

SYMBOLS

O'Neill School of Public and Environmental Affairs
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Author: Rebecca Wiebke and Rees Wimmer

Symbols:

Similar to the “no indication” group, organizations in the “symbols” category typically have very little expression of faith on the most accessible sections of the webpage. Organizations in this category tend not to disclose their religious connections. Instead, these foundations and grantees use symbols that are tied to faith principles and may not be associated with only one religion, but convey a widely-understood faith-oriented message. One example of this expression is the yin-yang symbol, which has roots in Taoism, but has been universally adopted to signify two different characteristics that can complement each other and bring harmony. People have used this symbol to explain concepts like light and dark, order and chaos, and other qualities whose existence depends on the presence of an opposite.

Foundations and grantees in the “symbols” category rarely seek to promote religion. These organizations typically provide humanitarian aid or seek to promote knowledge of and participation in cultural or heritage groups. Despite not advertising an explicit religious connection, the organizations’ connection to faith is usually clear through the principles they promote and the symbols they display on their websites. Principles such as peace, acceptance, love, and charity are often at the heart of these organizations. While these concepts have deep ties to multiple religions, the concepts are presented in ways that are not clearly representative of a specific religion but rather invite participation by various religious and non-religious individuals who wish to participate in the organization’s work.

Case Study: Covenant House

[Covenant House](#) is a humanitarian nonprofit that aims to provide aid to people with immediate needs such as food, clothing, shelter, and healthcare. Covenant House is a Catholic organization, but the indications on their website are few and far between. The one apparent outlier to this lack of faith indication is the frequent symbol of the dove. The dove has been used across multiple religions to signify the quest for peace. Covenant’s use of the dove visualizes the group’s desire to bring peace to the lives of thousands of individuals across multiple countries through their work.

Despite Covenant’s faith connection, aside from the symbolic use of the dove it is difficult to find any indication of religious affiliation on the website. Their vision, while sharing many

values with different religions, is not explicitly faith-based, reading, “We are steadfast in our commitment to build a present and future of safety, healing, housing, and opportunity for young people facing homelessness. Covenant House is committed to providing unconditional love, absolute respect, and relentless support for each young person who walks through our doors.”

However, a further expansion of their mission statement on a separate page declares that, “We who recognize God’s providence and fidelity to His people are dedicated to living out His covenant among ourselves and those children we serve, with absolute respect and unconditional love.” From this, it is clear that Covenant House’s values and work stem from a faith-based conviction. However, the breadth of work they do with various communities across the world has allowed them to reach across religious boundaries both in terms of the partners they work with, as well as the individuals they work for. This pluralistic approach is reflected in their expression of faith, as they have chosen to center their religious expression around the symbol of a dove, which ties them closely to the principle of peace without being connected exclusively to one religion.