

1 Compassion

“Compassion” is dedicated to humane relationships with homeless animals.

This simple inscription graces the elegant bronze sculpture of a dog, foot raised in the air to scratch his neck, that rests in the entrance to Moscow’s Mendeleevskaia metro station. The dog commemorated in the sculpture was a stray, or more specifically, one of Moscow’s metro dogs, a uniquely Russian breed of canine that travels the city on public transportation, often snoozing undisturbed on subway and bus seats, and surviving on the food and makeshift shelters left by fellow commuters and station workers.¹ He had lived in the passageway leading to the metro and was a familiar presence to countless commuters, many of whom provided him with food, bedding, and affection. In 2007, the dog was brutally killed, allegedly by hooligans.² In anguish over the senseless killing, local residents pooled their funds to commission the sculpture and then lobbied authorities to allow it to be placed in the metro station.

Much like what is done at other grave sites and public monuments throughout Russia, Moscow’s commuters adorn the bronze dog with lit candles, store-bought bouquets of flowers wrapped in plastic, and hand-cut flowers placed in water in mayonnaise jars-turned-vases. In a city of



Figure 1. Titled “Compassion” and dedicated to a stray dog that lived in Moscow’s Mendeleevskaia metro station, this sculpture promotes compassion for all homeless animals. Copyright Melissa L. Caldwell.

fifteen million people, where residents often complain about the rudeness and selfishness of their fellow citizens and worry about how easily one could be swallowed up in the anonymity of such a sprawling megacity, the highly personalized and deeply intimate touches bestowed on a sculpture commemorating a stray dog are moving.

The community efforts to erect this memorial came at a particular moment when people across Russia were actively and publicly discussing their relationships and responsibilities to one another, their communities, the nation, and the state. Central to these discussions have been concerns with addressing injustices and ensuring that care, kindness, and generosity remain at the forefront of daily life despite the increasing neoliberalization of society and the state’s deliberate divestment from social welfare following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Over the past twenty years that I have been conducting fieldwork in Russia, primarily in

Moscow and the Moscow region, a seeming constant has been the frequency with which friends, acquaintances, colleagues, and strangers alike have complained about the consequences of Russia's economic and political transformation. While enjoying the benefits of neoliberal capitalism in terms of improved consumer experiences at home and in public, the freedom to travel, and greater independence in their daily lives, Russians have also been critical of what they perceive as growing social problems caused by the values and practices that constitute their new political economy. Citing such diverse issues as socioeconomic stratification, joblessness, homelessness, poverty, criminality, abandonment of children and the elderly, prostitution, drug use and alcoholism, the desecration and destruction of parks, forests, and other environmentally fragile sites, worsening traffic congestion and emissions-caused pollution, and political and economic corruption, among many others, concerned Russians articulate broader anxieties about social instability and moral decline.

Offering striking evidence of the prevalence of these worries, my field notes from the 1990s and early 2000s are filled with stories from friends and acquaintances who were frustrated by what seemed to them to be a dramatic rupture of the social compact that they believed had previously knitted their society together. Russian friends in Moscow and elsewhere drew my attention to everyday sights of elderly pensioners and small children standing along city sidewalks, tearfully begging for a few coins to buy a loaf of bread, and to severely disabled veterans struggling to navigate steep metro steps on makeshift scooters that carried their legless and armless bodies. One friend, a doctor who worked closely with victims of domestic abuse, confided that she was deeply troubled by what seemed to her to be skyrocketing rates of homelessness and the medical and hygiene problems caused by life on the streets.

Alongside such concerns over socioeconomic disparities were complaints about disruptions of general civility in public and private spaces. Moscow's mounting traffic problems were a favorite topic, especially the prevalence of rude and dangerous drivers, as well as the publicly visible displays of alcoholism that accompanied the growing occupation of public spaces by young people at night and on weekends. Other acquaintances noted the apparent escalation of physical violence, especially acts of domestic violence between family members, including between parents and

children. One friend, an English-language teacher whose clients included professionals from Moscow's leading businesses, was proud when her own professional successes were marked by her ability to become a home owner. Yet her initial excitement over her newly purchased apartment was quickly replaced by despair when she was forced to endure the constant fighting and screaming that emanated from the apartment next door. Still others complained about the graffiti, rubbish, and human excrement that littered both public walkways and vestibules of private buildings. Elderly friends specifically mentioned the fading away of public norms such as giving up one's seat on the metro for elderly, disabled, or pregnant passengers.

Within this context of mounting frustration and even resentment about social problems, the senseless killing of one of Moscow's metro dogs crystallized in a very public and visceral way the more widespread feelings of sadness and anger over the seeming disappearance of basic human decency and a loss of community cohesion. By investing considerable effort into mobilizing their neighborhood and working through Moscow's bureaucracy, local residents directly challenged hate and violence and sent a forceful message that shared values and practices of care and kindness remained at the core of daily Russian life. In this way, a simple statue of a stray dog turned the intimacies of compassion into a publicly performed act of civic responsibility.

For me, the installation of the Compassion statue beautifully exemplified the private and public acts of care and kindness that I have witnessed over my many years of doing research in Russia. I have witnessed countless people dig into their tote bags and pass on their own lunches to beggars and watched as elderly pensioners who depend on a food aid program dish some of their small daily portion of kasha onto paper plates for the stray cats that share their neighborhood. In the dead of winter, neighbors have propped open the doors to apartment building vestibules so that homeless people and animals might have a place to keep dry and warm. I have met and accompanied high school and university students who spend their evenings walking city streets to deliver sandwiches to homeless persons with whom they have developed deep and genuinely affectionate relationships. Middle-aged workers with tight paychecks and even tighter schedules conscientiously checked on their elderly and disabled neighbors by "dropping by" with the "too much" produce that they "accidentally" purchased at the

market. Attorneys, social workers, and clergy whom I knew dismissed the hate mail and death threats they received in order to continue serving and publicly advocating for Russia's most disenfranchised populations: the homeless, ethnic and racial minorities, and undocumented migrants. Through such acts, ordinary citizens and public servants alike link personal acts of genuine kindness with larger political and ethical issues and values. They are not simply caring for others, but caring for others in ways that have the potential to intervene in some of the most pressing civic issues in today's Russia: poverty, crime, immigration, and intolerance.

The ordinariness with which people engage in such activities invites intriguing questions not just about why care, kindness, and compassion matter in today's Russia, but also about the kinds of social and political work that care does. How and why do people engage with social problems and injustices? What does it mean to care for or to love another person, especially a complete stranger? How do acts of care shift between spontaneous acts to deliberate and organized forms of societal or even political improvement? What constitutes "doing good" in a world in which there are many problems and few easy answers? How might instances of "doing good"—helping, caring for, and loving another person—be a necessary part of being an active citizen in the world? And are these forms of civic engagement modes of resisting Russia's newly neoliberal world, or are they modes of supporting, nurturing, and even reinventing this new society? Or are they both simultaneously?

In Moscow, concerns with addressing injustices and righting wrongs have been front and center for the communities and individuals that I have been following for the past two decades. From spontaneous, individual acts of kindness and compassion performed by individuals or small groups of persons to organized projects funded by national and international organizations and administered through formal groups, Russians like my friends and acquaintances have worked hard to channel their personal inclinations to help others into practical action. Clearly, these activities matter to people. Yet intriguingly, when queried about their personal motivations for helping and why these activities matter, respondents have brushed off their actions as simply things one does because they are the right things to do. Above all, despite the seemingly never-ending injustices and constantly worsening problems they describe around them,

friends have articulated a compelling sense of optimism and hope that their efforts, no matter how small and inconsequential, will contribute to something larger that might in turn bring about significant changes in the world around them.

These are the issues and puzzles that animate this book.

