

**Accountability Through Diversity: Challenges for
Congregation-Based Community Organizing in Detroit**

by

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This work is dedicated to my parents, David and Christine Rusch.

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List of Abbreviations

BYNC	Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council
CBCO	Congregation-Based Community Organizing
CBP	Council of Baptist Pastors
CO	Community Organizing
CRI	Civil Rights for Immigrants (task force)
DARTA	Detroit Area Regional Transit Authority
DCPA	Detroit Catholic Pastors Alliance
DDOT	Detroit Department of Transportation
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
IAF	Industrial Areas Foundation
ISAAC	Interfaith Strategy for Advocacy and Action in the Community
JONAH	Joint-religious Network for Advocacy and Hope
MACO	Michigan Avenue Community Organization
MBC	Missionary Baptist Church
MDOT	Michigan Department of Transportation
MI-VOICE	Michigan Interfaith Voice (includes MOSES, the Ezekiel Project in Saginaw, JONAH in Battle Creek, and ISAAC in Kalamazoo)
MOS	Metropolitan Organizing Strategy
MOSES	Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength
MPO	Metropolitan Planning Organization
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAN	National Action Network
NTIC	National Training and Information Center
OSC	Organization for the Southwest Community
NOAH	Northeast Organization Allied for Hope
RUTH	Residents United Together in Hope
SEMCOG	Southeast Michigan Council of Governments
SNCC	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
TWO	Temporary Woodlawn Organization
UDL	United Defense League
WDIFCO	West Detroit Interfaith Community Organization

Chapter 1

Introduction: Purpose and Methodology

Congregation-based community organizing (CBCO) has received increased attention from scholars in recent years as a uniquely inclusive, democratic method of building interracial political coalitions.¹ Through this method, organizers, clergy, and lay leaders develop ties within and among religious congregations for local political action, most notably on issues where political institutions fail to represent the interests of poor and working class Americans.

Social capital—“the actual and potential resources linked to a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships”—has been conceptualized as a foundational source of individual and group capacity for political action.² Access to a network of relationships provides a particular combination of information and opportunities (not to mention responsibilities and constraints) through which people learn about politics and engage in civic behavior. But exactly how privately social capital can be a resource for “public-spirited” collective action is unclear.³ Congregation-based organizing presents an opportunity to study how religious social capital can be redirected toward democratic

¹ For example, see research by Boyte (2004), Coles (2006), Day (1998; 2002), Heathcott (2005), Kleidman (2004), Osterman (2002), Polletta (2002), Rogers (1990), Rusk (1999), Sabl (2002), Warren (2001), Warren and Wood (2001), and Wood (2002).

² See Portes (1998, 3) and Bourdieu (1985).

³ I am borrowing the concept of “public-spirited” behavior from Eliasoph (1996; 1998) and (Chong 1991). Scholars warn that the transferral of religious or other bonding social capital into political action is potentially dangerous for democracy. For example, see Portes on “Negative Social Capital” (1998, 15-18) and Putnam on “The Dark Side of Social Capital” (2000, chap. 22).

collective action. If social capital were visible as lines between associates in a community, organizers would be the tight-rope walkers, searching for potential leaders at the hubs of multiple connections and initiating new connections that might catalyze political action. By following organizers along their tight-ropes, scholars can learn about the characteristics of those ties and what political action they support.

The purpose of this research is to better understand what factors affect the political capacity of religious institutions by drawing on the unique perspectives of community organizers, clergy, and lay leaders. How can religious congregations contribute to political empowerment in addition to their contributions to associational life? What obstacles must be overcome? More broadly, how can private social capital lead to political action for public goods? I approach these questions through analysis of the history and organizing strategy of Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength (Moses et al.), a congregation-based organizing project in Detroit.

The concept of social capital, as represented by a person's associational memberships or the degree of trust and reciprocity in a community, has been criticized for overlooking the role of power in shaping relationships.⁴ The same associations may be either an asset or a liability for collective action, depending on the opportunities or obligations attached to the terms of relationships. Power relations shape the development of social capital, making it a duplicitous resource for political agency and empowerment. By "duplicitous" I refer to social capital's twofold or double-sided quality that means its presence cannot guarantee beneficial outcomes in a community and beneficial outcomes may be married to problematic obligations or outcomes. For example, traditional

⁴ For examples see Booth and Richard (1998a; 1998b), Cohen (2001), DeFilippis (2001), Edwards and Foley (1998), and Foley and Edwards (1996).

leadership within a congregation may maintain control over decision-making but also support lay people who are marginalized in public debates. Inequalities among individuals in tight-knit communities and among communities within larger economic and political contexts shape the character of a group's social capital and its consequences for individual and collective efficacy, as well as its potential for mobilization toward political goals.

Metropolitan Detroit offers a tough test case for the community organizing model. Incentives for public collective action are limited in the post-industrial city characterized by low generalized trust and reciprocity, a racially and economically segregated population, and the proliferation of municipalities. These factors undermine the public's capacity to use political action to overcome Detroit's legacies of segregation, deindustrialization, and disinvestment. I will argue that although churches remain some of the best generators of social capital in poor areas, they are impacted by disinvestment from urban centers and inner suburbs and must adapt to population changes in order to survive. Their attempts to organize politically in response to disinvestment are challenged by the pressures of their changing membership and a sense of responsibility for immediate social needs. Additionally, the tendency of congregations to be inward-looking and to maintain internal power arrangements can undermine lay opportunities for political action, depending on actors' interpretation and enactment of religious authority.

Community organizers attempt to overcome these challenge through the development of bridging relationships with diverse clergy and lay leaders. Their practices suggest that religious institutions can best contribute to democratic collective action and empowerment if they have access to bridging mechanisms to combine and leverage their

human and institutional resources. Relational, rhetorical, and ideological resources within congregations, like civic skills within a workplace, are not developed for political purposes but can be employed in political activity given the opportunity and access afforded by bridging relationships. The accountability afforded by a diverse coalition tempers the insular tendencies of religious communities.

This research proposes an elaborated definition of bridging social capital that further distinguishes bridging from bonding relationships and gives the concept grounding in democratic practice. Bridging has been largely defined by difference and can be read as beneficial for marginalized communities by definition (Putnam 2000; Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen 2003; Warren, Thompson, and Saegert 2001). This research argues for a more instrumental definition of bridging that takes into account the power relations and corresponding risk inherent to collaborations across unequal groups. The purpose of bridging for community organizing is to gain access to different networks, ideas, and opportunities that are not available in homogenous communities, in order to enable more innovative and issue-relevant collective action. Organizers, clergy, and lay leaders navigate religious institutions in order to develop new relationships and shared goals for public action. As with bonding social capital, defined as those resources linked to a tight-knit, homogenous network, bridging develops in larger contexts of unequal power relations. Therefore bridging relationships are not necessarily equally beneficial to all participants, and political collaboration is riskier for some actors than others. CBCO trains participants to articulate their own self-interests, learn the interests of others, and analyze power dynamics in part to avoid the pitfalls of unequal bridging relationships.

Finally, this research speaks to the successes and challenges of political action to advocate for regional solutions to metropolitan inequalities. Regional policy solutions such as mass transit require commitments from representatives of multiple policy venues and diverse constituencies, and a metropolitan-wide strategy creates some trade-offs for local activists. Organizers and leaders in Detroit have been challenged to maintain neighborhood-level actions while building a larger coalition capable of influencing regional and state policy. Informed by critical perspectives of social capital theory, this research illustrates how political organizing around shared interests can be limited by the very contexts and problems activists seek to change. However, community organizing practices benefit from the continuity of religious traditions and draw motivation from both faith and self-interest to persevere in difficult circumstances. Their pragmatic approach to bridging racial and religious divisions provides a model of public accountability through intentional diversity.

Methodology and the Research Site

This project began inadvertently in the autumn of 2002, when I first attended a MOSES (Metropolitan Organizing Strategy Enabling Strength) public meeting at Greater Grace Temple in Northwest Detroit. I had never seen anything like this meeting. It embodied many qualities that scholars of participation describe as sorely lacking from American civic life: racially diverse, well-organized, well-attended, timed to the minute, and actually fun. The most striking aspect was that “regular” people, laity as well as clergy, were the speakers behind the podium. They spoke clearly and poignantly from their own experience, from collected research, and from their values about major

community concerns (transportation, crime, etc.). And they asked public officials pointedly to support specific policies. Regular people ran the show, got results, and promised to follow-up. I was struck that this was a different kind of politics, both more democratic in its inclusiveness and more effective in its directness than “politics as usual.”

Early the next year after talking with MOSES staff about my research interests, I began working as an intern at the MOSES office a couple of days a week in downtown Detroit. I worked as an intern for about a year, and continued to be involved in the organization for another year after that. My relatively undefined intern role allowed me to participate in a wide variety of events and meetings. I assisted the other interns and organizers wherever I could with office work. Making phone calls and sending fliers to remind participants of meetings acquainted me with many of the active participants in the member congregations and their clergy, as well as the issue campaigns underway in MOSES and its sister organizations in Kalamazoo and Saginaw.

While interning provided an indispensable introduction to MOSES, most of my learning and fieldwork happened outside of the office. I attended monthly meetings of the Transportation Task Force, worked with staff to assist a core team, and conducted voter registration at a large Catholic church, and attended numerous local trainings, as well as trainings in community organizing by the Gamaliel Foundation of Chicago, through whom MOSES organizers are trained and receive professional support. Gamaliel events I attended included the national week-long training and Ntosake, Gamaliel’s leadership training for women. I participated in regular, often monthly, “leadership assemblies” for participants across congregations to report progress on particular issues, to evaluate

actions, and to generate discussion of future plans. I attended press conferences organized by the Land Bank Task Force and the Civil Rights for Immigrants Task Force, and once rode a bus to Lansing with immigrants to hear a speech by Mexican President Vicente Fox. With dozens of others I helped plan and organize the 2004 Public Meeting, working on the floor logistics team and coordinating turnout from the University of Michigan. I became accustomed to singing along with hymns and holding hands with strangers and acquaintances during prayers: MOSES events typically include prayers and are usually held in member congregations. Larger events often include a choir performances and speeches that draw on religious symbolism and liturgy. I heard local candidates speak in church basements and attended symbolic gatherings to heal racial division, as well as several proper religious worship services in member congregations. Clergy Caucus meetings introduced me to active clergy, their priorities and concerns about the organizing process, and their collegial manner of discussing both theology and politics.

Working in the office and attending staff meetings and innumerable community meetings of all sizes opened my eyes to the complexity of the work behind the 2002 event that first introduced me to MOSES. Initiating and maintaining relationships across religious, racial, ethnic, and professional differences requires patience and understanding with lay leaders and clergy, which the organizers somehow consistently embodied despite their almost overwhelming sense of urgency. The pace of the office at times rivaled Capitol Hill or an emergency room. In fact, an organizer once compared her job to a nurse serving patients, but in her case the patients are congregations, struggling to survive and make a difference in Detroit.⁵ It was difficult for me to reconcile how the fundamental practices of democratic community organizing were deceptively simple and

⁵ Interview with Ponsella Hardaway.

yet very challenging, even for extremely talented and committed community organizers. I felt that existing research on organizing did not capture the challenges of the work or explain the political sources of those challenges.

The evidence in the following chapters draws on my work experience, participant-observation, and archival research from the University of Michigan Bentley Historical Library, which holds a MOSES collection including staff and board documents, fliers, and videos. I also rely on many local newspaper articles collected personally or from the archive. These multiple sources helped me piece together and check them against each other, particularly for writing the chapter on MOSES history. However, the majority of the evidence for the dissertation comes from 49 interviews with clergy, active lay people, and community organizers, conducted in 2005 and 2006. From December 2003 to May 2006 I kept a research diary of field-notes, which contains descriptions of my participation, what I was learning about the organizing strategy, and relationships among players in the process. Some of the notes reflecting on particular events served as primary data for later writing, but the diary mostly allowed me to reflect on new experiences and make sense of the organizing process in the midst of a hectic atmosphere.

Before beginning interviews I conducted two focus groups in June 2005 in order to try out my interview questions, one with a group of suburban member clergy north of the city, and one with African American clergy in Southwest Detroit (See Appendix A for lists of respondents). Pastors from the surrounding suburbs discussed a variety of challenges for community organizing with their congregants: their church members often see less apparent need for neighborhood action to impact local governments and do not necessarily see themselves in shared circumstances with city residents. Based on the

focus groups and conversations with organizers, I decided to limit my interviews to clergy and lay people from congregations within the city in order to focus on challenges facing churches in the context of depopulation and disinvestment. My one exception to that decision was Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Ecorse, near Detroit's southern-most boundary. Mt. Zion's pastor, Rev. Joseph Barlow, was the first President of MOSES and his church's core team is one of the most active in MOSES.

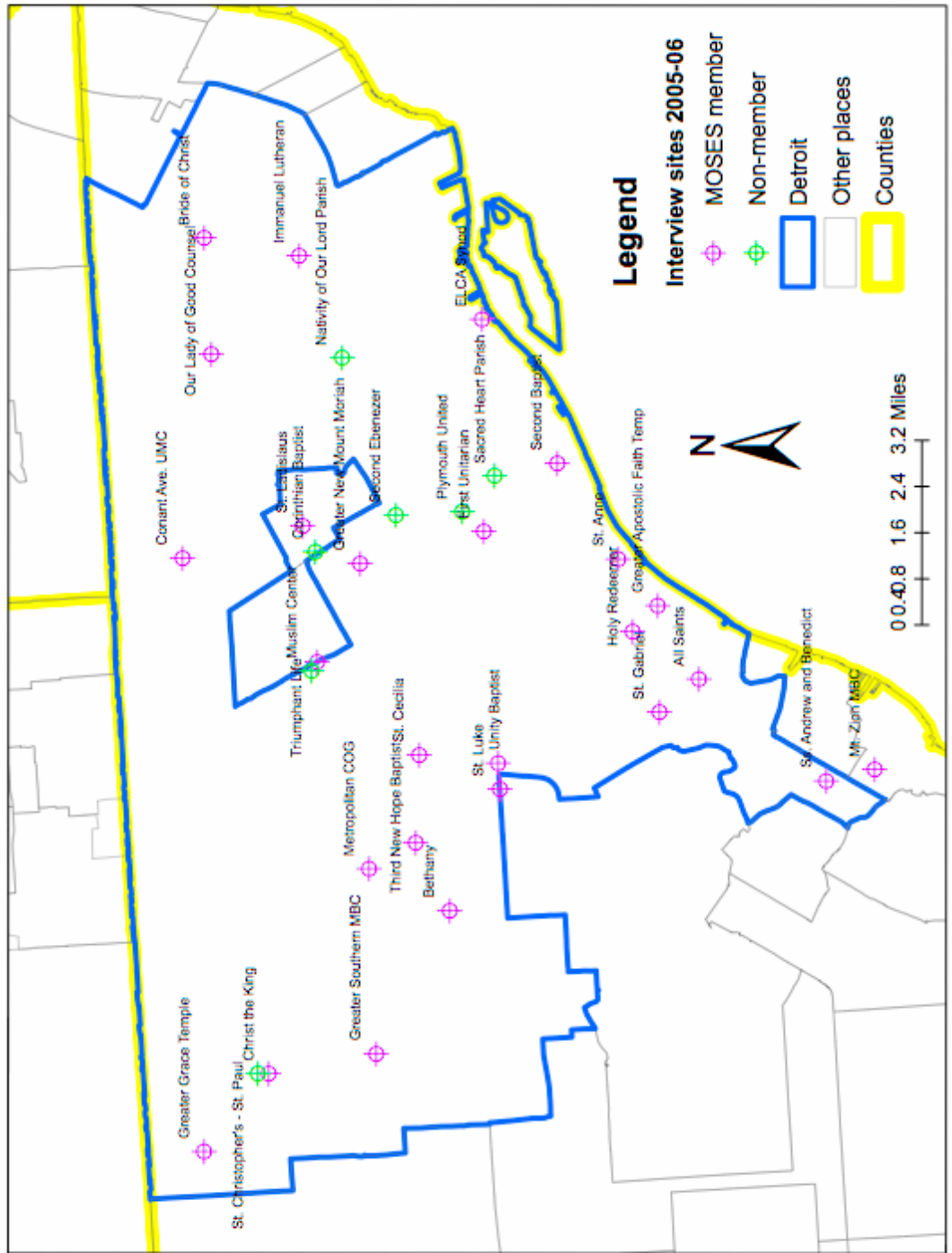
Map 1.1 shows the location of all MOSES member congregations in the metropolitan-Detroit area as of 2003. Map 1.2 shows the same congregations but includes poverty figures from the U.S. Census for 2000. In 2003, MOSES listed 43 congregations in the city of Detroit as dues-paying members; I ultimately interviewed clergy and lay leaders representing 26 of those churches. The 49 formal interviews included 26 African Americans, seventeen white-Anglos, and six Latinos. Twenty interviewees are women, who are underrepresented in the clergy. Some of the lay leaders, clergy, and organizers are members of the same churches. The 49 interviewees included 21 Roman Catholics, 13 Baptists (including Missionary Baptists), 5 Apostolics, 2 Evangelical Lutherans, and one of each of the following: Unitarian, Episcopalian, Muslim, a member of the United Church of Christ, and one from the Church of God. Interviewees also included one nondenominational Christian, one person raised Catholic who currently attends a Baptist church, and one MOSES staff member who is religiously unaffiliated.

Interviewing

I began requesting interviews based on contacts through my own involvement, by asking staff organizers for recommendations, and by asking interviewees for referrals. Referrals from pastors were especially helpful for getting interviews with non-MOSES clergy with whom I did not have any other contact. Starting with staff organizers was essential. They shared lists of participants for both clergy and lay people, and gave me suggestions regarding who they thought would be accessible for interviewing. When a community organizer said that a potential interviewee would probably not return my calls, they were right!

When selecting interviewees I aimed to include diversity across denomination and location within the city. Map 1.3 shows a map of churches where I interviewed clergy and lay leaders. Because MOSES began as three smaller district organizations, I felt that to understand the history of the organizing project it was important to include participants from across those three areas. I interviewed representatives of twenty-six MOSES member congregations and seven non-member congregations, for a total of thirty-three sites. A couple interviewees met with me in the MOSES office in downtown Detroit, but I met with most clergy in their church offices or meeting rooms. Lay people invited me to their workplaces, their homes, and their churches.

Map 1.3 Metro-Detroit: Interview Sites 2005-2006



I did not interview lay people who belong to member congregations but are inactive in MOSES. In other words I focused on lay people who are called “leaders” by the staff organizers. In theory, anyone can be a leader in community organizing, but it does require commitment that is challenging for working people with many demands on their time. For example, I remember visiting the house of one woman who was watching two small granddaughters and serving them dinner before our interview. In addition to her involvement in MOSES she was personally reporting illegal dumping in her backyard. As we left the house later, she reminded neighborhood children to stay away from a live wire protruding from a puddle next to the sidewalk directly in front of her house. Since I was already in the neighborhood we carpoled to a MOSES meeting that evening; she helped me with directions (I was forever getting turned-around in the city that is forever under-construction). Without the carpool, she probably would not have been able to attend. While I learned a great deal from the content of the interviews, I also learned from the acts of planning and coordinating the interviews and the contexts of the interviews. All of these experiences revealed the challenges facing Detroit residents and the need for political action to address them. They reminded me that many Americans do not “participate” regularly in formal politics for the very reasons that their participation is needed.

The interview questions were originally designed for interviews with clergy, so I tailored the questions for interviews with lay people and organizers (See Appendix B). With lay people I asked about core team process or task force activities, as well as personal experiences through involvement in CO. With organizers I focused more on the history of the organization, the organizing process and strategy, and what they felt were

major challenges to their work, especially in the context of Detroit. Additionally, I tailored each interviewee's questions based on what I knew about the person's involvement and their congregation.

Before every interview I asked each respondent for written consent to be interviewed, to be recorded, and to allow their names to be used in written reports. I also took notes by hand in every interview. Three participants agreed to be interviewed and recorded but preferred to remain anonymous. In most cases in the writing I cite the names for those who granted consent to do so. The only cases in which I do not cite names for those who granted consent are when I am concerned that even though they granted consent, their comments may be viewed critically by readers in some way that does not benefit the point of the research. My intention has always been to shed light on the variety of challenges facing the organizing process and opinions about those challenges among active participants and associated actors, not to emphasize individual personalities. A benefit of studying community organizing is the emphasis in the process on reflection and evaluation of events and actions, so most participants were relatively comfortable with the idea of speaking on record about their efforts and concerns. Accountability to each other and to the public is a primary goal of the organizers and leaders. Given my participation and commitment to the organization, and my wishes for its success, I cannot claim complete objectivity about the organizing process or MOSES in particular. It is fair to say that without participating in the process it would have been difficult to learn enough about the actors and methods to make informed judgments.

Throughout my participation and the research process I heard and read many critical comments about the organizing strategy, choices, and tactics from active

participants, from non-member clergy, from archive materials, and from organizers themselves. I personally wrote some critical comments in evaluation of a public meeting that I helped plan. As a participant and a researcher who benefited from their time and ideas, I feel accountable to the participants and organizers as well, which includes fair and honest reflection. My interview questions and the informed consent form are available in the Appendices. The research design and consent form fulfilled requirements for research with human subjects, as directed by the Internal Review Board at the University of Michigan.

Feeling accountable to both the organizing project and to conducting political science research raised many tensions for me throughout the process. These tensions were less about my capacity to be critical and more about balancing the role of participant and observer, and how personally invested I could be or ought to be as researcher who was not from Detroit. As a graduate student who could not expect to remain in the area, I felt conflicted about developing relationships that I may not be able to maintain in the long term. If I could do it over again, I would commit myself into organizing even more than I did, and worry less about my role as an outsider and a researcher in participant-observation. If you are there to learn from participation, you owe it to everyone else to fully participate.

I also felt tensions about finding a topic of focus for research in political science. My desire to learn about organizing practices as they unfolded throughout my participation made hypothesizing both easy and difficult. It seemed that almost every day a new potentially interesting problem or challenge presented itself, which may or may not have built on the problem from the day before. Given the atmosphere where organizers,

leaders and clergy themselves were continually asking questions about how to respond to political setbacks and offering their own theories of what was really going on, it was challenging to sort out the problems and solutions of the day from overreaching themes inherent to the organizing model and as applied to Detroit in particular.

Epistemology and Research Questions

As I participated in organizing practice and talked with people, I became aware of the challenges facing urban churches in Detroit. The Catholic churches were in the midst of membership inventories for the diocese to determine which churches would stay open or face closure due to low membership. Some Protestant churches were also moving or closing, or wanted to expand but could not due to the red tape of clearing titles on abandoned property. My initial research questions focused on how urban sprawl and corresponding depopulation is impacting city congregations, because that is a primary focus of MOSES's policy efforts and has significantly shaped their organizational history. Chapters three and four reflect that orientation. During the fieldwork I also became interested in understanding the worldviews of community organizers, clergy and lay people within the context of their congregations. I discovered that organizing work also faces challenges related to issues of authority and lay leadership in congregations and distrust across race and ethnic differences.

This research applies an interpretive epistemology by asking questions to develop contextualized understandings of human behavior (Feldman 1995; Lin 1998; Yanow 2006). Ann Lin (1998) argues that "discovering causal relationships is the province of positivist research, while discovering causal mechanisms is the province of interpretivist

research” (162). Interpretivist work seeks, “to understand what general concepts ... mean in their specific operation to uncover the conscious and unconscious explanations people have for what they do or believe or to capture and reproduce a particular time, culture, or place so that actions people take become intelligible” (162). While positivist questions search for the existence of a causal relationship between two phenomena, interpretively oriented questions target “how” or “why” the concepts of interest are related (165).

While indebted to positivist scholarship in political science on political participation and identity politics, this research asks how city churches have been impacted by depopulation and neighborhood change and considers the consequences of their adaptations (or lack thereof) for community organizing. It also considers how power relations within and among congregations, each reflecting their own “community of meaning,” matter for collaboration through a community organizing project (Yanow 2006, 10). To pursue these questions I needed to take a magnifying glass to actors’ own understandings of their roles in their communities and how they believe they must act in order to fulfill those roles while serving a larger democratic purpose.

