna have people that are in charge of it. Rescue people and that sort of stuff that are going to be in charge, you go help them.”

“I think the community in general, would be very organized and diligent about making sure that everyone is taken care of, and also, lend support as much as possible to anyone who’s in need. I can’t imagine inaction or something like that in the local communities.”
“The focus would be very outward oriented. The focus wouldn’t be on necessarily helping other Baha’is, but really on helping anyone that needed it. The Baha’i faith is very action oriented, in terms of really trying to have a positive impact on people, and I could see Baha’is getting together and having, you know, food banks and, you know places for people to stay, even search and rescue, you know I mean you name it, like anything that would need to happen.”

In addition to providing these types of instrumental support, Bahá’ís spoke to the importance of prayer during such crises:

“I would expect all Baha’i’s to immediately start praying. Doing and praying. Praying and doing. It’s just what we are. … Do the best you can with what you’ve got, and… keep it moving.”

“Baha’is would [be praying] trying to bring that divine assistance, but also in terms of helping from a mental and emotional standpoint, helping people, understand and deal with, a test, because that concept of viewing a test or viewing something like [a disaster] as a positive thing is not very widespread [outside of the Bahá’í community], you know. So I think that that’s something that the Baha’i community would be able to provide, for people as well.”

This participant pinpoints the unique contribution that the members of the Bahá’í faith could bring to those affected by disaster. The social support Bahá’ís would provide would be shaped by their belief in the value of being tested, like “fire and gold.” Bahá’ís would rely on their belief in the value of “turning crisis into victory” in order to reframe the disastrous event into a challenge that can be overcome, into an event that will create opportunities for strength and service.

Members of the Bahá’í community were clear when explaining that any and all support provided by members to other members of the community would be entirely voluntary. Many Bahá’ís affirmed that the faith is nonjudgmental. One can never know what another’s situation is at a given time, so one cannot judge another’s actions. There is an assumption that all will automatically be doing as much as they can to provide
assistance and service, and that if someone is not doing so, there is a reason that must be respected.

“In the Baha’i faith, service and servitude are very much voluntary. Baha’i… it’s not a passive faith. You don’t just work on your own spiritual qualities. The whole point of it is to bring world unity, and there’s a lot of work that goes into that. Right now since it’s a nascent community, it’s starting from focusing on how do we work within communities to help those spiritual and material improvements. There is no individual expectation, but the culture promotes being an active member in terms of serving the community.”

Members noted that the capacity to provide service to others or to contribute with financial or instrumental support would vary from member to member. No member would be expected to make a financial contribution. There was an expectation that every member would contribute within his/her own capacity.

“I think there would be 100 percent participation. And by that I mean, whatever an individual could provide, you know. And so in whatever capacity, because often times like, the elderly for example, they’re not gonna be able to go out there and do search and rescue. But what could they do at home, they could pray or they could, you know provide a hot meal or whatever. It’s whatever is within an individual’s ability to provide.”

The Bahá’í are self-described as “not a rich faith;” they are not to seek to amass wealth, but to seek avenues to shared wealth and equality among all people. As such, financial support demands are not part of the Bahá’í disaster response. Members may contribute if they are able, and any amount is considered a gift, regardless of its size. In this way, even those with limited income may participate in supporting recovery in a financial way. However, for the Bahá’í, the focus is more on other types of instrumental support, social and emotional support, and spiritual growth in the wake of disaster.
Buddhist.

Support expectations.

Members of the Buddhist community expected that their temples or community centers would provide whatever support they could after a disaster event. Members recalled praying, chanting or meditating for those who had been impacted by the Tohoku tsunami. The President of Soka Gakkai International, Daisaku Ikeda, shared: “Earnestly praying for your health and well-being, where all Buddhists and bodhisattvas and forces of the universe will rigorously protect you” (Ikeda, 2012, p. 7). Members of the SGI and Zen communities spoke of looking to their leaders for spiritual support:

“[They would provide] guidance by way of what we should do, you know how we should react to these kind things. But then definitely emotional [support] too. You know I think a lot of people look to the bon son [church leader, a term that emerged during Hawaiian plantation days] just for like how they should be reacting [when overwhelmed with] feelings of sadness.”

Members of the Hongwanji community spoke of the role of sensei in providing support by way of listening and being present with those who have been affected. There was, however, a distinction between a sensei listening and providing emotional support in the Hongwanji community versus the provision of spiritual direction that members of the other Buddhist communities expected. While Hongwanji sensei sought to provide companionship and solace, emphasizing the importance of not providing direction, members of the Soto Zen and SGI Buddhist communities discussed seeking comfort in the guidance and direction of a leader or mentor.

Support demands.

One member of the SGI community shared that Soka Gakkai in Japan are known for their rapid disaster response. There is, in the SGI community, an expectation that
members will be actively engaged in efforts to support relief and recovery. However, this expectation of support to the community would not exceed an individual’s personal capacity to contribute. In general, Buddhists are expected to contribute to their faith communities, but contributions can be as low as $1 (or comparable foreign currency), and members are only expected to contribute what they are able. It is important to note, however, that one member of the SGI community was clear that there are zero expectations of financial contribution in the SGI community. Additionally, participants shared other ways that a person can contribute to the Buddhist community that are non-monetary, such as sharing a smile, listening, providing shelter or food, or completing other types of support tasks. Buddhist participants spoke of providing emotional support and prayers for other members of their own communities. This type of personal/emotional support includes an engagement with others that is not merely talking, but instead, active listening. It is engagement with one’s whole being, body, mind and spirit. It is a conscious, active effort to be present with the other person. One sensei reported feeling that a minister’s role is to go out into the community:

“We just talked, we went and then we just listen, ‘cause we cannot say anything ‘cause they are the one face the reality and I was the one outside. I couldn’t say anything, but I wanted to do something, so I went.”

In this way, “Buddhism is action.” One can actively provide support, even when one cannot change the situation, by listening to others and providing assistance in whatever way possible. Through both prayers and actions, an individual can support others, and create positive karma for all.
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Support expectations.

On an ongoing basis, any member of the LDS community who is in need of assistance can request aid from his/her ward bishop. On a temporary basis, the ward is able to utilize its resources, including its disaster storehouse, to provide temporary assistance with food or rental assistance. Additionally, the community will provide budgeting assistance, help finding a job, or help planting a garden to those in need to create sustainable plans for their future. These resources that are readily available on an ongoing basis are also available during times of disaster. Several members of the LDS community explained that one of the reasons members are encouraged to have their own 3-month food supply is to allow the ward storehouse supplies to be distributed to members of the wider community who are in need post-disaster. While members of the LDS community are taught to be prepared in this life, there is also a sense of detachment from the material world. The purpose of disaster preparedness is not the amassing of goods; it is rather the practice of careful and deliberate planning that will enable the community to not just survive, but to be ready and able servants of others who may not be as aptly prepared or who may have less capacity to recover. They also expected that other LDS would provide “anything that I needed, and I would provide the same to anyone else.”

On the ground, in the immediate aftermath of disaster, members of the LDS community would be mobilized to assist in relief and recovery efforts. The community would seek to provide shelter, food, clothing, and other necessities to all affected. After ensuring the safety of their members, ward bishops would report to the stake president,
who would use satellite phones (if necessary) to report the community’s needs to LDS headquarters in Salt Lake City, and/or the storehouse regional supply distribution centers (in California for the Hawai‘i stakes). Members of the LDS community reflected confidence that the worldwide LDS community would provide support:

“It wouldn’t be incumbent on the affected community to repair or rebuild on their own because the national and international community would have the capacity to support it without overtaxing the members who are already impacted by that event.”

While this expectation of support is founded in the knowledge that resources exist to provide such support, members are to also be willing to submit to what was once known as “the law of consecration” where members were expected to give up everything they had to restore the church. While unlikely, the willingness to do so is a quality that members should seek to develop in case the need arises.

**Support demands.**

Members of the LDS community are expected to provide support to one another and to the broader community in times of disaster, including prayer for the safety and welfare of all who have been affected. Additional expectations may include fasting, monetary contributions, and service to the community. For the LDS community, a disaster is a call to action.

**Fasting and offerings.**

In the event of disaster, LDS leadership put out a call for fasting, which is optional but encouraged. A community-wide fast begins and ends with a prayer for the intended recipients of the fast. Members are then asked to fast for one or two meals and contribute the money that would have been spent on those meals as an “offering” to the humanitarian fund that will be distributing aid. The purpose of the fast, in addition to the
contribution, is to “be in tune with the spirit and to be in tune with God.” The LDS believe that in sacrificing the meal(s) and experiencing hunger, the individual draws closer to God and farther away from the comforts of “the natural man” which might distract one from concentrated prayer. The fast is also a sign of one’s commitment to God about the prayers that are being sent. Additionally, the money saved on the uneaten meals helps cover expenses for the emergent needs of the effected community.

Service.

Each ward within a stake is expected to care for its members. A formal system of ongoing care is already in place: the visiting teaching-home teaching program is an ongoing program wherein each member of the LDS community is engaging with other members of the community. Each member of the community serves as a teacher to one or two members of the community, and then other members of the community reach out as a teacher to him or her. This creates a network of contacts within the community who are engaged with each other on a monthly basis. This network is then utilized for communication and aid in the event of disaster. Phone trees are activated, and a list of those who are not actively engaged in the home visiting-home teaching program is also contacted. Very quickly, the membership is activated to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all in the community. The members of the Elders Quorum and the Relief Society then report back to the bishop of the ward, and if necessary, report any needs that have been identified. Some wards are divided into grids within ten minute walking distance to allow community members to reach those in need on foot in the event of road closures. When asked about the role of missionaries during a time of disaster, members were emphatic that proselytizing immediately ceases during an emergency or disaster situation. Bishops
in affected areas would call on all missionaries to provide manual labor and any other
type of assistance needed during recovery. For the rest of the community, “service is
voluntary. You don’t have to do it. And you’re not really expected to do it but you’re
kind of taught to do it, selflessly and without any expectation, without expecting anything
in return.”

**United Methodist Church.**

**Support expectations.**

Members of the Methodist community expected to receive assistance with
emergency food and shelter needs in addition to emotional and spiritual support in the
wake of disaster. Members of the community spoke of a food pantry stocked with
emergency food supplies for families in need on a regular basis as well as for
community-level emergency situations. UMC participants mentioned the spirit of the
Methodist community to help others even outside their local communities, through
formal channels in the United Methodist Church, such as the United Methodist
Committee on Relief (UMCOR), the global humanitarian aid organization of the United
Methodist Church, which provides supplementary funding and supplies for disaster-
affected communities. In addition to formal organizational aid, members of the UMC
community spoke of grassroots, community-level assistance as a core value of the United
Methodist Church:

“I think there’s an ethic of grassroots community organizing that has always been
strong within our churches. I think there is a unifying trend over the course of
time in the Methodist church because of how we view ministry in the local
context. So it’s unique to the Methodist church as well as unique to our specific
church.”
Many also talked about the Methodist community serving as a resource hub, connecting those in need of support with existing resources in the community.

Participants spoke of a value in the Methodist community of caring for others through food. This was reported both as a hallmark of the Methodist community and of the Asia-Pacific region as well.

“Through food, we care for our family members. When a suicide happened with one of the family members of the church, there were some of the key leaders of our church who were over there almost every day making sure that the partner of that person was taken care of. So I see that as a grassroots type of effort that just, as soon as there’s a need, we rise up to the occasion. And it’s something that is really… unique to our congregation and maybe, unique to a rural setting as well.”

In addition to grassroots level organizing, members of the Methodist church proudly spoke of their welcoming “aloha” spirit, something unique to the Hawaiian Islands but complementary to the same value in the United Methodist Church.

“I think we have a generous spirit, the Methodist people. And all is welcome, you know, ‘open hearts open minds open doors.’ All is welcome and we would do our best to spread aloha spirit and guide you where the resources might be.”

The aloha spirit, described in more detail below, is a part of Hawaiian culture that emerged as a component of the disaster experience across all faith communities as a way to explain the support that would be provided, and as a way to distinguish what is unique about the approach to disaster in the Hawaiian Islands.

Support demands.

The UMC church community collects special offerings during services to support disaster efforts, but contributions are voluntary and any amount is accepted. Participants spoke of the “spirit of giving” in the Methodist community to describe the core value of service to others.
Participants were clear that one would not be expected to give something beyond her/his capacity to give.

“I think our congregation would rally and would help one another after the initial hit. I think everybody takes care of themselves first. So people will still have their faith, they’ll just be shaken by the event, but not to say ‘ho, woe is us, and how come God delivered this to us?’ But I think after they settle themselves and see what they need and stuff, they’ll come back to the church and the church will reach out.”