At the center of this book is a Moscow-based assistance community that has emerged and coalesced over the past twenty years into a thriving network of charitable service providers with extensive reach across Moscow and Russia more generally. Caring for a broad and diverse range of Russia's population, both in Moscow and beyond, these charitable groups offer and support a broad array of programs that range from basic health services to public lobbying of Russian and international governments on urgent human rights matters. Positioning themselves as caretakers of their fellow human beings, as well as of the greater world around them, members of this community actively promote human decency and kindness in order to "do the right thing" and make the world a better place.

As the experiences and perspectives of the assistance workers, government officials, recipients, and supporters documented here reveal, their work and beliefs are shaped by a practical philosophy of goodness and kindness. In the face of the hardships, injustices, and despair these individuals witness on a regular basis, and confronted by problems they are too often helpless to prevent or alleviate, they nonetheless hold to an optimism that human kindness will ultimately prevail over poverty, injury, and injustice. Ultimately, what connects members of this diverse group of individuals and organizations is a shared concern that caring for others is not simply a practical matter or an idealistic, even utopian vision, but rather a project of faith and hope.

It is not insignificant that the individuals and organizations that comprise this network and subscribe to these views are enmeshed in what might conventionally be called "faith-based communities." At the heart of these communities is a core group of religiously affiliated organizations: Christian churches (Russian Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and Protestant), denominationally affiliated national and international development organizations (e.g., Caritas, Catholic Charities, Lutheran World Relief, the development department of the Russian Orthodox Church, among others), and small charities supported with funding and materials

from religious communities. These organizations are linked into a broader network of development and humanitarian organizations with religious backgrounds (e.g., Habitat for Humanity, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, and the Aga Khan Foundation), national and international development and humanitarian organizations (Russian state agencies and funding bodies, USAID, International Organization for Migration, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Russian Red Cross, and the International Red Cross), and numerous governmental social welfare agencies and secular nongovernmental social services organizations.

Yet as will become clear, the moniker of “faith-based community” obscures more than it reveals, as these individuals and communities defy easy classification and their practices of faith are oriented to a civic-minded social action that is explicitly pluralistic, and even resolutely secular in many instances. Although “faith-based” is a standard term in scholarly accounts describing such diverse organizations elsewhere in the world (e.g., Adams 2013; Dionne Jr. and Chen 2001; Elisha 2008), and was considered a reasonable generic gloss by the many different people I encountered in Moscow assistance organizations that were both religious and nonreligious, this term risks provoking assumptions that these organizations were explicitly and primarily focused on conversion, embedding religious doctrines and traditions into an ostensibly secular political and economic system, or even interpolating citizens and their lives into a religiously oriented political and economic framework (cf. Adams 2013; Elisha 2008: 211–12; Engelke 2007; Rudnycky 2010; Wanner 2007; Wanner and Steinberg 2008).

Within the network of assistance providers documented here, even as faith and hope are guiding ethics, religiosity and spirituality are often less important than a clear sense of a civic commitment to social justice. At the same time that the practical philosophies of goodness and kindness guiding people’s activities may be grounded in and realized through religious communities and their particular denominational histories and doctrines, they are not uniquely religious per se. These were not conservative, evangelical Christians, but liberal, progressive Christian communities that positioned themselves outside proselytization efforts (cf. Elisha 2011; Engelke 2007; Wanner 2007). Church attendance, belief in or adherence to religious precepts, knowledge of church histories, and even self-identification as a believer were largely superseded by shared commitments to what

many described as more fundamental and universal humanist qualities of human kindness and love. In fact, many people I interviewed and followed denied having any particular religious identity or affiliation or even any interest in religion beyond curiosity or a desire for feeling part of a community.³ By contrast, what most of my interlocutors found compelling about religiously affiliated communities was the extent to which they provided logistical and ethical frameworks for modes of social action that were deeply enmeshed in secular, civic, and even state affairs.

Ultimately, in very tangible ways, this is a community in which faith matters, but where everyone wrestles with what “faith” means and how it can be mobilized into compassionate action that benefits the greater social good, whether for the nation, the state, or a larger human community. In so doing, these individuals and organizations collectively challenge what is understood by “faith” and its effects. Consequently, one of the explicit goals of this book is to unsettle expectations of what “faith-based” means by examining critically what faith is and what it does.

By documenting the efforts of these individuals and the organizations with which they are affiliated as they strive to serve and help others in Moscow, this book takes up the question of what constitutes faith-based compassion in Russian life today. Specifically, I am concerned with what it means to live faithfully when striving to correct injustices. A key piece to this discussion is a consideration of the issue of faith as a spiritual, philosophical, economic, and even civic quality that makes compassion possible and actionable. As such, this is not so much a book about religion, religious charities, or religious perspectives on poverty, injustice, or suffering more generally, as it is an ethnographic account of how members of this particular assistance community in Moscow have mobilized faith-driven ideals about compassion, service, and social action to create an alternative system of social welfare and social justice that is contributing meaningfully to Russian society.

PERFORMING CARE BETWEEN THE CIVIL AND THE CIVIC

In her ethnography of the Italian state’s neoliberal projects to outsource and privatize the responsibility for providing care by conscripting the vol-

untary labor of ordinary citizens, Andrea Muehlebach (2012) has argued that these moves have reconfigured not just the organization of civic life, most notably divisions between public and private spheres, but also the nature of the citizen in this new world. Identifying this new citizen as a “moral neoliberal” who is motivated by affect to do the work of supporting and improving society, Muehlebach (2012: 11) asks, “what are we to make of the public production of citizens as heartfelt subjects?” This question is critically pertinent to the issues animating the cultures of compassion at play in Moscow and in Russia more generally. The events and issues that I discuss here come at a particular historical moment in Russia, as the state, its citizens, and other residents debate fundamental questions about their relationships to one another and specifically whether service to others is a civic responsibility (Malkki 2015; Muehlebach 2012).

Prior to the creation of the Soviet Union, acts of benevolence and compassion were carried out primarily through and by religious institutions. During the Soviet era of the twentieth century, benevolence and compassion lost their official connection to religious traditions and were transformed into state-sponsored activities rather than privately held ethics and activities. As such, the state recalibrated need into entitlements and charity into a social welfare system of rights and protections guaranteed to all citizens.⁴ To provide labor for this collective social welfare system, the state encouraged—and even coerced—citizens into practicing compassion as part of a form of moral citizenship. Schools, workplaces, and neighborhood associations organized compulsory voluntary activities that mobilized citizens to provide caretaking for others: children, the disabled, the elderly, and other less fortunate individuals, as well as the environment, the state, and a more abstract notion of society.

Such official and mandatory forms of compassion often backfired, as citizens may have grudgingly participated in voluntary activities while distancing themselves from any sense of compassion or empathy for the beneficiaries of their actions. Instead, it was private and individual acts of mutual support and caretaking among family members, friends, and neighbors that were more often associated with feelings such as empathy or even friendship (Caldwell 2004). Consequently, caring activities were often bifurcated between what Jodi Halpern (2001) has described as empathic encounters—those in which care providers and recipients are

emotionally connected—and encounters marked by “detached concern.” As for the case of Russia, acquaintances have suggested that emotional disconnection between care providers and beneficiaries was characterized not simply by disinterest but by apathy or even active hostility (Caldwell 2007). Toward the end of the Soviet period, during a period of ongoing political, social, and environmental crises (including the Chernobyl disaster), community ethics of compassion shifted as grassroots citizens’ groups began challenging not just the state’s monopoly on controlling and directing compassionate activity, but more importantly its ability to provide adequate social services, by setting up independent charities.

These grassroots efforts by private citizens have been the backbone of charitable and philanthropic activity in Russia since the early 1990s, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The first decade of the post-Soviet transition was notable for extensive infusions of cash, supplies, and personnel from foreign governments and development organizations that were interested in ridding Russia and the other former Soviet Bloc countries of their state socialist pasts and transforming them into modern, neoliberal capitalist democracies. One of the most immediate responses by the Russian state was to reduce social welfare services, under the rationale that welfare was no longer an entitlement but was, in fact, an impediment to cultivating the new ethos of autonomy and independence required of post-Soviet citizens (Kornai 1997, 2001). By withdrawing from social welfare—or “social protection” (*sotsial’naia zashchita*) as social services are also termed in Russia—the Russian state left a gap in service provision that was filled by charitable and benevolent organizations and private citizens. More importantly, according to social services providers and recipients, this withdrawal was also an affective one, with the state acquiring a new neoliberal identity of impartiality and nonsentimentality, thereby leaving the affective work of “compassion” to private citizens and organizations. In the second and now third decades of Russia’s post-Soviet period, nonprofit social services providers continue to supplement the limited efforts and abilities of state agencies.

