

AAR Regional Development Grant Application
“Corona Chronicles: An Oral History Project”

1. Contact Information

Primary Researcher

Mary Wilson

Collaborative Researcher

Tiffany Puett

2. Narrative

This proposal requests funding for an oral history project that will gather stories from faith leaders in Texas about their experiences during the current pandemic and its impact in their religious communities. Faith communities are facing unprecedented questions about the use of technology, when or how to safely meet in person, budget challenges, and questions about the viability of their future if their community struggles to adapt to changes related to the pandemic. The interviews will probe how the pandemic has affected their ministries, teaching, budgets, and overall community well-being. Gathering oral history interviews from faith leaders during this time will be an invaluable resource for future students, historians, researchers, and religious leaders as a means to understanding current perceptions and the unfolding reality of the pandemic. The interviews will become part of the historical record and preserve diverse voices, which will enrich future studies of congregational development, practical theology, and church history, among others.

The oral history interviews will be housed in the Religions Texas archive. Religions Texas, a project of the Institute for Diversity and Civic Life in collaboration with the University of Texas at Austin, is a digital public humanities initiative that explores Texas as a site of religious encounters and a meeting place of religious difference. It is rooted in the practices of community-based research, storytelling, and public history. The Religions Texas project is a publicly accessible, engaging, and sustainable digital resource on religious life in Texas for scholars, educators, students, journalists, policy makers, community leaders, and the general public.

3. Methodology

Given the current state of rising cases in Texas, all or almost all of the interviews will need to be done via Zoom. After the first of the year, depending on the conditions at the time, it is conceivable that a few interviews could be done in person. As the primary researcher and interviewer, Dr. Wilson will be responsible for identifying and contacting the potential faith leaders to be interviewed, for scheduling the subsequent interviews, and for designing the questions and format for the interviews. As the collaborative researcher, Dr. Puett will be consulted through each phase of the project and will oversee the archival portion of the project. We expect to conduct 15 interviews, approximately an hour each, drawing on a

variety of faith community sizes, locations, and religious identities. Once the interviews are completed, each interviewee will be contacted again in order to reconfirm their consent to making the transcript and audio of the interview accessible to the public on the Religions Texas website. The participants also have the right to decline to have any part or the entire interview made public. A research assistant with IDCL/Religions Texas will work on converting the audio to a transcript, editing the interview if requested by the participant, and entering the interview into the Religions Texas archive.

4. Regional Significance

This project creates a much-needed space for faith leaders, seminarians, and scholars in the region to tell their stories, process and glean meaning from their experiences in this pandemic. Documenting the challenges posed by the pandemic also offers resources to faith leaders, community leaders (religious or secular), scholars, and citizens within the region. Although Religions Texas demographically focuses on Texas, narratives from Texas can be helpful throughout the region. To date, Texas has been in the national news for the alarming growth in the number of people becoming ill with COVID-19 and for political responses to it. In addition, faith communities have taken different approaches on whether or not to meet in person, what restrictions or guidelines they will follow if and when they choose to do so. Questions arise as to the function of faith communities when in person gatherings are not viable. The role and purpose of faith communities are being re-examined, the forms of worship have been transformed, and clergy with their community leadership are being called on to make potentially life-altering decisions. The times are unprecedented and documenting the challenges during the struggle is a service to all those navigating their way through this new way of being community. This project will help church leaders, seminarians, scholars and laity in the region engage in an important conversation about the challenges and gains experienced by churches in Texas during this historic moment.

5. Timeline

Phase I: Preparing for the interviews: Identifying faith leaders who will agree to be interviewed (July 2020-September 2020)

Phase II: Scheduling interviews and conducting interviews (October 2020 – March 2021)

Phase III: Transcription and cataloguing of interviews (March 2021-May 2021)

Phase IV: Either a webinar or in-person release to introduce the work. Planning will be dependent on the state of the pandemic at the time. (June 2021)

6. Budget

Primary researcher stipend (recruiting interviewees, preparing for interviews, including gathering consent and information documents, and conducting interviews)	\$3000
Technology support (e.g. Professional level Zoom account)	\$180
Travel (gas, meals, lodging)	\$220
Research assistant (transcription, editing, archiving)	\$600
Total	\$4000
Requested AAR Regional Grant	\$4000