“Well I think for us, food is something that’s very important in Filipino culture in our church. You were able to witness that today all the food that we have and we do that every week. And so what I have noticed is that, when people are in need, regardless of the disaster be it, you know, a much broader scale like a hurricane or tsunami, or a personal disaster, tragedy, the community responds very quickly.”

Members spoke of their church being severely damaged by a hurricane, and people coming together throughout the rebuilding process to gather resources, feed volunteers and workers, and contribute additional funds to complete the project. The Methodist ethic of service to others is perhaps best expressed by the following quote from John Wesley himself:

“Do all the good you can. By all the means you can. In all the ways you can. In all the places you can. At all the times you can. To all the people you can. As long as ever you can.” (“John Wesley,” n.d.)

Participants also spoke of the sense of family, both literal and figurative in their church in a small rural community. People are aware of and reach out to one another because they feel responsible for their extended family and the church family. However, one participant who did not have family ties in the community reported feeling less connected, and reported fewer instances of other members of the community reaching out to ensure his/her safety during evacuations. Another member of the community without family ties reported that others reached out to ensure s/he had a safe place to evacuate and was being looked after during a recent evacuation.
Cultural Considerations

In addition to religion, culture must be examined as a factor in the disaster experience. In a region as culturally diverse as the Hawaiian Islands, the interplay between religious and cultural beliefs about disaster can be complex and difficult to separate. Native Hawaiian culture serves as the sociocultural context for those who live in the islands. Three Hawaiian values emerged as important factors for those who participated in this study: the aloha spirit; living pono; and mālama ʻāina.

The aloha spirit.

Many participants from all four of the faith communities talked about the spirit of aloha as an important component of the disaster experience in the Hawaiian Islands. The aloha spirit describes the sense of warmth, caring, generosity, and community that characterizes social life the Hawaiian Islands. The word aloha in Native Hawaiian is commonly translated to mean “hello” as well as “goodbye,” but in the Islands, the spirit of aloha is much more than a greeting or a farewell. Aloha is a spiritual invocation of “divine breath” (alo meaning presence; hā meaning breath) and is commonly used in the islands to express a sense of love, affection and hospitality for others. Participants invoked the spirit of aloha when describing both their own personal experiences of disaster as well as their expectations in the event of a potential devastating disaster event in the Hawaiian Islands. Participants expected that people across the Hawaiian Islands would actively seek to care for each other, especially providing food and shelter for family members and for the many “transplants” who do not have family in the islands. There was a strong sense of care and awareness for friends without blood relatives or
adoptive families here in Hawai‘i, and many expressed a priority of reaching out to ensure their safety and wellbeing.\textsuperscript{18}

Several participants from various faith communities spoke of the plantation roots of communities across the Hawaiian Islands, and the spirit of aloha that emanates still today from these tightly knit communities, where members of many different cultural groups came together, shared food, and cared for one another across cultural lines in difficult living situations during the days of active plantation work.\textsuperscript{19} One participant shared how these plantation roots played out after Hurricane Iniki:

“\textquoteleft\textquoteleft We are a very close-knit isolated plantation community, and as such, there was a sense of connectivity… and because of that close-knit bonding there was a sense of wanting to help each other, being respectful about the way we would stand in line for water, be appreciative of the help, support, and assistance that was rendered. So it was a helpful as a coping mechanism if you will.\textquoteright\textquoteright ”

Another participant on O’ahu who was an insurance adjuster after Hurricane Iniki shared his experiences in the aftermath of that devastating event. Adjusters who had been flown in from the mainland to assist in the recovery were amazed at the selflessness and care for others shown by those who had been impacted; these mainlanders were experiencing the aloha spirit firsthand: families without homes were feeding workers; families with homes

\textsuperscript{18} It is important to note that while the aloha spirit extends to visitors and transplants to the Hawaiian Islands, there is also a strong sense in the islands of loyalty to the Hawaiian Kingdom, which was unlawfully overthrown in 1893 with the deposition of Queen Liliʻuokalani by American entrepreneurs with the help of the U.S. military. An exploration of the ongoing military occupation of the Hawaiian Islands is unfortunately outside the scope of this study. Additional exploration is recommended. See Iaukea, 2012; Kamahele, 2000; Kelly, 2009; Laenui, 1993; Osorio, 2002; Salzman, 2001; Serna, 2006

\textsuperscript{19} In the 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20th centuries sugar plantation interests in the Hawaiian Islands sought foreign laborers from Japan, China, Portugal and Korea. Plantation communities were the original cross-cultural melting pot of the Pacific. While still controversial for many reasons, plantation communities fostered the “spirit of aloha” among cultural groups and reinforced in the diversifying culture of the Islands the sense of care and hospitality already present in the Native Hawaiian culture.
that had been decimated were sending adjusters to homes that had not been damaged as badly so that their neighbors’ more minor damage would be fixed first, without having to wait for homes that had been destroyed to be processed. Thus, participants reported the aloha spirit throughout all phases of the disaster experience. Several participants did express concern that while the spirit of aloha would likely be pervasive in the initial aftermath of disaster, that spirit had not been tested in the instance of a longer-term emergency or catastrophic situation impacting all of the islands in the chain. There was some concern expressed that the spirit of aloha might not survive indefinitely if the islands were cut off without supplies for an extended period of time, a likely possibility given the Islands geographic isolation and the location of ports and airports along coastlines.

Living pono.

About one-third of participants from the four faith communities spoke of disaster events as a message that the people are not living pono, a Hawaiian word indicating how one should live: in balance mentally, spiritually, and physically, as well as in harmony with others and with nature.20

“Now things are happening making people think, ‘oh what’s going on, that’s not supposed to happen here at this time of the season’ or whatever. I think it’s a warning of… we’re not pono, nothing’s – it’s not right. Things are not right anymore. … You need to be right with yourself, you need to be right with God, and you need to be right with other people.”

For members of the Native Hawaiian community, their religious beliefs and their Native Hawaiian culture shape the framework for interpreting disaster events. Regardless of whether people, God, or nature is/are responsible for the event, for the Native Hawaiian,

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20 See McMullin, 2005.
an event of such magnitude creates an opportunity to reflect on the ways that life may be unbalanced, and seek avenues to return oneself, relationships, or community to a place of balance. This was reflected in several of the faith communities. “The Hawaiian culture and the LDS are very intertwined for me, my family, and my daughters, our faith is very much intertwined with our beliefs and our culture.” This participant went on to say that for her, prayer is a way to “talk story” with God. “Talk story” is a tradition in Native Hawaiian and many other Pacific Island cultures meaning a genuine exchange of one’s self with another through storytelling, or mo’olelo. Again, religious and cultural values and beliefs are intertwined in both interpretation (living pono) and coping/recovery (prayer/talking story).

Mālama ʻāina.

Participants also spoke of the Native Hawaiian value of mālama ʻāina, or the people’s responsibility to care for or preserve (mālama) the land (ʻāina). This was reflected by members of the Buddhist community who discussed the Buddhist belief that “blood relationship is not only human being, but also the mountain, river and ocean, too. The basic Buddhism teach us connection.” In Buddhism, humans are not seen as dominant over the earth and all of its creatures; rather, people must care for “all living beings,” including the earth. This parallel between Buddhism and Native Hawaiian beliefs helps shape both the interpretation of disaster for Buddhists in the Hawaiian Islands, but also the level of responsibility one has to care for the earth and all of its inhabitants. For Native Hawaiians of all faith communities, mālama ʻāina is a sacred duty.
Discussion

At the start of this discussion, it is important to note that this is not an analysis of the content of historical texts. It is an exploration of how those texts are interpreted by the faithful in the modern world; it is an exploration of the way leaders and members of faith communities grapple with catastrophic disaster in terms of their faith; and it is an investigation into the ways in which faith shapes the disaster experience. The sections that follow provide within- and between-group (congregation) comparisons related to the five main areas of interest in this study: religious narratives; disaster preparedness; causal attribution; faith-based coping mechanisms; and post-disaster support. Implications for disaster risk reduction, recommendations, and areas for future research follow.

Within-Congregation Comparisons

Conducting comparisons between congregation leaders and lay members of their faith communities was far more nuanced than anticipated at the start of this research endeavor. The United Methodist Church is the only congregation among those in the sample with a formally trained clergy that operates as such. The leadership structure of the other three communities (described in Appendix D) does not lend itself to such clear-cut comparisons. The Bahá’í community eschews a hierarchical faith leadership structure or, for that matter, a formal teaching/learning paradigm. Rather, leadership is by committee at local, national and international levels, and independent investigation of the faith is highly encouraged. While the Buddhist faith does have a formal priesthood, members of the priesthood eschewed their role as “leaders” and preferred to be seen in a role of companionship with the members of their communities. Informal mentor/student relationships are common in the Buddhist community, but more as a model for emulation
than a formal didactic model. The international Latter Day Saints leadership structure mirrors the early Christian Church, and is led by a prophet and twelve apostles who provide the global LDS community with direction and guidance. At the local level, laypersons assume leadership positions as ward (congregation) bishops for a period of time. Bishops provide support and management at the local level, but are not formally trained as members of the clergy and do not necessarily provide formal spiritual direction. Thus, while the global leadership structure is indeed formal and didactic, local bishops and stake (regional) presidents serve more as the local voice of the LDS global leadership than as clerics.

With these complex leadership structures in mind, comparisons between the responses of those in leadership roles and other members of each community were made. Those who were trained as formal leaders (i.e., the Methodist and Buddhist communities), had more structured responses than the members of their communities; they spoke more prolifically on the broad concept of theodicy (or the Buddhist equivalent), on meaning-making and on religious texts. What is important, however, is that despite providing more polished responses that were delivered in the context of more exposure to theological concepts over the course of directed study and training, the responses of leaders in the Methodist and Buddhist communities did not differ greatly from those of lay members of the respective faith communities. Similarly, in the Bahá’í and LDS communities, lay persons in leadership roles reflected similar responses to those provided by other lay members of their communities, with little divergence.

These findings indicate a relatively cohesive set of beliefs within each faith community, as communicated by participants. It is possible that participants sought to
respond in ways that were consistent with their faith communities; however, the researcher does not believe this is the case. Many participants responded with statements such as “I don’t know what the rest of my community thinks or what my [faith leader] would say, but the way I see it is…”. This type of unsolicited statement indicates that participants were answering honestly, and results reflect their true experiences and perspectives rather than an artifact of response bias. Since members of communities originated from different geographical areas (i.e., did not all originate from the same local congregational community), it is also unlikely that responses reflect the beliefs and experiences of simply one local area congregation. It may, however, reflect similar beliefs among those who were raised in the Hawaiian Islands, or those who have chosen to live in the islands. It is possible that core beliefs may differ: in mainland communities; in areas with more conservative perspectives than the relatively liberal socio-political milieu of the islands; and in areas with either less cultural diversity or with comparable levels of cultural diversity but representing ethnic groups other than those with Asia-Pacific origins.

**Between-Congregation Comparisons**

Comparisons between faith communities will shed light on the similarities and differences among communities that will serve as the basis for developing recommendations for disaster risk reduction. Comparisons are organized according to the five main areas of interest of the study. While the results section was organized according to the structure and flow of interviews (i.e., questions regarding religious narratives were asked prior to discussion of disaster preparedness and the viewing of the elicitation videos), the discussion is organized so as to allow for a more cohesive presentation of the
perspectives of each community and how they compare to the other communities (i.e., narratives and causal attribution are both tied to each other and to theodicy, and are therefore discussed together).

**Disaster preparedness.**

There was a stark contrast between perspectives on preparedness among the congregations, the most obvious distinction being the approach of the Latter Day Saints community. The extremely structured and efficient framework for preparedness that spans the production of goods, the stocking of warehouses, and the recommended storage of a year’s worth of supplies creates an atmosphere and expectation of preparedness among members of the LDS community. Both the message and the mechanisms for achieving the goals set forth by the international LDS leadership are simple, clear, and presented as achievable. Furthermore, support is provided at every level, from financial guidance to the availability of goods in bulk at community storehouses to an operational framework for community connection and accountability. For members of the LDS community, preparedness is a part of the “Mormon way of life.” While the establishment of this type of elaborate framework is not likely in the other three communities sampled, the effectiveness of disaster preparedness when embedded within the religious context cannot be denied. The incorporation of some of the LDS approaches in the other communities may help to reduce risk in these communities, and is discussed in greater detail below.