Within this larger landscape of nonprofit social services provision in the 1990s, faith communities focused primarily on poverty relief. At the beginning of the post-Soviet period, when socioeconomic disparities were

in greatest focus, programs that provided basic sustenance to the poorest Russians were the most common and popular: food relief programs, orphanage support, and material support for the disabled, elderly, and homeless.⁵ Although some larger charitable groups, including those sponsored by faith communities, have been engaged in multiple projects and issues simultaneously, the field of social services as a whole has been marked by niches, as most programs have specialized in a small subset of related programs: children, immigrants, health care, education, or housing, among others. For instance, Russian Protestant minister Pastor Ivan's description of his congregation in the early 1990s—"we were like a distribution center here"—was due to their role as a hub for receiving and dispensing medicine and food, often from foreign donors.

Following that initial focus on immediate material needs, faith communities expanded their efforts to reach constituencies beyond the most impoverished. During the height of Russia's financial crisis in the mid-2000s, when rates of personal credit defaults were increasing, the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) was a leader in creating programs focusing on financial management, debt counseling, and safe investing for middle-class professionals and recent retirees. A number of Christian congregations and faith-based NGOs created an alternative medical system with high-quality treatment programs and care for Muscovites from all socioeconomic levels. Nina, the director of the ROC's development department, stated that medical care at the ROC's charitable hospital in Moscow was so good that wealthy Russians attempted to buy their way into the wards, only to be turned down on the grounds that the ROC needed to keep the program accessible to all.

Another group of closely affiliated denominations cooperated on several distinct projects ranging from heritage preservation of historic religious buildings in Russia and immigration reform to creating materials for multiculturalism and tolerance initiatives in Russian school curricula. Yet other faith-based groups have tackled issues such as substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, prison reform, refugee and asylum processing, and entrepreneurialism and small business development, among others.⁶ Clergy and staff have also received invitations to provide expert advising services on service provision, legal matters, management, and fund-raising to groups

as diverse as the International Red Cross, professional labor unions, and the city of Moscow's philanthropy department.

Pastor Ivan reflected that in Moscow, there were many people who had realized that there was more to life than simply making money and they wanted to find ways to live meaningfully by helping others. He noted that without an organizational structure such as that offered by churches, people want to help but cannot; consequently, churches have important roles to play in providing specific and structured ways to help. Nina, the ROC development director, expressed a similar sentiment when she described the church's efforts to educate people to be responsible to and for their neighbors. She commented that in today's society, the church can help people do something for one another: "There are many ways to help others."

Consequently, acts of care and compassion have been associated, in both public sentiment and practical expression, with the work of private citizens, largely as simultaneously shoring up the needs of the state and offering powerful critiques of the shortcomings of the state. In the late 2000s, a popular form of public action occurred via social media, as "flash mobs" of civic-minded young adults organized spontaneously through internet communities to perform random acts of voluntarism and activism benefiting communities in need. Thus, much like in the Italian case described by Muehlebach, Russians' care work, whether rendered privately or through charitable organizations, is fundamentally embedded in the country's civic life (see also Hemment 2015).

Over the past ten years, the Russian state has increasingly recognized in public ways the value of kindness and compassion as part of an ethical citizenship. In 2009, Moscow's social defense agency launched a campaign to promote tolerance and compassion with a series of advertisements featuring young girls wearing blindfolds, accompanied by the simple caption "I see with my heart." By summer 2014, it was impossible to ignore Moscow's compassion campaign, as a "social media" advertising blitz had blanketed the city's streets with billboards encouraging residents to support and get involved in a diverse array of charitable initiatives ranging from children's cancer research and elder care to animal welfare. This is the ethos of compassion that is already alive and well among Moscow's faith-based communities and that has guided their work and allowed their activities to grow and become successful.



Figure 2. The caption to this billboard reads “I see with my heart.” It appeared on busy Moscow streets in 2009 as part of the city’s promotion of compassion as a civic virtue and activity. Copyright Melissa L. Caldwell.

FAITH AND THE POWER OF POTENTIAL

In Moscow, as in other parts of Russia, local responses to the outsourcing of social assistance have been diverse in terms of both organizational structure and ideological focus. The field has at different moments been composed of governmental social welfare agencies, Russian and foreign nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), informal operations run out of private citizens’

apartments, and international relief agencies such as the International Red Cross, Doctors Without Borders, and the Peace Corps. At different moments, assistance programs have worked together, at cross-purposes, and in isolation from one another. Determinations of “success” or “effectiveness” are thus difficult to ascertain. Certainly for many aid seekers I have met, there is a persistent sense that there has been far too little assistance. As Ruth Mandel (2012: 224) has noted in an account of the rise and fall of post-Soviet assistance programs, “something has gone remarkably, profoundly wrong . . . This period witnessed the highest per capita amount of international development assistance ever invested in a region, yet despite this deluge, many of the countries appear not to be better off.”

Curiously, Moscow’s faith-based social services programs have earned a reputation for being relatively more successful than their nonreligious counterparts in addressing need, a perspective documented for faith-based organizations operating elsewhere in the world (e.g., Adams 2013; Bornstein 2005; Elisha 2011; Fountain, Bush, and Feener, eds., 2015; Muehlebach 2012). Moscow aid seekers whom I interviewed expressed preferences for faith-based programs, citing what they believed to be the greater degree of personal care and greater amount of material support that these projects provided. A common response from interlocutors was the assertion that churches are simply more accustomed to helping others.

Perhaps the most common example of this alleged greater success that I heard during my research was the purported difference between faith-based and secular programs in addressing addiction problems in Russia. When describing relative success rates of different treatment programs, as measured in terms of continuing sobriety and lack of recidivism and return to rehabilitation, clergy, Russian social workers, and nonaffiliated health professionals alike were consistent in their assertions: as numerous individuals told me, while secular rehabilitation programs typically had success rates of about five to ten percent, Christian rehabilitation programs boasted success rates of around sixty to seventy percent.⁷ I was never able to verify those figures, but whether or not they were accurate was not nearly as significant as the prevalent view that Christian programs were more effective.

Another set of success stories focused on the impact of faith-based organizations on human rights problems in Russia. International human

rights organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the International Organization for Migration, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch have all partnered with Moscow-based religious organizations to work with Russian and international governmental agencies to provide unbiased, fair services to asylum seekers and other migrants with tenuous legal status. Perhaps more importantly, these organizations tend to rely on research data about asylum seekers, racial discrimination, and human rights violations generated by these faith-based organizations. Al Jazeera, the British Broadcasting Corporation, and the Economist are just a few of the international media organizations that have cited research data gathered by faith-based organizations. Even Russian media have drawn on their research to push Russian officials to respond to social problems.⁸

Other potential markers of the perceived successes of faith-based organizations include their recognition by the Russian government and official invitations to meetings with officials from welfare services, the police, migration services, and human rights projects. Staff and volunteers with several of the larger congregations and their social services programs received invitations to advise regional and federal departments about best practices for service provision, including fund-raising. Still other programs received grant funding from city and federal authorities. During summer 2009, when the city of Moscow's public campaign to promote compassion and charity was emerging in a "soft launch," two staff members from a church-sponsored NGO that I knew well received an invitation to meet with the director of the city's newly created agency to support philanthropic activities. During the meeting, the director explained that although city officials had allocated money to fund philanthropic groups, their office was having trouble identifying eligible groups with legitimate, and viable, projects. Because this particular church had a strong track record in providing critical social welfare services over an almost twenty-year period, the director strongly encouraged the staff members to apply for a grant from the city.

