

Relmagine Appalachia
Faith Toolkit Remarks
June 23, 2022

My first appointment as a United Methodist pastor was to the Keystone and Northfork Churches in McDowell, West Virginia. At that time, of the top ten economically devastated towns in West Virginia two, if not three of those towns, were located in McDowell County, including Keystone.

The local faith community is often the last institution left in a community: the school is gone, the Post Office is gone, the stores might be all be gone, but generally, local faith communities are still there. Faith communities are often the only institutional counterweight to unresponsive government and large corporations. So, Keystone and Northfork each had about 6 or 7 churches in each town. So, for a combined population of around 1,200 persons, there were about 12 – 14 churches.

I think that the faith community has a lot of offer. It can offer values about the kind of economy communities want, such as an economy that looks out for and supports people. Faith communities can give voice to those values, particularly when those values are in danger of being left out of the discussion. A faith community can also lift up the voices of those in a community who might be being left out of the conversation, even though they may be the most impacted. And, of course, local congregations, in addition to playing a leadership role, can provide space and other support for meetings.

The big question, of course, is, “Where to start?” The toolkit has been used in other places and provides some good guidance as to where to begin.

The best way to think of the toolkit is that it is like your Grandmother’s recipe for a really great dish. There may or may not be exact measurements. It might be a pinch here or a handful there, but what’s important is that you need to know all of the ingredients for that family recipe. The toolkit provides both guidance and a checklist of ingredients that you’ll want to include to make sure everything is good to go before you start community economic development. Now, depending on the situation or just personal taste you may need or want more of one thing or another and that’s o.k. Every situation is going to be different.

I think the second thing that the toolkit offers is connection to and examples of what other organizations are doing that can broaden your view of what’s possible and provide some contacts. You might see some people that you would like to invite to your next meeting to provide some inspiration, guidance, or just basic knowledge. You don’t have to do this alone. The toolkit is a place to start planning, a rallying point for the community, a way to get organized.