Coding, Analysis, and Grounded Theory

This research fits the traditional characteristics of an ethnographic case study in its methods and approaches to the research questions (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994). It relies on participant observation of the interaction among multiple member congregations and a single umbrella organization, MOSES. Data were also collected from semi-structured interviews that allowed for improvisation and required coding beyond, “a closed set of analytic categories” (248). I wanted to talk with clergy and lay

people representing diverse congregational members from different areas of the city and different denominations, so I could not spend enough time in each church to deeply analyze each congregation's culture and constraints. Therefore this work is not ethnographic at the congregation level, but it is ethnographic in trying to understand the worldview of the community organizers in relation to the different perspectives of clergy and lay people who are in regular conversation with the staff organizers.

As a form of interpretive research, grounded theory methodology allows theory to evolve “during actual research ... through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection” (Strauss and Corbin 1994, 273). Respecting advice from qualitative scholars, I began coding and writing analytical memos before I had conducted all the interviews (Miles and Huberman 1994, 50). I used NVIVO qualitative software to organize and code interview transcripts. I initially searched for theoretically defined categories that aligned with the interview questions and coded based on those themes, such as church-neighborhood relations, commuting, neighborhood changes and church adaptations, information on MOSES history, and denominational differences. Issues of race and ethnicity became subcategories under many of these other codes. I also created codes that emerged out of the interview data and further participation, including issues of lay leadership and influence, variations in the pastors' roles in organizing, and organizers' philosophy and practice.

To analytically group coded data for writing, I created queries in NVIVO based on major themes. For example, what I called a “MOSES involvement query” included all the coded data relating to mobilization, one-on-ones, task forces, and internal congregational development. A query of “race and ethnicity” turned up 58 pages of

related coded data. These queries were too broad to develop neatly into theoretically cohesive chapters. But reading through and writing about the categorized data led me to refine my searches and identify areas where I had enough material to make arguments related to my theoretical questions. The challenge of explaining why emergent themes were theoretically relevant forced me to further clarify the organization of quotes or other evidence in relation to each other. Writing often involved moving back and forth between the primary data and social science literature in order to articulate the theoretical significance of themes from the data.

The methodology of grounded theory focuses on “the perspectives and voices of the people whom we study” while the researcher accepts responsibility for interpretation of what is observed (Strauss and Corbin 1994, 274). The goal is for the interpretations and perspectives of actors to become incorporated with the researcher’s interpretations and concepts so that theory rings true with lived experience (280). Theory elaboration is a “process of refining the theory, model or concept in order to specify more carefully the circumstances in which it does or does not offer potential for explanation” (Strauss and Corbin 1994, 282; Vaughan 1992, 175). Implementing both of these aspects of the methodology, for example, in Chapter 5 I quote a lay person describing his experience of being on stage at a MOSES event. In his words, the audience “sees me but not me.” He was articulating how his success was in part a reflection of his congregation’s support. In combination with other evidence that quote led me to think differently about how individual participants approach interracial and interfaith community work. Many feel responsible for representing their congregations and communities during their participation in political activities. Combining that learning with evidence about the

unequal risks community actors take in participating in interracial endeavors (which took shape in Chapter 6), I began to think differently about the meaning of “bridging” social capital and outlined a theory of bridging that I think more accurately reflects the experience of participants in community organizing and possibly in any diverse, collaborative endeavor.

In her dissertation on AIDS activists in New York and Chicago, Deborah Gould (2000) explained that her analytic narrative was aided by reading sources “against the grain” to discover the prevailing common sense among activists. I also watched for multilayered meanings within interviews and documents, especially to consider what participants might take for granted about how congregations operate, their norms and values, and their sense of political possibility. By paying attention to participants’ understandings of power within communities, I think scholars can better appreciate what it takes for non-elites to participate and the risks many incur by endeavoring to act collectively. In the chapters that follow I draw on illustrative examples and stories employed by interviewees to demonstrate how people were thinking about their political involvement, the meaning of leadership and authority within religious congregations, and their personal transformations.

Overview of Chapters

Chapter two provides a review of research on the significance of community-level institutions for political participation and the failure of political institutions to mobilize working class Americans. It considers how religious institutions can act as agents of social change and discusses historical examples of such contributions, including the

tradeoffs and challenges they faced. Based on these reviews of existing literature, the chapter argues that social capital should be considered a significant but problematic resource for political action.

To provide the reader background on the topic of study, the third chapter offers a historical overview of MOSES, including discussion of the Detroit context and how the organizing project consolidated from districts to a city-wide organization in order to address regional inequalities driving neighborhood-level problems. The remaining chapters are organized to demonstrate the types of challenges facing community organizing in Detroit. Chapter four explores adaptive trends in congregations within the context of Detroit that affect political organizing capacity. Sprawl has affected congregations in ways that make them difficult to organize politically because it undermines tight-knit, overlapping networks. This research will show how “delocalization” hampers church capacity to organize locally for social justice and improved quality of life. It also identifies several trends in congregational adaptation to out-migration and neighborhood change. Those include non-local membership, a service or charity orientation to neighborhoods, and the rebuilding of culture to incorporate new members. In the context of significant neighborhood change, bridging race or ethnicity must operate alongside the typical religious project of developing bonding relationships.

Chapter five explores how internal power arrangements matter for lay civic and political participation. This chapter reviews research on the impact of religious hierarchy on civic and political engagement and proposes that the interpretation and enactment of religious authority may be as important as structural differences. From the organizer’s perspective, structure is less important than their capacity to understand and navigate it.

Across denomination, African American and Latino church members make sense of authority within congregations in reference to experiences of inequality in the larger political system. This chapter suggests the importance of access to bridging mechanisms such as community organizing groups, for the political participation of marginalized groups.

Chapter six focuses on the challenges MOSES has faced building a coalition that bridges race and ethnicity across congregations. It proposes a revised understanding of bridging social capital, arguing that the significance of bridging lies not in superficial diversity but in the institutional and community infrastructure behind any individual involved in bridging work. Bridging is difficult not only because of individuals' mistrust of each other based on past experiences but also because segregated communities find their own ways of responding to community problems and institutionalizing organized responses to problems in ways that prioritize particular values and methods of political action. This chapter also analyzes the larger political context of Detroit for the development of MOSES and different approaches to churches' political involvement. The chapter focuses on challenges for interracial organizing but also suggests those challenges can be mitigated by organizers and leaders acting as bridging mechanisms between communities and congregations.

Finally, chapter seven summarizes the challenges for community organizing in the Detroit context and reviews the theoretical contributions of the dissertation.

Chapter 2

Religious Institutions and the Duplicity of Social Capital

Organization

This chapter orients the reader to the dissertation's location within research on civic engagement and on the significance of community organizations to political participation. The chapter then moves into a review of literature in four theoretical areas so as to contextualize and support the research. The second section reviews literature on challenges facing community organizing in the post-industrial city, particularly given the decline of union presence in urban areas, and suburbanization. Those trends require new scholarly analysis on how the overlap of place and identity shape opportunities for collective action from community-level organizations. The third section briefly considers how American religious institutions can fit within democratic theories of civic engagement, and what congregations can uniquely offer to democracy. The fourth section discusses twentieth-century examples of religious institutions' contributions to collective action, and also what factors constrained or limited their public purpose. I then review relevant critiques of social capital theory and civil society as resources for political participation and consider how community organizing methods suggest a different way of thinking about "participation."

Orientation to the Field

There is consensus within the field of political science that increased income inequality and decreased political recruitment in recent decades has serious negative consequences for political participation among less affluent Americans (APSA 2004). While economic privilege has always been an asset for making one's preferences known, the decreased political mobilization of average Americans has made socio-economic status even more significant for who participates. In the past thirty years, organized groups have become more professional and oriented toward specific interests; the political system has rewarded organized groups with attention and policy outcomes that privilege the affluent and educated (Skocpol and Fiorina 1999). The decline in union membership and the reliance of political parties on fundraising and activation of their bases has undermined the average citizen's opportunity to be recruited into organized political activity (Rosenstone and Hansen 1993).

The lack of direct mobilization into politics leaves citizens and residents more reliant on community and institutional resources and experiences that indirectly support civic engagement. Scholars have identified institutional mechanisms that encourage citizens to become active politically. Schools, workplaces, and civic organizations develop the skills, networks, interests, and efficacy that enable political engagement (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). But income and educational background drive selection into and treatment within those institutions. Therefore lower income, less educated people are least prepared to advocate for their interests or to benefit from active citizenship in public life (Mansbridge 1997). In turn, policy makers are most responsive to the most organized and privileged. The effects of

these disadvantages are compounded for racial and ethnic minorities, many of whom are economically and socially isolated by residential and employment segregation, and whose wealth on average remains a fraction of their white counterparts (Cohen and Dawson 1993; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Oliver and Shapiro 1995).

Community-level voluntary institutions offer a uniquely inclusive opportunity for civic engagement. Because they are organized and supported by diverse residents and citizens across socio-economic levels, religious institutions provide the space and opportunity for the development of civic skills, social capital, and other resources for their members' political behavior (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Church attendance is positively associated with electoral political behavior.⁶ However, while religious institutions are beneficial to political action indirectly via their civic contributions, most religious institutions do not explicitly engage in political activity. If churchgoers are not explicitly recruited or mobilized by political groups, the nature of the relationship between civic and political participation is indirect. That relationship hinges in part on group norms and social identities developed through informal political talk occurring in both organizational and casual settings, which tends to reinforce intra-group attitudes and discourage "public-spirited" talk and action (Eliasoph 1998; Walsh 2004).⁷ Therefore the correlation between civic and political participation is stronger when institutions explicitly engage in political activity (Fuchs, Shapiro, and Minnite 2001).⁸

And a local connection helps: research on neighborhood organizations in low and middle-

⁶ The degree of this association varies by race or ethnicity. Jones-Correa and Leal (2001) found that for Anglos, church attendance is positively correlated with presidential voting and voter registration but has no significant impact on voting in congressional elections or on non-electoral behaviors. In contrast, Latinos who regularly attend church are more likely to participate in all of the above.

⁷ See Eliasoph (1996; 1998) and (Chong 1991).

⁸ Fuchs et al (2001) found that involvement in purposefully political community organization is a stronger predictor of political participation for Black and Latino political participation compared to white Americans, though the latter also benefit significantly from intentionally political mobilization.

income communities has shown that “residents of neighborhoods with strong organizations participate more in face-to-face political activity than do those of similar income levels in neighborhoods with weaker organizations” (Berry, Portney, and Thomson 1993; Fuchs, Shapiro, and Minnite, 292).

Neighborhood organizations matter both for individual participation and for the prevalence of social and political collective action. In their study of collective action events in Chicago over four decades, Robert Sampson and colleagues (2005), found that organizational density is the key predictive variable for explaining the occurrence of collective action events (meetings, rallies, hearings, celebrations, etc.). Measures of social capital in neighborhoods, including membership in civic associations, friend/kinship ties, and reciprocated exchange, were found to be either irrelevant or negatively associated with the occurrence of collective action events. Echoing other scholars’ concerns about the negative effects of bonding social capital,⁹ the authors suggest that dense local ties and reciprocity may “foster a more parochial sense of community and attenuation of collective or larger community-based initiatives” (699).

Sampson and colleagues implicitly raise questions about the role of religious congregations in contributing to local collective action. Their measure of civic membership, which included membership in religious institutions, was found to be irrelevant to generating action. And the measure for organizational infrastructure excludes direct reference to religious institutions, though their presence is probably captured within programs for youth, families, counseling, and so on (693). That said, their discovery of an increase in “hybrid” events, “blending” protest claims or grievances

⁹ For example, see Portes on “Negative Social Capital” (1998, 15-18) and Putnam on “The Dark Side of Social Capital” (2000, chap. 22).

with civic forms, suggests that non-political organizations are responding to an opportunity to act flexibly in the public sphere, speaking out on various issues in concert with other organizations. If, as Sampson et al. argue, community organizational infrastructure is the key factor generating collective action, then the bridging capacity of local organizations is important for gearing institutions toward collaborative public acting, and away from parochial actions that do not contribute to any larger policy change. The encouraging persistence of collective action events does not reveal the nature of collaboration among local organizations, or their outcomes.

My research investigates how community-based institutions, particularly religious congregations, can help generate collective action, and thereby play a central role in developing the efficacy of disempowered, disenfranchised people. I argue that, alone, these community institutions are insufficient for mobilizing public-spirited collective action, in part because institutionalized social capital is indebted to existing power relations. Religious institutions offer accessibility and social supports available in few other places, but those benefits can exist only because institutions somehow fit within and adapt to prevailing power relations for survival. That is to say, the social capital within institutions tends to operate duplicitously, reifying some inequalities even while challenging others. This characteristic could help explain why measures of social capital in Sampson et al.'s research are uncorrelated, or are negatively correlated, with the prevalence of collective action events. Perhaps it is not so much the amount of social capital that matters for political action but whether how that capital is directed and transformed in concert with others for political relevance.

Organizing the Post-Industrial City

Structural definitions of social capital recognize that social infrastructure does not exist in a vacuum. Political and economic contexts matter for the translation of civic energies into political action and for the willingness of diverse groups and institutions to collaborate (Booth and Richard 1998a; Drogus and Stewart-Gambino 2005; Edwards and Foley 1998). Relationships embedded within and among religious institutions are arranged in response to pressures of adaptation to the economic and competitive climate of their field, political repressions or freedoms, and prevailing social constraints such as segregation. Those pressures affect who joins as members, how a congregation relates to its neighborhood, internal and inter-group relations, its leadership and organizational norms, and its political relationships with denominational groups and public officials. All of the above affect the capacity of private institutions to make public claims regarding political issues, and their choices about how to do so collectively.

In the United States, the lack of institutions organizing working class people is in part a reflection of the arrangement of work and residence in the post-industrial city. Ira Katznelson (1981; 1992) argues that the U.S. working class was never as politically cohesive as their peers in the U.K., due to the separate mobilization of identity through the workplace by labor, and through neighborhood wards by local machines. As summarized by Joseph Kling (1995), “ethnic and neighborhood particularisms undermined the development of a strong working-class movement or labor party. Workers spoke the language of local community and cultural identity in their places of residence, the language of trade unionism at their workplaces” (145). Urban areas today lack organized working class constituencies that characterized the first half of the

twentieth century, who benefited politically from union, religious, and social organizations at the neighborhood or ward level (Heathcott 2005, 280).

The decline of organized labor is an important part of the equation. In 2002 union density was only 13.5 percent of all wage and salary workers, down from more than one-third of workers in 1954 (Levi 2003). Joseph Kling (1993) argues that as industrial production has moved out to suburbs and exported overseas, the city has faded as a center of working class life (39). “Class-oriented cultures and institutions of the industrial city were, over the course of the twentieth century, displaced by the rise of a fragmented, privatizing, and service-oriented urban polity” (29). The mobility of global capital, and federal policies supporting urban sprawl for industry and residents has meant that, “the structural bases for class-oriented mobilizations literally move out from under organized labor” (39). Citizens are left without the spatially overlapping experiences in their neighborhoods, workplaces and civic arenas necessary to build “a strong, common public life and culture” (39). So in addition to dissipating labor power, the demographic tide from cities has depleted and reorganized the membership of city congregations. What were once “well-defined and bounded communities” have dispersed, and that change has both operated and reverberated through religious institutions (Putnam 2000, 214; Verba and Nie 1972).

Scholars of community organizing express concern over the capacity of congregation-based methods to build politically effective organizations in contemporary urban America (Fisher 1999; Heathcott 2005; Kling 1993). While not focused on the sites of production (factories), religious institutions are also subject to the instability of capital investments, issues of land and resource management, and local political regimes. Not all

community institutions can mobilize the level of resources and power that the Catholic Church and labor unions provided in Saul Alinsky's era. As described by Omar McRoberts (2003) in his study of storefront churches in Boston's Four Corners district, the low rent and available property in poor areas is a draw for many small congregations. Unfortunately, commuting members are often too disconnected from the surrounding area to be concerned about its civic or economic vitality. Therefore they are less likely to initiate bridging networks to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood. In his research of the Texas IAF, Mark Warren (2001) similarly found, "Many community residents were not members of churches, and so could not be directly reached by IAF efforts. This was particularly a problem in African American communities, where local churches drew members from the broader metropolitan area, retaining shallow roots in their immediate neighborhood" (81).

The increasing disconnection between residence and organizational membership creates challenges for traditionally neighborhood-based methods of community organizing and encourages organizing based on identities other than class (Fisher 1999). "New" social movements can be understood as societal forms that developed out of the "contemporary fracturing of people's urban life spaces" (Kling 1993, 28). Because people are segregated by race and ethnicity, residentially and occupationally, resistance has been increasingly formulated along lines of identities "manifest in the spaces of everyday life—the spaces where people reside and consume, as opposed to those where they work" (44).

This shift creates a persistent tension in grassroots organizing methods between the necessity of reaching people through associational activities and the fact that no

single association can represent all of who we are or what we need from the political system. Activists effectively decide what affiliations or identities to politicize in order to gain response from a fragmented, bureaucratic state. For example, scholars of community organizing debate how to prioritize between or balance two goals: organizing to secure tangible political wins for improved quality of life and organizing for a more equitable culture, such as confronting issues of racism and sexism. Mike Miller (1996) champions the former, the traditional model of “Alinsky-style” organizing, that builds “units of permanent power, rooted in local communities, led by and accountable to local people” (Quoted in Calpotura and Fellner 1996). By contrast, in *Beyond the Politics of Place*, Gary Delgado (1997) describes a growing variety of organizing efforts in communities of color that put racial inequality at the forefront of their efforts to address any issue, from police violence to bilingual education (32-33). In those configurations, “community-based” organizing refers to community of identity rather than geography. These organizations focus on gender, sexual orientation, or racial and ethnic identities, historically not addressed by neighborhood or congregation-based organizing. And the fact that grassroots activism is often pragmatically organized along lines of identity does not mean that people can compartmentalize their experiences of marginalization and issue concerns in their communities.

In their essay reviewing the place-identity debate, Calpotura and Fellner call to “reshape our organizing circle” to include identity politics and challenge enduring inequalities that transcend location.¹⁰ A growing body of feminist scholarship on women’s community-based activism provides myriad examples of how women have

¹⁰ See Richard Wood’s race-based example of the Center for Third World Organizing in Oakland, CA. Comparing religious culture to racial identity as a basis for community organizing, he argues the latter is limited from being an “influential player in political society” (Wood 2002, 269).

“challenged the false separation of productive work, socially reproductive work, and politics under changing historical contexts” (Naples 1998, 4). For example, historian Tamar Carroll (2007) examines a coalition of working-class, white ethnic women and African American and Latina women public housing residents in 1970s Brooklyn. Drawn into politics by urban renewal and disinvestment policies, the National Congress of Neighborhood Women developed out of community networks and responsibilities including family, religion and cultural traditions. While necessarily engaging identity politics in order to collaborate, their grassroots activism is also “implicitly place-bound” (Feldman, Stall, and Wright 1998, 261; Also see Shaw 1996). Activism in low-income communities, such as struggles over public housing, is “intimately connected to ongoing struggles for rights and control over spatial resources to house social reproduction activities that create and sustain those communities” (261).

Debates over whether to organize communities of “place” versus “identity” overlook how attachments to place also construct racial, ethnic and gender identities, and how neighborhood and regional organizing face real struggles within ongoing multi-racial alliances to be successful in those locales. Certainly, contemporary professional community organizing networks (including “neo-Alinsky” networks) have adapted to include leadership development for women and people of color, to address issues with more salience for those groups, and to bolster local leadership, broadly defined, in their communities rather than outside professionals (Delgado 1997; Warren 2001). But as this research will show, those goals continue to be a work in progress, and without the benefit of mass working class institutions, post-Alinsky organizers face the continuing question

of “how to bridge good political organizing tactics with broader efforts toward economic transformation and multiracial civic culture” (Heathcott, 290).

In his research on labor-community alliances, Dorian Warren (2005) has written that coalitions must address “racial and class conflicts unique to the specific local context,” facing the histories of discrimination within particular union locals or civic organizations. When potential allies neglect those histories, their alliances are weak and local elites or corporate interests find ways to exploit pre-existing racial and class divisions. Margaret Levi (2001) argues, “the development of social networks requires bringing people together in associations in which they get to know each other sufficiently to make them willing to help each other” (249).

A major point of this dissertation is that “bringing people together” is a political project, whether the issue is labor-community relations (as it is for Levi and D. Warren) or coalitions among congregations, schools, unions and others. The bridging work of co-creating enduring and flexible coalitions among local organizations faces challenges rooted in the response of community institutions to structural inequality. Organizing around salient and material, but parochial, issues can miss opportunities for greater social benefit, and inspire reactionary local politics (Fisher 1999). Levi (2003) argues that in order for labor unions to rebuild their central role in working class political engagement, organized labor should support social movement unionism over business unionism. That is, they must “fight for improvements in the material conditions of their members but also have an agenda that transcends the economic interests of the rank and file,” by engaging in “larger issues of democratization, (within the union and within the larger polity), social justice, and economic equality” (46). Critical to that effort is the ability of unions to build

coalitions and work effectively with community-based organizations; it requires bridging significant mistrust based on past experience and uncertainties over shared interests (Levi 2001; 2003).

Levi is arguing for a public role for unions: how labor might fulfill a larger purpose and bring about a more democratic society. Theoretically her challenge to organized labor can be applied to any institution developed for the benefit of particular members but not explicitly organized to disadvantage others—that is, just about any civil association in democratic society. Harry Boyte (2004) argues that professional organizations benefit from discovering the public contributions of their work. Can religious congregations also serve this “higher” purpose, and what constrains their potential? To that end, the following discussion situates religious institutions within civic engagement practice and corresponding approaches to democratic theory.

Appreciating the divergent qualities of social capital will allow scholars to distinguish among the kinds of contributions that congregations can make to public life, and to confront challenges to particular democratic practices. Drawing on democratic theory and historical work on social movements and community organizing, I argue that the political practices in the social movement tradition are necessary to question the social inequalities that undermine liberal democratic practices. Social democracy is dependent on the collaboration of politically motivated, community-based institutions to creatively engage local knowledge, build confidence, and develop new leadership.

Democratic Theories of Civic Engagement & the Role of Religious Institutions

Political theorist Derek Barker (2007) has developed a framework categorizing practices of civic engagement within five broad approaches to democracy. These approaches include: associational, representative, participatory, deliberative, and social democracy, all which favor different yet overlapping types of civic and political practices. Barker argues that particular practices reflect different democratic ideals coexisting in democratic society, serving somewhat different ends, and emerging in different social contexts. The framework helps clarify the typical and potential contributions of religious congregations to civic life and politics. Arguably, religious congregations contribute indirectly to all five approaches to democracy, and can undermine all five as well. But the key issue at hand is the differences between their contributions to associational and social democracy.

In their daily business, churches typically fall within associational views of democracy, represented by the voluntary associations that citizens form independently of government institutions. By teaching shared beliefs and building spiritual communities, congregations inclusively draw people into civic life, develop dense and broad networks, teach basic civic skills, and distribute information, which have consequences for political participation (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). But associationalist democrats value social interaction and cooperation primarily for their own sake—and the development of social capital to feed back into civic life—without political intentions (Putnam 2000).

Empirically, Nancy Ammerman (1997) found that most religious congregations fit within a “civic” orientation to the community. “Civic” churches, “work at being good, cooperative citizens of the community, helping out where they can, without significantly

challenging the status quo. Their emphasis is on individual citizenship.” In contrast, activist churches also want to be good citizens but “see that goal as requiring advocacy and change” (338).¹¹ Churches rarely have a primarily activist orientation. About a third of the congregations in Ammerman’s sample mixed activism with evangelist and civic goals.¹² When congregations are agents of social change, and not only of social capital, they contribute to social democracy.