Even in the current period, during which the Russian government has enacted laws restricting the efforts of "foreign" organizations—most notably the so-called Foreign Agents Law, which requires nonprofit organizations that receive foreign funding to register themselves as "foreign agents," thereby effectively curbing their ability to organize and provide services—the

faith-based groups described here have so far not suffered the same fate as many of their counterparts. In fact, faith-based groups such as the ones in this network continue to operate cautiously but openly, oftentimes in full view of the state. In one case, two faith-based groups provide services in a facility immediately adjacent to the Lubyanka, the headquarters of the KGB and its successor the FSB (Federal Security Service). Over the course of the past twenty years that I have been following this network of faith-based social services groups, they have outlasted the Peace Corps, Doctors Without Borders, USAID, the Ford Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation, among many others. It is important to note, however, that although the overall network of faith-based social services groups has generally outlasted these organizations, some of the particular groups within that network have closed, moved, redefined themselves, or even completely reinvented and renamed themselves (including with new official legal registration from the Russian government).⁹

What accounts for the accomplishments of Moscow's faith-based organizations in maintaining and expanding their work, and even in some cases leveraging those achievements to inform and influence Russian legal and political attitudes and policy? There are, I suspect, several interrelated reasons. In many respects, faith-based organizations are better positioned to weather crises because their institutional structure as spiritual ministries can easily be adapted for social ministry work.¹⁰ In addition, religious communities are more likely to respond to changing needs on the ground, not to expectations and priorities set by bureaucrats or external funders, which may or may not have a basis in reality. Several of the programs I have been following have shifted their projects dramatically over the years as local needs have shifted. One program that was created with the initial purpose of providing material, legal, and social support to single Russian mothers who were raising biracial children had gradually changed its focus over the past twenty years as those children grew up and public attitudes about racial minorities had become more tolerant. Most recently, the program was providing educational and occupational support for those children who were now entering university and the workforce. Several other programs that had been heavily invested in service provision to the elderly in the 1990s had changed their focus to single mothers after Moscow authorities increased pensions for its residents to a level that elevated most reti-

rees out of abject poverty.¹¹ And finally, faith-based organizations sometimes enjoy a degree of privilege and leeway for their presumed moral and institutional superiority in terms of addressing need.

When asked, recipients in faith-based assistance programs repeatedly assured me that they believed there was something special about the fact that religious groups were providing services. One man commented, “It’s important because I think only the Christian church has the strength and power for doing this work,” while another man told me, “Yes, [it] is very important because whatsoever come[s] from God can never be move[d] by any man on earth.” Another simply stated, “A church is a charity organization, and [I] think helping people should be their ultimate goal.” Pastor Ivan, a Russian minister whose Protestant congregation was known for its work with Russian orphans and prisoners, summed up these reasons when he explained that no matter what an individual person’s religious conviction might be, it was a human universal to want to share and help others. Pastor Ivan reflected that as a society, “we (i.e., Russians) do not provide organized opportunities,” but churches do, and they make it possible for people who want to help to give money and their hearts and to share with others.

Although each of these reasons is part of the puzzle, I think there is something else at play that is less about *what* work faith-based organizations do and more about *how* they do it. Specifically, it is the emphasis on faith that animates the ideals and practices of these organizations and the many different people who come together through their activities. As will become clear in the cases that follow, this is not faith in the sense of a belief in a particular doctrine or deity, a conviction in a particular truth, or even as a claim to a moral framework. Rather, as seen through the activities of Moscow’s faith-based communities, faith is a commitment to believing and trusting that goodness will prevail (see also Jeavons 1994: 50–51).¹²

For the many individuals who had struggled through the 1990s and 2000s to move social welfare and justice concerns to the forefront of Russian policy and individual practice, they have sustained their deep convictions that the work did matter and would have significant, profound consequences into the future. Specifically, what has kept Moscow’s faith-based assistance providers going is faith as an optimistic belief that there

is a bigger purpose in life and that things will get better. This is akin to what Cheryl Mattingly terms “hope” in her ethnography of communities of care among poor American families with chronically ill children. For these families, hope is a fight against despair in an effort to imagine and create possibilities (Mattingly 2010). Similarly, in her ethnography of post-Hurricane Katrina recovery in Louisiana, Vincanne Adams (2013) has described faith as what reassured and propelled aid seekers and aid providers forward into imagining, and in some cases realizing, improvement. Yet as both Mattingly and Adams have noted, hope and faith are predicated on doubts, anxieties, and uncertainty: faith and hope are practices of optimism and possibility but do not guarantee absolute or predictable outcomes. As Mattingly (2010: 15) asserts, “Hope lives in an uncertain place. . . . It points us toward a future we can only imagine” (cf. Elisha 2011; Rudnyckyj 2010).

As one physician who volunteers with several faith-based charities told me:

Every day our faith is tested. It is harder to believe than not. When you are actually looking at a world falling apart, it is hard to believe in an all-powerful, all-just God. Yeah, that’s hard. You could do the easy thing and wall yourself off from religious stuff or from problems. If you believe in truth as all relative, then you will never expect anything and are not disappointed. But I have to believe in the Truth. I cannot explain everything that I see or be satisfied, but I keep going and I keep loving. Faith is a challenge every day. But I would rather keep fighting that fight than give up that truth or ignore the obvious.

The Nigerian ambassador, a devout Christian who supported several of Moscow’s churches and their charities both personally and in his professional capacity, explained the nature of faith through similar references to futility and struggle.

If Jesus came to such a country [i.e., Russia], what will his first question be to us as Christians? . . . We as Christians wait for problems to grow, like that big tree. Then we try to move the tree. . . . [But] as Christians and believers we will keep on addressing problems. But too often we fold our hands and close our eyes and lips. So the big question is, when does a Christian’s social responsibility come in? The church must always keep on kicking and never give up.

For individuals like these deeply devout men, faith is a forward-looking optimism, a clinging to goals that they would likely never themselves witness being reached, as has been the case with some of my informants, who have died over the past twenty years or moved away from Moscow, never seeing for themselves the outcome of their work. Yet it is precisely this uncertainty that is important for professions and practices of faith among Moscow's aid providers. As another minister told me when I asked him about the uncertainty of faith, he described it as a profoundly beautiful experience of witnessing the unfolding of a future over which one does not have ultimate control.

Such perspectives do not mean that individuals involved in aid work are abdicating control or responsibility over their actions or the outcomes of their actions. Rather, these individuals do not identify practices of faith and care as conditions for producing particular results. Unlike the conservative American Christian evangelicals described by Omri Elisha (2011), whose interest in putting their faith into practical action, most notably social services, was geared at helping their recipients adopt new behaviors and beliefs (both material and moral), the individuals who participated in these Moscow assistance communities separated what they could reasonably achieve (i.e., provide care) from any personal assurances of the greater consequences of those actions.

For participants within these Moscow faith-based social services programs, faith that is put into practice becomes a future-oriented, dynamic, generative quality that mobilizes action and produces results. Faith circulates through an affective economy of kindness, compassion, and love. As such, it is external to any one individual but becomes a form of capital that can expand, grow, and produce results (Adams 2013; Ahmed 2004; Miyazaki 2003; Muehlebach 2012). Faith produces results, whether actual ones in the here and now or merely hoped-for results in a not-yet-realized future, much like the forms of hope that guided Miyazaki's Japanese arbitrage workers (2003, 2006) or the millennial capitalists described by Jean and John Comaroff (2000). When it is a divinely inspired Invisible Hand at work, faith is an optimistic, generative force that produces and shapes an entire political economy grounded in ideals of kindness, compassion, and justice (see also Muehlebach 2012: 26).¹³ Faith does not simply imply potentiality and promise, but it is an energy

that produces real, tangible results in this-worldly struggles against injustice.

This point came through clearly in my interview with Father Thomas, a Catholic priest, when he reflected on the nature of charity and care.