For the Bahá’í community, the idea that having disaster supplies is “just not part of the mentality” could be a barrier to implementing disaster preparedness strategies in this community. However, the Bahá’í goal to serve as a resource for the wider local and
global communities mirrors the LDS imperative to be prepared so that they may be able to serve other members of the community. Similarly, the Bahá’í belief in the need to learn from the past in order to make choices that create real change and reduce inequality and suffering in the world are consistent with a disaster preparedness orientation. While the Bahá’í community is not likely to begin farming and global distribution of goods, it is possible that Bahá’í community centers might serve as resource centers in case of disaster. Additionally, the focus on capacity to serve may be leveraged as an impetus for individual members of the Bahá’í community to prepare 72-hour kits so that they may have enough to survive the first few days post-disaster without having to seek assistance elsewhere; rather, with a minimal level of preparedness, members of the Bahá’í community would be ready and able to serve in the event of disaster.

For the Buddhist community, the fundamental value of acceptance of the world as it is may be a barrier to disaster preparedness efforts. As noted above, the view of the world as impermanent and the need to accept the world as such may lead to a passive approach to disaster preparedness. The belief in the benefits of creating good karma, and of transformation of suffering may provide opportunities to increase levels of disaster education and preparedness. Leveraging the reported shift to a more engaged form of Buddhism would allow disaster managers entrée into the Buddhist community. As one Buddhist sensei described above, the use of educational materials such as the elicitation video used in this study may provide members of the community with a point of departure from “business as usual [which] hasn’t worked” regarding preparing communities for the worst, and generating active engagement in disaster preparedness in order to reduce risk in this community.
Members of the Methodist community had a high level of preparedness, but this was possibly due to previous experience with disaster as well as geographic location close to the coastline in tsunami inundation areas. It is likely that levels of preparedness among members of the UMC in other areas would vary widely from that of participants in this study. However, based on the responses of participants, it seems that members of the Methodist community would be open to disaster education and training at the personal and community levels, and their interpretive framework does not fundamentally provide any barriers to effective implementation.

**Religious narratives and their role in the disaster experience.**

One member of each of the Bahá’í, Methodist, and LDS communities, and two members of the Buddhist community, were unable to recall a narrative or character in their faith that helped to explain why disasters happen. This suggests that while narratives and characters may provide a framework for interpreting such community-wide events, all members of a given community may not formally apply these narratives to specific real-world disaster situations. However, the majority of participants provided one or more narratives or lessons, or could recall the story of a person or a character whose life provided guidance for the faithful in times of personal or community disaster.

For the Bahá’í, narratives speak to the need to have faith in God, but also the need to take directed action toward individual and community transformation. For Buddhists, disasters are part of the natural world; acceptance of the world as impermanent and mutually interdependent allows for personal growth and transformation despite hardship and suffering. When one embraces the universal law of cause and effect, one can cultivate positive karma, seeking a life directed toward enlightenment. Narratives of the
Latter Day Saints community also speak to acceptance and action. Disasters are accepted as evidence of the fulfillment of the prophecies of the latter days; the faithful are directed to take action to be prepared physically and spiritually. Members of the Methodist community predominantly referred to characters/historical figures in the Old Testament of the Bible as narratives for interpreting disaster events.

All of the characters and historical figures described by participants across all four faith communities reflected common characteristics: they were beset with seemingly insurmountable odds; endured unthinkable hardships; overcame doubt, either their own or those of their loved ones; and showed courage and fortitude when embarking on difficult and often dangerous tasks in the name of their faith. These are the heroes of the faith communities included in this study. Their lives serve as models for modern life, with a common theme across them all: personal faith and personal action are inextricably tied. There is a sense of faith, perseverance, and responsibility to self and others throughout all these narratives.

*Theodicy in the context of religious narratives.*

What differentiates the narratives of the Christian faith communities from the Bahá’í and Buddhist communities is the role of human culpability and consequent godly retribution. For the Bahá’í and Buddhist communities, culpability and retribution are not part of the interpretive framework; as such, theodicy does not emerge as a source of uncertainty. For the members of the Christian communities in this sample, there emerged some equivocality in the lessons to be learned from the lives of the characters/historical figures in the Old Testament of the Bible. The Old Testament narratives described by participants in both of the Christian communities all include a component of wrongdoing
(or suspected wrongdoing) and retribution from either a wrathful, or loving but just God.
Noah and his family are spared the great flood that cleanses the wicked from the Earth; his reward for his righteousness is his salvation. Job’s afflictions are assumed by his family to be punishment for some kind of wrongdoing; they call for his repentance to alleviate his own suffering. The Egyptian armies are swept from the face of the earth by the Red Sea as punishment for the persecution and pursuit of the fleeing Israelites, who are saved by God. God’s wrath is brought down upon the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, the sole survivors being the righteous Lot and his family. These Christian narratives elicited during interviews speak of a God who punishes those who do not follow His will, and who rewards those who are righteous in His eyes. While the members of the LDS community were more likely to speak of obedience (a term that was not used by any member of the Methodist community), the message of the narratives was consistent in both Christian communities: in the past, the Lord has taken a punitive stance on disobedience; individuals will be judged by their actions in this life; and there is the potential for moral transgression to be punished in the future as it was in the past.

This ominous stance on transgression notwithstanding, the modern interpretation of these narratives seems to be less strict regarding God’s punishment. Participants spoke of a more loving God, revealed in the New Testament through the life and death of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament narratives, however, still linger in the background (a finding also discussed by Stern, 2007), as a reminder of the power of God, and the magnitude of His might and His mercy. While the God of the Old Testament lingers, it seems that the revelation and resurrection of His Son, for the faithful, is a beacon of forgiveness and hopefulness, marking a departure from an Old Testament framework of punishment and
shame. Some members of the Methodist and LDS communities discussed uncertainty about the duality of a loving and powerful God. The differences between the themes in the Old and New Testament narratives may leave some of the faithful in a place of ambiguity in making meaning of current events. It would seem then, with the uncertainty of theodicy remaining, that the role of Christian faith leaders is all the more crucial for interpreting such events in the world today.

*Theodicy in the context of causal attribution.*

As Adeney-Risakotta (2009) suggests, participants from the various faiths in this study did vary in the questions they asked about the disaster events, the “moral sources to which they turn[ed] for answers” (p. 234), and the answers to those questions that arose. Additionally, results of this study supported the notion of “religion … shaping the appraisals of the event” (Newton & McIntosh, 2008, p. 132), as evidenced by this participant: “I mean I’ve lived my whole life with my faith and so it kind of frames the way I think, automatically it does.” While members of all communities reported struggling to understand the massive scope of catastrophic disaster, the struggle to understand *how* or *why* such devastation could occur (if God/the universe is good) varied across communities (a finding also discussed by Stern, 2007).

Members of the Methodist community reflected the greatest amount of struggle with theodicy. Methodists spoke openly of struggling with hardship, with coming to terms with it, and with trying to understand it in the light of a loving God. There was, however, no sense of disconnect from their faith during times of theological struggle. Rather, it was acceptable to be unsure, acceptable to question God’s role, acceptable to want to seek answers to such questions. The Methodist pastor spoke of a long tradition of
theodicy within Judeo-Christian faiths, and the acceptance that struggle is part of the relationship with God, rather than a sign of wavering faith. The permissibility of such questioning releases the individual from feelings of guilt or shame that might be associated with questioning as an implication of wavering faith. However, if the continued struggle prevents forward movement, this struggle could be detrimental to recovery. For those struggling with theodicy, finding a place of peace with the event and with God may be the ultimate goal to facilitating recovery. This could be a crucial factor for increasing resilience and decreasing risk in communities where a struggle with theodicy is a predominant response to a disaster event. Collaboration between faith leaders and disaster managers could begin to bridge the divide between stagnation and recovery in these types of settings.

Despite overlapping foundational texts and narratives, members of the LDS community did not struggle in the same way with theodicy as the Methodists. It seems that the acceptance of disasters as signs of the times precludes a struggle with “why” the events are happening; they are happening because God said it would be so. There is an interesting juxtaposition here between the acceptance of God’s revelation that increasing global disasters will mark the second coming of Christ and the steadfast belief in the omnipotence of God. For participants from the LDS community, the fact that God has revealed that disasters will occur and that His omnipotence includes the power to stop them are not connected. It seems that these may be parallel beliefs: God is both all-powerful, and these disasters will happen because He said they would occur. However, for members of the LDS community, questioning God, His power, His intentions, or the
causality of such events is simply not part of the epistemology. As such, a struggle with theodicy did not arise for members of the LDS community who participated in this study.

For Bahá’ís, the duality between science and religion to some extent precludes the types of questions that might arise in the Judeo-Christian faiths, such as “why did God let this happen?”. As noted above, the Bahá’í perspective on this kind of question is a complete epistemological shift:

“At the base of asking a question, ‘why did this happen?’ is the assumption that God being powerful should have stopped it. You have to change your understanding [that] God isn’t here to prevent suffering.”

For Bahá’ís, wrestling with theodicy is not the question to be asked; the question is: what can we do about what has happened? This fundamental shift in both the question and the answer lead unequivocally to an action-oriented response, regardless of the nature of the situation. The focus on the disaster then shifts from one of crisis to one of victory: how can we utilize this terrible event as a catalyst for transformation for ourselves, our communities, and our world?

The Buddhist perspective similarly precludes wrestling with theodicy. Without a higher power to contend with, or to question the reasons for sending or allowing such devastation, Buddhists are better able to move to acknowledgment of the impermanent nature of the world, acceptance of the event and the suffering it has left in its wake, and move toward finding a way to learn from the event. Once the lesson has been sought, this path leads toward a perspective of directed action and transformation. While one sensei reported a story of a Buddhist woman grappling with the question “why” in the context of a personal tragedy (terminal illness), his response too, was one of acceptance. We will never know why; we will never truly understand suffering, and therefore, we must accept
it. For the Buddhists, continuing to grapple with “why” is contrary to the basic tenets of the faith: acceptance, impermanence, and karma. One must accept in order to detach, to better one’s karma, to adapt with the changing world, and to ultimately reach enlightenment. While “why” might arise, it is a question that is eclipsed by the very tenets of Buddhism.

An interesting point of convergence between the Buddhist and Methodist communities, despite disparate perspectives on theodicy: for both Buddhists and Methodists, “it is okay to not understand.” What differentiates these communities is that Buddhists release this lack of understanding. By letting go of the attempt to understand, Buddhists are able to turn toward recovery. Methodists, on the other hand, continue to grapple with this not knowing. It seems that the Methodist community may reflect a similar response to that of the Jewish community. For the Jewish faithful, acceptance of destruction as punishment and questioning of that same destruction are not mutually exclusive. Rather, in the safety of the covenant between God and the people lies the possibility of questioning. The important point here is that the message for the Jewish faithful is clear: struggling with one’s relationship with God is acceptable (Mintz, 1984). For the Jewish faith, the immutability of the sacred covenant itself is that to which the faithful can turn in times of hardship and confusion. Whether this ongoing theological struggle impedes or facilitates recovery is yet unknown. A negative impact on recovery resulting from or related to continued struggle with theodicy was not

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21 Mintz (1984) explores theodicy through a comprehensive exploration of catastrophic destruction and the relationship with God in the Jewish faith from the destruction of Jerusalem through the Holocaust.
demonstrated in the Methodist sample. Future research that examines this topic in similar Christian and Jewish communities is an area for additional exploration.

While the perspectives on theodicy differed among the faith communities, the role of theodicy (or for Buddhists, the endeavor to accept such tragedy as part of the changing world) within each community was fairly cohesive. In faith communities that allowed for uncertainty (Methodist, Buddhist), participants reflected some level of uncertainty in their faith interpretations of disaster events; in faith communities that by their nature precluded uncertainty (Bahá’í, LDS), participants reflected assurance in their faith interpretations. The importance of the faith community in shaping the understanding and meaning-making of disaster is once again supported.