Social democracy is most concerned with collective action as a means for social change, particularly to challenge persistent problems, such as unchallenged inequalities, that stymie other democratic practices.¹³ This approach favors practices in the community organizing and social movement traditions, including, “community building” such as Ella Baker’s “spadework” in the civil rights movement (Payne, 85), and “public work” by citizens and residents to directly transform their communities (Boyte 2004).

While activists in social movements and everyday community politics choose any number of particular issues as their focus, the “animating impulse” of citizen organizing is a “broad democratization in social structures” (Boyte 1980, xii). Open to multiple strategies and change-oriented, practices reflecting social democracy can access potentially transcendent beliefs and marginalized networks of people that associational democracy cannot. Social democracy benefits from religion’s populist inclusion of people in need of justice, and by its rhetorical, historically rooted, claims to justice. Whereas associational democracy flows from the arrangement of social capital in

¹¹ Ammerman also categorizes churches into “sanctuary” and “evangelist” orientations.

¹² For a discussion of factors affecting clergy’s activism, see (Day 2002; Lincoln and Mamiya 1990). Pastor’s level of education, denominational independence and size of the congregation are positively correlated with radical activism or protest. However as Day describes, those factors do not fully explain what approaches to activism a pastor and congregation will take.

¹³ To clarify, I am talking about social movement practices and approaches necessary for democracy, not Social Democratic political parties, or ideologies about the welfare state.

community institutions, social democracy asks where power lies in that arrangement. It asserts that without questioning the social order, democracy in other forms can become superficial and illegitimate in the eyes of the disenfranchised.¹⁴

Religious Institutions and Collective Action

All of the above mentioned approaches to civic engagement can suffer from the collective action problem. Individuals have an incentive to “free ride” off others’ efforts, and benefit from the public good without contributing to it. If no one joins the club, votes, attends the community meeting, or deliberates, all suffer from a poorer public life and concerns left unaddressed (Chong 1991; Olson 1971). But the practices that characterize social democracy are especially subject to collective action problems, because their desired outcomes are most challenging to existing power holders, and they can offer few promises of ultimate success. The transformative quality of this view of democracy even makes success difficult to define. Additionally, resource poor groups are especially limited in political influence because characteristics of their marginalization undermine their attempts to challenge policies maintaining the marginalization. So for instance, a person who lacks a car in Detroit has limited ability to protest the lack of mass transit by attending public meetings or hearings. Or another example, the lack of access to political influence for undocumented immigrants obviously undermines their ability to

¹⁴ John Guidry and Mark Sawyer (2003) name the work of social movements “contentious pluralism:” a process through which marginalized groups contribute to democracy by claiming space in the public sphere and challenging what is considered politically legitimate by elites (273). Critiquing institutional and social capital perspectives on democracy and democratization, the authors argue that both need “a fuller understanding of political contention’s central role in building and inclusive public sphere—a necessary condition of democracy” (274).

impact the system that constrains them. These are different kinds of problems than lack of interest or political knowledge, though those are also relevant for marginalized groups.

Given these challenges, how to account for the existence of mass collective action for social change? Scholars point to community institutions and social capital therein to encourage and maintain engagement. For example, Doug McAdam (1982) attributes the development of black insurgency in the mid-1950s to the growth of three institutions: black churches, colleges, and NAACP chapters by which black southerners developed “indigenous organizational strength” (231). Churches, schools and organizational chapters provided “established interactional networks” facilitating “block recruitment” of participants (129). Building on this research, Dennis Chong (1991) argues that the context of ongoing social relations (repeated exchanges and encounters with community members) provided social and psychological benefits of participating and increased the costs of not cooperating. Additionally, leadership (e.g. by local people, and organizers from SNCC) within those networks incurred start-up costs while others decided whether participating in the movement was effectual and worth the high risk (234). In addition to social networks and leadership development, the cultural language of religion, including liturgy, constructs moral commitments and related political understandings that can inspire and motivate political action (Dillard 2007; Wood 2002).

Rich historical analyses of the political capacity of congregations have revealed a persistent paradox within even those groups that ultimately mobilize for social change. Especially for marginalized groups, congregations can provide an “oppositional civic consciousness” that critiques the mainstream society and supports the questioning of social order essential to the social democratic view. Yet as Fredrick Harris (1999) argues,

“the culture and institutions of dominated groups can nurture political beliefs and strategies that at the same time both support and oppose the existing civic order” (67).

Similarly, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham (1993) describes the church as “a social space of unifying and conflicting discourses.”

For example, the history of the civil rights movement illustrates how religious institutions’ contribution to social democracy was contested, and the effort to move institutions to action was in itself central to social change. Churches played a more complex role in the movement than is typically remembered; their involvement varied based on both internal and external constraints and resources. In addition to most congregations’ tendencies to avoid overt political involvement, many churches were initially reluctant to get involved due to realistic fears of reprisal (Payne, 189-91). Churches that supported the movement risked losing members due to outside pressure from employers and targeted violence. While indigenous political strength depended on community institutions, many of those institutions were in some ways dependent on power structures (that employed church members or owned church land) that limited their capacity, more so in rural areas. Responsible for acclimating huge numbers of migrants, Southern black urban churches were better financed with larger memberships, more efficiently organized with more activities, and enjoyed greater organized cooperation among institutions (Morris 1984, 5). Even within the cities, although churches were the essential “institutional link to the masses,” they “were not ideal as the decision-making center of a mass movement; they were too numerous and were preoccupied with too many other functions unrelated to protest. Besides, the church had no control over significant secular groups or formal ties to their leadership” (21-22).

Given these constraints, churches and activists in Baton Rouge ingeniously developed the United Defense League (UDL), an “organization of organizations” which directed the Baton Rouge Bus boycott in 1953. The UDL was soon followed by other “movement centers” in Montgomery, Tallahassee, and Birmingham, that united local leadership and mobilized the mass memberships. As summarized by Aldon Morris,

The presence of indigenous resources within a dominated community does not ensure that a movement will emerge. Rather, movements are deliberately organized and developed by activists who seize and create opportunities for protest. Social activists, in this view, must play creative roles in organizing and developing movements; they must *redirect and transform indigenous resources* in such a manner that they can be used to develop and sustain social protest (283) [emphasis added].

In most cases the institutions, and their traditional leadership, did not catalyze local civil rights actions. Rather the institutions provided the space for community discussion, accumulation of resources, and incubation of activism that perpetuated and gave momentum to the work that local leaders and organizers had initiated. Once those critical leaders initiated actions and started internal debates, traditional leaders had to make a choice under political pressure whether to support the movement.

The history of community organizing in Chicago provides another example of the complex role that religious institutions have played in transformative political action, and therefore, their capacity to contribute to social democracy. In his biography of Saul Alinsky, Sanford Horwitt (1989) writes that the success of the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC) was due to churches’ involvement in a coalition including fraternal and athletic clubs, local businesses, and labor unions (69). Sent to the stockyards in the 1930s by an anti-delinquency sociology project, Alinsky built a coalition to transcend conflict among (largely Catholic) Polish, Lithuanian, Slovak,

German, Irish, and other churches, not to mention tensions among churches of the same national origin. As most of their congregants were packinghouse workers being courted by the CIO, Alinsky modeled the BYNC on organized labor: delegates represented their congregations or clubs rather than serving as individual members (Plotkin 1996). This “organization of organizations” gained national attention for expanding a federal free lunch program, developing recreation centers, youth employment programs, nutritional education, and so on. It brought to the neighborhood a new library, credit union, and post office, all challenging the local political machine. Their successes were due in part to funding and support from the Church hierarchy, but would have been impossible without careful relational work through which organizers learned the traditions and conflicts within the community. From that understanding they nudged and pushed all parties to constructive collaboration.

Unfortunately, that collaboration met its limits at the intersection of race, place, religion, and class. Alinsky was proud of the Council’s support for the Packinghouse Workers Union, which had a large black membership, and their work to stop the harassment of blacks in community retail stores, restaurants and bars. BYNC is also credited with stabilizing the neighborhood by successfully undermining block-busting efforts by real estate developers (Slayton 1996). But their efforts were not so much for integration as to maintain civility among racial and ethnic groups (Horwitt, 316). As African American migration to the urban north increased and integrated housing became a hot issue in the 1950s, Alinsky became increasingly embarrassed by the prevailing segregationist attitudes and practices in the Back of the Yards Neighborhood and Council (317). As described by historian Wendy Plotkin,

The unity that contributed to this community effort was fueled in part by an anti-black agenda, in which the only outreach to African-Americans was the effort to protect them at their place of employment and their travels thereto from their segregated neighborhoods. In an attempt to stem the Council's segregationist agenda, Alinsky tried to persuade his Back of the Yard Council co-founder Joseph Meegan and key Catholic officials to accept an agenda of limited integration, involving racial quotas that would avoid the rapid racial turnover of the neighborhood. The antipathy of these erstwhile allies amazed and overwhelmed him, and led him to an attempt to achieve some type of integration in another similar neighborhood on the Southwest Side (1).

Alinsky's Organization for the Southwest Community (Williamson, Imbroscio, and Alperovitz) received strong support from sympathetic leadership within the Chicago Catholic Archdiocese, in part because the Church feared out-migration of its congregants, tempted by suburban housing stock and the decline of the local meatpacking industry. Progressive clergy realized that community organizing and mass education was necessary for the neighborhood to handle demographic change, in a way that could benefit both new and existing residents. But others simply interpreted the program as an opportunity "to forestall the in-movement of African Americans" (Plotkin 1996). Regardless of personal ideology on race relations, "There was no getting around it: if you were a Catholic pastor on the Southwest Side of Chicago, you were concerned about saving your parish from the possibility—even the probability—of a mass exodus of your white parishioners" (Horwitt 1989, 321). The Church's investment in those neighborhoods, given the prevailing attitudes about integration, both enabled and limited community organizing efforts (McGreevy 1996).

Given all the government-funded incentives to move out of city neighborhoods, the Church's efforts were too little, too late. The Church hierarchy could not enforce total commitment of the local priests on issues of money or race (Horwitt 1989, 434). Alinsky came to believe that the BYNC would not change its position of self-preservation by

racial exclusion, unless a powerful black community organization developed to “bargain collectively” with other organized groups (367-8). He turned to communities neighboring the Southwest Side and his team began organizing with African Americans to build the Temporary Woodlawn Organization (TWO), which dovetailed with the burgeoning civil rights movement.

The BYNC, OSC, and TWO were similar to the Southern movement centers in Montgomery and Birmingham as organizations that coordinated across religious institutions and other community associations, bringing together often feuding groups to develop a common purpose and work towards it. The successes and challenges of these examples provided the basis for future generations of community organizers.

For scholars, these examples of political organizing suggest a complex role for religious social capital in solving collective action problems and working for social justice. As discussed at length by Putnam (1993), social capital mitigates individual free-riding for public goods. High levels of trust and expectations of reciprocity in communities facilitate collective action—to some ends. But on what greater power relations does that internal reciprocity depend?

Local civil rights activists and student organizers made the best of indigenous organizational strength and religious leadership traditions. They were initially limited but not defeated by the reluctance of churches in the context of structural inequality, such as segregated control of employment and transportation. Alinsky also made the most of indigenous organizational strength in Chicago, drawing on traditional leaders within the Catholic Church to improve the neighborhoods quality of life, empower working class people, and challenge the urban machine. Yet those efforts were also limited by the

nature of social capital within those networks: the investment of the residents and their churches in the neighborhoods combined with racism to stall greater social transformation.

An incentive to free-ride on others' efforts—while still present—is not the only problem in these examples. Prior to the collective action problem is the challenge of developing a common public purpose within community institutions, given that the same social capital that enables and motivates some organized efforts for social change also works against the same or similar efforts. The limitations in both cases had to do with the ways the institutions and their networks were situated in larger power relations, and internal actors' expectations that those relations were immutable. Developing a shared purpose is an organizing problem rather than a mobilizing problem. The transformative power of the local leaders and community organizers in both examples came from their pragmatic recognition of those power relations in order to work within and among them, without accepting that limiting structural inequality is permanent. Through the collaborative effort to bring civic associations into public roles, the politics within and among congregations, and their potential to be agents of social change, became visible.

Social Capital: two sides of the coin

In *Bowling Alone*, Putnam suggests that social capital is a neutral tool similar to human or financial capital, and therefore its consequences depends on its use (2000, 22).¹⁵ Neutrality implies social capital is potentially duplicitous, and that associations in civil society will not on their own terms encourage collective action to challenge social inequalities. The bonding social capital embedded in community institutions both enables

¹⁵ Also see Coleman (1988).

and restricts transformative political action for social change. The way in which a particular set of community institutions limits social change depends on the way that hierarchies in the larger environment operate through and are perpetuated within the local organization. In this way the social capital that develops within any particular community is not simply good or bad for social change—it is potentially and simultaneously both, for different kinds of change.

Several scholars have argued for a politicized understanding of social capital as an outcome of situated relationships rather than the relationships themselves (Bourdieu 1985; DeFilippis 2001; Loury 1977). In this conceptualization, social capital is both those investable resources (i.e. inter-personal, financial) derived from relationships and the power to manage and control those resources. It is the contextual knowledge, connections, and influence that result from the way a particular community develops. Therefore a community may be rich in relationships but lack the information or access necessary for those relationships to fully meet community needs.

This research draws on two critiques of the dominant conceptualizations of civil society (DeFilippis 2001). (1) Political and economic institutions and social hierarchies in the United States shape and perpetuate themselves through civil society. From this view, social capital is complicit in maintaining inequalities *among* economic or racial subgroups. (2) Understanding civil society also requires addressing tensions and inequalities *within* communities (Cohen 2001; Foley and Edwards 1996). James DeFillipis (2001) challenges the assumption that any set of networks and interlocking norms that shape a culture is equally beneficial to everyone in that community, implicit in views of civil society that idealize cultural institutions. For example, Nancy Burns and

colleagues (2001) find that women and men are differently selected into religious congregations and experience different opportunities for engagement within them, impacting their leadership development and future political participation. By highlighting tensions among and within subgroups, the second critique notices how social capital operates through and reifies some institutional hierarchies, even in attempts to dismantle others. With this reasoning we can better appreciate the political pressures shaping community-level institutions and their internal discussions and choices, without glorifying those institutions or assuming they speak for all community members.

John Guidry and Mark Sawyer (2003) argue that, “social capital is not an undifferentiated arena of human agency. It is shot through with forms of power and domination ... that limit the agency of marginalized actors” (274). Just as revolving credit or mutual aid associations highlighted by Putnam (1993) directly benefit members rather than outsiders, the segregation of religious congregations by race and class, also reproduces exclusive access to social and professional networks, educational opportunities, and so on. This institutional tendency is exacerbated in communities with high levels of segregation and mistrust. As noted by Cohen (2001), while lower income racial or ethnic groups share resource and service deficits, “there is nothing in our explorations to suggest that the use of social capital to alleviate such deficits crosses the boundaries of race, ethnicity, language, and class” (276). In order to contribute to or benefit from public life beyond their own membership, congregations need access to bridging mechanisms that can work across their unique arrangements of authority and religious identity.

Collective Action in Community Contexts

Understanding the transformational role that organizing can play for people within congregations is significant for political science because it suggests a different way of thinking about political participation. Survey research has demonstrated that individuals' participation reflects their combination of civic resources, psychological engagement, and access to networks for recruitment into politics (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Because these factors are so central to participation, it appears that involvement in politics is a linear process beginning with skills, interest, and recruitment, and ending in particular political behaviors (voting, letter writing, etc.). But this dissertation proposes that in community organizing practice, recruitment, learning, interest, efficacy, and action are jumbled together. Involvement in a local political action is a tool organizers use to engage more people, and often novices are asked to participate in planning events. In the process of trying to gain an official's attention, political knowledge may be gained and interest developed. People have different ways of influencing each other in community contexts, and roles with authority matter, so skills or knowledge may be less important for some kinds of participation than not wanting to say "no" to the pastor. In such cases, the political and social motivations for participation are blurred. Community organizing values relationships first, with the shared intention to bring those relationships to political significance through the development of shared goals.

In *Bad Civil Society*, Chambers and Kopstein (2001) seek to shift the academic discussion that posits the benefits of engaged, associational life against apathy and isolation. The authors argue, "the choice is not really between isolation and participation

but rather between different types of participation” (838). This dissertation builds on that argument, as well as Paul Lichterman’s work, by suggesting that even well-intentioned civil institutions maintain and perpetuate social inequality unless they reflexively create bridging relationships that challenge inequities.¹⁶ It also builds on Richard Wood’s (2002) research comparing race-based and faith-based organizing groups in California, and Jane Mansbridge’s (1980) work comparing forms of direct democracy and how power operates within them. These scholars consider the unique benefits to democracy that come from different participatory methods and orientations to politics.

In his review of *Voice and Equality*, John Aldrich (1997) suggests that depending on the research question being asked, all methods of participation may not be theoretically comparable. He argues that different *domains of participation* (i.e. electoral politics, community action) may include their own unique processes for particular kinds of participation, where one kind affects another. This suggestion is helpful for thinking about community organizing, which is not one form of participation but a comprehensive approach to impacting local politics.¹⁷ To answer the question, “why did she get involved?” Aldrich argues, “What is missing is a domain-specific measure of political preference, of what it is they want to achieve, or, in short, why they are participating. In particular, the individual must care about the political end sought.” In order to understand why people act, theories should, “involve the wider array of actors, goals, and institutions” (423).

¹⁶ In his study of church-related volunteering and advocacy groups, Paul Lichterman (2005) found that the customs and quality of talk within groups repeatedly undermined bridging efforts. One group that was more successful at bridging, practiced “reflexive” talk, that is self-critical and thoughtful reflection on the relationships between volunteers and program agents.

¹⁷ Organizing groups use multiple tactics, including both creative and traditional practices, to gain responses from local officials for tangible outcomes.

This dissertation involves a wide array of actors, their goals, and institutions, loosely or tightly connected as participants, allies, or professional contacts in conversation with MOSES. Lay leaders and clergy “care about the end sought” because they collectively and continually choose immediate goals, to eventually arrive at larger goals—including public goods that are stymied by collective action problems. Political goals are developed concomitantly with the development of relationships. The organizing methods must overcome obstacles both within and among congregations in order to have political impact. By understanding the political capacity of religious congregations through the eyes of local strategic actors, scholars can better conceptualize both the challenges facing the development of bridging social capital, and how it is necessary for democratic collective action by religious institutions.

Chapter 3

MOSES History in Context

This chapter follows the development of MOSES and how the organizing project grew and evolved in response to a challenging local context and outside consultation. Its goals have been to build social capital within and among religious communities and improve the quality of life in the city in ways that support a more democratic and accountable public culture. Within the context of a struggling rust-belt city, MOSES provides a test case for the community organizing praxis and the metropolitan-wide strategy that is advocated by proponents of regionalism.

The chapter describes a chronology of the organization's history, beginning with an overview of Detroit's history post-World War II, and in particular the role of the Catholic Church in shaping that history. In the process of trying to improve their neighborhoods, clergy and community organizers came to understand the decline in neighborhood and religious communities as a result of structural changes that create incentives for out-migration. Participants learned about and came to advocate for regional solutions to Detroit's challenges, and shifted their organizing strategy in order to work toward those solutions. Organizers believed that a new relationship to space in the purpose and definition of the organization was necessary to meet their expanded mission, but that mission challenged the project to maintain its base and develop new leadership in participating congregations. While describing the organizational history and context, the

chapter also introduces the basic practices for community organizing in faith communities. Finally, discussion of a MOSES task force explains how the organizing model has successfully won policy changes, shaped the regional policy agenda, and bridged multiple organizations, public and private, religious and secular, for a common purpose.

A Shrinking City and Divided Region

Detroiters have a rich legacy of determined activism for equality and the public good, particularly through the cross-fertilization and collaboration of religious institutions, organized labor, mainstream civic, racial-uplift and radical organizations (Dillard 2007; Shaw 1996). Those stories of agency, however, are often overshadowed by racial and economic polarization that has prevented local actors from acknowledging their shared interests and pursuing policy change to benefit the entire region.

Detroit has become a classic case-study for racial animosity, segregation and urban sprawl. Historical developments that led to the current high degree of racial and economic segregation in industry-reliant metropolitan areas are well documented (Massey and Denton 1993; Sugrue 1996). Following the Second World War, federally subsidized low-interest mortgages and highways, automobile production and popularity, and housing shortages created demand for Detroit to grow outward. African Americans, who had moved in the thousands for industrial jobs and to escape Southern segregation, became re-segregated within inner cities by restrictive covenants, exploitative real estate agents, public housing, and slumlords (Darden et al. 1987, 67-68; Massey and Denton, 36-37, 56-57). As the automotive industry gradually cut jobs and moved operations out of

the city, south, or overseas, competition for employment contributed to social tension. In an impressive coordination of “civic engagement,” white ethnics organized into numerous homeowner associations to prevent residential integration, through voting, pressuring elected officials, and violently harassing individuals or businesses that attempted integration (Farley, Danziger, and Holzer, chap. 6; Sugrue, chap. 8-9). As outright discrimination became illegal, white citizens moved out in droves. In contrast to popular narratives, the infamous Detroit riot of 1967 was a culmination of, as well as an instigator for, many years of “white flight.” The city’s white population dropped by 85% from 1950 to 1990 (Farley, Danziger, and Holzer, 9-10). Detroit’s population peaked at 1.85 million in 1952, and between 1960 and 1980 the city lost almost half a million people. Over that same period, neighboring suburban counties attracted over a million new residents (Darden et al. 1987, 19). While suburbanization among Blacks and Latinos is also increasing, Detroit remains unique among American cities for the stark divide between primarily white surrounding suburbs and a predominately African American central city (Farley, Danziger, and Holzer, 9-10). The U.S. Census Bureau estimates Detroit’s 2006 population at 83 percent African American and 6 percent Latino. Almost one third of the city’s population currently lives below the poverty level, more than double the national average.¹⁸

Industry that remained in or joined the region has also moved to the suburbs, further reducing the city’s tax base and employment (Orfield and Luce 2003). As a result of depopulation and industrial disinvestment, the city’s assessed property values plummeted from representing half the region’s property wealth in 1960, to just 15.5% in

¹⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, 2006 American Community Survey.

1980. After 1980 the central city ranked behind suburban Oakland and Macomb counties in property wealth (Darden et al. 1987, 20-21).

Catholic Closings

The recent history of the Catholic Church in Detroit is central to the depopulation of the city and the development of MOSES. Historians have documented how identity groupings, including class status, race, and religion, intersected with public policy to encourage out-migration by some groups faster than others.¹⁹ Gerald Gamm (1999) explains how middle class and elite community members have driven the creation and sustaining of religious institutions, their priorities, and their demise. The pace of suburbanization quickened due to federal highway and subsidized mortgage programs, the automobile, and programs for urban renewal. In that context, the exodus of middle class and wealthy families was the signal that remaining institutions were in distress.

Gamm argues that in the context of federal policies encouraging suburbanization, religious institutional structures guided the decisions of residents. Catholic neighborhood cohesiveness and investments in the grounded parish supported the preference to stay, particularly for working class residents who had fewer resources to move. Combined with individual and institutional racism by policy, these circumstances motivated discrimination and violence against African Americans attempting to move from overcrowded enclaves. In his authoritative work on twentieth century Detroit, Thomas Sugrue (1996) explains the cultural ties

¹⁹ Institutional rules and relationships with their surrounding communities are important factors driving adaptation to social change. Scholars typically divide denominational authority structures into three broad categories: “congregational”, “presbyterian”, and “hierarchical”. These vary in the degree to which regional or national governing bodies own the denomination’s property, set policy and direct placement of personnel (Ammerman 1997). The Roman Catholic Church is the classic example of hierarchical structure, while Baptist churches exhibit the autonomy typical of congregational structure.

that defined Catholic life in the post-war city. Sixty-five percent of Detroit's population in the mid-1950s was Roman Catholic, most living in "intensely communal neighborhoods."²⁰ While Catholics lagged in suburbanization compared to their counterparts of other faiths, white Catholics eventually moved out in droves from many urban areas. Sugrue contends that it was "the mutual reinforcement of religious and racial territories" which led to the violent resistance to integration by white, working class Catholics.²¹ The communal bonds and centralized authority of the Catholic Church could not compel most of its congregants to stay in their parishes, once integrated.²²

John McGreevy's study of *Parish Boundaries* (1996) in the urban North explains both the practical and ideological divisions that led white Catholics to eventually leave their parishes. He argues that the overlapping Civil Rights Movement and the Second Vatican Council influenced Catholic clergy toward leftist politics, producing "a church almost unrecognizable to longtime communicants."²³

The often violent struggles over transitioning neighborhoods overlapped as well with a transformation of authority structures in the Catholic Church. Activists within the church pressured for more laity involvement, and were successful in the new policies of Vatican II. In the context of the challenge to authority within the church, Catholic leaders who demanded racial reconciliation and integration were often debated and resented by the newly empowered white

²⁰ Sugrue, 213.