Do we engage people in difficulties? Yes. Do we look out for them? [Yes.] Do we try to draw them in like flies to honey? No. Do we help them? Yes. We do things because they seem to be the right things at the right time. Were those things planned? No. Things happen; they seem to be part of events. Is that altruism? I don't know. These were just the things that happened. You just take these things as they go along.

Ultimately, as the examples described in this book show, faith represents people's commitment to trying to find and enact goodness and decency in daily life, even when the realization of those efforts seems doubtful. While personal convictions may be bolstered by religious practices that allow individuals to appeal to higher powers or to draw evidence of goodness from Biblical teachings, people's daily actions are embedded more explicitly in ideals and discourses of social justice and human rights. Ultimately, the people who comprise this community share a belief in the inherent goodness of people and the necessity of rightness as an ethical responsibility to make sure that all creatures—human and nonhuman alike—can flourish. Thus it is faith that sustains them and their work and enables future possibilities and opportunities.

This is a provocative and perhaps counterintuitive way to think about faith as a principled stance and technique of transforming optimism into reality, especially in a context such as Russia, where scholars, religious leaders, and politicians alike have tended to render faith as a distinctively religious or spiritual practice, albeit for different purposes (Hann and Goltz 2010; Metropolitan Hilarion 2013; Wanner and Steinberg 2008; cf. Berger 2013). Yet it is precisely this optimism and belief in a future goodness that illuminates the ways in which faith is more than belief but a practical activity with profound and tangible effects (Adams 2013; Mattingly 2010). At the same time, it is not simply a utopian dream but a practice that people enact and experience in very tangible ways.

In the discussion that follows, I treat faith as a form of practice that community members talk about, strive to enact, and then credit for the

changes they witness. By focusing on faith as a distinctive feature of religiously affiliated compassion projects, I trace the contributions that this community has made to Russian civic life. Both in terms of political and economic activities, I examine how and why faith has played such a significant and consequential role. My discussion is organized around various permutations of the practice of faith as a mode of civic engagement, the forms of civil society and civic person these modes take, and the uncertainties and precarities that are revealed by the practical actions of faith.

I begin by considering how the secular humanist and public service orientations of faith-based assistance groups and their members have produced both a philosophy of social justice and a strategy of cooperation that I am calling ecumenism. This ecumenism rests on interfaith partnerships and has transformed the nature of religious life in Russia today. I then turn to an examination of the place of faith-based groups within Russian practices of public service and civic engagement, with particular attention to the ways in which compassion is a practical experience of shared intimacy, a perspective that informs how participants conceive of both justice and spirituality. The discussion then situates faith-based organizations and the values of compassion and kindness on which they draw within the larger context of Russian development projects. A key aspect is the contributions of faith-based organizations to civil society initiatives, most notably through their emphasis on civility and humaneness as something greater than humanitarianism or human rights. As civil society actors, members of Moscow's faith-based assistance communities promote principled practices of service that belong to a longer history of the ways in which faith-based organizations have worked in partnership with the state. As such they are engaged in practices of "ethical citizenship" that promote care for others, not just as an essential quality of human decency but as a critical right and responsibility of being a citizen of the nation-state, what Muehlebach (2012: 11) has described as "citizenship to be lived with the heart" (see also Malkki 2015).¹⁴ I then turn to the consequences of this focus on service with regard to Russia's political economy, with particular attention to the ways in which kindness, goodness, and compassion more generally have generated a robust compassion economy that is both productive and problematic. Finally, I turn to the precarity of faith and how as faith-based proponents increasingly take on

explicitly human rights work, they must navigate a delicate balancing act between preserving humaneness while safeguarding rights that calls into question their personal beliefs about both social justice and religion.

MOSCOW'S FAITH-BASED CHARITABLE ASSISTANCE WORLD

The questions and issues that animate this book have emerged out of my ongoing research in Russia. During that research I have been captivated by how and why ordinary people expend time, energy, and resources to help the people around them in an effort to make the immediate world around them a little better for all who live in it. In the mid-1990s, I began conducting fieldwork among several church-based social services charities in Moscow. That research was unplanned but fortuitous, as my initial research project in the early 1990s was meant to examine Russia's emergent consumer society by focusing on how Muscovites were experiencing the country's transition to a post-Soviet, neoliberal capitalist economy.¹⁵ Just as I entered the field, the Russian economy suffered a setback, which prompted several years of economic stagnation and widespread shortages of money and consumer goods. In response, charities and other social services programs expanded their reach, and in so doing found themselves inheriting the role of social welfare providers that had formerly been the domain of the state. As a result, rather than focusing on consumer growth, I found it more interesting and timely to look at how post-Soviet consumers dealt with scarcity and their relationships with these new social welfare providers. This led me to a community of Christian congregations that were among the most active in Moscow's social welfare sphere (Caldwell 2004).

Over the past twenty years, even as I have engaged in other research projects in Russia, I have continued to follow members of this community as they have modified and expanded their services, navigated Russia's changing political and cultural currents, and more generally established themselves as reliable actors in Moscow civic initiatives. By the mid-2000s, the growing politicization of Russia's religious landscape was marked by what appeared to be growing closeness between the Russian

Orthodox Church and the Russian state and the concomitant marginalization, even ostracism, of non-Orthodox religions, especially other Christian communities. The passage of new laws and regulations defining which religions were “traditional,” and thus “legal,” marked most non-Orthodox groups as not legally recognized and therefore in constant danger of being closed or, in the case of groups with foreign members (which included several of the churches I had been following), having their members deported.

Within this context, the network of religiously affiliated social services providers that I had been following not only expanded their programs but gained legal recognition, which in turn endowed them with certain protections by city and state authorities. Most intriguingly, at a time when the leadership of the Russian Orthodox Church, often in coordination with conservative political parties, was publicly promoting religious and cultural isolationism, these social services programs and the non-Orthodox churches that sponsored them had established formal, albeit often very quiet, working relations with their Orthodox counterparts, including in the offices of the patriarchate. I became deeply curious as to why these religious communities and their social services programs were able to weather these events and even thrive in some cases, and my curiosity repeatedly brought me back to these communities, following them as they changed over time.

Thus, the research on which this book is based began in the mid-1990s, although the majority of events and issues described here came from fieldwork conducted between 2005 and 2010, with follow-up visits in 2011, 2014, and 2015. Having the vantage point of twenty years of ongoing field research has been both advantageous and challenging. As I have described elsewhere (Caldwell 2005), in a setting like Moscow that is characterized by people in transit and organizations in flux, I have been one of the most regular and constant features of this community. I have watched as clergy, parishioners, and staff of churches and social services programs have cycled through (one church community that I have followed has rotated among at least six clergy over the past twenty years, while others have had the same clergyperson for the entire duration of my research). In other cases for charities that I have been tracking, I have watched competing dynamics as, on the one hand, volunteers have moved up through the ranks to paid staff over the course of one or two decades, while other volunteers

have come and gone. As a result of this length of time, I have been fortunate to be able to recognize patterns at different scales, both short-term and long-term. I have also been fortunate to develop deep and abiding friendships and collegial relationships, and I have had a front-row seat to important life cycles of children growing up, parents aging, romantic partnerships forming and dissolving, and friends dying. In many ways, despite working in a city of more than fifteen million people, I have been able to enjoy some semblance of the classic, albeit mythical, village anthropology.

At the same time, this long-term research within these communities has necessarily kept me involved in their affairs rather than venturing further afield to other topics or other regions of Russia. While this may indeed be a shortcoming, the fact is that these communities have changed dramatically in many different ways, and they are not the same communities that they were twenty years ago. They have expanded, moved in new directions, and created new networks and identities. Virtually all of the social services programs that I have been following over the years have thoroughly reinvented themselves, as has more than one of the churches described here. It would be a grave anthropological misstep to presume that these communities remained static over time. Perhaps most notably, in the case of programs that started in the late 1980s and early 1990s with the help of “foreigners,” they have firmly established themselves within Moscow as local communities, including with legal registration identifying them as “Russian” entities. As a result, my deep temporal investment in this world offered contacts and insights that would not be possible in a new community after only a year or two.