**The implications of causal attribution.**

There was no evidence of scapegoating or blaming of other religious groups or of “sinners” in one’s own religious group among participants, likely due to a lack across all communities of a one-to-one direct retributive interpretation of modern day disaster events (i.e., participants did not believe the Japanese people were punished for wrongdoing with a tsunami). While at least one participant from each religious community reported that disasters could be interpreted as signs that humanity has strayed from the path of righteousness (however that may be defined for that particular congregation), blame and retribution were not part of this interpretation. Rather, events such as these were viewed as signs (either direct or indirect; from a higher power or from the universal law) of this departure from the path of righteous living or, alternatively, as opportunities to make better choices to lead better lives.
Although neither of the Christian communities in the sample reflected any kind of causal attribution related to specific or individual wrongdoing, for members of the Latter Day Saints community, there was a distinct understanding that events such as these “signs of the times” are indicative of the second coming of Christ, who will return “in fire and glory to cleanse the earth” of its wickedness. The LDS faith was the only community that spoke to such modern day events being attributed to sin. While the New Testament interpretations of such events speak more to God’s forgiveness than His vengeance or wrath, for the LDS community, the Jesus who returns to cleanse the earth bears the mark of the Old Testament God who smote the wicked and sent floods, famine, and pestilence. The LDS interpretation is in this way closer to the Jewish interpretation of disaster discussed at the introduction of this study, than to that of the other Christian community in this sample, the United Methodist Church.

What is interesting is that while the members of the Methodist community recited the same narratives from the Old Testament as the LDS community when discussing the cause of disaster events, the vengeful God cited by the LDS did not arise in the Methodist interpretation. The LDS community, however, is highly prepared because they expect such destruction to come. The level of preparedness in the Methodist community was due more to personal experience with disaster events than any expectation of the fulfillment of ancient biblical prophecy. Members of the Christian communities demonstrated both Old and New Testament interpretations of disaster events, indicating that denomination and the role of leadership may be important factors in the ways Christian communities understand disaster events. Additional exploration of the similarities and differences among Christian faiths with Old versus New Testament causal attributions, and their
links, if any, with the Jewish perspective, may shed light on how these communities approach the disaster experience.

For members of the Bahá’í community, attribution of a disaster event to scientific causes did not preclude human culpability. Rather, Bahá’ís reflected on the emergent nuclear disaster as an example of the failure of the human population to responsibly care for the earth and its inhabitants. Instead of blame, however, Bahá’í participants asked the following questions: 1) what can we learn from this; 2) how can we make this better; and 3) what can we do right now to begin to create real change in the world to prevent such devastation in the future? Causal attribution did not turn Bahá’ís toward theological inquiry, but instead toward reflection on and action toward community-level change.

The Buddhists in this sample, from three distinct sects, did not demonstrate the pessimistic explanatory style or fatalistic worldview suggested by Levy, Slade, & Ranasinghe (2008). Instead, Buddhist participants from the Zen, Hongwanji, and Soka Gakkai International communities reported an interpretation in line with De Silva (2006): acceptance of the world as impermanent allows for greater detachment from the world and its current reality; suffering is viewed as a part of life that helps to detach from one’s self and one’s own needs and desires in a way that draws one closer to enlightenment; and karma engenders active engagement in creating a positive life for self and others. As such, it seems that for the Buddhists in this study, causal attribution embedded in the Buddhist values and philosophy did not serve to hinder, but rather to facilitate recovery.

None of the study participants, including both leaders and lay members, from any of the four religious communities reported disaster being seen as an opportunity for opportunistic conversion, to reinvigorate communities, or to draw members back to the
faith community. Of particular interest regarding this topic was the Latter Day Saints community, which is commonly known for its youth on mission proselytizing door to door. Members of this community were firm in expressing that when disaster strikes, all proselytizing is immediately discontinued and missionaries are set to work as volunteers in affected areas. While those interested in the faith are not turned away at this time, disaster is not viewed as an opportunity for anything but aid. This perspective held across all four of the faith communities in the sample.

**Faith-based coping mechanisms.**

For all of the faith communities, releasing the pain, confusion, and hardship of a disaster event was a powerful coping mechanism. For the Buddhists, this appears as acceptance of the world as impermanent, and releasing the need for control to the universal laws of nature. For Bahá’ís, LDS, and Methodists, this manifests as releasing the need for control by turning it over to God. It seems that the ability to release what has happened may be a key coping mechanism that facilitates recovery by creating an opportunity for those affected to turn toward a future orientation and begin to take action. Release, then, may help to alleviate feelings of helplessness and hopelessness that could be generated by various religious tenets such as karma or sin, and the suffering they may cause. When the individual no longer bears the responsibility for (possibly) causing what has happened, or the need to understand how or why it has happened, s/he is free to move forward.

Members of each of the communities spoke of prayer, chanting or meditation as a coping mechanism when faced with hardship or disaster. It is seen as both a comfort and

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22 See Pargament (1997) for an in-depth discourse on the role of religion in coping.
as a way to help others by seeking God’s intercession on their behalf, or invoking the
universal law of cause and effect, in the Buddhist community. For the members of these
faith communities, prayer is viewed as an active form of assistance for self and others. In
the Buddhist and Bahá’í faiths, prayer is a mechanism to positively influence the lives of
loved ones who have passed into the next life. Participants spoke of prayer, chanting, or
meditation as a way to contribute or make a difference when making a financial or
instrumental contribution was outside their capacity to do so. Prayer, chanting, or
meditation was also seen as a mechanism to turn “faith into action,” at which point the
individual must release attachment to the outcome (Buddhism, Bahá’í) and “turn it over
to God” (Bahá’í, LDS, Methodist).

Faith communities relied on their view of the afterlife as a mechanism for coping
with loss. Members of the Methodist community did not provide extensive commentary
on the topics of life and death. For members of the Bahá’í and Latter Day Saints
communities, the next life is considered the true reality; life on this planet is a testing
ground for the development of the skills and characteristics one will need for eternal life
with the Lord. For the Buddhists, whether seeking enlightenment in this life or in the next
series of lives, the possibility of reaching enlightenment, or the potential for reincarnation
to a higher plane serve as way to cope with loss of a loved one or the prospect of one’s
own death. A focus on this value may help to direct members of these communities

23 This may be due to two factors: 1) the investigator probed for these types of questions
among the other communities due to a lack of familiarity with beliefs in the Bahá’í,
Buddhist and LDS communities. Additionally, the Methodist community as a sect of
Christianity is relatively close to that of the primary investigator’s own faith community,
Catholicism, which may have precluded the exploration of the faith’s ideas regarding life,
death, and heaven. 2) Interviews with the Methodist community were completed at the
earliest part of data collection prior to the development of some of the follow-up
interview questions.
toward active engagement in the recovery process, rather than becoming stymied in the
grief of great loss. Members of the Bahá’í, Buddhist, and Latter Day Saints communities
also spoke of the ongoing connection among families and loved ones in the next life, as
one member of the LDS community explained:

“We lived before this life and we’ll after this life. And our whole mortal life is
kind of a tiny speck in our whole existence. And so that’s a comfort too…
eventually there would be a time when it [the loss] was a distant memory and that
we would have forever to look forward to.”

For a member of the Bahá’í community, the important thing when faced with loss is

“understanding that life is in fact a journey, that prepares us for the real life, this
[life] is just a reflection. It’s not the real thing. Our reality is over there in that
world.”

This eternal connection provides solace after a loss that helps to mitigate grief and turn
back toward one’s goals in this life. Members of all four communities also spoke of the
need for perseverance through adversity, often citing the narratives, characters and
historical figures discussed above as models for how to do so. Participants additionally
reported turning to their holy scriptures in times of hardship for comfort and inspiration.

Participants’ perspectives on the purpose of suffering also helped them cope. For
members of the Bahá’í, Buddhist, and Latter Day Saints communities, suffering is
viewed as a natural part of life that has the potential for transformation. Suffering is
viewed as a temporary experience in this fleeting portion of existence in comparison to
the next life, which is eternal. Acceptance of suffering is the first step toward actively
reframing hardship or disaster into an opportunity for growth. Bahá’ís then seek to move
“from crisis to victory;” Soka Gakkai (SGI) Buddhists seek to turn “poison into
medicine;” and LDS connect with their purpose, as they are “placed on this earth to be
tested.” Framing active engagement in disaster preparedness and mitigation activities as
opportunities to develop skills and honorable characteristics, transform lives and contribute meaningfully to communities may help leverage existing belief systems to boost disaster readiness. A perspective of “faith into action” would harness all of these transformative epistemologies, and would also engage the Methodist community’s call to service. This focus on service in all four of the communities in this sample could be leveraged as a resource in their broader communities when recovering from disaster.

Members of both the Bahá’í and Buddhist communities seek detachment from the material world. This concept emerged among members of both communities as a reason disaster preparedness was not a priority. As one Bahá’í put it, “We are not here to protect our own lives.” In order to overcome the challenge that this fundamental value of these faith communities may pose to disaster risk reduction strategies, an approach that acknowledges the importance of detachment, but emphasizes the positive outcomes of disaster readiness (i.e., the opportunity to serve others by being prepared to take care of one’s self and family without needing to seek assistance) may facilitate increased preparedness. It is also important to note that the emphasis on detachment may concomitantly serve as a resilience factor, as it may enable those affected by disaster to release that which has been lost and move toward a future orientation. As such, detachment, rather than an impediment to readiness, may instead be leveraged as a resource for coping and recovery in the aftermath of disaster.

Viktor Frankl.

As mentioned briefly above, leaders from the Buddhist and Methodist communities spoke of relying on the existential framework of Viktor Frankl when seeking to assist the faithful in making meaning in the wake of tragedy, as logotherapy
seeks to cultivate the “uniquely human potential at its best, which is to transform a personal tragedy into a triumph” (p. 135). While not mentioned explicitly by members of the other two faith communities in this study, Frankl’s words echo the Bahá’í “from crisis to victory” and the Soka Gakkai (SGI) “poison into medicine” paradigms for transformation. Additionally, the Bahá’í model for life, 'Abdu'l-Bahá,24 was a paragon for finding meaning in life despite living in terrible conditions, a value also reflected in the Buddhist ongoing search for enlightenment. It seems that the framework of meaning-making through transformation is a common thread throughout all four of the faith communities in this study.

The emergence of Viktor Frankl’s logotherapy as a coping resource for faith leaders was unexpected but not surprising. In fact, it provides evidence for the importance of the research undertaken in this study. As asserted above, “it is in the spiritual realm that people find meaning and direction when assumptions about an orderly and reliable world need reconstructing” (McCombs, 2010, p. 134). When seeking meaning, the faithful turn to their faith, and to their faith leaders for direction and sustenance. Those leaders, or in the Bahá’í community, the faithful themselves, turn to a paradigm for meaning-making like logotherapy, to reconstruct an orderly world, and ultimately move forward. This process of making meaning of the incomprehensible is accomplished through additional faith-based coping mechanisms, like those noted above, such as prayer, meditation, and service to others.

24 Described in greater depth in the Results section, 'Abdu'l-Bahá is a model of service and perseverance in the Bahá’í faith.
Post-disaster support demands and expectations.

None of the members of any of the faith communities reported that their congregations would place expectations of post-disaster support that would exceed the capacity of individual members. Expectations of support did differ among congregations, however. Members of the Bahá’í, LDS, and Soka Gakkai (SGI) Buddhist communities expected that members would be active in the community providing as much assistance as possible. Here, the values of providing service to others as a fundamental value of these faith communities, is evident. Members of the remaining Buddhist communities and the Methodist community reported willingness to provide assistance, but support demands of members were more passive (i.e., providing assistance if asked, but not necessarily being driven to actively and energetically seek ways to provide support, as reported by the other communities). Members of the Methodist community did, however, speak of their desire to be of service, consistent with the community’s history of “grassroots organizing” and high willingness to provide assistance. The turn toward engaged Buddhism also suggests that members of that faith community may be making a shift toward more active engagement in relief and recovery efforts. Members of all of the faith communities spoke of prayer as another way to provide support to those affected by disaster. From a social support standpoint, both the Bahá’í and Buddhist communities reported expectations of providing social support to enable others to “turn crisis to victory” or to achieve “personal transformation” respectively.

As might be expected, the Latter Day Saints community had greater levels of expectation of individuals providing monetary support to the faith community than did the other congregations. The embedded framework of tithing and fasting holds in the
post-disaster scenario. This type of support was, however, both voluntary and expected only of members outside of affected areas. LDS reported that members of their faith living in areas impacted by disaster are likely to have high expectations of support from their faith community, based predominantly on the vast capacity of the international LDS community to provide such support. The system is already in place; it has been tested and shown to be effective. Members willingly contribute when others are affected, and they have an expectation of receiving the same level of support if impacted themselves. That tithing is a percentage of one’s salary creates an air of equity for those who have more and those who have less. However, ten percent of one’s income is arguably more impactful for those who have less than those who have more, and members spoke of struggling at times to contribute ten percent to tithing when they were unsure how they would cover their expenses. Those who continued to do so, however, reflected that their needs were always met (e.g., one participant reported that as a missionary, members of the community provided food when funds were low; all members spoke of the availability of emergency food via any ward’s bishop). This ongoing expectation to provide support that seems to extend beyond individual capacity may normalize the act of doing so in times of disaster.