²¹ Sugrue, 238. "The attacks on property were not irrational outbursts of an angry mob. They were political acts, carefully calculated to intimidate individual black families, but even more importantly they were hortatory acts, intended to announce racial boundaries and serve as a warning to blacks of the high costs of breaching Detroit's racial frontiers" (Sugrue, 249).

²² W. J. Wilson (Wilson 1987) argues, "the removal of [higher-income] families made it more difficult to sustain the basic institutions in the inner city (including churches, stores, schools, recreational facilities, etc.) in the face of prolonged joblessness. And as the basic institutions declined, the social organization of inner-city neighborhoods (defined here to include a sense of community, positive neighborhood identification, and explicit norms and sanctions against aberrant behavior) likewise declined" (144).

²³ Also see Farley, Reynolds, Sheldon Danziger, and Harry Holzer. 2000. *Detroit Divided, The Multi-City Study of Urban Inequality*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. Pp. 155

laity.²⁴ Many priests and nuns believed that their new calling was to integrate parishes and unify Catholics across races; the national or ethnic parish seemed antiquated and divisive to Catholic theologians post WWII. Working class white Catholics often resented their pastors' lectures on integration, after building and investing in tight-knit and homogenous parish communities.

As a result of these conflicts and ideological changes, the American Catholic church had become a different institution by the 1970s. McGreevy explains,

Even the territorial structure of the parish became increasingly fragile, as more Catholics became accustomed to 'shopping' for a parish whose liturgy and programs matched their own inclinations. Here the diversity in liturgical practice permitted by the Second Vatican Council – along with the widening divide between liberal and conservative Catholics – logically took the form of individual parishes appealing to different segments of a broader Catholic market. A de facto congregationalism became dimly evident.²⁵

Though the Catholic Church remains unique in its geographically-determined jurisdiction and hierarchical structure, both qualities were significantly challenged in the past fifty years when implicit and overt racial requirements for place-based identity were revealed and challenged.

Cardinal John Dearden perhaps best embodied the Church's dramatic changes during and after the 1960s. As a result of his participation in the Second Vatican Council in Rome, 1962-1965, Dearden personally transformed from an adherent of traditional church doctrine to an advocate for updating of the church for the modern world. Both as president of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and as Detroit's head Catholic, Dearden encouraged reforms that amplified the voices of priests and laity, permitted the mass to be said in English, widened the role for women and reached out to Protestants (Stanton 1988). He also opened the first office of Human Relations in 1960 to assist parishes in racially changing neighborhoods, and opened

²⁴ McGreevy, 221.

²⁵ McGreevy, 261.

the nation's first Office of Black Catholic Affairs in 1970 (Alcser et al. 2005). In a speech to a gathering of priests, Bishop Tom Gumbleton remembered,

In 1968 Cardinal Dearden made the announcement that the Archdiocesan Development Fund that year, the whole fund [\$1 million], would be used to try to put money and resources into the city of Detroit to fight racism, to counteract the racism, and also to help rebuild the city, which had been so devastated ... That was an extraordinary, controversial thing that Cardinal Dearden did, where he experienced great negative reaction, and the ADF went down for a couple of years after that, because people were not ready for the kind of challenge Cardinal Dearden presented to the church. (Gumbleton 2005).

Additionally, in 1971 nine nuns teaching at St. Raymond's school on the East side of Detroit quit in protest, saying the parish was deliberately trying to keep blacks out of the school. Cardinal Dearden supported their controversial decision (Stanton 1988).²⁶

Though Dearden closed a fifth of Detroit's Catholic schools in 1969, it is his successor Edmund Szoka, who is remembered for abruptly closing parishes in the city.²⁷ Following the lead of Pope John Paul II, Szoka "moved to tighten the reins of authority" when Dearden retired in 1980 (Stanton 1988). A month after Dearden's death in 1988, Cardinal Szoka announced that forty-three churches would be closed in the city of Detroit. The decision to close forty-three churches was a surprise to most Detroit Catholics, including priests, who had not been a part of the decision-making process. There had been speculation that there would be closings and clustering²⁸ of parishes, but few were prepared to relinquish their intimate communities. The

²⁶ Dearden also famously organized Synod 69 in Detroit, a series of meetings among lay and religious leaders to discuss the ideas of Vatican II. It involved over 80,000 Catholics over three years and produced hundreds of recommendations for reform. Dearden adopted many of the changes, including creation of regional vicariates and opened Catholic schools to children of other faiths (Stanton 1988).

²⁷ Dearden closed the schools in response to a state constitutional amendment approved by voters that year. The amendment banned state aid to parochial schools (Stanton 1988).

²⁸ Clustering refers to the arrangement where one priest serves two or more parishes. This is more economical for the diocese but also more work for the priest, especially if the communities have significant cultural differences.

financial reasons for closing and clustering parishes were no secret, however. The number of Catholic households in Detroit, Hamtramck and Highland Park dropped by more than half between 1976 and 1988 (AP 1988). Many churches were holding masses for decreasing numbers of aging parishioners. Additionally Catholic vocations became less popular than they once were, and Detroit, like much of the country, faces a priest shortage (Ager 1988). Meanwhile, Catholic populations in Detroit's rapidly growing suburbia pressured the diocese for more churches and more priests (Crumm 1989).

Along with the initial shock from the bad news, media reports of the response of city Catholics to the closings revealed tensions between urban and suburban churches, discomfort with racial differences, and arguments over the Church's commitment to the poor. The closings were interpreted in the context of white flight, so the Church was accused of leaving or abandoning the city for greener pastures. Local news media often made the comparison between industry, unions and major retailers leaving the city, and the Church's decisions.²⁹ For example, the *Detroit Free Press* quoted a black member of Holy Ghost Parish who lost his job that year: "I worked for GM, and first they closed the Fleetwood plant, then they closed my union hall, and now I look up and they want to close my church." Similarly, Fr. Norman Thomas, pastor of the predominately African American Sacred Heart parish stated, "The church is no different than businesses, corporations, that go where 'their people' are – 'their people' in quotes – which kind of angers me. Who are 'our people?'" (Ager 1988).

Father Thomas was one of the key dissenting priests to publicly challenge the diocese. As pastor to a predominately black church near the heart of Detroit, Thomas helped organize

²⁹ In an interview Dr. Rashid from Marygrove College agreed, "there was no (institutional) commitment to the city. After 1949 it's pretty clear the UAW had no commitment to the city."

protest demonstrations and was a founding member of the Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance (DCPA) and the Urban Parish Coalition. Formed out of a previously existing prayer group that mobilized in response to the closings, the DCPA seeks to maintain and build parish communities in Detroit.³⁰ These groups have protested the closing of city parishes and the methods by which the decisions to close were made (Kresnak 1988). A priest from Detroit's west side expressed why there was such an emotional response to the closings in the city.

People who still live in the city live here because they're committed to this particular environment, to this city, to this parish, to this neighborhood, and so they have strong feelings about their parishes, and it was very heavy-handed 15 years ago (...)³¹

Activism by urban priests and their lay members opposing the anticipated closings was highly publicized. The diocese responded defensively to accusations of abandonment and exacerbated resentment. At one public meeting to discuss the closings, a spokesman for the archdiocese said that Detroit's Catholic population would not grow because many Catholic suburbanites still feared crime in the city. "You won't be surprised when I tell you that I know people who think I'm nuts because I work downtown" (Crumm 1988b). Debates about the future of the Church in the city reached a low point when each side publicly accused the other of racism (Crumm 1988a). Cardinal Edmund Szoka accused many of the white priests in opposition to their plan as, "displaying racist attitudes by patronizing black Catholics and neglecting to promote black leaders in their parishes." Szoka charged those priests as expressing a "plantation mentality" that went beyond their interest in keeping parishes open (Crumm 1988a).

The diocese did not immediately close about half of the churches that were originally listed. This was partially a result of the resistance from Detroit Catholics and the public attention they were able to attract. Some churches to be closed worked out alternative cost-sharing

³⁰ Interviews with Fr. Norman Thomas and Sister Jolene VanHandel.

³¹ Interview with Fr. Clore.

arrangements with the diocese, such as being clustered with other small congregations. The threat of closure also encouraged some parishes to reconsider their relationship with their neighbors and the community. For many churches there was a less public but still stressful negotiation with the diocese over what they could do to stay open and keep their priest. Glennie Barber, a MOSES lay leader, recalled how her church successfully responded to the threat of closure.

Well, I didn't want ours to close 20 years ago either. Boy, I'll tell you, we begged, we talked, we explained, and we gave them a whole lot of things we could do – we started doing them. See, they weren't being done before. Now one of the solutions that did come about was the cluster, and we are one of the models of that. We started clustering our two parishes in 1991. [...] We didn't have the input then that we have now as to the selections and suggestions as to how we can keep at least some churches [...] So if this is happening in the city, then we've got to come up with some way to keep the parishes viable, which means, if you didn't do community work before, you'd better do it now, you see [*Laughs*].³²

Mrs. Barber emphasized the importance of developing church-neighborhood relationships to provide stability. Lacking that effort, many parishes have closed since 1988 because their dwindling membership, usually commuting from outside Detroit, did not adapt to the changing environment. While the closings of Catholic churches have been drawn out over at least twenty years, the real loss of these churches was the earlier and ongoing failure to bridge divides of race, class, and religious culture.

The Logic of Congregational Action

This context of high unemployment, a shrinking tax base, closing churches, and much reduced federal support as a proportion of the city's budget, provided the impetus for the antecedents of MOSES to collaborate in an organizing project (Neill, Fitzsimons, and Murtagh 1995, 130). Local clergy and activists were concerned about what they saw

³² Interview with Mrs. Barber.

happening to their congregations and neighborhoods. One organizer explained in a grant application, “Once viable neighborhood organizations and institutions including churches have collapsed under the loss of stable residents and for lack of a healthy neighborhood economy.”³³

The Gamaliel Foundation offered an interpretation of neighborhood decline and stress on congregations as a loss of community, and that the rebuilding of community required political action. Gamaliel is one of a handful of national church-based community organizing networks in the United States that trace their roots to the organizing methods and philosophy of Saul Alinsky.³⁴ Gamaliel began in 1968 in Chicago as an attempt to “link local religious bodies with groups organizing around housing issues” (Frenchak 2004, 242). The organization supported African American homeowners on Chicago’s West Side who faced discrimination from banks and savings and loans.³⁵ Today Gamaliel is an organizing network of sixty affiliates in twenty-one states across the United States and five provinces of South Africa.³⁶ The name Gamaliel was inspired by a religious leader of Jerusalem in the Old Testament, “who looked for God’s hand in the activities of agitating groups and who was the teacher of Paul (who then went on to found many of the early Christian communities). The name reflects the organization’s mission to recognize the existing forces for renewal, as well as train

³³ Sister Cheryl Liske, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, CHD National folder, Catholic Campaign for Human Development grant application, 1995.

³⁴ Other national organizing networks include: the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN) which uses a direct membership model rather than an institutional model; the Industrial Areas Foundation founded by Alinsky, which has created or inspired many other organizations, including The National Training and Information Center in Chicago, Organize, Inc., the Pacific Institute for Community Organizing (PICO), among others. For discussion of differences among the major approaches to community organizing in the U.S., and for a longer list of organizer training centers, see Gary Delgado’s book, *Beyond the Politics of Place: New Direction in Community Organizing* (1997), pages 16-18 and 73.

³⁵ See “Community organizing: A quiet revolution” on ReligionLink: Resources for Reporters (http://www.religionlink.org/tip_040518c.php)

³⁶ See the Gamaliel Foundation website (<http://www.gamaliel.org/NewsRoom/NewsGamalielToday.htm>)

people for organizing” (Frenchak, 242). The Gamaliel Foundation helps local affiliates hire organizers and provides retreats and leadership trainings “that teach participants the basic concepts of organizing and the skills needed to interact personally with political, corporate, and institutional leaders” (243). Through this practical educational mission, training centers like Gamaliel also connect affiliates to scholars and professionals to contextualize communities’ experiences and better strategize for effective action.

Father Joe Gagnon of St. Conrad’s said in a press interview, “One of the things we learned from the Gamaliel Foundation is the church (across the country) is suffering from the deterioration of community (including family life). We have to strengthen the church before we can address social needs” (Ludtke 1994). Rev. Joseph Hobbs of Eastern Star Missionary Baptist was quoted in Detroit papers comparing the salience of AIDS in cities to the decline in community infrastructure.

While everyone has heard of AIDS, fewer people are able to recognize the other national epidemic known as NIDS, Neighborhood Immune Deficiency Syndrome. NIDS means that neighborhoods are no longer strong enough to ward off dangerous outside influences that destroy. People in metro Detroit, like many other areas across the country, do not have a community . . . People do not know their neighbors or the positive assets of a neighborhood. Gangs, drug dealers and petty criminals take over and the neighborhood dies (Amick 1996).

Based on their own experiences in Detroit, and training from Gamaliel, “community building” became the prevailing frame that organizers and pastors used to describe their motivation for creating the MOSES organizing project. According to Gamaliel, churches need more purposeful, intentional training for building community. From this perspective, religious institutions are not only responsible for cultivating spirituality: churches should also build an actionable community, a community of people

who will challenge each other to pursue political actions where their individual sense of self-interest overlaps with the interest of the congregation and the larger community.

One document in particular, “Church Based Organizing: A Strategy for Ministry,” makes the argument for why church-based organizing is necessary. This training document is a core background reading for community organizers, active pastors, and lay people. It lays out Gamaliel’s understanding of the current state of church community in struggling urban areas and what they hope to do about it.³⁷ The piece explains how churches in Alinsky’s era were attracted to community organizing to address the needs of their congregation members. Today that self-interest still exists, but a close-knit community, surrounding and including the church, does not. The “industrial wastelands” of the Back of the Yards neighborhoods in Chicago “seemed to have been incredibly fertile ground for creating healthy church” [II]. While communities like Back of the Yards suffered from poverty, bad housing, and unemployment, the churches were a strong and visible counterpoint to those realities. The document contrasts early twentieth century organized congregations to churches today in poor neighborhoods that are struggling to survive; today the primary self-interest of the city congregation is survival.

The document points to neighborhood transience, time spent commuting or in front of the television, and the separation of shopping and living areas as undermining community well-being. Neighborhoods had a sense of community because people walked to work and school, belonged to unions, ethnic clubs and taverns. Gamaliel argues that communities as they once were are “practically non-existent” [IV]. Prior to these trends, “the churches’ job was to minister to (community), nurture it, celebrate it, and raise to a sacred level the life struggle of the people in that community. The church did not have to

³⁷ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, first folder.

create community it already existed” [II]. But the celebration of community is no longer adequate for urban congregations—they must now recreate it.

Gamaliel argues that the best strategy for churches today is to create community by intentionally building relationships, connections that are not being built through other local, structured interactions. A church must include a strategy for involving lay leadership; too often church staff are overwhelmed with tasks, and relationships are lost in bureaucracy. “In any modern institution people will not be pawns, followers, clients, and passive observers . . . loyalty is not created by doing things for people but by giving people meaningful things to do. A food pantry does not evangelize those receiving food, it evangelizes those of the church who hand out food” [VI].

Underlying their purpose of organizational survival, Gamaliel’s strategy posits that the primary task of religious congregations is the creation of community that will in turn sustain the church: “the *raison d’etre* of community organizing is the creation of community” [IX]. “The more experienced practitioners of the art of church based community organizing began several years ago to reflect with their church partners on what it would take for organizing and church to be more effective. They concluded organizing must be done in a way that helps build up church.” Community organizing addresses “the problem of people being alienated from the systems that control their lives; alienated from each other; and alienated from their own selves” [VIII]. The new paradigm and responsibility for church is “moving from ministering to a community to aggressively creating community” [XI].

The three essential components to “ministry in troubled communities” include (1) a strategy for intentional and intensive relationship building; (2) a strategy for the

development and involvement of lay leadership; and (3) a strategy for effectively impacting the public arena [VI]. What is most interesting about this approach is that “community building” is conceived as *including* public action—not as an antecedent to action. Gamaliel believes that taking initiative in local politics is necessary for civic institutions to be relevant in marginalized communities. The document argues that if churches will become irrelevant to their members if they do not respond to the pressures and problems people experience outside of church. In contrast to civic associational approaches to democracy that understand community as a web of social relationships prior to and apart from politics, community organizing understands the development of political action, and inclusive dispersal of leadership skills, as intrinsic to “building community.” Therefore the creation of relationships through community organizing methods is about public or civic relationships. Trainings emphasize that participants should be able to differentiate between public and private relationships, and when in doubt consider a relationship public. Knowing the difference is the “antidote for the fallacy of building community through intimacy and co-dependency” [XI].

Antecedents to MOSES

The first professional organizer for what would become MOSES, was Sister Cheryl Liske.³⁸ We met in the MOSES office, what used to be living quarters for priests, upstairs from Ss. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in downtown Detroit. “All these palatial surroundings,” she said grinning, began in the late 1980s, “when an organizer with the Michigan Avenue Community Organization [MACO] started talking with some

³⁸ Dominican Sisters of Divine Providence, a Catholic religious order.

pastors on the far west side of Detroit.”³⁹ Pastors at St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Suzanne’s, Temple of Faith Baptist, and Liske’s pastor at Our Lady Gate of Heaven initiated these early conversations.⁴⁰ The clergy were originally thinking about it more as a joint food pantry. They hired Liske as director and organizer. “I could figure out what a director was [but] I didn’t know what an organizer was. So that was in October. And in November, I went to the Gamaliel Foundation weeklong training because it was the next training available.”⁴¹

Liske attended the Chicago-based Gamaliel Foundation’s leadership training through contacts with Gamaliel Director Greg Galuzzo. While the small group had originally decided to work with the Neighborhood Service Organization [NSO],⁴² the training Liske and others received through Gamaliel fueled their desire to be faith-based and work with a group that was “thinking big.” A dozen churches incorporated as West Detroit Inter-Faith Community Organization [WDIFCO] in 1989, and signed a contract with the Gamaliel Foundation for ongoing training and support in September 1990.⁴³

³⁹ MACO was a community development organization comprised of six large neighborhood groups as well as “block clubs and churches aligned to form an Alinsky-style umbrella” (Shaw 1996). According to Fr. Clore, MACO included mostly Polish churches around Michigan Avenue and Livernois. In the 1980s, MACO activists protested at city council meetings, advocating spending on neighborhood organizations and affordable housing. See Shaw, Chapter 7.

⁴⁰ Respectively, Rev. Leo Sabourin, Rev. Mike Coone, Rev. Rochelle Davis, and Sr. Rosemarie Kieffer, O.P. Interview with Cheryl Liske. For a complete list of the twelve WDIFCO member churches that applied for funding from the CCHD in 1995, See Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, M.O.S.E.S archive, Box 1, CHD National folder. The group at that point included: five Catholic Churches, three Baptist, two Evangelical Lutheran, one Episcopal and one Presbyterian church.

⁴¹ Interview with Cheryl Liske.

⁴² NSO is a secular, non-profit human service agency, involved with community health, seniors, homelessness, and neighborhood development. Unlike Gamaliel, the NSO did not charge fees for consultation. See www.nso-mi.org/

⁴³ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board 1998 folder.

Pastor Samuel Bullock of Bethany Baptist, one of the founding members, described the purpose of WDIFCO as being neighborhood-focused from the beginning.

He explained that their organizing efforts,

Came about as a result of the challenges that were facing the neighborhood, in terms of housing, crime, education, recreation, and the need to do something about it. And that truism that what you cannot do by yourself, in concert with others you have a better chance of getting it done. So, we got - churches got together and formed WDIFCO.⁴⁴

Encompassing River Rouge Park, the WDIFCO area was bounded East and West by busy Telegraph Road and Southfield freeway. Plymouth Road was the approximate northern boundary and Tireman Avenue the southern.⁴⁵ The territorial base for the early organization is evident in member pastors' descriptions. As Rev. Bullock explained, "in an effort to expand the movement to include more churches, we expanded the boundaries." Similarly, Fr. Victor Clore of Christ the King Catholic parish said,

At some point they made a decision that they probably would be a little more influential, that they could expand their geographical area. They were a fairly small geographical neighborhood, so they decided that they probably should go see if they could get some partner churches north of the Jeffries freeway, so that's us. They came and made a request to us.⁴⁶

The territorial base helped define what those inside shared in common and therefore their interests in working together.⁴⁷

WDIFCO's first targeted goal was to reopen a public swimming pool that was built in the 1930s and condemned for boiler problems. Members researched the issue and

⁴⁴ Interview with Rev. Bullock.

⁴⁵ Interview with Fr. Clore.

⁴⁶ Interview with Fr. Clore.

⁴⁷ A geographical base can also limit involvement from other potentially interested parties, not within that immediate area. For example, Fr. Joe Gagnon was involved while he was pastor at St. Christopher's during 1988-89, but he was not involved with WDIFCO for the three years he was at Presentation Our Lady of Victory because it was not on the west side of Detroit. Once he was moved back west by the diocese, he was contacted by an organizer. Conversation with Fr. Gagnon, retired from St. Conrad's in Melvindale, MI. Jan. 13, 2005.

discovered the state would provide a \$750,000 grant if the city contributed \$250,000 (Bonfiglio 2002). Liske described the campaign and early victory:

The problem was they [the City] were going to have to match the grant with their own money to do it. And they never put anything in the budget to do that. [...] So anyway, at our very first meeting we had the recreation director come in. We presented him with the grant papers and asked him to sign them in front of us which meant he would have to connect that money to the project that he said he was going to do. So there was you know we had some notoriety, we had some publicity anyway. [*laughs*]⁴⁸

Publicity from the Rouge Pool victory drew in interested churches and caught the attention of Bill O'Brien in Southwest Detroit.

While Cheryl Liske was organizing with WDIFCO, Bill O'Brien, previously a MACO organizer in the early 1980s, was working at Holy Redeemer Catholic parish in as the Director of Christian Services.⁴⁹ From that position, he organized a food bank and eased tensions in the predominately Latino and Anglo parish over African Americans and others coming in for food. "The neighborhood was totally deteriorating, so I tried a couple of ways of organizing that were very parochial, very much in that neighborhood."⁵⁰ He organized several actions around gang violence, pressured police to close down a drug house, and successfully brought the sheriff and police to attend meetings at the church on public safety.⁵¹

The nation's urban centers, including Detroit, experienced a surge in youth violence in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Butts and Travis 2002). O'Brien explained that there was an eruption of gang activity in the primarily Latino neighborhood around Holy Redeemer while he was on staff. Bringing together representatives from several

⁴⁸ Interview with Liske.

⁴⁹ In between working for MACO and Holy Redeemer, O'Brien worked for Witness for Peace and Justice in southeast Michigan, and also organized with the Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance.

⁵⁰ Interview with O'Brien.