At the heart of these communities is a network of assistance programs that includes the church that was part of my original research in the 1990s: the Christian Church of Moscow (CCM). In the 1990s, the CCM like many of its counterparts, including other groups described in this book, tended to operate more or less alongside but separately from other organizations. Since then, as the faith-based charitable sector has expanded, both religious and nonreligious organizations have increasingly forged religious and assistance partnerships, thereby facilitating a vibrantly multicultural and eclectic community that traverses religious, secular, and governmental lines. As a result, the CCM has become one node within a much larger network of partners, affiliates, and supporters that extend across Moscow and beyond.

Other nodes in this larger faith-based assistance network represent a diverse set of Christian and non-Christian communities: Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, Quaker, the Salvation Army, Jewish, Muslim, and Hare Krishna, to name just a few among a large community. In some cases, individual congregations sponsor social services as part of their outreach programming, while in other cases formal aid projects have been formed and administered through partnerships among multiple congregations. In still other instances, groups of volunteers from a variety of religious backgrounds come together formally and informally under ecumenical, even secular understandings of social action. One of the most active and visible of these ecumenical groups is the local chapter of Sant'Egidio, a street ministry started in Rome by a Catholic priest that attracts socially progressive, young adult Russians from a range of religious backgrounds, including atheists. Additionally, formal and informal partnerships bring together individual congregations and transnational denominational development agencies such as the Catholic agency Caritas, Lutheran World Relief, World Vision, and the Jewish Joint Distribution Council.

These communities rarely work in isolation from one another. The multifaceted work that religious and social services organizations pursue brings them into relationships with diverse partners across the religious/nonreligious spectrum. In some cases, partnerships reflect logical synergies between closely related religious denominations. Within Moscow's Protestant community, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist communities have long worked together, finding common ground in spite of historical divisions, such as those between Russia's indigenous German and Ingrian Lutheran communities or between liberal and evangelical and even Pentecostal congregations. In other cases, partnerships span more sharply defined and publicly visible ruptures, such as those forged by Russian Orthodox and Russian Catholic communities, or between Christian, Jewish, and Muslim groups. One of the curious details that emerged during this research was the extent to which ministerial work was a profession and not exclusively a denominational affiliation, as clergy from different denominations often knew one another professionally and personally from having studied together at prominent ecumenical seminaries in the United States or Western Europe.¹⁶ For these individuals,

bringing their congregations together for shared projects was a natural extension of their own preexisting friendships and partnerships, which they saw as being based on shared experiences, not necessarily identical values and perspectives.

In fact, it was not uncommon for clergy ordained in one denomination to be employed in a service position in another denomination, as the ongoing interfaith dialogues and working partnerships forged by different religious communities illuminated the extent to which denominational traditions and theological differences were less significant than expressing compatible viewpoints on the types of services to provide and the system for administering those programs. Despite the Russian Orthodox Church's official rhetoric of exclusivity and its often public face of hostility to other religious traditions viewed as "competitors" (e.g., Knox 2008), the patriarchate's service programs employed staff who had been ordained in other faiths.

Collaborative relationships with other religious communities were supplemented by partnerships with nonreligious organizations, including governmental agencies and international humanitarian and development organizations that have shared interests. For instance, the Russian Red Cross, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and regional and provincial-level welfare offices have supported poverty relief programs sponsored by church groups in Russia, while staff from USAID and the American, British, Irish, and Nigerian embassies, among others, have worked closely with religious communities that offer health care services to low-income and homeless Russians.

I would note that one formally organized community largely absent from the network I have been following is that of Muslim groups. Although I have attempted to document the role of Muslim groups in social services over the past decade, this has been a surprisingly difficult task. Development and assistance providers in Moscow whom I approached for help in making contact with Muslim service providers repeatedly told me that they did not know of any such providers working in this area. Most intriguing was that several development/assistance programs I approached had significant Muslim communities among their recipients—all of whom received services from Christian communities. The imam of one of Moscow's mosques was in fact a registered aid recipient with one of the Protestant churches described here. The arrival of the Aga Khan Foundation in Moscow in 2009

was an exciting development precisely because aid providers saw it as the first instance of Muslim assistance in Moscow. In fact, this was how the director of the Aga Khan Foundation announced their presence—as their first venture in Russia proper. In 2014, a colleague related that the Gülen movement was just starting to become active in Moscow.¹⁷ Nevertheless, as I discuss later in this book, whether or not Muslim groups were active in Moscow social services work is not critical as a detail in and of itself, since one of the fascinating developments from faith-based welfare has been the creation of interfaith, secular theologies of compassion and social action.

The individuals whom I have interviewed and shadowed come from across the assistance spectrum: recipients and their family members, volunteers, staff, clergy, congregants, donors, attorneys, social workers, Russian government officials, foreign diplomatic staff, and random strangers, among many others who inhabit Moscow's assistance world. Collectively they represent an equally diverse set of legal, economic, ethnic, racial, and national backgrounds: Russian and foreign; religious, atheist, and avowedly secular; university students, pensioners, undocumented economic migrants, professionals, and the homeless, among many, many others. With them I have attended church services, church council meetings, and church fellowship activities; volunteered in and visited a broad array of social welfare programs, funding agencies, international aid and development organizations, and governmental offices and programs; attended meetings at attorney's offices, with real estate agents, business managers, and corporate executives; and participated in seminars, workshops, and roundtables sponsored by federal and international organizations. To accommodate the fluid nature of this research, I have had to conduct interviews in Russian, English, German, and French, at times tracking the shifting linguistic registers of conversations between individuals from different backgrounds as they talked with one another through multiple languages. In some cases I became the translator for people who were talking with one another; at other times I accompanied staff and volunteers who did not speak the same language and then observed as they carried on conversations through another multilingual staff member who served as a translator.

Working with these individuals and groups has taken me into some unexpected places far beyond people's homes and workplaces: press

conferences at the ITAR-TASS news agency; meetings at the offices of the International Red Cross, International Organization for Migration, and the Aga Khan Foundation, some of which were attended by high-ranking Russian officials; interviews and events at foreign embassies, including the offices and personal residences of ambassadors; a reception hosted by the US ambassador for the American Secretary of State; black-tie gala events; supermarket aisles and managers' offices; public parks; and the patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church.

TROUBLING CONVENTIONS

One of the threads of this book examines how the work of Moscow's faith-based assistance programs and their members proceeds precisely because they exist and operate in a civic zone of compassion and assistance that straddles multiple registers of public and private, governmental and non-governmental, commercial and nonprofit, religious and secular. In this respect, to practice forms of social action faithfully is to inhabit spaces of uncertainty and confusion and to find opportunities and potentialities within those "borderlands" (Mattingly 2010). As a result, as a mode of foreshadowing some of the uncertainties and messiness that follow, I would like to offer a few preliminary notes about some of the words, phrases, and concepts that will appear in the discussions to come.