It is important to note that all LDS participants in this study reported participating regularly in tithing; it may be that members of the LDS community who do not participate in tithing have different perspectives on support demands in this faith community. In the Bahá’í, Buddhist and Methodist communities, financial support was neither demanded of nor expected by members. Participants of these communities did report willingness to contribute to voluntary collections made on behalf of disaster-
affected areas, but there were no expectations regarding the amounts of such voluntary contributions.

**Considerations for Disaster Recovery and Disaster Risk Reduction**

There are characteristics of each faith community that make it unique; characteristics that make each community resilient; and characteristics that put each community at greater risk. Each of the five areas of interest in this study play a role in the disaster experience for these communities, and therefore, are factors that must be considered when developing and implementing strategies to reduce disaster risk. A better understanding of faith-based factors in the disaster experience will elucidate parallel practices (Chester & Duncan, 2010) that will enable both religiously and scientifically-based strategies for preparedness and recovery to be utilized concomitantly in a comprehensive disaster risk reduction strategy that leverages strengths and minimizes obstacles to implementation.

Members of the Bahá’í faith spoke of the unity of the global Bahá’í community as a characteristic that makes the Bahá’í faith unique. Without any sects or schools within the Bahá’í community, members are of one global body of faith. They spoke of their confidence that if in distress, they could walk into a Bahá’í center anywhere in the world and know they would receive assistance. The value of service to others is so deeply ingrained that there is a comfort in knowing aid would always be provided. Given the ultimate goal of global unity and the goal of service to others of the Bahá’í faith, one member shared, “I predict that the Bahá’í community will eventually become a real source of refuge for humanity because it has really no ulterior motive than to be of service.” Members of the Bahá’í faith also believe that the progressive, egalitarian socio-
economic and political nature of the Bahá’í epistemology, birthed at a time when racial and gender equality were highly controversial, will contribute to the emergence of the Bahá’í faith as a global powerhouse of equality, justice and unity in the coming decades. The Bahá’í belief that the human population has reached the age of maturity, and it must begin to take responsibility for itself, its actions, and the impacts on the planet and its global inhabitants also distinguishes it among the other faith communities. This urgency to global unity may indeed have implications for reducing disaster risk in communities around the world. One member of the Bahá’í faith touched on these implications:

What I really see that kind of differentiates the Baha’i faith is that action-oriented perspective. There’s always things that we can do to make improvements, to make things better, to help each other, to help ourselves grow. And that’s what I really love is because, we as human beings are by nature very action-oriented. And to be given the guidance and the direction of how we can make a step forward is really helpful when it comes to dealing with disaster situations.

As noted above, the Bahá’í community is not likely to begin to amass storehouses of food and supplies. However, with its goal to reduce inequality and create community resource centers around the world, there is great opportunity to harness the resources and goals of the Bahá’í community to reduce disaster risk at the local level, and on a global scale. Doing so would also be in the spirit of ’Abdu'l-Bahá, who, as described above, had the foresight to take mitigative action when he perceived risk of starvation and drought.

Since the process of mitigating disaster risk is in line with the Bahá’í efforts to reduce inequality and achieve social justice, it is recommended that members of the disaster management community reach out to Local Spiritual Assemblies in the Bahá’í faith to determine the interest in and viability of creating small food pantries and other resources for communities in the event of disaster. Through educational outreach initiatives, disaster managers and local leadership could encourage members of the
Bahá’í community to prepare 72 hour kits in order to provide for the first few days and increase readiness to respond to the needs of others in the community in the first few days post-disaster. While one participant noted that the Universal House of Justice recommends a one- to two-week supply of “provisions,” it seems that this is not formally communicated as a strong recommendation, and none of the participants had such provisions. Thus, a formal educational outreach initiative pertinent to local hazards and disaster risk would be helpful in local communities.

In the Buddhist faith, members spoke of reason and flexibility as being core strengths that differentiate their faith community. Acceptance is a part of both of these: one must accept the world as it is (the laws of the universe are reasonable); and once accepted, one is better able to adapt to the constantly changing world. Acceptance and flexibility are both crucial in recovering from catastrophic disaster. One participant from the Buddhist community noted that these characteristics build personal and communal resilience, a key factor in disaster recovery (see Norris, Byrne, Diaz, & Kaniasty, 2008). The engaged Buddhism of the SGI community lends itself to greater involvement in building more resilient communities that are better prepared, thus reducing their risk to natural hazards. Active attempts to seek opportunities for transformation by this community reflect a future orientation, which has been shown to lead to better post-disaster outcomes (Norris et al., 2002). Furthermore, “seeing the struggle as something positive,” (hope, optimism) a characteristic of the Bahá’í, Buddhist, and LDS faith communities, has been shown to be associated with better post-disaster outcomes (Norris, Byrne, Diaz, & Kaniasty, 2008). These factors relate to community-level resilience, and if fostered, can help to facilitate recovery as well as foster engagement in community-
wide strategies to reduce disaster risk. Members of the Buddhist community who seek to cultivate greater community engagement might tap into some of the approaches of the SGI community. Sensei who seek to cultivate greater disaster readiness can utilize resources available in the disaster management community to increase outreach and education efforts within their congregations. With these efforts, they may begin to shift the framework of acceptance from a place of passive receptivity to a more active readiness.

Further, while detachment may be leveraged as a coping mechanism, it need not preclude disaster preparedness. If faith leaders and disaster managers can draw connections between acceptance of the world as it is and active engagement in the community, members of the Buddhist community may move to a place of becoming more knowledgeable about the hazard risks in their geographical regions, and take action to reduce or mitigate those risks. As recommended by one of the sensei who participated, in more traditional communities, the use of educational videos may be effective in creating a bridge between passive acceptance of the world as constantly changing and the potential for reducing negative outcomes or creating positive karma by engaging in disaster preparedness and mitigation activities. Furthermore, disaster managers might tap into some of the values and coping mechanisms utilized by the Buddhist community (acceptance; impermanence; cultivation of positive karma through service to others) during the recovery process on a broader community level by engaging community members in community rebuilding and meaning-making throughout the recovery process.

The clear distinction of the LDS community is its emphasis on preparedness. There are few recommendations that can be made to increase preparedness in this
community. However, the LDS community can serve as a resource to other faith communities seeking to reduce their own risk. Through local interfaith community alliances/boards, leaders in the LDS community can offer educational and preparedness materials as resources for other faith leaders. Pamphlets related to preparedness may be adapted; emergency plans, emergency kit supplies lists, and emergency contact networks could be easily implemented in any faith community. Members of the disaster management community should optimize opportunities to leverage the resources of the LDS community. With a common goal of disaster risk reduction, and a commitment to refraining from imposing either a religious or a secular perspective upon collaborating partners, the opportunities to increase community resilience and reduce disaster risk are great.

However, one potential area for increased risk that may jeopardize disaster recovery in the LDS community is the violation of support expectations in the event of a catastrophic event if, for instance, the global supply chain was disrupted. This is particularly of interest in Hawai‘i, which, as noted above, is at risk for post-disaster supply disruption in the event ports and airports are damaged or inoperable. It is likely that in the event of a longer-term disaster in the Hawaiian Islands the LDS storehouses will be rapidly depleted by members of the LDS community and non-members alike. Despite cultivating a lifestyle of preparedness, if LDS expectations of received and perceived support are not met, violations of these expectations may have greater implications for recovery in the LDS community (see Norris et al., 2005).

For the Methodists, the generous spirit of welcome, embodied in their “open minds, open doors, open hearts” policy characterizes this community’s approach to
community engagement. Additionally, the connections between the local community and the broader Methodist community are reinforced through regular contact at yearly conferences that some members can attend, helping members feel connected and aware of the resources available to them in the wider faith community. The Methodist community was receptive to more disaster outreach and education initiatives. Members spoke of hoping to cultivate greater collaboration among religious congregations within their communities, and were open to implementing strategies to reduce risk in the wider community. Creating a more formal structure within the congregation for disaster preparedness and post-disaster support may be an effective means of engaging members of the community while bolstering feelings of connectedness and support that have been shown to foster post-disaster recovery.

**The Role of Faith Leaders**

Many of the faith leaders spoke of a desire for more information and more assistance in helping to increase awareness and preparedness in their communities. Those with formal training noted that this training did little to prepare ministers for managing a tragedy of scale beyond the losses encountered by individuals and families on a more day-to-day basis. The Methodist pastor reported that disaster preparedness and recovery are not currently included as part of the formal pastoral training model, and that additional training and formal preparation would be extremely helpful in meeting the needs of communities. Despite a lack of formal training, lay members of the communities in this study all reported that they would turn to their faith leaders for assistance, including physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and instrumental support in the event of disaster. Thus, faith leaders are indeed viewed as thought leaders when it comes to
disaster recovery, despite a lack of formal, didactic training. Likewise participants reported that if they had support to provide to their communities, they would contact their faith leaders for direction and assistance in identifying opportunities to provide support. Additionally, participants spoke of their faith leaders as being conduits to their broader faith communities and the information and resources available from these larger networks. Results from this study, therefore, confirm these faith leaders as both brokers of social capital and as bi-directional resource hubs.

**Policy Implications**

From a policy standpoint, religious leaders must be formally included in all phases of the disaster management process. Leaders must be invited to the table during planning phases, not merely relegated to support positions within relief efforts. Furthermore, disaster management experts should be actively engaging with training institutions across all religious congregations. Incorporating disaster education, planning, preparation, and strategies for risk reduction into the formal training models of faith communities will meet several key objectives: 1) We will begin to build bridges between faith and civic leaders; 2) Faith leaders will be better prepared to create a framework of preparedness within their faith communities; and 3) Disaster managers will have better access to faith leaders as resource hubs for disaster planning and recovery.

For all communities, especially faith communities that do not have formal clergy training, disaster managers must reach out to local leadership to establish relationships that can begin to build these bridges to disaster risk reduction. None of the faith leaders who participated in this study reported having been contacted by civic leaders regarding disaster outreach, education, preparedness or mitigation. All of the faith leaders indicated
being interested in opportunities to increase education and preparedness in their faith communities, and all faith leaders were open to collaborative efforts to build community resilience and reduce disaster risk. For many, the myriad responsibilities they have to juggle and their limited experience with disaster management serve as barriers to embarking on disaster management endeavors in their faith communities. It is also important to note that what minimal disaster strategies were in place, aside from the LDS community, were predominantly loose disaster response plans. There was little to no active disaster preparedness across the other communities. Prioritizing faith communities as both targets of and resources for disaster management initiatives through local and national policy is the first step toward leveraging faith-based resources and reducing disaster risk.

**Areas for Future Research**

Future research should continue to expand the knowledge base linking religious beliefs and the disaster experience, particularly in communities not included in this sample, such as the Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Shinto and Tao faith communities. Extending post-disaster research to include comparisons of the recovery process in different faith communities will demonstrate how the paradigms elucidated in this study emerge in vivo. For instance, the Bahá’í, Buddhist, and LDS view of suffering as an opportunity for growth or transformation may be leveraged into a cohesive, disaster risk reduction paradigm applicable in all three of these faith communities and others with similar values systems. Utilizing these existing epistemologies may generate greater engagement in disaster preparedness and risk reduction strategies without requiring dramatic shifts in foundational belief systems.
More research should be conducted in areas like the Hawaiian Islands that are at high risk for disaster before disaster strikes to continue to elucidate the religious epistemology utilized to understand such events. Research into the impact of the struggle with theodicy on disaster recovery, particularly in the Jewish and various Christian communities is also warranted. Further, research that helps to inform the development of disaster spiritual care best practices [as noted by Roberts & Ashley (2008)], will serve to build the bridges between the fields of faith leadership and disaster management.