⁵¹ Conversation with O'Brien, May 20, 2004.

local social agencies, they formed the Council Against Gang Related Violence. Like WDIFCO, the group targeted recreation as an issue for collective action. They realized that the head of the recreation department for outgoing Mayor Coleman Young, “was sitting on a lot of money.” Clark Park in Mexicantown became the focus of their efforts. According to O’Brien, sectors of the city government were thinking about closing down the park, “just when you needed something like that. And they had a great ice skating rink, kind of a legendary ice skating rink that wasn’t functioning.” The group successfully pressured the city for \$50,000 to fix the rink and improve the park. O’Brien continued,

And then based on that, I realized that the agencies were all in competition with each other. Some of them were very angry that we would dare go against Coleman Young’s department. So there was a lot of, social agencies were protecting the city establishment, because they in turn, were getting money. [...] So there were a range of about five or six of these agencies, and many of them have the same board of directors.⁵² So it was all in cahoots. And some of the boards of directors actually welcomed the emergence of Holy Redeemer into the fight, because it allowed them to say things that they previously would be punished for saying at their own board level.

Then I realized how Holy Redeemer was in the driver’s seat. And then Holy Redeemer took the lead in a meeting with all the party store owners and police to get the party store owners to agree to get rid of drug paraphernalia from their counters, you know to get rid of the worst of the porno – to clean up the entrances to their party stores and not allow them to be gang hangouts. And that meeting, we had 250 people of whom 230 came from the church, and about 20 came from all these agencies. [...] Well, that all showed me that I could organize the church [...], but I had no strategy. And that’s when I called Cheryl in the fall of 1992.⁵³

As the Director of Christian Services at the parish, O’Brien helped develop the church into a political actor, negotiating with governmental and nonprofit service agencies. In the interview, the community organizer describes the church, rather than himself, as the

⁵² Relationships among independent community organizations and government agencies can have positive consequences for collective action. For more on this point see Shaw, page 386, Footnote 71.

⁵³ Interview with Bill O’Brien.

primary actor in the community. O'Brien was working with lay members and clergy in order for the religious institution to gain respect as a political actor. Once he realized the church members could act collectively and had growing influence, he took the opportunity to connect to another organization and continue their momentum.

O'Brien called Liske after reading about WDIFCO's swimming pool victory in the newspaper, impressed by her organizing success. The tools of congregational development taught in the Gamaliel trainings proved useful for working with Holy Redeemer. Liske explained,

When we started working in Southwest Detroit, Father said, "You know I need new leaders here at Holy Redeemer." He was kind of frustrated with his parish council. There was only two or three people that ever showed up. Those kinds of things. So we actually organized before we even started Jeremiah. One of our outreach processes in at Holy Redeemer alone, we probably trained 200 leaders [each] to do an outreach to 10 to 15 other people. So we reached about 2,000 people at Holy Redeemer.

And we also increased their membership roles because one of the things we did is a lot of people weren't registered. So at the services on Sunday we asked people to sign up for these one-on-ones. And as they filled out cards, you know we also asked them if they would register for the parish. Yeah, sure they thought they were already registered.⁵⁴ So anyway that was one of the beginnings of Jeremiah is as kind of an experiment that Holy Redeemer and Fr. Halter had on creating this in-reach."⁵⁵

While O'Brien's work in this church enabled some political successes, the introduction of Gamaliel's community organizing techniques intentionally built relationships within the congregation that in turn built a base for future action. Many people in a congregation only know each other in a superficial way that does not prepare them for any purposeful,

⁵⁴ Increasing and keeping track of membership is one way community organizers can show pastors their worth. Churches are interested in keeping track of their membership to varying degrees, based on the congregational structure and beliefs. Most churches would like to know who attends; Catholic churches historically keep track of who attends church and whether or not they live in the parish. They use these numbers to communicate to the diocese about their needs and assets.

⁵⁵ Interview with Cheryl Liske.

shared endeavor. “One-on-ones” are a fundamental tool of faith-based community organizing, where two people sit down for intentional listening and conversation.⁵⁶ From those interpersonal connections, clergy and organizers can identify and encourage potential leaders to form a “core team” in their congregation. The community organizer works with the core team to discover their interests and decide a plan of action.

Because their original organizing strategy was neighborhood and parish-based, the community organizers perceived the city geographically. When O’Brien started the Jeremiah Project in October 1993, “the turf I wanted Jeremiah to be in was from the river all the way up to where Cheryl was working, which was Warren Avenue. I wanted everything south of that.” Ten years previous, MACO was the community organization along Michigan Avenue, in the center of the area he wanted to organize. So in 1993, he made several phone calls to MACO, “to find out if they were really dead or alive because I didn’t know if they would oppose me. And if they were alive, would they work with me? Well they were dead, for all practical purposes. Churches didn’t know anything about them.”⁵⁷ Following the in-reach campaign at Holy Redeemer, the Jeremiah Project became the southwest side’s correlate to WDIFCO.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ According to Liske’s writing in 1995 as Director of WDIFCO, the purpose of one-on-one meetings is three-fold: “1) To begin to develop significant networks of relationships within the congregation and community; 2) To identify current or potential leaders; and 3) To begin to identify the important concerns of those interviewed.” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, CHD National folder, 1995 Application for funding, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Bill O’Brien worked for MACO from 1983 to 1985. MACO was affiliated with the National Training and Information Center (NTIC) of Chicago, through organizer Shel Trapp. Bill O’Brien termed the NTIC a “very loose network”. MACO was also connected with organizer Tom Gaudette who previously worked for Saul Alinsky. Gaudette and Trapp were both consulting with MACO in the early 1980s. According to O’Brien, that was as close as MACO ever got to an Alinsky-style organization.

⁵⁸ Jeremiah was initially funded by a grant from the Catholic Campaign for Human Development [CCHD], which has provided key seed and sustaining money for similar community organizations across the nation. Interview with Victoria Kovari. The CCHD is the primary domestic anti-poverty program for the U.S. Catholic Conference (Delaney 1996a). Additionally, according to a CCHD grant proposal, “By June 1993, Ms. Cheryl Perry then of the Center for Community Change began working with WDIFCO and the Gamaliel Foundation to establish an interested group of congregational leaders on the lower east side of

The choice of name was based on *Jeremiah 32:15*, “Houses, fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land.”⁵⁹ This verse reflects the language of rebirth often employed by clergy about their mission and hopes for the city. One minister described their namesake as a risk-taker who called for rebuilding Jerusalem: “When the Prophet Jeremiah bought the field at Anathoth (near Jerusalem) in the midst of a Babylonian siege, his friends said he was crazy. Maybe we’re crazy, too. But I’m betting the Lord hasn’t given up on southwest Detroit any more than he gave up on Jerusalem.”⁶⁰

The multiple, overlapping coalitions for affordable housing and neighborhood development in the 1980s contributed to WDIFCO and Jeremiah. Most significantly, Victoria Kovari formerly organized with the Detroit Tenants’ Union and Detroit Organization of Tenants, and worked with the United Community Housing Coalition [UCHC] in the 1980s (Shaw 1996).⁶¹ Kovari and her husband, Bill O’Brien were friends with the brother-in-law of Rev. Joseph Hobbs, pastor at Eastern Star Missionary Baptist [now Triumphant Life] in Highland Park, a municipality in the Woodward corridor surrounded by Detroit. They connected with Fr. Stanley Ulman, pastor of St. Ladislaus parish in Hamtramck, a former Polish enclave and small municipality also surrounded by Detroit.

According to O’Brien, these pastors and others in central Detroit were receptive because a number of their lay people attended Jeremiah’s 1994 meeting,

Detroit, towards the aim of establish [sic] yet another ‘sister’ organization.” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, CHD National folder, 1995 Application for funding.

⁵⁹ The name was suggested by Rev. Fenton of Zion Lutheran.

⁶⁰ Rev. Katherine McIntosh-Smith, then interim pastor of Southwest United Methodist Church, quoted in the *Detroit News* (Hamada 1994).

⁶¹ In 1993 Kovari managed City Councilor Maryann Mahaffey’s campaign for Council President. She had interned with Mahaffey in the early 1980s. Mahaffey was a champion for Detroit’s affordable housing and homeless organizations and persistently challenged Mayor Young’s budget proposals (Shaw 1996).

They went back and told their pastors, holy cow, that was good! We should do the same thing. ... There was a lot of anti-politician rhetoric, especially in Hobbs church. Okay, so then they go back, and they keep moving. I think Cheryl was staffing them. And they got up to about 14, 15 pastors and formed a group called NOAH which had its first public meeting in [...] in that winter time of '95.

With Rev. Hobbs as their president, the Northeast Organization Allied for Hope

[NOAH]⁶² thus became the third district in Detroit to work with the Gamaliel

Foundation's organizing methods ("All faiths," 1995). (See Illustration 3.2 showing the district boundaries).

As the districts grew and held their own meetings and localized actions, they also sent participants to Gamaliel leadership trainings. Those trainings challenge members to consider what they personally want to achieve through their participation, define their "self-interest" in the context of their faith communities, and develop a common understanding of the purpose of the organizing project. While the organizers, clergy and lay people were working out of different districts, they shared common experiences in the city and language from Gamaliel, which enabled and encouraged their strategy to work together towards a metropolitan-wide effort.

Since early 1994 WDIFCO and Jeremiah had been considering how to connect their organizing efforts across the city and the larger region. At that time, the WDIFCO leadership ratified the "Metro Organizing Strategy" at the annual Board retreat, as a project to formalize the effort of creating sister organizations, with the intention to build a federation of these organizations in 1996.⁶³ In a 1995 letter to leadership of Jeremiah, the Northeast sponsoring committee, and WDIFCO, Liske explained that their previous plans

⁶² NOAH in Detroit was distinct from another NOAH, the Northeast Ohio Alliance for Hope. Both are affiliated with the Gamaliel Foundation (Kleidman 2004).

⁶³ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, CHD National folder, 1995 Application for funding.

“involved federations of some sort though the structure and definition of such a federation was always ill-defined. The question was always what would be the glue that binds us to each other in the struggle?”⁶⁴

She proposed a first draft at describing a metro-wide organizational structure. The history section of that draft reflected on WDIFCO’s experience winning a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Many of the original pastors in WDIFCO were primarily interested in developing affordable housing, and created a housing task force. WDIFCO received almost one million dollars through a HUD Hope III Implementation grant to refurbish houses. They successfully rehabbed houses from that funding over five-years, but future funding applications reflect a change in strategy.

At first we were elated over such a great victory and then we were plunged to the depth of despair when we realized that \$1 million dollars was but a drop in the bucket compared to what we had ambitions for doing ... In addition we recognized that the tables of power that were influencing our neighborhoods were rarely located anywhere near our neighborhoods. The capacity of a community organization, even one as well organized as WDIFCO, to affect the decisions of bank conglomerates, governors, insurance companies and multi-national corporations was slight [...] Very quickly the leadership of WDIFCO understood that securing that much money and influencing that much power required a lot more organizing in a much larger and influential territory. If our people were truly to have a say in those things which affect their lives, then the whole of the metro area needed to be pulled together in one unified effort.⁶⁵

The Detroit projects were influenced by other members of Gamaliel, including affiliates in Northern Indiana, Chicago, St. Louis and Cleveland, who seemed to be “coming to the same conclusion.”

Soon after the Detroit partners wrote a grant proposal based on the federation strategy, an affiliate in NW Indiana, “the only true federation in the Gamaliel Network,”

⁶⁴ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board 1998 folder, letter dated March 17, 1995, pg. 2.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

disintegrated. “The accountability of the regions to the central organization was weak, and vice versa. Eventually, one whole region separated from the federation over a difference in policy.”⁶⁶ Concerned about the “tendency to fractionalize,” the districts considered their options. Reflecting on Gamaliel’s strategy, the choice seemed clear: expand or die.⁶⁷ Recruitment within the city of Detroit continued to be a goal. But in the context of ongoing discussions about regional solutions to city problems, the answer was to recruit congregations beyond Eight Mile Road.⁶⁸

Robert Kleidman’s research describes the Gamaliel Foundation’s developing connection with regionalist scholars in the early and mid-1990s. Presentations by Myron Orfield, David Rusk, and John Powell helped convince the senior staff to adopt Regional Equity Organizing as their guiding strategy.⁶⁹ Regional studies and GIS maps made apparent the dynamics of population movements, poverty, crime, segregation and tax rates, and showed organizers how these processes affected their neighborhoods (Kleidman 2004). The research resonated with Gamaliel and Detroit activists because it

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ At a MOSES board meeting in 1997, Gamaliel Director Gregory Galuzzo’s said that he saw his work, “in the tradition of St. Paul who wrote to the communities that he founded to scold and inspire, especially when they began to grow complacent. *A congregation-based organization is either growing or dying*. Are we serious about bringing in new churches? How many have been to week-long training and how many are getting others to go?” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board 1998 folder, MOSES Board Minutes, May 15, 1997, pg. 3.

⁶⁸ Eight Mile Road is a municipal boundary that symbolizes racial divisions between Detroit and its northern suburbs. As documented by Thomas Sugrue (1996, 64), in the 1940s a housing developer constructed a half-mile, six-foot wall in the Eight Mile-Wyoming community in order to separate a poor black neighborhood from adjacent white subdivisions. The developer built the wall as a compromise in order to gain loans and mortgage guarantees from the Federal Housing Administration, whose appraisers considered non-white neighborhoods too high a risk for financing.

⁶⁹ Professor Myron Orfield, University of Minnesota School of Law, and Executive Director, Institute on Race and Poverty. David Rusk is a former New Mexico state legislator and former mayor of Albuquerque; author of *Cities without Suburbs* (1993). Professor John Powell founded the Institute on Race and Poverty, University of Minnesota and is current Executive Director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, Ohio State University.

provided larger explanations for what religious communities were already experiencing, and supported further movement in directions they were already moving.

In an interview, Liske explained that the experience working on housing led leaders in WDIFCO to begin to “think regionally” about larger systems of inequality affecting their neighborhoods, and how to address metropolitan-wide inequalities. Their usual operating strategy was to “rehab” the one bad house on the block, believing that would solve the housing problems in the area.

What we discovered was six months later, there were three more abandoned houses on that block. And right about that time we had actually we had some leaders go to an organizer retreat where Myron Orfield and David Rusk were doing a presentation. And you know Orfield said “look, you’re trying to rebuild the City of Detroit, but it’s sitting on a melting ice cube.”

Rusk pointed out that thousands more houses were being built in the Detroit metropolitan area than the number of households being created. Liske said, “So people in Detroit, in the Detroit market, were basically walking away from houses,” attracted by bigger, newer homes, in suburbs with lower taxes, better roads and schools. Organizers and leaders became concerned that their housing efforts were effectively concentrating poor people in poor neighborhoods, limiting their chances for long term success. The organizers decided they could not successfully fight out-migration and disinvestment without a regional strategy. “So the leaders said, we’ve got to create an organization that’s metro-wide and working on some of these issues. You know we can do housing, but we’ve got to do much bigger issue work.”⁷⁰

While the staff organizers and community leaders were successful on many neighborhood actions, they came to believe that their neighborhood problems were

⁷⁰ Interview with Cheryl Liske.

symptomatic of regional inequalities and disinvestment. Ponsella Hardaway, current Executive Director of MOSES, explained their transition in thinking.

When Orfield, Powell, and Rusk came to us about 10 years ago, we weren't thinking about this stuff. [We] wrestled with it within our own selves. [...] We were just neighborhood organizing and we wanted to hold the mayor accountable for the garbage dumps in our neighborhoods and the blighted housing and tear down abandoned housing and fix the streets. You know, we didn't think about it in those terms. [...] We had to go through some training and learning ourselves, what that means for us and how do we rethink the way we're organizing? So I think it's the same kind of conversation we have to have with pastors.

It's like you have to constantly talk to people about this sophisticated way of organizing to get them to understand. Oh, *this* is why our region is in such trouble. We have to look at certain policy. We have to hold politicians accountable for decision-making in Lansing that affects me locally. Because we only can close so many drug houses.⁷¹

These conversations marked a change in consciousness for the organization as a whole, a transition that had to be developed with member congregations. When she says “you have to constantly talk to people about this sophisticated way of organizing,” Hardaway describes the educational and training function of community organizing. This is a consciousness-raising process that occurs among organizers, pastors and lay people: to discover connections between neighborhood conditions and state and regional politics, and to decide how to respond. It is also a training process, both for organizers and community members, on how to adapt the organizing methods to new circumstances or create new understandings of the circumstances they face.

Citing Mike Miller's comparison of organizing styles, Francesca Polletta writes,

The most effective organizers are teachers ... but the most effective teaching takes place in the middle of the action, not in a classroom ... Practical questions ... should be combined with discussions of people's values, alternative political visions, and the power structures that they are up against. (Miller 1993; Polletta 2002, 187).

⁷¹ Interview with Ponsella Hardaway.

The big-picture question in this case was how to adapt their methods to a new understanding of what the goals should be, and therefore who the organizing should include. An ideology of regionalism was helpful in making sense of the ongoing expansion further and further beyond the city. Expanding metro-wide was an idea that resonated strongly with their experience as organizers and clergy, most of whom lived in the city and experienced the impact of out-migration first-hand. The majority of participating churches draw their congregants from throughout the city and suburbs; neighborhood churches are largely seen as a thing of the past.

The organizers believed that to do nothing would be choosing MACO's fate. Worrying over how to maintain internal accountability, and anticipating needless competition over funding, the organizations rejected the route of federation in favor of one metro-wide organization. Liske wrote, "Assuming we can create strong congregational and regional structures and strategies this is the best option for a strong future."⁷² Creating strong congregational structures proved an ongoing challenge. In a WDIFCO memo to the Metropolitan Organizing Strategy (Moses et al.) Steering Committee in August 1995, Liske wrote, "With the exception of the southwest region, none of the regions are anywhere near where we had hoped eight months ago. The southeast region especially is way behind the schedule. It in essence doesn't exist except in a few (but determined) pastor's minds. She added, "We are not reaching the African American pastors the way we should be." NOAH, covering eastern and central Detroit, never seemed to achieve the grounding that the west side groups had. Perhaps NOAH did

⁷² Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board 1998 folder, letter dated March 17, 1995.

not have enough time to establish its own relational base before the three districts decided to officially join forces.⁷³

A 1996 news article tentatively describes MOSES as, “a new umbrella organization for the local groupings Jeremiah, NOAH, WDIFCO, and another that is still forming on Detroit’s lower east side” (Delaney 1996b). Organizing efforts on the lower east side, for a time called ESTHER, never coalesced into a district. Three pastors had been thinking about creating such an organization, but apparently all three envisioned themselves as the president and, “they weren’t exactly talking with each other.”⁷⁴ This sector of the city posed unique challenges for community organizing. Known for areas of concentrated poverty, some even referred to it as a “demilitarized zone.” Southeast Detroit borders the Indian Village neighborhood, a contrasting concentration of wealth, which did not think of itself as connected to the poorer areas. The lower east side had a proliferation of community organizations already in place when WDIFCO and Jeremiah were getting started, including U-SNAP-BAC housing, Warren/Connor economic development corporation, and the Morning Star neighborhood association. According to Liske, these organizations had their own programs in place and were not interested in the Alinsky method of community organizing.⁷⁵

At the same time that they were discussing the metro strategy, the districts were having success with multiple neighborhood-level actions. In the mid 1990s congregations started creating “Safe Zones” in their neighborhoods.⁷⁶ An extension of the basic

⁷³ The district also appears to have lost some member congregations due to poor relationships or racial tensions. See Chapter 3 on challenges of bridging across race.

⁷⁴ Telephone conversation with Liske, November 16, 2006.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ For specific Safe Zone methodology, see www.mosesmi.org/pages/safezone.shtml. Also MOSES handout, “What is the Philosophy behind Safe Zones?”

organizing process, Safe Zones participants build neighborhood trust and gather information by surveying their neighbors about safety concerns in a door-to-door “porch patrol” around the area of a church, temple or school.⁷⁷ Participants use the information to develop relationships with law enforcement and solve neighborhood problems (Selwa 2002). They also meet with public health, public works, lighting and safety engineering agencies, area school representatives and businesses. Organizers use this method to intentionally and strategically build community relationships, so that social agencies will have a community in which to base their services. The first Jeremiah Safe Zones were located in two ten-block sections in southwest Detroit parishes, All Saints and Sts. Andrew and Benedict. Those two Safe Zones were held up as examples of what was possible in preventing and fighting drugs in Detroit. In a grant application from November 1996, MOSES reported that their piloted Safe Zones had resulted in 24 drug houses busted, seven dump sites cleaned up, 22 dangerous buildings demolished, 30 buildings boarded up, one area of prostitution (on school grounds) eliminated, and one area park re-opened, re-equipped, and re-staffed.⁷⁸ Between August 1996 and May 1997, the number of Safe-Zones increased from four to thirteen.⁷⁹

Over a period of at least three years the district organizations discussed the creation of MOSES as a metropolitan organization, and its implications for the churches and districts. Jeremiah Board minutes from February 1996 report uncertainty among clergy. Rev. Halter from Holy Redeemer acknowledged that combining the districts

⁷⁷ This work was enabled by a partnership with the Detroit Bureau of Substance Abuse. *MOSES News Update*, Fall 2003. Also see Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board 1998 folder, Executive Summary (11/14/96), National CHD Application.

⁷⁸ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board 1998 folder, Executive Summary (11/14/96), National CHD Application.

⁷⁹ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board 1998 folder, MOSES Board Minutes, May 15, 1997, pg. 2.

would facilitate securing funding but he asked for other examples of how the churches would benefit. Rev. Barlow advocated for a combined MOSES, saying he believed they could accomplish more on a larger scale, train more leaders, and he thought that Jeremiah could maintain its identity. The minutes report, “Rev. Wyatt looked at power as unity in a spiritual way. Rev. Duggan thinks we should move slower, or we will not accomplish much with our organizing.”⁸⁰

Clergy and staff of the districts planned a meeting for April 20, 1996 that included guest presenter Myron Orfield, to address “pastors and leaders of Jeremiah, WDIFCO, and NOAH with answers to the following questions: “Do we need MOSES? How would our lives be better? Will MOSES help my congregation? What would MOSES look like?”⁸¹

Rev. Cain of Waterfall Baptist Church was co-chair of the MOSES Steering Committee. In a speech that appears to have been addressed to Jeremiah members, Rev. Cain speaks to uncertainty in the room over MOSES membership. He assured Jeremiah members that NOAH and WDIFCO, “know what Jeremiah Board of Directors and members want, and I am sure that the others have the same concerns.” Cain reminded the audience of the way community organizing transforms faith communities from the inside out, through building relationships internally and with neighbors. He then argued for the metropolitan strategy.

As we were planning the agenda for the (April 20) MOSES meeting, the question came up about how we can convince our congregations of the need for a MOSES. Then my thoughts were – how quickly we forget, or how slow we are to remember and understand what Jeremiah has done by itself and what the others

⁸⁰ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 2, Jeremiah Board Meeting 1994-1996 folder, Minutes, Jeremiah Project Board Meeting, February 8, 1996.

⁸¹ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 2, Jeremiah Board Meeting 1994-1996 folder, flier included with Board Meeting Agenda, April 11, 1996.

have done by themselves. Now, what do you think we could do together? Could we hurt ourselves by being in an organization that covers the counties of Wayne, Oakland, or Monroe?”⁸²

Answering Cain’s question of what they could accomplish together, the three districts united in their first regional public meeting in 1996. Led by Rev. Barlow, the districts amassed three thousand people with US Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey, Director of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) program (Buckley, Walters, and Kovari 2005). Detroit had been suffering from scourges of drug addiction and violence, but it was not accessing the national HIDTA program that prevents drug distribution and provides treatment for addicts. The organizations held up their Safe Zones strategy as evidence of the community’s commitment to working with government agencies on crime. The public meeting impressed McCaffrey, led to Detroit’s designation as a HIDTA in 1997, and directed new federal dollars to the city (Bonfiglio 2002).

The groups’ reasons for combining were in part a response to the resistance they faced trying to impact local governments. In an urgent speech to the districts in June 1996, then lay leader Vicky Kovari connected the prophet Jeremiah’s call to “return people to the land,” to the need for the districts to work together to push the government to take action vacant land use. Kovari explained that the city of Detroit owns more land within its own borders than any other city in the country, a result of foreclosed houses and lots. The abandoned houses and vacant lots do not bring in local taxes, decreasing the city’s capacity to provide basic services.