The first instance of categorical messiness is that of trying to parse out what constitutes "religious" and "secular" or "not religious" among the individuals and programs detailed here. In terms of their focus on "religious" concerns such as belief, theology, practice, and identity, religiously affiliated assistance organizations cover a broad spectrum. At one end are organizations with explicitly religious origins and affiliations (for example, congregational social ministries or the development department of the Russian Orthodox Church) and at the other are groups that are adamantly secular (for example, Habitat for Humanity and Oxfam). Faith communities can also differ significantly in regard to whether they explicitly couple assistance with the performance of religious obligation, whether on the part of service providers or recipients. Orthodox and Jewish programs in Moscow are among those that require recipients to declare their religious affiliation and

perhaps even to attend services (see also Tocheva 2011). While these conditions are acceptable to some Russians, including persons who might strategically claim religious affiliation (or more than one) without committing completely to any one congregation, others find them too limiting (see Caldwell 2010). Russian Orthodox churches have come under particular scrutiny for restricting services to enrolled members rather than to all Russians. Staff with the development office at the patriarchate confided that while these regulations were necessary for practical reasons, they were undesirable in terms of providing assistance to those individuals who were truly in need, regardless of their religious backgrounds. These requirements for religiosity are in sharp contrast with communities such as Oxfam and Habitat for Humanity whose religious origins have been largely forgotten and who do not demand religious affiliation or activity from either supporters or recipients.¹⁸

More common, however, are groups that do not disguise their religious origins or institutional affiliations but implement their social services programs as secular programs. The Christian Church of Moscow is like many congregations that have created explicitly secular assistance organizations for ideological reasons, namely that it is an ethical responsibility to help anyone in need and to attract volunteers regardless of their personal religious backgrounds. Similarly, although the employees in the Moscow office of Caritas were practicing Catholics, including several priests, their work was explicitly nonreligious. They worked independently of any of the Catholic churches in Moscow and provided their services through spaces rented or borrowed from local government agencies. Recipients were largely unaware of the program's connections to the Catholic Church, a detail that Caritas's staff were keen to maintain given anti-Catholic sentiments in Russia. Staff and volunteers with nonprofit programs administered by other religious congregations have even reported that their recipients were completely unaware that they were being helped by a church, thinking instead that the program was operated by the regional government.

The term "secular" poses similar problems. As I will discuss later, there are no easy distinctions between "religious" and "secular" in Russian terminology or practice. Although the word *svetskie* is the word most commonly used to mean "nonreligious," in practice Russian organizations and laws have created a complex and shifting terminological system to

designate nonreligious organizations as nonprofit (*nekommercheskie*, noncommercial) or nongovernmental (*nepravitel'stvennie*, nongovernmental, or *obshchestvennie*, social / community, among other renderings) entities. As Sonja Luerhmann (2011) has documented, “secularism” has a very particular political and historical context in Russia. Most notably, the Soviet project of secularization prioritized a human-centric approach by removing nonhuman (including mystical) agents from daily life and recalibrating people’s affective frames of reference for moral, cultural, and social relations. Thus, while Soviet-style “secularism” shares some similarities with movements described by Talal Asad (2003) and Charles Taylor (2007), it also derived from a very different set of political and philosophical contexts. Therefore, I use this term carefully, either to reflect its use by my informants or to capture what seems to be the most important features of a particular organization at a given time, rather than to make a clear statement about whether a group or action is definitively aligned with a religious or nonreligious sphere or approach.

It is worth noting that although most of the religiously affiliated charities that operated as secular entities described here did so for ideological reasons, this had pragmatic ramifications because it satisfied Russian laws governing the interaction of “foreign”—that is, non-Orthodox Christian—religious communities with Russian citizens. Moreover, because of their secular nature, these types of faith organizations also tended to work closely with other national and international assistance and development organizations, both religious and nonreligious, as well as with Russian and foreign governmental agencies. As such, they enjoyed both a greater degree of security and a more diverse set of partners than either their explicitly religious counterparts or international development agencies.

Distinctions between “foreign” and “domestic” or “Russian” constitute the second layer of categorical messiness. One interesting feature of Moscow’s faith communities is that many have occupied dual roles as both beneficiary and donor, as over the past twenty years they have simultaneously relied on assistance to support their own programming as religious communities and on funding for their public service activities. As I heard from numerous clergy whom I interviewed about their congregations’ charitable activities, some of their own congregations were the recipients of international and domestic humanitarian aid during the initial period of

the post-Soviet transition when foreign congregations sent considerable sums of money, material resources, and personnel to Russia in order to create or rehabilitate religious communities. Although American ministers and churches that sent aid and missionaries to Russia for evangelism and church-building activities, such as Billy Graham and his ministry, have been the most publicly visible and recognizable, denominational bodies and individual congregations from Western Europe (Germany, Finland, and the United Kingdom, in particular), Asia (especially Korea and Japan), and Australia have also been active in these areas (see Caldwell 2015).

At the same time, faith communities have also received support from Russian sources, including governmental bodies, primarily in the form of the return of real estate and other property that had been seized from religious communities by the state during the Soviet period. In some instances, post-Soviet Russian authorities have returned church buildings, synagogues, mosques, seminaries, monasteries, and other religious property to their former owners, or the successors to these religious communities, although by no means has this been a comprehensive policy. The Russian Orthodox Church has perhaps been the most visible recipient of these returns, but Russia's other faith communities—Baptists, Lutherans, Anglicans, Catholics, Methodists, and Jews, to name just a few—have also had property returned to them. Faith communities have also benefited from grant funding and other forms of financial support from nonreligious development programs and private donors geared at restoring religious heritage and values.¹⁹

Perhaps more significantly, despite persistent presumptions by both Russians and outsiders (including skeptical anthropologists) that non-Orthodox Christian churches are “foreign” congregations in the sense that they are denominations that were not indigenous to Russia but were introduced from abroad, largely as part of the massive proselytization efforts of the 1990s, this is not necessarily true, especially for the communities described here. Lutheran, Baptist, Methodist, Anglican, and Catholic denominations, among many other Christian faiths, existed in Russia for several centuries before the Bolshevik Revolution and are now reclaiming and rebuilding their historical legacies, even as they are creating ties with their denominational counterparts abroad. These liberal, progressive denominations are among the most active congregations

described here. Consequently, it would be inaccurate to presume that these congregations are not Russian. Pastor Ivan related that one of his greatest frustrations was convincing Russians that his Korean-Russian congregation was in fact “Russian” and not “foreign.”

Third, if congregations were constantly confusing categories of Russian and not-Russian, so, too, were the individuals who moved through these congregations and the larger social services networks. Although during the earliest phases of this research in the 1990s, the congregations and charities I followed typically had more foreigners than Russians, this has changed over the years. Some congregations are balanced between foreigners and Russians, while others are primarily or exclusively Russian. Most have experienced fluctuations in their congregations and programs over the years, reflecting larger demographic and migration trends within and beyond Russia as foreign expatriates, students, and asylum seekers have entered and left Russia, and as Russian citizens have emigrated abroad or found other interests to occupy their time.

As for non-Russians involved in this work, there are several general patterns. Most were resident in Russia for long periods—some for four or five years at a time, but many for ten to twenty years or longer. These longer periods of residence were most common among the African students and asylum seekers who had come to Russia in the late 1980s and then created lives for themselves, including marrying Russian citizens and having children who were Russian citizens. Other long-term foreign residents were businesspeople who had come to Russia during the same time period and remained for family and other personal reasons. On the other end of the spectrum were Russian citizens who had left during the periods of openness in the late 1980s and early 1990s to study and work in Europe, North America, and Asia, and then returned after many years of living abroad. In some cases, these returnee Russians had less cultural and linguistic capital than their foreign-born counterparts. Within this shifting identity terrain, I have used names that are in keeping with a person’s background—for instance, an English name or a Russian name. Yet even these conventions are at times ambiguous, such as with Korean-Russians who have Anglicized their names, German-Russians who have Germanic names, Africans who have adopted Russian names after marriage to Russian citizens, and Catholic priests who have adopted saints’ names after ordination.

As a result, because even the category of “Russianness” cannot be taken for granted, the question of who is authentically Russian is perhaps not as important as the issue of how the beliefs and actions of individuals involved in these communities are contributing to a particularly Russian civic sphere.

Fourth, referring to and describing any particular individual’s legal status in Russia is tricky, especially as Russian laws have different policies governing the rights and responsibilities of citizens and noncitizens. One important detail is that citizens are required to be legally registered to a place of residence as their official address. Through this address, citizens are registered to a particular district, where they are entitled to receive public services such as access to schools, medical care, and other welfare services. As a result, to lack a legally registered address is to exist outside of legal structures.