Finally, additional resources must be developed to assist faith leaders in moving their communities toward better disaster preparedness. This can be done by building on existing resources for dealing with community-wide disaster events targeted for faith leaders such as Disaster Spiritual Care: Practical Clergy Responses to Community, Regional and National Tragedy (Roberts & Ashley, 2008). As the title suggests, this is a practical guide for clergy, providing checklists and action items for spiritual ministers at all stages of the disaster cycle. The book’s editors’ note the dearth of scholarly research related to disaster spiritual care best practices, and call for research that will inform best practices for disaster recovery in the context of spirituality. As an example, Stern’s (2007) Can God Intervene? provides a thoughtful exploration of the faith-based meaning and interpretation of the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami through interviews with key informants from a range of religious congregations, including: four Christian denominations, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhist communities, as well as the perspectives of various nonbelievers. This exploration, while conducted by a journalist rather than a scientist, addresses many of the same issues investigated by this study. Those interested in the role of religion in meaning-making in the disaster experience are
encouraged to review Stern’s work. Those among the scientific community seeking to build on the findings provided by the present study can utilize the interpretive frameworks discussed by Stern’s participants. In addition, extending the current body of research to include some of the additional communities investigated by Stern may be a fruitful next step in incorporating religious factors into the scientific knowledge base that is informing the evolving disaster risk reduction paradigm. In order to advance the field as quickly and with as much information as possible, we must engage in concomitant efforts in both research and practice.

**Recommendations for Disaster Risk Reduction**

As a platform for moving forward, this study has demonstrated that faith leaders can: speak with the voices of their constituencies; serve as thought leaders in making meaning of events; identify vulnerable members of the community; and serve as conduits for those needing and those able to provide aid. The untapped potential of faith leaders to contribute to disaster risk reduction can no longer be ignored. An obvious question that might be raised in light of all of the above is how the disaster management community is to navigate competing narratives and values frameworks of various faith communities. How can the disaster management community practically provide a comprehensive approach for disaster risk reduction for a range of religious communities if their leadership structures are so diverse and their narratives are conflicting, or even diametrically opposed?²⁵

In order to successfully advance both research and practice related to disaster risk reduction, collaboration is key. If disaster managers are to fully leverage disaster risk

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²⁵ See Fox (2011) for a discussion on competing narratives in the Israel-Palestine conflict, which similarly bridges religious and civic realms.
reduction strategies at all levels of the ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 2004), then we must broaden the scope of engagement at key points of leverage. While we are currently employing strategies to increase awareness and education and reduce risk at individual, organizational, community, national, and international levels, we need to develop a more cohesive approach that reaches across those levels. As this study demonstrates, faith leaders serve as bi-directional resource hubs at the individual, organizational (microsystem) and community (mesosystem) levels. First, faith leaders must be incorporated as key thought leaders and conduits for social and financial capital (Homan, 2004), and leveraged as access points for education and training at leadership and lay member levels, as requested by participants in this study. Second, disaster managers should reach out to interfaith alliances to become familiar with local faith leaders, to learn about the needs and resources within those faith communities, and to provide education and training at leadership and lay member levels. Nearly all of the participants in leadership positions indicated an interest in having disaster management professionals provide educational and training opportunities for themselves and their communities. Third, the establishment of information sharing networks among disaster managers and faith leaders will open the lines of communication and allow professionals from these areas to identify the needs and strengths of faith communities that will lead to more resilient, better prepared communities.

Finally, community psychologists must optimize their unique positioning as conduits for multidisciplinary collaboration. Community psychologists can help to build these bridges by continuing to investigate the role of religion in the disaster experience. Furthermore, community psychologists may serve to facilitate this collaboration by
assisting in the adaptation of the successful disaster preparedness paradigm currently 
employed by the LDS community for implementation in other faith communities. The 
development of new, or engagement with existing, interfaith alliances would be an 
excellent way to begin to increase disaster-related conversation among faith communities 
as well as serve as an entry point for the disaster management community to engage and 
leverage these crucial community resources for disaster readiness and ultimately, risk 
reduction. Finally, community psychologists can utilize skills crucial to multidisciplinary 
collaboration, including: needs assessment; stakeholder engagement; capacity building; 
evaluation; policy change; advocacy; and empowerment, among others. Community 
psychologists can help to foster disaster-related systems-level change that: addresses 
needs at all levels of the ecological system (Bronfenbrenner, 2004); is culturally situated 
(Trickett, 2009); and is geared toward building community sustainability. This study 
articulates the need for this type of multidisciplinary collaboration, and is the first step to 
the development and practical implementation of faith-based disaster risk reduction 
platform.

**Contextual Influences and Research Limitations**

Several factors influenced the outcomes of this body of research. First, data reflect 
the experiences and beliefs of the members of the faith communities who participated in 
this study; the data may not be representative of all members of the respective faith 
communities. It is also possible that due to snowball sampling, participants reflected 
beliefs that are more similar to one another than to other members of these faith 
communities, despite attempts to sample from a diverse range of ages, ethnicities and 
both genders in each faith community. Additionally, faith leaders and lay participants
were not sampled from a singular congregation; rather faith leaders and participants were sampled from faith communities across O’ahu and Kaua’i. As such, the within-group comparison discussed above does not reflect a hierarchical comparison within a singular faith congregation. However, this broader sampling frame allows for a less insular view than that which might arise from participants all deriving from the same local faith congregation.

Second, the primary investigator was raised in the Roman Catholic faith. This background may have influenced the types of follow-up questions asked, specifically in communities with which the researcher was unfamiliar. As noted above, this may have unintentionally impacted the level of exploratory follow-up questions asked of members of the Methodist community due to its relative similarity to the Catholic faith. Additionally, all interviews were conducted in English, which was a second language for several participants. It is possible that some of the information these participants communicated was misconstrued by the researcher, or vice versa.26

Finally, it is important to note that this study does not include a comprehensive analysis of religious and historical texts. While participants were asked about religious texts and their significance in both meaning making and coping, the texts themselves were not investigated by the researcher for accuracy or comparison. This was a purposeful exclusion. Many lay participants asserted that they were not theologians, scholars or members of the clergy, and were not certain their interpretations of their sacred texts were precise. This is precisely the reason lay members of these communities were selected for participation: religious interpretation and meaning making among

26 For more information on the primary investigator, see Appendix E.
members of the community are often less formal than those of religious leaders. To examine the texts themselves would be adding an interpretation of these texts from someone (the principal investigator) who is relatively unfamiliar with their contexts and historical significance. Informed examination of these texts, specifically the sections referenced by participants, would be an area for additional research for those seeking to continue to bridge the divide between theology and the disaster experience.

Conclusion

As the current study demonstrates, faith plays a prominent role in the way members of faith communities interpret disaster events, and the strategies they employ to recover from disaster and prepare for and/or mitigate hazard risk. A better understanding of the role of religious beliefs in disaster interpretation, causal attribution, preparedness, coping and recovery can offer vital information that will aid in the development of disaster risk reduction strategies that increase community-wide resilience by leveraging the strengths and resources of faith congregations within those communities. Furthermore, collaborative efforts between faith and civic leaders will begin to build bridges that will engage a broader network of resources to increase community preparedness, facilitate post-disaster recovery, and reduce disaster risk. By leveraging the expertise and resources of faith leaders, disaster managers can adapt community response plans to better meet the needs of diverse constituencies and develop educational outreach initiatives that communicate crucial hazard information in a way that is both meaningful and helpful for local residents, providing clear actions that are logical and possible given their unique needs, strengths, resources and complex interpretive frameworks. Additional research can build on the data that has emerged from this study to further elucidate the
link between religiosity and the disaster experience. These results may then be applied in faith communities in geographically and socio-culturally diverse communities at risk to a range of natural hazards around the world.
Appendix A
Interview Questions\textsuperscript{27}

Questions related to disaster experiences and disaster preparedness:
\begin{itemize}
  \item Have you or has anyone in your immediate family ever directly experienced a disaster event? If so, please describe the event (What was it? When did it occur?)
  \item In a few words, can you tell me about the impact the event had on you? (physically, emotionally, spiritually) and any losses you experienced (property, home, loved ones)?
  \item Do you (does your family) have an emergency plan? If so, tell me about it. When did you establish it? If not, can you tell me more about why not?
  \item Do you (does your family) have an emergency kit? If so, tell me what is in it. If not, why not? If not, do you have the supplies that you would need readily available?
  \item Tell me about your congregation’s disaster readiness (plans, drills, kits, educational outreach, etc.)
\end{itemize}

Questions related to faith narratives:
\begin{itemize}
  \item Tell me any characters, stories or narratives in your faith that explain why disasters and other such tragedies happen.
  \item Tell me about what those stories say about how to cope when such events happen. What actions do the stories tell you to take? To whom do the stories tell you to turn for help?
\end{itemize}

Questions related to post-disaster support and demands:
\begin{itemize}
  \item What kind of support does your congregation provide to its members in times of disaster?
  \item What kind of support does your congregation expect from its members in times of disaster?
\end{itemize}

Questions for Video Clip 1: Tohoku Tsunami:
\begin{itemize}
  \item What, in your mind, was the cause of the 2011 tsunami that hit Tohoku, Japan?
  \item Does your faith help you understand this event How?
    \begin{itemize}
      \item For congregation leaders: How did you interpret this event for your community? Tell me about your experiences in a leadership role during this disaster event.
      \item For community members: What did your leader(s) say about the cause of the tsunami?
    \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{27} Interview questions were developed based on the preliminary research conducted by McGeehan (2012) as well as the existing research in the fields of community psychology and disaster management that relate to the topic of faith and factors associated with risk, recovery and disaster preparedness.
• What kinds of questions did this event raise for you (your congregation) related to your faith?
• How did your congregation respond?
• What (if any) assistance did you receive from your religious community?
• What (if any) assistance did you provide to your religious community?
• What (if any) changes did you make to disaster plans or activities after the 2011 Tohoku tsunami? What (if any) disaster preparedness/mitigation measures did you take afterward?

Questions for Video Clip 2: Simulated Hawai‘i Tsunami
• How would you interpret an event like this happening in Hawai‘i?
• What (if any) disaster preparedness/mitigation measures would you take after such an event?
• What kind of support would you expect your congregation to provide to its members after such an event?
• What kind of support would your congregation expect from its members after such an event?
• If an event like this happened in Hawai‘i, and you were the only person in your church/temple/community center, and someone came in and said they were new to the faith and struggling to cope with what had happened, is there someplace (a book, a passage, a person’s life) in your faith that you would recommend to find help on how to cope?
• Are there any books/passages/lessons that teach about why disasters happen or how to cope?

Wrap-Up questions:
• In light of all that we have discussed, are there any other stories/narratives from your religion that come to mind as being important related to disaster or coping?
• Anything else that is special about the way your faith community copes with hardship?
• What is your age?
• What is/are your ethnicity/ethnicities?
Appendix B
Introductory Overview of the Project

Religious Narratives and Their Implications for Coping, Recovery, and Disaster Risk Reduction

You are invited to participate in an interview regarding your religious and cultural stories of coping, your experiences with disaster, and your thoughts, feelings and behaviors before, during, and after disaster events.

The researcher, Katie McGeehan, is a 33 year-old Ph.D. candidate in Community and Cultural Psychology at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. She has Masters degrees in Counseling as well as Community and Cultural Psychology. She has spent several years living and working among the Navajo, a Native American tribe in Arizona on the U.S. mainland, in addition to cultural research in Guyana, South America and the Marshall Islands. She works for the Department of Health for a project that provides culturally grounded services to girls who have been victims of trauma. She has a deep interest in culture and religion and wishes to better understand how religious beliefs shape the experience of disaster.

The information that you share about your experiences will be kept private, and will be combined with the responses of others. One goal of the study is to help describe how your religious community understands and responds to disaster events. By understanding the role of religion in the disaster experience, this research will:

• help disaster managers better tailor strategies to reduce your community’s risk for disaster;
• begin to build a bridge between religious and civic leaders seeking to help communities to increase disaster resilience; and
• help your community, and other communities impacted by disaster, to prepare for and recover from future disasters.

If you are interested in meeting with Katie to learn more about the project, and possibly talk with her about your experiences, you can contact her at kmcg@hawaii.edu or (267) 664-0979.

Mahalo nui loa for your consideration.
Appendix C
Religious Narratives and Their Implications for Coping, Recovery, and Disaster Risk Reduction

Consent for Participation

You are invited to participate in an interview regarding your religious and cultural stories of coping, your experiences with disaster, and your thoughts, feelings and behaviors before, during, and after disaster events. You have been selected as a possible participant for this study because of your involvement in your religious community and your residence in the Hawaiian Islands.

Participation in the project will consist of an introductory meeting followed by one interview with the investigator. Interview questions will focus on your religious and cultural stories of tragedy, coping, and recovery. You will then view two short video clips, and will answer some questions related to your experiences, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. The interview is expected to last about an hour or more, but you are welcome to speak as much or as little as you feel comfortable. The interview will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription. No personal identifying information will be included with the research results.

Research data will be confidential to the extent allowed by law. All research records will be stored in a locked file in the primary investigators’ office for the duration of the research project. Audiotapes will be destroyed immediately following transcription.