Without services, what happens? People move. Now most of us, we don’t want to move, we can’t move. But when we can’t get services we have to fight. And everything becomes a fight. Get your street light turned on it’s a fight. Get the police out in your neighborhood it’s a fight. Get your vacant lot cleaned up, it’s a

⁸² Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 2, Jeremiah Board Meeting 1994-1996 folder, Rev. E. Cain. Speech is undated.

fight. People get tired of fighting. But why? Because we don't have the tax base we need. So what do we do about these rat infested, garbage filled, 40 thousand pieces of property? You'd think the city would be anxious to sell this land and they are. [...] But who do you think they want to sell it to? Do they want to sell it to the church so they can make a parking lot? No. Do they want to sell it to the community groups so they can fix up the houses? No. Not really. They want to sell it to the highest bidder. They don't care if the highest bidder is a slum lord. They don't care if the highest bidder wants to put a used car lot 50 ft away from us or our church. [...] You know this, it's happened in your neighborhoods. So what are we going to do about this land and how it's gonna be used sisters and brothers?⁸³

The following segment of the speech recalls the groups' background in affordable housing efforts and argues that political organizing is necessary for community development to be successful.

We need to get the city and county together ... and stop fighting each other. We need to get them together to support community groups that are doing housing [...] Nobody else is going to start rebuilding these neighborhoods but these community groups and these churches. [...] So, we the people who are going to make up MOSES ... we must change the way land is used and abused in this community, across Wayne county, across metropolitan Detroit. We need each other. Jeremiah - I'm telling you - Jeremiah cannot do it by itself. I'm telling you we have tried. We have tried. We can't even get a list of the property the city owns in our neighborhood, let alone change the way they use it. WDIFCO is the same way, NOAH you can't do it by yourself. We have no choice but to get together all of us across the city and say, hey this is the way it's going to be.⁸⁴

Her final emphasis is on the shared responsibility that the people in the room had for changing the political dynamic and reclaiming the land of Detroit. The leaders interpret the districts' failure to change underlying dynamics of disinvestment as proof of need for a larger organization that can more effectively pressure public officials to be responsive.

Declaring Interdependence

⁸³ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, Video: "Together for a Change."

⁸⁴ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, Video: "Together for a Change."

On September 19, 1998, the organizations held a “MOSES Visioning Conference,” with the stated purpose to review and agree upon the mission and basic goals, analyze the political environment, and develop a shared vision for the future.⁸⁵ One month later, the districts’ member congregations and allied organizations held a meeting to formalize their unification and sign the MOSES *Declaration of Interdependence* (See Illustration 3.1 and Appendix D). Their “facts submitted to a candid world” included the dearth of funding for mass transit, the loss of farmland to development, state policies that encourage new road construction, and zoning laws that prevent the construction of affordable housing throughout the region.

We, the undersigned, hereby commit ourselves to create a powerful organization of the people who will pursue policies which achieve greater metropolitan equity and strengthen the region as a whole ... MOSES, acting in concert with their allies in the religious and academic community, government, labor, business, non profit sector and other entities in the public and private arenas, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do solemnly publish and declare that all peoples and municipalities of this entire metropolitan area are, and of right ought to be, INTERDEPENDENT ENTITITES.⁸⁶

Initially the districts continued to hold separate board meetings, until the number of meetings became unwieldy. The organizations decided to meet separately at a common location and then join together for the MOSES Board.⁸⁷ In the late 1990s, the districts continued their own projects. Several member congregations organized effectively on local actions both as primary actors, and in collaboration with each other. For example, Holy Redeemer of southwest Detroit “won a victory over a polluting oil refinery and earmarked the \$1 million settlement for youth programs in the neighborhood” (Selwa

⁸⁵ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 2, Blue Binder (1999), MOSES Visioning Conference flier.

⁸⁶ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, Declaration of Interdependence folder.

⁸⁷ Like WDIFCO, Jeremiah created its own CDC and in 1999 built sixty low-income single family homes through its \$12 million Newberry Estates project in Southwest Detroit (Ankeny 2002). This was the largest single-family housing development effort in the area in decades (Chambers 2002).

2002). Jeremiah congregations successfully lobbied the federal government to build a sound barrier along Interstate 75, which enters Detroit from the suburb Allen Park. That victory was the result of collaboration by leaders from Sts. Andrew and Benedict, All Saints Catholic, Waterfall Baptist, Southwestern Church of God and Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church (Selwa 2002). Chaired by Victoria Kovari, the Jeremiah Community Development Corporation (JCDC) helped acquire city-owned vacant lots and secure \$6 million in tax credits from the state housing authority, to build the first phase of Newberry Estates – sixty subsidized homes around Newberry Elementary School (Gargaro 1997).

MOSES is probably best known locally for its transportation task force. At a public meeting in November 1999 focused on increased state funding for public transit, MOSES brought together 800 members, as well as county executives, suburban mayors, state legislators and representatives of five major corporations. Kovari, the key organizer on transportation issues, explained how they wanted to impact officials in the meeting.

Our strategy is to try to get these players on the same stage and try to create this regional unity around increased funding, [...] with people from all of our churches in the background daring them to say no (Bagwell 1999).

The following April, the group organized a hearing on the need for more public transit funding in the state legislature, which led to a \$50 million increase for public transportation spending (Ankeny 2002).

WDIFCO eventually separated the housing component financially and renamed the organizing component RUTH.⁸⁸ Explaining the reason for the separation, Liske said there were “some people that were in housing that felt they had to cultivate a favorable relationship with the city. [...] It was two different ways of operating. And eventually it

⁸⁸ Residents United Together in Hope.

was spun off.” The organizers prefer to maintain independence from government funding agencies in order to autonomously critique and pressure officials, and avoid conflicts of interest.

As the staff and clergy expanded their networks to include more congregations across religion and geography, they developed the expectation that leaders will act like professional organizers. This was a reasonable expectation given that two leaders from member congregations, Kovari and Hardaway, did become professional organizers, and that other participants became effective lay organizers within their own congregations. They believed this would enable the staff organizers to eventually manage 25-40 congregations each, in order for MOSES to reach their goal of 100-150 member congregations. In the late 1990s, the metropolitan strategy meant that staff organizers were meeting with more possible recruits in the suburbs than in the city, in order to catch up to the city’s number of member pastors.⁸⁹ The Executive Director wrote in 1999, “I envision a fall 2000 entering group of 40+ suburban congregations ready for a covenant with MOSES congregations.” He also envisioned recruitment for African American congregations in the city, but wrote that the strategy for their recruitment was “less developed.”⁹⁰

Organizers emphasize the importance of holding public actions with public officials because the experience of planning an action helps new leaders develop. By supporting the development of allied organizations, organizers believed they could better influence state policy. As they were discovering in policy areas such as road repair and

⁸⁹ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board Meetings 1999-2000, “Paradigm Shift: Leadership-Driven Organizing = Leaders Acting Like Organizers.”

⁹⁰ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board Meetings 1999-2000, “6 month review of MOSES 1999 Goals”.

funding for mass transit, state policy significantly affects the scope of their impact on the local level. In 2000, Cheryl Liske began to work full-time with leaders in Saginaw and Kalamazoo to form sister organizations. O'Brien's responsibilities increasingly moved to regional consulting for Gamaliel, in New York and Ohio. Maintaining congregation-level actions became increasingly difficult as MOSES sights became state-wide. The strain surfaced in comments like this; "Director's Summary: I am very disappointed in the lackluster outreach and the few actions. Organizers did not move people into action and leaders do not see themselves as leaders. Many wait for the organizers to call, plan the action, do the turnout, do the thinking, do the agendas."⁹¹

MOSES continued to build on its successes, but its expansion felt costly to some leaders and congregations that preferred to focus organizational resources on the neighborhood level. In September 1999, the RUTH Board wrote a memorandum to the MOSES Executive Committee, listing several concerns about the state of the organization. They wrote that the districts were inadequately staffed for the ends they desired: "The efforts at suburban and out-state organizing appear to lack an overall strategy and will only create increased demand for organizing staff at a time when MOSES cannot meet the needs of existing districts." Some RUTH leaders were concerned that the Gamaliel Foundation held too much influence over Detroit organizing priorities, "e.g. Urban Sprawl is a Gamaliel issue not a grass roots issue. The majority of time and efforts by the staff and leadership has been spent in this area." These concerns led back to what they felt was an undermined role for the districts: "The continuation of our current approach will leave little reason for District involvement with MOSES and

⁹¹ Ibid.

culminate in MOSES being a hollow shell without credibility or respect.”⁹² The RUTH Executive Board recommended that MOSES organizers be reassigned to focus on the districts, in particular the organizer who was responsible for working with their congregations.

In a letter to the Executive Board, Executive Director O’Brien opposed the reorganization of staff efforts suggested by RUTH. He argued this move would harm relationships benefiting urban and suburban members, jeopardize funding based on the metro-equity agenda, confuse allied organizations, and void the Declaration of Interdependence. He expressed belief that the concerns over Gamaliel’s influence were reflecting resistance to new strategies of community organizing, including 1) metropolitan (including suburban) organizing, 2) “expansion-recruitment-consolidation,” and 3) Leadership-Driven Organizing. He argued,

The rage deep in our souls at conditions and suffering in Detroit and poorer suburbs must be met by hope in new strategies. Old strategies of organizing will not work anymore – they are too limited, insular, and don’t take into account changes in our society that have driven people further and further apart geographically, spiritually, racially, economically.

O’Brien wrote that if they wanted to expand, they would have to consolidate, which included the need to have organizers push themselves past the usual ratio of 1/12, 1/20 at best, organizers to congregations. When they started Jeremiah, the organizers worked with 6-12 core teams. “I believe we have taken a balanced approach ... We are working with the core teams AND expanding at the same time. But some think we have not struck a good balance. They think that core teams are not getting enough attention ... or they think that districts are not getting enough attention, even though district actions are being

⁹² The RUTH Executive Board voted in support of the memo, with one dissension. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board Meetings 1999-2000.

planned as we speak.” He said that some core teams are waiting for organizers to take action. “Still others block people from stepping forward, or block organizers from working with their congregations, or complain they need organizing attention but do not declare any strategy for which they need help.”⁹³ He wrote in another memo that it was his experience, “that the majority of the MOSES leaders understand the complicated path and the hard decisions that have to be made in ‘metropolitan organizing.’”⁹⁴ In reaction to the RUTH memo, the staff responded to the technical concerns regarding Gamaliel’s authority and the amount of staffing, and pointed to district and metropolitan achievements as proof against RUTH’s claim that MOSES was in crisis. But the line-item response to each “accusation” probably did not respond to what must have been deep feelings driving the concerns.⁹⁵

According to Liske, working with RUTH’s concerns was, “sort of an ongoing struggle.” WDIFCO and Jeremiah seemed to understand that their organizers supported them but also worked in other capacities. For example, Hardaway was doing work in southwest Detroit though she was employed by WDIFCO. When MOSES was created, all the organizers became employed by MOSES.⁹⁶ The organizers’ response to RUTH was always “what is (RUTH’s) plan in the district, and we’ll figure out what kind of staffing plan needs to be there.” For whatever reason, the district was looking for more from organizers while the organizers were looking for more from the district. In a 1999 report, Executive Director O’Brien wrote that he was working with pastors who would

⁹³ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board Meetings 1999-2000, MOSES Memo dated September 30, 1999. “RUTH’s 3rd Recommendation.”

⁹⁴ RUTH members had participated in the 1999 Goals and the 1998 MOSES Visioning Conference. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board Meetings 1999-2000, MOSES Memo from Bill O’Brien to Rev. Barlow, President, 10/5/99.

⁹⁵ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board Meetings 1999-2000, “Staff Report to MOSES Officers on the RUTH Recommendations,” Oct. 9, 1999.

⁹⁶ Phone conversation with Liske, November 16, 2006.

like to join MOSES in “clusters” of 5-10. Clusters were an experiment of grouping interested member churches in a local area smaller than the districts. He was also in conversation with a congregation who wanted to join MOSES and Jeremiah even though it was outside of their boundaries “for reasons of fellowship.”⁹⁷ In response to RUTH’s concern that the establishment of clusters would eliminate “partnership within MOSES based on common issues,” (by common issues they seem to mean territory-based) the staff responded: “The limitations of geographical districts were discussed at the May 20, 1999 Board Meeting. Some pastors express desire for affinity based on relationship with particular pastors or leaders, or perhaps common issues across geographical lines.”⁹⁸ Liske said they created clusters and other organizational arrangements to “advance the strategy of issues,” and they did that in conversation with the pastors and leaders.⁹⁹ In the end, Rev. Henry Sims who had led RUTH’s concerns did not stay with MOSES, with the stated reason that he was too busy, having been elected as the local representative for his denomination.

MOSES moved forward with its larger territory. Defining the scope of the organization was part of the work of developing a common purpose. As Liske explained, “Organizers organize organizations, in order to show people where they are at, who they are, what they are trying to do, their rights and responsibilities” to each other. It had become important to understand “who we are” as part of a larger region. The prevailing belief among organizers was that organizations have to change every three years so they

⁹⁷ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board Meetings 1999-2000, 1999 Goals – Director’s Report 5/20/99 to MOSES Executive Committee.

⁹⁸ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board Meetings 1999-2000, Staff Report O MOSES Officers on the RUTH Recommendations, Oct. 9, 1999.

⁹⁹ Conversation with Liske, November 16, 2006.

do not become stale, and to accomplish that as a broad-based project, “every organization has to stretch beyond its own boundaries, be they geographical, issue, or racial.”¹⁰⁰

In 2002 organizers worked with twenty suburban mayors and city managers to help them establish the Michigan Suburbs Alliance, which supports the goal of bringing resources back to the city and inner suburbs.¹⁰¹ The public meeting in September 2002 convened five thousand participants, including gubernatorial and congressional candidates. The meeting was held at Greater Grace Temple, a mega-church and new member congregation in Detroit’s northwest corner. Governor Granholm agreed to a state-wide, “Fix it First” strategy, part of an anti-sprawl agenda to prioritize fixing existing roads over building new.¹⁰² With the success of this meeting, organizers proclaimed, “MOSES is now on the radar screen nationally.”¹⁰³

At least every two years MOSES schedules a major public meeting, and the success of 2002 raised the ante for 2004. Yet in an April planning meeting for the September event, Organizer Kovari reported that member evaluations of MOSES revealed a sense of concern about the state of the organization. She said that organizations generally experience a decline every four to five years, and was concerned that MOSES leaders lacked the inspiration they once had. A leader from St. Ladislaus said that she felt attendance at MOSES meetings was dropping off, and questioned how to attain more participation from throughout the member congregations.¹⁰⁴ A cycle of

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ The MSA is now fully independent organization encouraging regional collaboration and joint service delivery to counteract fragmentation in the metro area. See www.michigansuburbsalliance.org

¹⁰² MOSES leaders helped develop sister organizations ISAAC in Kalamazoo and Ezekiel in Saginaw. As a supportive coalition, these organizations incorporated as Michigan Interfaith Voice [MI-Voice], September 30, 2003. They have since been joined by Jonah in Battle Creek, MI.

¹⁰³ Internal report generated 10-10-02 by MOSES staff/board, included in Agenda for PMOC: Public Meeting Organizing Committee Meeting, April 20, 2004. p. 10-11.

¹⁰⁴ Field notes, April 26, 2004. PMOC meeting agenda.

organizational growth, stagnation, decline and rebirth is difficult monitor in an organization only ten years old, but organizers intuited that they were experiencing a trough. By all outward accounts the 2004 public meeting was a success, bringing in approximately four thousand participants, including Mayor Kilpatrick of Detroit and, again, the Governor of Michigan. But participation fell short of the organizers' publicized target attendance of seven thousand.

One possible explanation for this lull is that as MOSES staff became more involved in issue task forces and interfacing between those task forces and government officials, there was less attention to recruiting new churches and "building the base" of core teams.¹⁰⁵ As described above, once the organization realized the limits of what could be accomplished at the neighborhood and even the city level, they decided they needed to have a broader impact. Some core teams and pastors wanted to make that shift and were tired of talking about abandoned housing, but others felt neglected by the organizers who believed that core teams were ready and capable of carrying on the neighborhood work themselves.¹⁰⁶ As Catholic churches increasingly closed or clustered, or pastors were transferred, it became difficult to maintain the base of member congregations. In 2003-2004, six key pastors were transferred or moved to other churches. Those churches had collectively mobilized one thousand people to the public meeting in 2002 but could only turn out two hundred people in 2004.

It's been a huge challenge for us to maintain our base. That's why we have to constantly recruit, which we haven't been doing the last couple of years, and we have to constantly rebuild those relationships and build new ones. And the more into issues we get, the less we do the relationship building.

¹⁰⁵ Conversation with Kovari Dec. 9, 2003, and conversation with Father Joe Gagnon, January 13, 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Kovari.

Kovari explained that usually before a public meeting, MOSES will hold congregation in-reaches. “We’ll go do one-on-ones with people, we’ll get people to do one-on-ones with their folks, and we’ll end up in a public meeting ... But we didn’t do that this year (2004), we barely did it two years ago. I think it showed with the weaker base.”

Henrietta Rogers from Greater Southern Baptist described a change in her church members’ participation after MOSES became a regional organization.

When it was individual, we focused on the concerns surrounding our congregation, while with MOSES, we took on a metropolitan area. So sometimes if you don’t have, and I think that’s why a lot of core teams members, I think they lost a little interest too, because a lot of ‘em I can’t get them to go to the meetings now like I did when it was with WDIFCO, because its not of their self interest. When you start taking on regional things, its not. But to me, it doesn’t matter, because it’s still social justice.

I asked her if church members were more concerned with issues like abandoned housing in the neighborhood, and she replied, “Instead of abandoned houses all over the state, [laughs] you see what I’m saying?” But Rogers also said she has been able to regularly mobilize her church members for meetings in Saginaw and Kalamazoo.

One Catholic pastor explained his concern over the organization’s movement away from district-level actions.

Of course, the problem with MOSES is that it's so large that it seems to diminish the impact of the local concerns, and that's been a concern of mine ever since MOSES started [...] They can't spend much energy on relationship with the local police precinct or that kind of thing, at least they don't seem to be able to. Possibly it's just a matter of not having enough staff. They are genuinely concerned about those issues, but they don't have the time to assist with any actual organizing tactics for specific issues like a given park where there are drug dealers hanging out or something like that.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Interview with Fr. Clore.

Leaders and pastors especially felt neglected where the neighborhoods need the most work.¹⁰⁸

In interviews, lay leaders propose that both the movement away from districts and individual choices explain why some congregations are not as involved as they once were. A lay leader from southwest Detroit, said,

There's got to be a way to do both [district level and metropolitan organizing]. But right now, I think a lot of people were discouraged when we got away from the more grassroots actions that we were doing. Yeah. I think that was a problem with the parent organization. I think the districts lost their identity. And ... I can't blame that on the parent organization. That's really our fault. As the people, we should have kept Jeremiah Project going.¹⁰⁹

More levels of activity meant more meetings and a heavier time commitment among already-active church people. Members who were struggling to develop or maintain the interest in a core team within their congregation, and were most likely members of some task force on an issue of particular interest, did not find benefit in district level meetings. But that meant that the kinds of issues that were more likely to arise in district meetings did not have a setting for incubation and action, especially if a church's core team was inactive.

I think it was an issue for active lay people. Not only in this congregation. In a lot of congregations. We had a lot of people that just kind of dropped out completely, you know, after Jeremiah kind of lied dormant. And we went on with the bigger issues with MOSES.

I guess some people felt it wasn't affecting them in their neighborhood. Wasn't in their backyard. With Jeremiah, we were in a district. [...] And we were dealing with things in our neighborhoods that affected us personally. And I think we can still do that. We just have to find the time, and you know, that's the problem.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Victoria Kovari.

¹⁰⁹ Interview with Mr. James Smith.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

A complicating factor on this point is that at least half of the church members in MOSES congregations do not live in the neighborhood of their churches, which means that church members feel varying degrees of responsibility to those neighborhoods and how the church is affected by its environment. Some identify with their churches to a degree that they feel some responsibility for the neighborhood.¹¹¹ This creates a quandary for the organizing strategy over how to best involve church members in local actions.

I asked a lay leader why there are more MOSES churches on the west side than the east. She responded, “That's because, you know, when the districts were involved, we were active. But since the districts are not involved, we're not active anymore. We're not active. And so people lose interest.”¹¹² She was explaining that “we,” the district NOAH, are not active and therefore not attracting church members.

At a monthly leadership assembly in February 2006, assembled clergy, organizers and leaders approved a change in by-laws that confirmed the dissolution of the districts' role. The group decided to elect the MOSES Executive Board, the day-to-day governing body, at-large from the Board of Directors rather than from the districts.

Since the districts have not been meeting or functioning well the last several years it is cumbersome even to hold district elections. Many new congregations and institutions who joined MOSES have never related to a district and consequently their representatives to the Board of Directors would not be in a position to be on the Executive Board.”¹¹³

Many member congregations that were a part of the districts back in the early 1990s continue to carry on their own actions and collaborate with other congregations, despite the replacement of districts by metro-wide MOSES. Additionally, newer

¹¹¹ For more on this topic see Chapter 4 on church adaptation, below.

¹¹² Interview with Sandra Samuels.

¹¹³ MOSES Leadership Assembly Meeting agenda, February 12, 2006. Greater Apostolic Faith Temple, Detroit.

members in the city and the suburbs that never had a district affiliation began doing the same. The creation of MOSES as a metro-wide organization meant an increased organizational focus on metro-wide policy problems and solutions, including mass transportation, a proposed land bank to process vacant land efficiently, health care, insurance redlining, racial profiling, and education. This transformation brought in new members who were most interested on those task forces rather than working on neighborhood-level issues. Additionally the task forces brought in suburban churches and allied groups with shared interests, such as local unions, environmental groups and others promoting improved mass transportation.

Developing issue-focused task forces makes sense given population changes of the city. Protestant churches must keep members who move away or draw new members from all over the metropolitan area in order to survive, and Catholic churches in most areas of the city are reliant on commuters. So while church attendees may not have a particular neighborhood experience in common, they do share the symptoms of sprawl and disinvestment visible throughout the region.

Task Forces

Task forces operate by attracting participants, both clergy and laity, from member church core teams. Staffed by a professional organizer, task forces meet regularly (usually once a month) to discuss a salient issue and consider means of addressing it. Participants decide who they should talk with from the larger community to gather information, and invite professionals to give presentations or join the task force. They also choose venues for advocacy and action. Based on those meetings and actions,

participants evaluate progress and set-backs on their goals, which also transform with the experience and new knowledge. Decisions about process, how to go about influencing people and policy, and decisions about which policies to target and how to meet their ultimate goals, are all decided interactively, evolving in communication with diverse actors. Below I describe a prominent MOSES task force that has successfully bridged across multiple types of organizations to work for policy change.

Transportation Task Force

Perhaps the best example of ongoing collaboration across urban and suburban interests in MOSES is the transportation task force, which arguably has had the most policy impact and gained the most press of any MOSES endeavor since its inception in the late 1990s. Plans to improve mass transit in Detroit date as far back as the 1950s, but have repeatedly failed due to limited state funding and the unwillingness of suburbs and city to work together. Nearly one-third of Motor City residents do not own a car, and the lack of effective mass transportation severely isolates residents from job opportunities outside the city (Davenport 2002).

In September 2002 Jennifer Granholm, candidate for governor, committed to three important pieces of the MOSES transportation vision: fully funding public transit to 10% of state gas tax revenue; appointing a new Director of MDOT with a record of support for public transit, and supporting the passage of a bill creating the first ever regional transportation authority for Detroit: the Detroit Area Regional Transportation Authority (DARTA). The task force helped coordinate a unique group of allies to push for the bill's passage, including labor unions, the Chamber of Commerce, SEMCOG,

NAACP, the Archdiocese of Detroit, environmental groups, a transportation advocacy group¹¹⁴ and various state and local elected officials. Unfortunately on the last day of the year, outgoing Governor Engler vetoed the DARTA bill. The following year, the new governor secured an agreement between Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties and the City of Detroit—known as the “Big Four” to create DARTA.¹¹⁵ In another twist, the bus mechanics union in Detroit challenged the new policy over fears of losing retirement benefits if they were no longer employed by the city. Finally, a court decision prevented DARTA’s creation, because the deal lacked a funding mechanism for DARTA (Gray 2006). Much of the task force’s work since that time has focused on exploring different funding options and venues for a future comprehensive public transit system.