In American activist discourse and scholarly and media writings, the term “illegal immigrant” has largely been replaced by “undocumented migrant” (or even “undocumented person”), reflecting the moral idea within US immigration debates that people cannot be illegal but they can be undocumented (e.g., Dumon 1983). Yet the phrase “undocumented migrant” does not easily capture the everyday reality for many persons living in Russia today. For the case of economic and political migrants, who come both from other republics in the former Soviet Union and from foreign countries, most notably sub-Saharan African countries, China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and other Middle Eastern countries, the problem is not that they are undocumented. Rather, the problem is that their documents are not legal. Russia’s foreign borders are very rigid, and the majority of foreign visitors are required to get a visa for entry. Yet it can be relatively easy to purchase an entry visa for Russia, especially education visas given that some university faculty disgruntled by their paltry salaries have supplemented their incomes by “selling” student sponsorships to would-be economic migrants. Other brokers sell business visa invitations to would-be migrants with the promise of a job in construction, transportation, the market, or other sectors, even though most of these jobs never materialize. Thus most individuals enter with legal documents and as legally recognized visitors.

Once foreigners arrive in Russia, they must register their documents at an official place of residence or work. Few economic or political migrants

have an official place of residence, however, and few landlords are willing to “write in” migrants to their apartments, because of the danger that persons who are “registered” to a residence could eventually claim possession. (And often landlords are reluctant to do this even for visitors with fully legal documents, such as a fieldworking anthropologist.) Thus, it is very common for economic and political migrants to become “illegal” quickly; while their documents are legal, they themselves are not registered and so have become illegal. The final step on the path to “illegality” in Russia is that foreigners cannot leave the country without an official exit visa, which requires proof of continuous legal residency registration. Foreigners who have failed to register their residence or who never received an entry / exit visa in the first place do not have legal rights to leave the country.

Qualities such as “illegal” versus “undocumented” become further muddled because of the common practice of sharing documents among economic and political migrants, especially in the African migrant community I worked with most extensively. People who possessed fully legal documents shared them with relatives and friends who were searching for work, needed medical care, or needed to travel either within Russia or abroad. During the summer, it was very common in the African community with which I worked for legally documented individuals who had secure housing and employment in Moscow to lend their documents to other persons who then used them to work in the summer resorts along the Black Sea. In a claim that I heard from numerous Africans, they believed that Russian officials were so racist that all black faces looked alike.

By contrast, Russian citizens could be undocumented, which was especially true for the homeless population, as well as prisoners and former prisoners, children living in orphanages, former orphans, and even persons who had been hospitalized. Poor record-keeping and lack of secure storage are rife across institutions, which has meant that many people have had their documents lost or stolen while they have been institutionalized. Upon release, a lack of documents prevents Russians from accessing housing—or even reclaiming their own legally registered property—and other resources. This forces many people into homelessness until they can accumulate the funds to begin the lengthy process of regaining their documents. Being undocumented can also affect citizens who have had more mundane experiences, such as squabbles with roommates in a

shared flat that result in them being forcibly evicted without their documents, being robbed, or even getting divorced and being forced to move out and unregister from the residence they formerly shared with their spouse. In the latter instance, while a divorced person might have a legal passport, he or she might lack the official registration stamp, which makes him or her illegal.

Consequently, possessing legal documents, possessing legal registration, and being “legal” are not coterminous states. It was far more common for foreigners to possess truthful documents, even if only at certain moments, than it was for Russia’s homeless, orphan, addict, and prison communities to do so. As a result, foreigners could be documented but not legal, while Russians could be both undocumented and in tenuous and shifting states of legal existence. In most cases, Russians were “legal” but could not prove their status until they were able to produce the necessary documents.

In this book, I try to avoid using terms such as “undocumented” or “illegal,” but when I do, it is for very specific reasons relating to the distinctions explained above. It is not my intention to be drawn into debates about American immigration policies, both because those circumstances are vastly different from instances that I describe here, and because the morally laden terminology used in American immigration debates and discussions simply does not work for the Russian case.

More generally, as will become clear in the following chapters, trying to classify and describe fully the activities, philosophies, and approaches undertaken in these communities is complicated, not just because there is such a diversity of groups and projects, but also because there is no neat terminology with which to describe and categorize these communities, their projects, and their legal status and classification. Scholarly traditions, including but not exclusively anthropology, have typically distinguished among social welfare, charity, philanthropy, development, humanitarianism, human rights, and social justice as distinct sets of practices with their own philosophies about interactions between aid givers and aid recipients, the types of assistance that flow between partners, the organizational structures, funding sources, and even temporal modes (see, for instance, Bornstein 2012: 12; Fisher 1997; Redfield and Bornstein 2010).

As for Russian programs described here, faith-based organizations and their affiliates have at different moments described themselves or have been officially classified as charities, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), nonprofits, noncommercial enterprises, development organizations, social services agencies, social welfare programs, social justice groups, human rights organizations, or even humanitarian groups, among many other terms. Moreover, these organizations often pursue many different things simultaneously, sometimes in separate realms. Consequently, they cover a broad spectrum of the types of activities, philosophies, and approaches.

For instance, while Pastor Ivan described his congregation's activities in terms of both spiritual ministry and humanitarianism, his colleague Pastor Mark from another congregation described his congregation's activities in terms of social justice and human rights, acknowledging that these terms reflected the theological perspective of his denomination. A conversation with a woman who created her own food relief program that was subsequently administered by a church reflected this shifting terrain in her response to my question about whether there was necessarily something special about religious organizations doing charitable work. She commented that while some organizations do good things, there is often a *noblesse oblige* connotation with charity, whereas social justice evokes a different sensibility. In her view, for the people doing this work there was a significant difference: "[For] a lot of religious people [who are] true, devout believers, people do charitable work, social justice work, [they] do it because they believe it is God's work." She went on to note that these are more than just "earthly" activities, but are perceived as divinely inspired.

Perhaps the best evidence of the ambiguous nature of Moscow's faith-based groups is their role as connectors between programs, oftentimes to fill gaps created between other projects. Even though Moscow's religious communities are becoming increasingly structured and even bureaucratized in terms of how they administer their programs, most retain an inherent flexibility that allows them to take advantage of unique circumstances and even to access communities that secular NGOs and governmental agencies miss. Above all, religious communities can connect at a more intimate level—specifically, with individual people and the minutiae

of their daily lives. As noted by Eloise, a British national who served as a development director for the charitable projects of one Moscow-based church, the legal aid groups that served the same set of clients served by her church tended to focus on court-level activities, such as changing laws and filing class-action lawsuits, whereas her organization responded to individual cases that were often too messy and ambiguous for class-action work. Unlike larger legal aid groups, her organization could use personal connections to find an attorney, who could often be persuaded to work pro bono, to take on a case involving a single individual.

One such organization was Humanity (*Chelovechnost'*), a secular NGO that focuses on human rights issues in Russia. Alla Mikhailovna was one of the most senior attorneys and had worked with Humanity for almost a decade. Over that time, her organization has partnered with many other groups in Russia and abroad to document human rights violations, especially those against religious, ethnic, racial and other minorities. One of their most active and important set of partners has been an interfaith consortium of churches and faith-based organizations that support racial minorities, including both minorities who are native-born Russian citizens and nonwhite migrants from other parts of the former Soviet Union and from outside Russia.

Given the perilous nature of human rights advocacy and documentation, Alla Mikhailovna and her colleagues rarely met in person and worked from their homes. Alla Mikhailovna was the most public face of the organization and periodically emerged from the privacy and security of her home to make public statements or appear at public events. As a result, she frequently received death threats and confided to me at a workshop on tolerance hosted by an international NGO that she fully expected to be killed for her work. Given these constraints and real fears, Alla Mikhailovna's organization, despite their many accomplishments and the tremendous acclaim they enjoyed, was limited in their ability to pursue all the work they wanted to do. Yet their interfaith partners offered possibilities for working around these constraints, a feature that Alla Mikhailovna identified as one of the most compelling and productive strengths of faith-based work and advocacy in Russian civic life. This is the topic to which I turn in the next chapter.