The investigator believes there is little or no risk to participating in this research project. However, there may be a small risk that you will experience psychological discomfort when speaking about your personal experiences of disaster. Participating in this research may be of no direct benefit to you other than offering you the opportunity to speak about these important events.

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw from participation at any time during the duration of the project with no penalty.

If you have any questions regarding this research project, please contact the primary investigator, Katie McGeehan, at (267) 664-0979 or kmcg@hawaii.edu. If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if you wish to file a complaint, please contact the University of Hawai‘i Committee on Human Studies at (808)956-5007, or uhirb@hawaii.edu.

Participant: I have read and understand the above information, and agree to participate in this research project.
☐ I give my consent for this interview to be audio recorded.
☐ I do not give my consent for this interview to be audio recorded.

__________________________________________  ____________________________  __________
Name (printed)                              Signature                             Date
Appendix D

Brief Overview and History of Faith Communities Included in the Sample

**Faith Communities Included in the Sample**

The four faith communities included in this study are: Bahá’í, Buddhist, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), and the United Methodist Church. A brief overview of each faith community and its fundamental values is provided. Information included is as described by study participants and supplemented with foundational texts and passages, some of which were identified and/or recommended by participants.²⁸

**Bahá’í.**²⁹

*Values and beliefs.*

The Bahá’í faith was founded in the 19th century in Iran by Hussein Ali, the son of an aristocratic Persian family. He is known to Bahá’ís as Bahá’u’lláh, which means “the glory of God”. Bahá’ís believe that Bahá’u'lláh is the most recent manifestation or prophet of the Lord, a list that includes foundational figures from all of the world religions, including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus Christ from Judeo-Christian faiths, as well as Buddha, Muhammad, Krishna, and Zoroaster. Bahá’ís believe that each of these manifestations, or successive revelations, was sent to a different area of the world in different eras to teach specific lessons to the people of the time.

²⁸ This overview does not in any way attempt to represent the values systems of these faith communities in their entirety; values included address themes that emerged from the data or that provide context for understanding the themes that emerged from the data.
²⁹ Information in this section was provided by participants during interviews, and was supplemented with information from the official website of the Bahá’í faith, www.bahai.org.
“With each new manifestation, there is an energy, a spiritual energy that is inserted with power into humanity. In the past, that’s been for specific place and time. The Buddha went one place and it wasn’t really a message for other places. Krishna was another message for the same sort of places and so on, but with Bahá’u’lláh this is the first time the message is for the whole world. And we feel that and we’ve been told there is a disintegration of the old world order, the way everything is breaking down. But at the same time, everything is building up. So it’s kind of like a disintegration and an integration at the same time. Some of the bad things we see, not the tsunami, that just happens, but Syria, or Iraq or Afghanistan or some of these things are part of the disintegration [of the old world order].”

“One of the main principles - or teachings of the Baha’i faith is progressive revelation that, there’s only one God and that he has sent manifestations throughout the ages, and they all come from the same one God. The spiritual principles, they stay the same, but there’s different social teachings because society has changed drastically over the ages.”

The Bahá’í social teachings speak to the need for social equality and global unity. They also speak of the repercussions that will be felt around the world while injustice remains:

“We’re warned in the Baha’i writings that if we don’t work towards the oneness of humanity, if we don’t eliminate all prejudices, you know, blood will run through the streets. We’re warned of disasters happening if people don’t get their act together and start living their lives the way God wants us to, that if we don’t accept each other… we’re warned of what happens if we don’t establish the equality of men and women, if we don’t have universal education for everyone, if we don’t believe in the harmony of science and religion, if we don’t try to find out the truth for ourselves instead of kind of having clergy go through it for us. We’re warned that there’ll be devastating ramifications for that. We are told that there are devastating consequences for not treating each other properly.”

Members of the Bahá’í faith do not, however, view these consequences as punishment from God. Rather, they are the natural consequences to universal and scientific law.

Famine and greed are a natural consequence of an unbalanced and inequitable world. The Bahá’í thus see ongoing famine, wars, and racism as evidence that this old world order must be disassembled. For the Bahá’í, the ultimate goal of life in this world is global unity, which will require the breaking down of social, economic, cultural, religious and political barriers that lead to and perpetuate injustice. The achievement of this global
society will require the elimination of prejudice and extremes of wealth and poverty; and
the establishment of gender equality and universal education, among others. This means
an end to competition for resources, and an end to socio-political and religious conflict.
For the Bahá’í, there need not be winners and losers; instead harmony is achieved
through valuing differences, or “unity through diversity”. One participant was clear that
this distribution of wealth is:

“Not like communism coming and say, oh, you have to share your wealth, but, if
we can change your heart and my heart in a way that’s saying yes, the resources
of the earth, must be shared equally among the inhabitants of the earth, okay. So
all the oil that Iran may have, all the oil that Saudi Arabia has, all of those
resources have to be shared equally with all the inhabitants, of the earth.”

This unity also means that when some members of the global community are suffering,
all are suffering;

“What is going on with the Baha’i community in Iran, is happening to the entire
Baha’i world. What happened in Auschwitz, happened to all of us, because it’s so
horrific, and so we feel it.”

Thus, in the Bahá’í faith, the mechanism for change is a “spiritual solution to an
economic problem.” Inequality and injustice are resolved through the unity of humanity
under the same loving God, who has sent His messengers to all corners of the Earth in
many different ages.

In addition to the evolution of human society, Bahá’ís seek personal evolution.
The Bahá’í faith uses a metaphor of a fetus in the womb to understand life here on earth.
The individual will be given opportunities (challenges) that will help her/him to develop
the characteristics s/he will need in the next life, which is considered the true, everlasting
reality. One participant explained: “The whole purpose of life on this planet is to build
character because character, memory, feelings go with you into the next world.”
Challenges, then, are seen as opportunities for growth. This fundamental value emerged as a prominent theme in the way Bahá’ís interpret disaster events (discussed in greater depth below). Additionally, there is a strong emphasis on service to others. One participant asserted, “to be of service to others is paramount.” Another, when asked about the fundamental values of the Bahá’í faith, shared: “Service. Service to others. Love your brother, love everybody like they’re your brother.” For the Bahá’í, there is no room for judgment. Some members may have evolved toward the ideals of service and selflessness more than others: “the degree to which you have… let go of your worry for yourself and adopted a worry for other people, it’s gonna be different, I mean different people, different ways.” The faithful Bahá’í strives to achieve the highest level of self and society by releasing attachment to the material world and one’s own success and turning wholeheartedly toward service to others and the global community.

**Brief history of the faith and its central figures.**

The Bahá’í community has suffered ongoing persecution since its inception. As one participant describes, “the persecution of the Bahá’ís by the Muslims in Iran followed the pattern [of religious persecution] seen throughout history”. According to participants, the Muslim clergy felt threatened by the emergence of this new faith, and subsequently set about persecuting its leaders. The faith’s first “prophet founder,” a man known as the Bab (a given name meaning “the gate”), was a herald to Bahá’u'lláh, similar to John the Baptist in the Christian faith. The Bab was murdered by the Shah (Iranian king). After an attempt on the life of the Shah by some zealous Bahá’ís, the leaders of the Bahá’í faith, including Bahá’u’lláh (the most recent manifestation or prophet of God) were imprisoned and many were executed. Bahá’u’lláh was later exiled to Iraq, Istanbul, Turkey, and
eventually to the prison city of Acca in Israel. 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the son of Bahá'u'lláh, was imprisoned from the age of nine, and lived his life in exile in the city of Acca. The grandson of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, Shoghi Effendi, was chosen by 'Abdu'l-Bahá to be guardian of the faith after his death.

*Modern leadership structure.*

Because Bahá’ís believe in the evolution of the individual and society, the faith is less proscriptive than some other faiths. The leadership structure of the Bahá’í faith is more communal than hierarchical. Israel, the seat of the Bahá’í faith, is home to the Bahá’í World Center and the Universal House of Justice. The Universal House of Justice is the supreme governing body of the international Bahá’í community, and is comprised of nine elected members. National Spiritual Assemblies and Local Spiritual Assemblies mirror this structure and are also comprised of elected members who serve five-year terms of service. The Bahá’í faith does not have clergy. Bahá’í communities gather together for prayer and education regularly, and faith gatherings are more communal than hierarchical or didactic.

*Buddhist.*

*Values and beliefs.*

Buddhism is considered by many to be more philosophy of life than religion. The Buddhist epistemology is based on dharma, a universal law that governs the universe. For Buddhists, life is eternal. The goal of existence is to reach enlightenment, which is done over the course of many lifetimes, though some Buddhist sects seek enlightenment in this

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30 It is for this reason that the Bahá’í faith’s holy places are located in Israel, rather than Iran. Participants explained that this connection with Israel fuels the Muslim suspicion and ongoing persecution of Bahá’ís in Iran today.
lifetime. These lifetimes are tied together, so that an individual’s actions and experiences carry over from one lifetime to the next, a concept referred to as karma. Buddhist practice hinges on an active embrace of the concepts of impermanence and acceptance. The world is in a constant state of change (impermanence), and therefore one must learn to accept the world as it is. When one reaches Nirvana, a loose translation to the Buddhist concept of heaven, the individual is released from the cycle of death and rebirth. Several participants spoke of the potential for Buddhahood (becoming like a Buddha, or enlightened one) in every person. Furthermore, death is not seen as the end of existence, but rather the continuation of the cycle of life, death and rebirth. That reaching enlightenment is a release from this cycle into eternal enlightenment is a celebration rather than an event evoking grief.

“You’re a Buddha in life, so you’re also a Buddha in death. Death is also considered an existence of life so to speak… an easy way to think of it is like nature. Even though the winter comes and things seem to be dead, it doesn’t mean that life is not existing, or ceased to be existing, it’s that it’s part of this cycle of life and death.”

Brief history of the faith and its central figures.

The Buddhist faith was founded in the sixth century BCE by Shakyamuni Buddha. Born a prince under the name Siddhartha Gautama in Nepal, he renounced his title in search of spiritual awakening that would eliminate suffering in the world. After finding enlightenment (understanding the true nature of the world), he adopted the name Buddha, meaning “awakened or enlightened one”. He then traveled throughout India spreading his knowledge and teachings on the path to enlightenment. So began the spread of Buddhism throughout the world. In the 2,500 years since the Shakyamuni Buddha’s
time, many schools of Buddhism have emerged. Those represented by the participants in this study will be briefly described.

**Hongwanji.**

Hongwanji Buddhism is a subsect of Shin Buddhism, which was founded by Shinran Shonin in Japan in the thirteenth century. Shinran Shonin’s descendants started the first Hongwanji temple at the site of Shonin’s burial. Members of the Shin school of Buddhism seek the attainment of Buddhahood, which is the ultimate transformation of self into a place of wisdom and compassion. Detachment from the self, personal desires and suffering will eventually lead the soul to “the Pure Land” upon death. The soul is then to return to help spread enlightenment to others. ("Shin Buddhism," n.d.)

**Nichiren Buddhism.**

Nichiren Daishonin established the nam myoho renge kyo practice of Buddhism in Japan in the thirteenth century. The practice centers on daily chanting of Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, which (roughly) translates to devotion to the concepts of the Lotus Sutra, the penultimate teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha. There are multiple sects of Buddhism that follow the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, or Nichiren Buddhism. Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is an international organization of lay Buddhists around the world who follow the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. Participants in this study were members

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31 Nam is a Sanskrit word meaning to devote oneself; Myoho Renge Kyo is the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese characters of the Lotus Sutra’s title. For more information see “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo,” (n.d.)
32 Soka Gakkai is generally used to refer to the Buddhist community following these teachings in Japan, whereas Soka Gakkai International refers to the international organization of lay Buddhist following the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin through this practice. As such, Soka Gakkai (SGI) will be used to differentiate the international organization from the Japanese organization and from other followers of Nichiren Buddhism.
of the SGI organization of Nichiren Buddhists. As one participant explained, “Soka Gakkai is a Japanese word that means value creation.” The SGI practice includes chanting and recitation of parts of the Lotus Sutra, and is an active Buddhism that seeks to engage the self and others in transformation of self and society, known as human revolution. Through this human revolution, individuals, and over time the entire world, find peace. This is known as kosen-rufu, or “world peace through individual transformation or human revolution” and is achieved by transforming the “three poisons” (greed, anger and foolishness) in order to fulfill one’s potential and seek an enlightened life (Hochswender, 2006; “Three Poisons,” n.d.).

Zen.