In 2004 MOSES successfully pressured the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments (SEMCOG) to move ahead on a study to determine the feasibility of high-speed rail along the I-94 corridor, from Detroit to Metro Airport and Ann Arbor. Taskforce leaders organized over twenty meetings with business leaders and elected officials in order to build relationships and find champions of regional transit in Southeast Michigan.¹¹⁶ That year, MOSES also assisted in organizing a group of wheelchair riders in Detroit to file suit against the City, in order to get wheelchair lifts fixed on all buses.¹¹⁷ In part through MOSES’s efforts, the U.S. Department of

¹¹⁴ Transportation Riders United (TRU).

¹¹⁵ MOSES conducted five public actions in Lansing involving over one hundred leaders. The bill passed both the Michigan House and Senate in 2002. (MOSES Program, “Marching on for Justice,” 6th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Banquet, January 20, 2003. Annual Report on Major Accomplishments.) The transportation task force, led by Rev. Patrick Thompson (Church of Our Savior Presbyterian) was instrumental in securing a chair on the board for their labor partner, Paul Bowen (Amalgamated Transit Union). (MOSES Program, “My Vote is MI*Voice,” 7th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Banquet, January 19, 2004. 2003 Accomplishments.)

¹¹⁶ MOSES Program, “Back to Basics,” 8th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Banquet, January 17, 2005, Major Accomplishments in 2004.

¹¹⁷ The task force benefited from the participation of lawyers Richard Bernstein and Gary Benjamin.

Transportation decided to investigate the Detroit Department of Transportation to determine whether the City was in violation of federal laws protecting the disabled. In October 2005, the City of Detroit agreed to all demands and settled the case. The U.S. Department of Justice agreed to monitor the City's compliance with provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act.¹¹⁸ Kara Williams, an active member of the task force, reflected in an interview, "We won in the global sense of the term 'won', but not really. Nobody was punished. Nobody was made to do anything. They put out these new buses they already had ... We won a hollow victory." In the process, MOSES leaders helped win passage of a new state mandate requiring all operators of public bus systems to verify working wheelchair lifts.

In November 2003 MOSES brought suit against SEMCOG for lack of representation for the people of Detroit. Only five percent of the SEMCOG board represents Detroit, whereas Detroiters comprise nineteen percent of the population of the region SEMCOG serves. MOSES lost the lawsuit but attracted the attention of the mayor of Detroit who until that point was unresponsive to MOSES on transit. Task force members met with the Mayor's executive council and began discussing the possibility of Detroit leaving SEMCOG, and forming its own metropolitan planning organization (MPO). Five years previous, "nobody would've ever believed that Kilpatrick would've been siding with MOSES." As Williams explained, the current MPO, SEMCOG, receives billions of federal transportation dollars typically used for road expansion rather than public transit. According to Williams, the reasons for this are two-fold, "One, the city doesn't demand it, and number two, Oakland County has more influence on SEMCOG

¹¹⁸ MOSES Program, "In Tribute to Rosa Parks and the 50th Anniversary of the Montgomery Bus Boycott," 9th Annual Martin Luther King Banquet, January 16, 2006, Major Accomplishments in 2005.

than it should,” hence the lawsuit for increased representation. While threatening to leave SEMCOG is “a drastic step,” task force members are convinced that they are left with few alternatives by the council of governments. Other smaller municipalities have opted out of SEMCOG, and Detroit also can take that path if it chooses. Task force members are frustrated because while SEMCOG listens to public comments and produces more studies with tax dollars, “they don’t really do anything.” Kara Williams argues, “the only thing that people listen to in government is if you take their money away, and if we took SEMCOG’s money away, then they would be willing to listen to us. I think even the threat; the formal threat of leaving SEMCOG may bring reasonable people to the table. That’s my hope.”

The task force has attracted interest from previous skeptics as it has generated new conversations about this issue—assumed a hopeless case. In the task force meeting prior to our interview, two representatives of a small municipality on the Woodward Avenue corridor attended for the first time. Williams said,

As you go up Woodward, there’s these little enclaves, okay? [...] I don’t even know if they have a mayor. It’s like twenty blocks, [...] and they never have anything to do with us, and they sent two people to our last transportation taskforce meeting, and they said, “MOSES is more powerful than even MOSES knows,” and they’ve been watching us. So because we have been just very adamant about coming up Woodward Avenue, I think that people are finally saying, “You know what? This is a good idea. We need this.

As the membership evolved to include both transportation novices and professionals, so did their goals. The task force began with MOSES member congregations, but grew and extended to include union representation, former public officials who work in transportation, advocacy groups supporting mass transit, including advocates for the disabled and the Sierra Club, representatives of local universities, of

smaller neighboring suburbs, and transit advocates from Detroit's northern suburbs.

When the task force began, the main goal was raising public awareness. But they learned that "it's really not the public that is against regional transportation. It's the politicians. ... They'll tell you that they support you, but no one wants to put it in writing, or go on the record."¹¹⁹ Participants have been frustrated by the lack of political leadership on transit, across party lines. Organizer Victoria Kovari explained why she thinks Detroit has made so little progress on transportation despite many proposals over decades.

Just look at the transportation system. Is any Democratic politician calling it for what it is? Saying that this is a disgrace? Should be changed? The city has to change it before they're going to get any new money? No. [...] And they won't do it. Because to say that would sort of fan the flames of the racists out there, that we know are just looking for any excuse to trash Detroit.

When they position themselves as independent from established political camps, religious institutions can help establish a public space for discussion of contentious issues.¹²⁰ According to Williams, "MOSES has been able to meet at Second Baptist Church with the unions. Oooh, scary, but the unions really do respect being in the church." By getting the elements of an agreement from the unions, the task force also made headway with Mayor Kilpatrick. The lawsuit gained the mayor's attention and their unique coalition gave MOSES credibility. One taskforce member is a former bus driver of thirty years, Art Varteman. Another is Al Martin, who worked in public transit for MDOT, DDOT, and for suburban Detroit's bus system. "Once you have an Art Varteman and an Al Martin at the table, people take notice. This is not just this faith-based group running around ... These are people with the facts, been there, and they know all the

¹¹⁹ Interview with Kara Williams.

¹²⁰ On the concept of public space, see "Framing Democratic Space" by Nan Skelton (Kari and Skelton 2007, 42-51) and Evans and Boyte (1986).

players.” The combination of who MOSES brought to the table, and the information that they gathered “changed his attitude towards everything.”

Williams explained why they had previously been unable to get support from Mayor Kilpatrick.

I don't think that he had the facts. [...] he wasn't fully aware of the impact of SEMCOG on regional transportation, and the city was not in the financial crisis that it is. It spends, out of the general fund, like \$80 million dollars on the bus service, and it just – we're not getting any bang for our buck. We're the only major city that doesn't have a regional transportation element in it, and we're not recapping any of the federal dollars, which is horrible.

So once the mayor sat down, listened, and found out the entire picture, not just a snapshot of DDOT buses, he was able to say, “Okay, this isn't fair, and you guys are right, and we need to do something about it.”

In this task force example, congregation members working with the community organizer, exercised a unique bridging capacity to create a public space for open consideration of how to improve the mass transit system in metropolitan Detroit. Church involvement helped set the right tone for a shift in regional conversations about transit. Their conversations are genuinely public oriented, with certitude that no one is benefiting from the current system. The participants are not “neutral” parties because they began with a moral claim that the system is unjust, and failing most residents. But they are not interested in maintaining the old fights that had created impasses, such as the urban-suburban divide that led to the creation of two separate yet overlapping bus systems. Not overlooking structural inequality, task force members insist that Detroit is underrepresented in regional policy decisions directing transit spending, compared to the surrounding municipalities. And they insist that the City of Detroit is also responsible for doing something about that, and acting to change their transportation system. Finally, the task force has demonstrated that it is possible to work with public officials without

working for them. It has collaboratively generated new momentum on an issue, and other stakeholders began to come around as the organization gained publicity and new credentialed participants. Unlike single issue advocacy groups, this broad-based, assertive “taskforce with no name” has shifted the region’s sense of possibility on mass transportation.

Conclusion

The progression of MOSES as an organization, as well as the behavior of MOSES task forces, reflects the belief that system-wide problems require collaborative action with participants who mirror the scope of the problem, including diversely affected parties. The choices of these Detroit activists also reflect their experiential knowledge of a point scholars have described: that resource poor groups must collaborate with other groups in order to have any significant policy impact (Warren, Thompson, and Saegert 2001). However the fragmentation of regional interests in areas such as Detroit, institutionalized in economically and racially segregated municipalities makes collaboration more difficult because multiple decision-making institutions affect final outcomes. Choosing a course of action to impact policy therefore is not a simple matter, but requires access to relevant professional networks and research on solutions that might encompass a wide array of actors, as well as a great deal of patience and persistence.

This chapter has described how the organizing project developed new relationships and new goals in order to redirect congregational resources toward political action. In the process of trying to impact local conditions through neighborhood-level action, participants discovered limitations of their congregational bases to have an impact

on policy and sought new ways to bridge across organizational forms and groups. They expanded the organization to include suburban congregations and developed issue task forces that include the experience and expertise of diverse individuals, representing different municipalities and organizations, as well as public offices. This expansion was not without costs for the organization, as some participants did not feel as much ownership over the broadly framed issues of sprawl and transit as they did when the organization focused on immediate local conditions.

That tension is unavoidable when bonding social capital is translated and redirected for larger public purposes, because in the short term participants will have to draw on motivations for collective action other than immediate or parochial gain. While bringing new participants into the fold, and the information and contacts they bring, community organizing simultaneously creates new goals and considers new means of addressing revised goals. Its base of institutions provides flexibility in attracting individually motivated participants. The organizing project as a whole is not bound to any particular issue outcome, or approach to reaching long term goals.

The following chapters focus on the types of obstacles confronting interracial, interfaith collective action. Those obstacles include external environmental pressures, internal power relations, and differing understandings of how congregations should act politically. Community organizing works to overcome those obstacles through the development of new relationships and new goals, which help the organization evolve to meet new demands and opportunities.

Illustration 3.1 Meeting Announcement Flyer

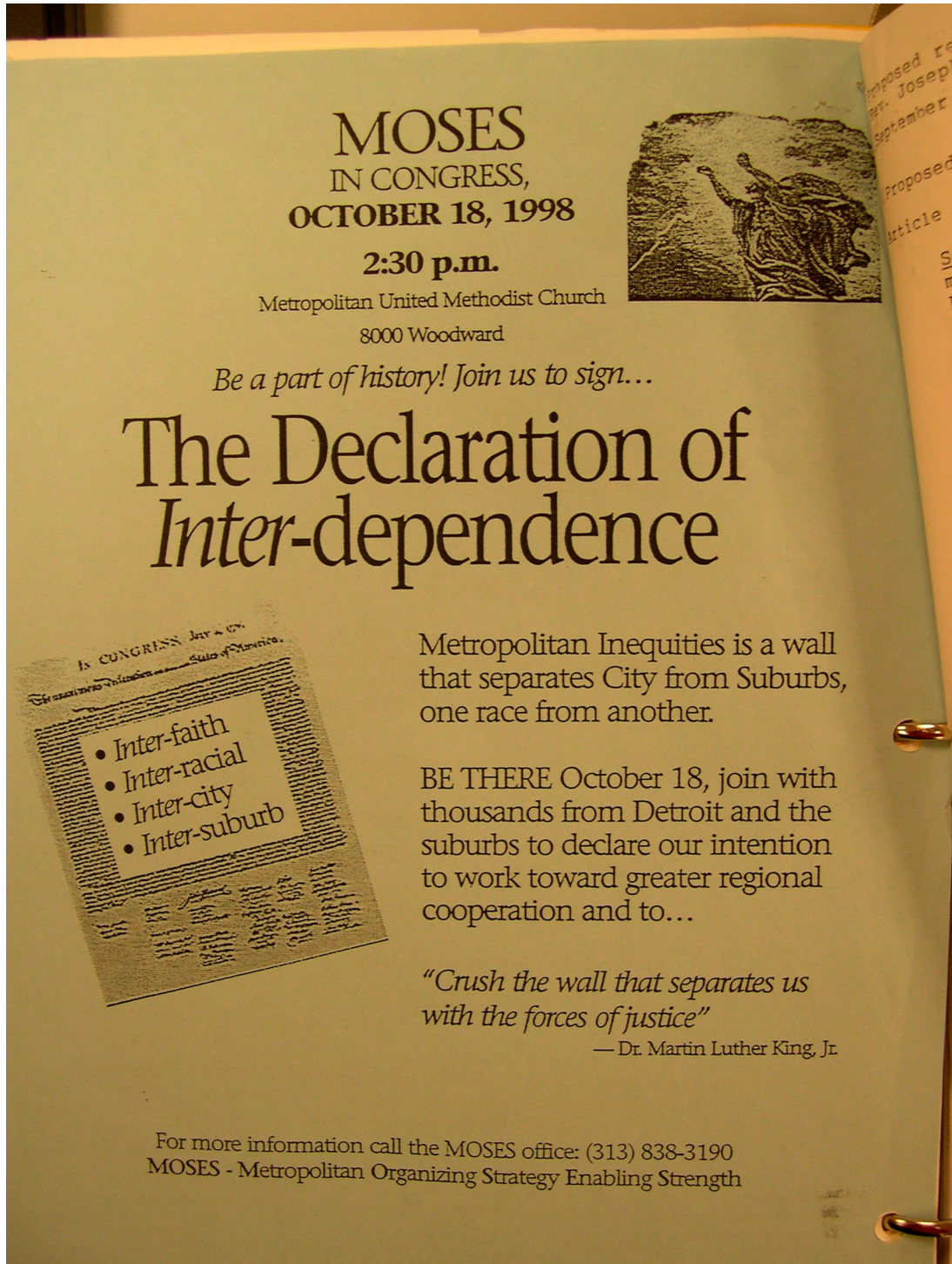


Photo by the author. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, Declaration of Interdependence folder.

Illustration 3.2 Drawing of District Boundaries

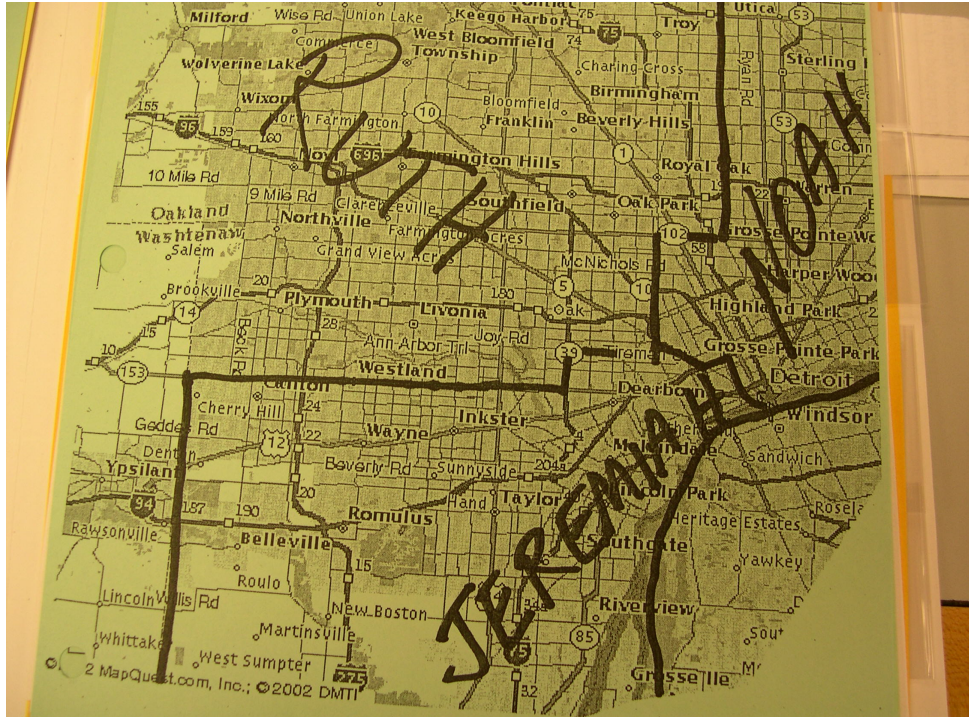


Photo by the author. Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection.

Illustration 3.3 MOSES Transportation Task Force Skit



Photo by author, August 12, 2004 at the MOSES Team Captain's Dinner. Leaders from the Transportation Task Force acted out a skit illustrating who is disadvantaged by the lack of efficient mass transit in Metro-Detroit.

Chapter 4

“Which Community?” Church Adaptation and the Incorporation of Community Organizing

Introduction

To assess the political capacity of congregations engaged through any method of organizing or mobilization, it is important to understand how congregations as community-level institutions survive in relation to their environments. Their experience in that environment shapes the ways in which their leaders and members are available for, interpret, and relate to the organizing methods. The first interest of congregations, of course, is not to have political impact but to maintain and build their memberships, in pursuit of how they conceptualize a spiritual community. While community organizing aims to assist in building that community in urban areas, in large part they must respond to how congregations are situated in the shifting political and economic environment.

This chapter will first discuss theories of how religious institutions adapt to their changing environments. Then it will investigate trends in how activist Detroit congregations have adapted to population changes. With the rise of urban sprawl, the relationships between city congregations and neighboring residents have changed.¹²¹ Finally, the chapter will consider consequences of those adaptations for incorporation of community organizing practices within congregations.

¹²¹ This is also true for inner ring suburbs that increasingly face the out-migration and blight common in central cities.

Congregational Adaptation: Literature Review

The dramatic loss of population in Detroit from the urban core and inner ring suburbs, especially by white ethnic groups, has required years of adjustment by religious institutions. In the context of demographic shifts, many congregations closed and moved to new suburban locations, reinforcing the sprawl along with migrating businesses and industry (Gamm 1999). But increased public mobility allowed many congregations to stay in their original location, at least for a while. When church members moved away from their previous enclaves, churches that were able to maintain existing members as commuters, and gain new commuting members, were able to survive. If they were unable to bring in new generations to the old location, or unwilling to welcome Detroit's growing African American population, they declined.

Some congregations' leadership made an effort to integrate their churches, or at least to calm tensions between racial or ethnic groups, risking conflict within their membership.¹²² Tension and conflict in those cases was inevitable, if not due to outright hostility and mistrust, then as a result of differing cultural practices and styles that infuse religious worship. In that context, white members often left integrating churches, or simply died out, and churches were reborn through internal racial turnover. A few, rare institutions maintained mixed race memberships.

These demographic and institutional trends have been theorized by sociological research on urban religion. In particular, Nancy Ammerman's (1997) research on urban congregations suggests three possible scenarios for how congregations typically respond to neighborhood change. Her research challenges the notion of religious congregations as

¹²² Interview with Rev. Victor Clore.

permanent fixtures in civic life; the norm among congregations has been continual adaptation or decline in response to larger forces.

The first scenario is a decline in older congregations that have lost members and are not attracting young families. This describes the situation of many Catholic parishes in Detroit (McGreevy 1996; Sugrue 1996). For example, between 1980 and 1989, the Archdiocese of Detroit closed thirty churches within the city limits, primarily due to loss of membership from out-migration. In that same time period, seven Catholic churches opened in Detroit's suburbs.¹²³ These city congregations are forced to share resources and eventually close. For the interim they struggle to maintain a sense of community as members scatter. Closings have led to protests against the Archdiocese in the short term. But political capacity is lost as institutional routines, shared familiar space, and previous memberships are irrevocably disrupted. There is little expectation for a shared future, especially if the congregation is mostly elderly.

The second scenario includes older institutions in neighborhoods that are gaining new populations, often of a different race or ethnicity than the former population, and integrating those groups into their community with varying degrees of success. This requires adaptation of norms, language and culture, which causes at least tension and possible conflict among groups in the short term. The process of adaptation and the change in community culture and needs could have a variety of ramifications for civic and political engagement in the neighborhood.

The third scenario is growth in new institutions that serve a more mobile population, willing to travel outside of their neighborhoods to attend religious services. Ammerman names these "niche" congregations because they "establish an identity that

¹²³ Data from the Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit.

transcends location” (44). This scenario has proven beneficial to many city churches because they are able to maintain a religious community despite neighborhood depopulation or economic decline. Niche congregations manage to create internal stability for themselves in the context of unstable environments.

Some congregations can be clearly categorized in one of the above scenarios, but many are hybrids. Even Catholic congregations have become more “congregational,” welcoming a more mobile public. Today there are few wholly neighborhood congregations; most contain some mix of residents, commuters and new recruits from other neighborhoods.

The second and third scenarios are further elaborated by the term “delocalization.” This phenomenon drives the creation of niche churches, and the need for adaptation in older institutions. As described by Omar McRoberts (2003), delocalization refers to an institution’s decreased reliance on its geographic residence for membership and neighboring resources (147). In his study of storefront churches in Boston’s Four Corners district, the growth of small storefront churches is a response to the availability and affordability of land in poor neighborhoods, as well as people’s willingness and ability to commute to church. He shows that organizational residence does not necessarily imply local public commitment to neighbors or recruitment and mobilization on issues. Unfortunately, commuting members are often too disconnected from the surrounding area to be concerned about its civic or economic vitality.

None of the churches included in this research qualify as “store-front” churches—they do not occupy commercial space. Yet many MOSES congregations are similar to McRoberts’ churches in that they draw a majority of worshipers from outside their

surrounding neighborhoods. Their members cross the economic spectrum, but many boast middle class and affluent membership, some who commute significant distances to attend worship services. Scholar of urban religion Lowell Livezey (2000) noted that delocalization impacts both neighborhoods where the church members reside and where they attend worship services.

Thus the local ties of the more prosperous congregations of all faiths are weakened by the centrifugal forces of people on constant reassignment and the speed of capital allocation. These cause members to spend little time in their own neighborhoods and to have few occasions to work with neighbors on problems and projects of common concern (8).

For example, a family may live on the east side and attend church on the west side. Both neighborhoods may face abandoned housing, unreliable mass transit and high taxes but residents of the two neighborhoods do not necessarily have the connections within a community institution necessary to realize their common challenges and collaborate politically on these problems.

Activist congregations in this research include both older adapting and “niche” churches. Most of their members have either moved out of the church’s neighborhood or have never lived in the same neighborhood as their church. In some cases when the church has moved in order to expand on larger property, members followed and others were attracted to that congregation’s style and personality.

The next two sections describe and analyze church adaptation, as experienced by MOSES member congregations and associates. The first section describes congregations that are still transitioning internally from the racial turnover of their neighborhoods, a corresponding turnover in membership, and therefore a changing relationship to the surrounding neighborhood. The second section describes African American

congregations that are successful in part due to their delocalization. While the membership of most MOSES congregations is not dependent on their immediate surroundings, many participants from older congregations and niche churches alike express a sense of commitment to their congregation and to the city.

Transitional Congregations

Membership in community institutions responds gradually to population changes, at least compared to the speed of residential change. Though by 1990 Detroit was 75% African American, today a few congregations in this study continue to adjust to the racial and ethnic turnover in membership that follows neighborhood change (Farley, Danziger, and Holzer 2000). The rapidity of residential turnover in Detroit gives the impression of almost instant social change. But transition periods can reveal instructive internal politics that affect the capacity of institutions to generate social capital, let alone political action. I begin with racially transitional congregations because while they represent a minority of the population studied, they evidence the challenges of transformation that many city congregations experienced through out-migration.

In her study of congregations in the 1990s, Ammerman found that race and ethnicity remain “major barriers” to congregational adaptation to population change. Even in the face of imminent decline, “Congregations are more likely to establish ‘sheltered’ congregations or simply rent out their buildings than to set up integrated ministries” (321). Among clergy interviewed in this study, two Protestant pastors (the second is a MOSES member) have been working to transition previously majority-white congregations to predominantly African American membership. This effort is a result of

the pastors' personal and religious mission to overcome their denomination's historically exclusive behavior. Their experiences point to the challenges of cultural integration and help explain why church delocalization became the norm.