Zen Buddhism was founded in China in the sixth century. The philosophy was brought to Japan in the twelfth century by an Indian scholar by the name of Bodhidharma. The defining feature of Zen Buddhism is the focus on meditation. Meditation allows the seeker to reach enlightenment by releasing the individual from the constraints of conventional thinking. Each person has the capacity to break through this veil of ignorance to understand the true nature of reality. The potential to attain Buddhahood is believed to be in everyone. (“Zen,” n.d.).

“In Zen Buddhism, in America they have something very specific called engaged Buddhism. In other words, you don’t just sit your ass on your cushion, and meditate all the time, you have to take something out to the community, like plant a garden. Now in Hongwanji they want to try that approach too.”

As this participant suggests, all of the above Buddhist organizations represented in this sample are either already practicing or moving toward this practice of engaged Buddhism, pairing the evolution or transformation of the self through prayer, meditation,
or chanting with active engagement with the community to achieve global transformation.

**Modern leadership structure.**

While the schools of Buddhism are as varied as the sects of Christianity, in general, the Buddhist faith is rather self-directed. “Since the experience is so individual, Buddhism tends to generate few rules, dogmas, commandments, and the like” (Hochswender, 2006). Several participants in this study referred to the mentor-student relationship wherein a mentor who has been practicing Buddhism for a longer period of time agrees to serve as a model for engaged Buddhism for the student: the student seeks to actively engage in exploration of the faith by emulating the mentor. One SGI participant explained:

“The Buddhist concept, mentor and disciple, the mentor is practicing this Buddhism correctly. He’s showing with his life, how much you can bring it out of your life and practicing this Buddhism correctly. And so the disciple is always seeking the mentor, and seeking not to just follow him like a sheep would follow, but to also stand up with him with the same vow to create peace in this world or Kosen-Rufu we call it.”

Buddhist priests or sensei are viewed as leaders, but more so as community leaders than spiritual guides. One Buddhist priest explicitly said “I not [sic] the leader”. All of the sensei who participated indicated that their role was more to listen than to preach. These leaders are seen as “ordinary people, both men and women, who are just more learned or experienced spiritual seekers” (“Shin basics,” n.d.). Each individual’s experience is viewed as valid, and as such, there is less proscriptive direction from a religious “authority” figure. The sensei thus fills a more facilitative role in the faith experience for the Buddhist practitioner: “I don’t talk to, I just listen, listen, listen.”
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.\textsuperscript{33}

Values and beliefs.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), also known as the Mormon faith, is a sect of Christianity. The following values are core to the LDS way of life: strengthening families, helping others, missionary work, lifelong learning, freedom to choose, humanitarian aid, community service, and knowledge of one’s own family history (“Values,” n.d.). For the members of the LDS community, faith is not merely a set of religious beliefs; it is a “way of life” that permeates everything they do. Many participants used the term “families are forever” in describing the emphasis on family within the community, and the strength of that bond which lasts into eternal life. The terms “brother” and “sister,” used to refer to other members of the faith community, reflect this emphasis on the church family as well. One participant shared her view on the faith: “I’ve been taught this since I was a little girl: to be prepared, to have faith, to do what is right because when you do what’s right, right things come back. So do good and good comes back.”

The LDS way of life is fairly proscriptive. Members follow the “word of wisdom” which calls for members to abstain from alcohol, tobacco and caffeine. Members are also taught to resist the desire of “the natural man” that might draw an individual toward his/her more animalistic, basic human tendencies toward consumption, greed, etc. in order to live to each person’s “highest calling,” to live in the “likeness of God.” Members of the faith believe that:

\textsuperscript{33} Information in this section was provided by participants during interviews, and was supplemented by information from the official website of the LDS faith, www.mormon.org.
“We’re put on earth to be tested, to go through all these trials and tribulations and some of those trials and tribulations would be natural disasters. How would we overcome it in a way that is pleasing unto God?”

Members of the faith community seek to live lives that will be pleasing to God “so that eventually we can go back to live with Him.” By resisting the way of the “natural man,” an individual can live her/his highest calling and come closer to the likeness of God so that s/he may return to spend eternal life with Him upon his/her own death or upon the second coming of Christ.

Members of the LDS community are expected to participate in the tithing system, whereby each individual contributes ten percent of his/her gross annual income to the church community. Tithing funds are used to cover operating expenses for the church, to help support missionaries, to fund humanitarian aid, and for education and outreach. Many young women and men volunteer as missionaries, spending up to two years serving a mission wherever the church calls them, often in a city away from their homes. During this time of service, young members of the LDS community share the gospel with others (proselytize). Missionaries are not paid for their time, and are expected to save money prior to their mission in order to be self-supporting during that time of mission. Members of the community participate in a “home visiting home teaching program,” where brothers and sisters of the faith community visit with one another on a monthly basis to talk about the faith and check in with each other. This creates a fairly close network of members in each ward (a congregation or division of the LDS faith community), where members are expected to know each other and care for one another.

Many members of the LDS community spoke of an ongoing affirmation of their faith through seeing the blessings they are promised manifest in their lives and the lives
of other members of their faith community: “If you pay your tithing, if you go to church, if you pray, if you read the scriptures, if you serve, all these different things, you’ll see blessings. And so for my life, I’ve seen it.” Blessings may not arrive at the time and place one hopes, but it is during those times that the faithful must “walk the faith” with the knowledge that “God has a plan for you even if you don’t understand it right now, and over time there are answers to the questions [that one may have] that make sense.”

**Brief history of the faith and its central figures.**

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was founded in 1830 in the state of New York by a young man named Joseph Smith. Over the decade prior, Smith had been visited by God, Jesus Christ, and other messengers of God, who directed him to translate *The Book of Mormon* (described below) into English, and to subsequently found the Church. Members of the LDS faith believe that before the time of Christ, a man named Lehi and his family were commanded by God to travel to the area that is now North America to found a new faith community. After His resurrection, Christ visited this new colony and passed his teachings on to the faith community. Lehi’s son, Nephi, became the next prophet of the Lord, and their family recorded the early history of this community over the course of its first century in *The Book of Mormon*, so named after one of the early scribes of the book. The book covers a period of time from approximately 2000 BCE to 400AD. At some point after this time, *The Book of Mormon* was lost, until Joseph Smith was directed by God to uncover it, translate it, and use this ancient scripture to re-establish the faith community God had originally intended, which had fallen away after the time of the original Apostles of Christ. *The Book of Mormon* is viewed as a companion piece to the Christian Bible, confirming the truths presented
therein. There are two additional sacred scriptures or revelations: *Doctrine and Covenants* (directing the establishment of the LDS Church), and *Pearl of Great Price* (revelations from God to Joseph Smith). Members of the LDS community believe that two major events would precede the second coming of Christ: the renewal of the Church (restored in the form of the LDS faith community by Joseph Smith); and the occurrence of a great many disasters that would befall the earth, which should be interpreted as “signs of the times.” These “signs” indicate that the world has entered the “latter days” just prior to the second coming of Christ.

*Modern leadership structure.*

Today, the LDS faith community is guided by a modern day prophet and his twelve counselors, known as the Quorum of the Twelve. This structure mirrors the early Christian church, with Jesus Christ and his twelve apostles. Each LDS congregation, or ward, is led by a lay bishop who serves in a leadership role for a term of several years. Bishops are neither trained clergy nor theologians; these are lay members of the community who are selected to serve in a leadership role. Though these are elected terms, service as a bishop is voluntary. Bishops are not paid for their service, and retain their own careers to support their families, in addition to their duties in church leadership. Groups of nearby wards are called a “stake” and are led by a stake president. Members of each ward serve on committees such as the Elders Quorum and Relief Society for men and women, respectively. Every six months, the prophet and the apostles speak during General Conference. These conferences are available online and provide guidance about “every topic you can think of” related to life in the LDS community. These General
Conference recordings were mentioned by several members of the community as a resource for finding anything someone might be searching for about or within the faith.

**United Methodist Church.**

The United Methodist Church (UMC) is a denomination of Christianity with origins in the Protestant Church of England. The primary scripture of the United Methodist Church is the Bible, which is supplemented by other works written by founder John Wesley (e.g., The Articles of Religion) and other theologians over the past two-and-a-half centuries (e.g. The Confession of Faith). The faith community is imbued with its commitment to “open hearts, open minds, open doors.” Additionally, as one participant shared, “in the Methodist church our tradition is to constantly be in mission.”

**Values and beliefs.**

The United Methodist Church has a “primary emphasis on Christian living, on putting faith and love into action” (“Our Wesleyan Theological Heritage,” n.d.). Devotion to this way of life, known as “practical divinity, has continued to be a hallmark of United Methodism today” (“Our Wesleyan Theological Heritage,” n.d.). For members of the UMC, faith and good works go hand-in-hand such that “faith should inspire service” (“Our Wesleyan Theological Heritage,” n.d.). The faithful seek to be engaged in a meaningful way in their communities and the world. “The mission of our congregation is to make disciples. This is a four-fold task…. We could abbreviate our mission as one of welcoming-worshiping-nurturing-sending” (“Mission and Ministry”, n.d.).

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34 Information in this section was provided by participants during interviews, and was supplemented by information from the official website of the United Methodist Church, www.umc.org.
participants in this study spoke of the value of welcoming others into their community as a fundamental value of the United Methodist faith.

Grace.

Another hallmark of the Methodist faith is the importance of grace, which is understood as “the love and mercy given to us by God because God wants us to have it, not because of anything we have done to earn it” (Our Wesleyan Theological Heritage, n.d.). God’s grace is omnipresent and unconditional. An individual may choose not to accept the gift of God’s grace and love, but it is available and actively given by God to each and every person. The grace of God encompasses many aspects of His relationship with each person, including the will to turn away from sin, the humility to repent when one falters, the strength to overcome hardship, as well as forgiveness, restoration, and ultimately salvation through Jesus Christ. (Our Wesleyan Theological Heritage, n.d.)

Brief history of the faith.

The Methodist faith was founded in the mid-eighteenth century in England by John Wesley, a member of the clergy of the Church of England. The Methodist movement grew out of a “Holy Club” begun at Oxford University by John’s brother, Charles. The brothers traveled to Georgia where John served as a chaplain. John experienced a spiritual conversion in 1738, wherein he came to understand salvation could be attained through belief in Jesus Christ alone. Wesley soon began evangelical efforts, returning to England and establishing Methodist groups throughout the United Kingdom. The Methodist Church officially separated from the Church of England in
1784. As travel to the Americas continued, Methodist communities following Wesley’s model were established in the colonies. (“John Wesley”, n.d.)

Modern leadership structure.

The modern leadership structure to some extent follows the model set forth by John Wesley. Local churches, each appointed a pastor, are gathered into circuits overseen by a district superintendent who is responsible for all of the churches in a particular area. Larger areas, governed by a bishop, gather together at an Annual Conference to direct the work of the churches in the region. Every four years, the national assembly of the United Methodist Church gathers at the General Conference to “create church polity,” or manage the church functioning. Delegates include ordained clergy and members of the lay community at both the Annual and General Conferences. (“Glossary of United Methodist Terms”, n.d.) Members of the ordained clergy are both men and women, are supported financially by the church, and are permitted to marry.

35 For a comprehensive overview of the development of the Methodist Church from its beginning in the Americas to present, see “United Methodist Church Timeline Chart” (n.d.).
Appendix E

Background of the Primary Investigator

I, the primary investigator, was raised in a Roman Catholic family. I received a liberal Catholic education from the Sisters of Mercy and the Jesuits, both institutions with a commitment to social justice for and service to vulnerable populations. I served for two years as a Mercy Volunteer teaching on the Navajo Nation, the largest Native American reservation in the United States, where my deep interest in culture was further cultivated. While pursuing a master’s degree in counseling, I worked for a consulting firm specializing in charitable organizations, many of which were serving vulnerable populations. As a young adult during the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, and Hurricane Katrina in 2005, I felt called to disaster response. It is in the field of community psychology where I found the convergence of these three lifelong and emergent interests: faith, vulnerable populations, and disaster management. As part of my doctoral training in Community and Cultural Psychology at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, I have completed a certificate in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance.

My thesis (McGeehan, 2012) examined the relationship between cultural and religious belief systems and disaster risk reduction in American Samoa in the wake of the 2009 tsunami. The study revealed that for the people of American Samoa, religious leaders of various congregations had divergent interpretations of the event, its cause, and their recommended course of action post-disaster. The research endeavor that comprises this dissertation is an extension of both my personal commitment to disaster risk reduction in culturally diverse communities around the world as well as the evolution of
my professional objectives as a community psychologist and disaster management professional.
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