In northwest Detroit, Rector Pamela Redding serves as pastor at St. Christopher-St. Paul Episcopal Church.¹²⁴ She describes her small congregation of fifty to sixty participants as located in "a community in transition." When she joined this church in 2002, about twenty percent of the congregation were white elderly, who used to live in the neighborhood but moved to the suburbs. Most of her members live within a couple of miles of the church; their only commuters are a group from suburban Livonia. In the last year, six of them moved into the retirement communities, "and after they do that, we don't see them anymore. If they can't drive, then they're gone. And this black community group isn't connected enough with them to bring them."

When she first arrived, Redding found that church members prided themselves on having an "integrated" church, "but within the church there were a lot of racial boundaries. The former rector chose leadership only from the white community, and so the black community didn't develop the leadership skills within the church." She found that discrimination was compounded by class differences between the racial groups.

At first when I came, there was like an anger at not being allowed to do things that had not been allowed to be talked about. And my background is to make people talk about racial issues. So, once we started getting the dialogue open, things really changed pretty quickly.

A few of the older members were resistant to the dialogue, and left the church soon after. The congregation is "in a process now of redeveloping a whole different kind of church."

¹²⁴ This church is not a MOSES member, but was referred by a MOSES member clergy.

Compared to their historic black-white dichotomy, today there are more diverse cleavages among the neighborhood residents that are drawn to the church. Many residents originally came from Alabama, Mississippi, and other southern states. Some are life-long Detroiters. Still others hail from at least two Caribbean islands, and from African nations, who are accustomed to very different forms of Anglicanism.

And so when you get that many cultures [...] and try to find the kind of worship and the kind of music, nobody's used to worshipping the same way and it takes a lot of real effort of flexibility for everybody to worship in the same place and try to get along. And you know, get anything out of church.

I'm amazed how much, when you think about what they have to deal with to do that. Sometimes sitting in church with somebody from an African country that your country is at war with, you know, that kind of thing? It requires a lot of flexibility and openness to be part of a community like that.

Redding admires, "how much energy this community puts into getting along with each other, in spite of their diversity." To look at the congregation from the outside as "a black church" overlooks the complexity of relationships within. "When I pointed that out to [church members], they look at me and they say, "Yes. It's so true." But they don't talk about it with [other] white people. They figure either we either wouldn't understand or won't ask."

Redding's primary effort as pastor has been to transform the congregation, "into a community church, just the people who live in the neighborhood, within three or four miles. That's been my focus, and over time that's pretty much what's happened." The church's governing body, the vestry, "wrestled" with the church's reputation as "a scary dark church."

First of all, we wanted people to see what we look like, because this church was for quite a number of years, a white church in a black neighborhood. And we thought it would help if people just saw that regular people go to church here. So we starting having yard sales and we had them twice a year. We'd have a yard

sale on the front lawn and just to talk to people. [...] I think that's helped. Now we have people come over and just walk over from around the neighborhood and have become more active in church things.

This church is unusual for having a woman as pastor; it is unusual as a black Episcopal church; and it is unusual as a primarily neighborhood-based congregation. As the congregation develops, it is an open question whether they will continue to draw a majority of members from the neighborhood. Redding noted pastors are aware that many congregants visit more than one church “cafeteria style,” seeking particular programs, services and events. Currently as a small group, St. Christopher-St. Paul offers an intimate, shared atmosphere among neighbors. But it cannot compete with the array of amenities provided by the city’s mega-churches. While the pastor and members are successfully addressing internal issues of power and cultural difference, they do not have much capacity yet for external political action or influence.¹²⁵

A comparable story of racial transition comes from MOSES member Immanuel Lutheran, where Rev. Patrick Gahagen serves as pastor on Detroit’s East Side. Originally home to Swedish immigrants, in its heyday the church had 700 members. A well-respected previous minister challenged the congregation by welcoming African Americans into the church. “And they came in many ways because of him. But the [white] people really didn’t. You had some who did, but overall majority didn’t really welcome [African Americans].”

I understand [they] had African-Americans on one side of the church, and white members on the other side of the church. And they all loved the pastor and loved God ... but never really connected here.

¹²⁵ They tried unsuccessfully to bring mayoral candidates to the church during the last election period.

When the previous pastor left, “it really all blew up.” In 1995, there was a disagreement and eventual schism over a minister invited from Sierra Leone. The church had an election, and by one vote decided not to call him to lead the congregation.

And obviously people were mad [because] the call committee, the council, had both overwhelmingly endorsed him, said this is our man. But a lot of people felt that they were trying to make this a black church. So, they took another vote the next Sunday, and he got in by one vote. So he came. And when he showed up, a lot of people left. They just were so upset.

And then the other thing that happened was during that time, again, people don't always know how to talk to each other, and the charge of "racist" was put out, and a lot of people were hurt by that. Because they couldn't identify their own racism; the white people couldn't see their own racism, because they were very paternalistic and good-hearted people, but they couldn't see the issues they had.

So, anyways, in 1995 the church split and declined a lot. And I should also add that some of the people that left were big time money. Millionaires and stuff, who helped really support the ministry.

By the time Gahagen joined in 1998, Immanuel was down to fifty or sixty congregants on Sundays. It has revived since that time. Since Gahagen arrived, the congregation has brought in drums and gotten rid of their old hymnals. And his preaching style fits the audience. “I'm very informal and personable. [...] I don't preach in this big pulpit up there, I just preach right from the floor. Because I believe in being closer to the people. [And] church is a little longer, of course, now. We take more time doing it, so it was just a change in style.”

While staying true to Lutheran beliefs, he says they are adjusting to the fact that while the Lutheran Church in the U.S. is 97% white, his congregation is 95% black.

And so it has that identity that you have to be aware of, but at the same time we have to speak to the community and culture and celebrate it, not that, obviously we welcome white folks, because we have white members and me. But we aren't ashamed of and celebrate African-American culture and identity here. And so one of the myths in America, of course, is if you are pro-black, you must be anti-white, which it doesn't work. It doesn't have to be that.

Today Immanuel averages between 150 and 170 attendees on Sundays. “We're actually moving to go to two services now in October, and you see the renovations and new life being breathed in.” He points to a lighthouse painted on the auditorium wall with the church’s vision statement.

But it's a tense moment right now because we've grown to the point where it's too much for me as one pastor, and it's also a decision of where we go now. You know what I mean? The church is getting a new identity, all these new people, and it's not the same church it was, so it's a new identity being birthed, but it's the birthing pains we're going through right now.

Gahagen has a routine of Friday evening walks through the church neighborhood, knocking on doors, chatting with residents and learning about their concerns. Invited to join his walks, some members have said, “Well, I don't live over there, pastor.” He wondered aloud how to define *which* community they were working on building.

The dilemma we have today, of course, though is that even here at Immanuel, most of our folks don't live in this direct community, they live in the west side, they live down the street, they live up north, you know. [...] Which community, how do you define that?

That's the difficult part. And that's why if you look at our vision statement, it says we're in the Chandler Park community, which is where we have focused on, and we're having big movements now here but we need to start looking at city-wide. We need to start looking at it in a broader landscape, which is where MOSES, helps us to get connected to do that.

The fact that the members, and therefore their interests and concerns, span the city, directs the pastor to look beyond the neighborhood for broader political impact.

Gahagen and Redding are confronting a shared task: how to create a new identity as a religious community in the city, and connect with the neighborhood? That process necessarily entails developing trust to heal institutional racism and a history of division in

the congregation. As they grow, their developing identities and potential political influence will be shaped by their members' relationship to the church's neighborhood.

Commuter Congregations

The two congregations described above represent the last vestiges of racial turnover in Detroit congregations as a result of "white flight." Most vibrant churches in the city today have either always been predominantly African American, or transitioned years ago. But another population trend affects these more stable congregations: by the 1980s demographers noticed increased suburbanization of African Americans. This trend is the result of a growing black middle class, the dilapidation of city housing, and decreases in real estate discrimination (Farley, Danziger, and Holzer 2000; Frey 1994).

However, many African Americans remain committed to attending worship services in the city, regardless of their residence.¹²⁶ In addition to the niche or unique personality that congregants appreciate from their home churches, the sense of commitment comes from a family history within the congregation, and concerns about the state of the city's economy and the well-being of its residents.

MOSES president Rev. Kevin Turman is pastor at the historic Second Baptist Church in Detroit's downtown business district. He explained that some of his members who joined over fifty years ago found a place that, "appealed both to their intellect and to their spirit. They have invested a great deal of their energy, and effort, and finances into

¹²⁶ A few of the congregations in this study have moved location at some point in their histories in order to grow. At least one tried to move to an inner suburban municipality, but was prevented by an ordinance disallowing building new churches in order to favor businesses paying taxes. That congregation found another location within Detroit, and was able to maintain most of its membership.

the sustaining of the congregation, and see it very much as *their* church. And they would no more walk away from their church than they would from their family.”

Rev. Sandra Gordon, Assistant Pastor at Greater New Mount Moriah shared that over the church’s eighty years, “different groups of families have grown up here in the church, and their kids, and their kids’ kids, are still coming.” Similarly Ms. Henrietta Rogers from Greater Southern Baptist described the family roots in her church.

Basically, it came from the roots, from their parents, and they was raised up in the church, and they come back, or either somebody was in the church connected to them. See, the church was founded by the pastor’s father, and that was down in the inner city, down around the Grand River, Warren, and that area. That’s why I say, most of the people are older people now. They grew up in the church.

Rev. Gordon explained that today very few of her church members live in the church’s vicinity, which has “changed extremely” from the vibrant neighborhood and beautiful homes she remembers. She used to live within walking distance, but currently lives on the west side of Detroit. “I’m one who’s guilty of moving out, moving away, you know. But I got married and we moved, supposedly to a better neighborhood but even the neighborhood that I’m in is not that great now. You know so, most of the people here at the church do not live near the church.” She explained that the church, “is a middle class, upper middle class church. Predominantly African American. But we’re sitting right smack in an area where there’s deterioration all around us.”

Several interviewees mentioned reasons for moving out of their churches’ neighborhoods: high taxes, lack of access to jobs, fear of violence and other crime, and poor school quality. Many of the congregations are close to large highways, near industrial areas, or in residential areas with concentrated poverty.

According to Rogers, neighboring residents are not joining as active members in her church. “[Neighbors] come through the door, and go out the back one. It’s just that kind of neighborhood. They come in there because they’re hurting.” Many residents visit and benefit from the church’s charitable efforts, such as their regular clothing drives, but “they never stay.” Youth from the neighborhood attend programs and outreach events, but typically their parents are not involved.

While all the pastors accept that commuting membership is a fact of life, they varied on whether they thought it was no consequence, an asset, a problem, or all of the above. Several pastors asserted that some of their members who are most active in the congregation are commuting long distances. As Rev. Bullock explained, “the automobile sort of nullifies any barrier to attending what goes on in the church. [...] Sometimes, the people that live out by the airport are here more often than the ones living next door.” Other clergy questioned whether it matters if members are connected to the church’s neighborhood, given their view of the primary purpose and value of religious participation. For example, Rev. Dulin from Metropolitan Church of God explained,

What you do in the church is not limited to just participating in church activities. [...] But if the values you’ve attained as a result of being in the church help you to influence matters on your job, in the neighborhood where you do live, then that’s the church at work.

Rev. Edgar Vann is pastor at Second Ebenezer Baptist, not a MOSES member but in conversation with MOSES organizers. Just west of downtown bordering the I-75 highway, Vann’s mega-church attracts people from the five-county metropolitan area. 35 to 40 percent of his congregation lives outside of the city. Vann explained the sense of commitment that many of his commuting members feel for Detroit.

There is a great cultural piece for us, that many of the people who have moved outside of the city, have a great affinity for the city. And want to remain a connection to the city and their church becomes their real connection to the city, even after they've moved out. So, Sunday becomes a day where they come and they worship and then they go over to grandma's house for dinner and that type of thing.

Noting Detroit's high poverty, high functional illiteracy rate, and other socio-economic challenges, Vann emphasized, "for a congregation to be successful, they will probably be pulling members outside of Detroit." Rev. Barlow from Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist, a founding member of MOSES, further explained that perspective on commuting membership.

Looking at it on a selfish level, which many individuals don't recognize, that in order to have a vibrant church, a strong church in the community, I need strong people in the community. If we have all the minimum wage jobs, then my church can't be strong. So I need some engineer jobs, I need some doctors, I need some schoolteachers, I need whatever is out there. I need supervisors in the automobile manufacturers. I need paralegals, I need all of these things because if we're gonna follow [tithing], and I teach tithing, it's ten percent of your income.

In order to sustain all 51 programs and ministries of his active church, Barlow needs members' financial support for ministries and outreach programs to the church's neighborhood.

Organizer Ponsella Hardaway agreed that delocalization is not a concern in most churches, reinforcing interviewees' comments that their commuting members participate fully in congregational life. And the generous outreach of many congregations, from food pantries to community centers, demonstrates the benefit of churches' redistributive efforts. But she also believes that perspective sits in tension with the Biblical mission of these churches, to raise up the poor and evangelize in the neighborhood.

So even though the [church members] are all over the place, and the pastor might not live in the neighborhood, there is that gnawing piece there about what is your effectiveness in the neighborhood in which the church sits.

A primary role of community organizing is to help congregations recognize their interests and act collectively to address their concerns. Organizers are faced with a question of whether the interests of the congregation members really rest with the methods and goals of local community organizing.

Incorporation of Community Organizing Methods

Building relational political capacity within congregations is a primary goal of CBCO. This “relational organizing” and “congregational development” is the source of social capital to be directed towards strategic thinking and political actions (Warren and Wood 2001). The methods presume enough overlap between congregations and their neighborhoods to motivate locally focused political actions.

Compared to other types of political involvement such as voting, local community organizing is fundamentally affected by delocalization. Many commuting members lack personal interest in their church’s surrounding neighborhoods. Even when the church members are concerned about urban blight, their role as outsiders means they cannot, and perhaps should not, address issues of blight without the participation of residents. This separation amounts to limited organizing localized political actions, such as responding to illegal dumping or tearing down abandoned housing. The history of MOSES shows that these types of initiatives successfully engaged many core teams in the 1990s, who carried out numerous local projects. But many congregations are not as active as they once were. Previous leaders are getting older and cannot maintain the level of activity they once did. Unable to develop interest in new local actions, inactive congregations have not trained the next “generation” of core team leadership.

In a Feb. 5, 2001 memo to the staff, MOSES director O'Brien, wrote:

“My fear is that a year from now, with frantic behavior about a public meeting—we will be anemic:

- Only 60 congregations.
- Many major black clergy but not very deep in the pews.
- Few of the Catholic suburban congregations.
- Current member congregations still floundering with core teams.
- Analysis but no action-involvement by leaders pushing metro issues.
- Another fall where we are operating on a “money-panic” mode.”¹²⁷

A week later, in a plan for a core team training, staff member Janice Joseph wrote that only 15 to 20% of dues paying members had “effective or active core teams.”¹²⁸ She explained, “existing experienced leadership has been tasked to the fullest, and our organization has been in a mode of recycling the same leaders for every taskforce and function.”

Though the 2002 Public Meeting achieved an all-time-high of over 5000 participants, that peak reflected successful mobilization more than successful organizing. The lower turnout at the next Public Meeting in 2004 reflected that high mobilization could not be maintained given the erosion of their base. Leading up to that event, out of 61 religious congregations expected to participate, 18 churches had no core team leader designated.¹²⁹ That means almost 30% of member congregations did not have a lay leader, let alone a core team.¹³⁰ Nine of the 61 (15%) had no commitment on how many

¹²⁷ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, Folder 1 of 3, Feb. 5, 2001 Memo.

¹²⁸ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, Folder 2 of 3, Core Team Congress Organizational Plan, February 12, 2001.

¹²⁹ The list of 61 does not include other member groups and institutions, including universities, unions, and advocacy groups. It also does not include expected participation from “visiting” congregations who were considering membership.

¹³⁰ Source: author’s field-notes from MOSES staff meetings, July 8, August 4, and September 9, 2004.

members would attend the public meeting two and a half weeks before the event.¹³¹

Increasingly the core team leaders have acted as mobilizers for larger MOSES meetings, rather than developing a core team with their own group identity, and conducting their own political actions. Large turnout is essential to involve public officials and hold them accountable. Additionally, new leaders are drawn into the organization and learn about it through the larger assemblies. But the potential of the congregation for collective action depends on the development of their own active and regenerating team.

Interviews indicate that churches have had difficulty maintaining their teams.

One of the founding members of WDIFCO, Rev. Samuel Bullock described the current challenge of maintaining momentum to organize even in churches that have been active in the past.

I guess one of the hardest things to do with people is to maintain or perpetuate - that which is successful.

People get older, move away, you've got a new crop coming in, and so the passing the baton of responsibility is very hard to maintain, at least I find in our church family, it's very hard to maintain. Now the level of enthusiasm, energy, and activity that was born by the congregation when we first started out as WDIFCO and MOSES, has waned a considerable amount. But when we first started out, certainly it was one-on-ones, it was training, it was the issue conventions that drove and heightened the interest and the involvement of the people to collaborate and work together to arrive at our desired ends. And here again, that has waned. [...] We're not doing the one-on-ones like we did. We're not lifting up the issues with the same kind of enthusiasm and zeal that we once did. Just why that is at this point ...?"¹³²

Core team leader at Greater Apostolic Faith Temple, James Smith explained that he has a “faithful few” that really get involved with different political actions with MOSES, but for public meetings he has to “beg” other congregation members to attend. Many of his

¹³¹ Organizers ask active leaders, usually core team chairs, to commit to bring some number of people to meetings. The numbers range anywhere from two to 300 people, depending on the size of the congregation, their leadership, etc.

¹³² Interview with Rev. Bullock.

fellow church members attend only because he agitates them. They attend the rallies, “But that’s it.” In his words, “I think that’s where some of the other churches have the benefit over us, because the church is in their neighborhood. That directly, they can put the two together and really work it out. Like I said, our folks hit the freeway and they’re gone.”

Ms. Rogers explained her core team’s practice of conducting annual “porch patrols,” canvassing residents on what concerns them in the neighborhood. The year she was interviewed, the city had ended free pick-up of bulk trash, and illegal dumping dominated the residents’ concerns. But the core team is not as involved in responding to those issues like they had been in the 1990s. The age of the core team members is an issue: “Everybody don’t have the energy to go sit in city councils all the time like we used to.” Now they provide community members with information about who to contact in the city related to illegal dumping, but they are not actively conducting research and political actions. “We just come to that conclusion.” She asked the core team, “Do we wanna take this on? Or do you wanna throw it back to [the residents]? Before, we used to say, yeah, we’re gonna take this issue on, and take care of it.”

Though the core team continues to reach out to the neighborhood residents through the porch patrols, neighborhood concerns are of less interest to her congregation. As the team of people who were interested dwindles, there are fewer to replace them.

Because remember, 90% don’t live in the community, so they’re not concerned, so that’s why we go out every year, is to try to get the concerns of the community, and the congregation will not get involved like I said. They might – it might be three or four people, and that’s about it [...] ‘Cause they won’t join the core team, so they don’t know what’s going on. If I have a big thing coming up, oh yeah, they’ll attend, like we had a public meeting and stuff like that, and anything that I say I want them to do, they usually do it, but its just the idea, they won’t work with me on a monthly basis.

Interviewer: Okay, they'll come to the major things.

Yeah, the major things. They'll rally behind me then. (*Laughs*) Even the young people, like every year, I have at least ten people, young people. Sixty-two people at the banquet. [...] But if I said, "Come on, lets go out and canvas the neighborhood," I might get five. Sometimes I'll only get two.

Rogers has had difficulty recruiting people from her church to the core team, especially "young" people "on the other side of 65." "All they wanna do is sing in the choir and usher. They're not gonna go outside the walls." The disconnect between institutions and neighborhoods enables a mobilization mentality, where the job of the core team, especially the "faithful few" such as the core team chair, to turn out numbers to represent their congregation at large public meetings or the annual banquet.

Staff organizer Stephanie Hoffman found in one of her assigned churches on the west side, "They have a lot of people who claim to be members of the core team, but they haven't really done anything." Much of the neighborhood is non-residential, "And so there are not a lot of people that live around there. It's an African American church in an African American neighborhood, and there's no fear there [of residents]. There's just not a real interest." Lacking a neighborhood connection disrupts the very purpose of the core team, since the CBCO model depends on finding local, tangible problems as the starting point for building interest, teams, experience of success, and knowledge of how to take the next step in pursuing policy change.

While struggling to attract participants in the context of this disconnection, core team leaders adapt organizing practices to their church members and structures. "One-on-one" conversations internally among church members provide a basic example of community organizing methods. This practice has two main purposes. The first purpose

is making an individual connection with others, which is often neglected in favor of quick “hellos” and “how are you’s” in churches. In turn, that connection enables the second purpose: the discovery of people’s primary interests, concerns, as well as individuals’ skills, talents, and untapped leadership potential. Relationships and the knowledge those relationships provide are the basic resources a leader needs to build a team in a congregation. As core teams become more established within a congregation, they can become more of a survey exercise to pinpoint salient issues and neglect the one-on-one’s transformative, relational character.

As core team chair Jim Smith explained, through conducting one-on-ones, “you find out the interests of people. That kind of helps you as far as your core team is concerned. Are we targeting the rights things? We need to find out what these people want. What their biggest concerns are.” His core team leaders organized a congregational survey to discover the main concerns of the church membership. That is useful information for the church leadership to know, for all of their programs as well as for the core team. But it is not the same as having the one-on-one conversations that encourage people to discover what they share in common and open new possibilities for collaboration on action. The survey puts the core team in a role of providing a service for the institution’s other members and builds the team around a specified task similar to other ministries institutionalized within the church.

For example, Walter Jones described his core team’s “in-reach” process Mt. Zion. “Well, we go through a number of processes. First of all we do one-on-ones to get a sense of what’s going on with our members.” Then the core team sits down as a group for analysis.

We'll look at the issues and then how many people have said the same things on certain issues, you know? Then we'll sit there and we'll write them down and how many people have the same issues and we're prioritized as far as what the numbers and what the issue is in itself and we'll discuss it and see which one is more workable and achievable and then we'll vote on it.

That vote helps them determine what issue to focus on for one major campaign each year.

Mr. Jones tries to limit core team projects, "because everyone on my core team is a member of three or four other different auxiliaries and clubs. I try not to overload them because they're doing so much already, and it boils down to the faithful few. You always have 10% doing 90% of the work."

Rogers explained that she thinks that MOSES work "is like a ministry that belongs to the core team." The church is involved in many other organizations, including the American and the Progressive Baptist Conventions. She thinks that the church's board members view MOSES as just another type of organizational membership, only really relevant to the people on that committee.

And the same thing that they feel with MOSES, the core team. I think that's the feel of it, and nobody has really come out and say, but just the time we have done one-on-ones. They ask all these questions, [and say] "that sounds good," "I would like to be involved," but they never really get involved.

Participating individuals must fit the core team within their congregation's existing structures and activities. In order for church members to make sense of what a core team does, it is institutionalized as another ministry of the church. But that puts the core team in a position of competition with other ministries, and it is easily overlooked as one of many church programs, though their mission is participatory and transformative rather than service-oriented.

In order to cultivate participation, CBCOs require support and organizational structure within congregations. MOSES depends on its "key leaders"—lay people and

clergy committed to community organizing work—to build a core team within the congregation, carry out their own political actions, develop future leadership and build the larger network. If the lay leader, with the support of their clergy and the staff organizers, is not able to build a team, the CBCO’s connection to the congregation is tenuous.

Core team leader Leslie Denard described her church’s participation. “We don’t really have a core team right now. I’m just the chair of Church and Society, and MOSES falls under that committee. So does a lot of other [church work].” While their pastor had conducted one-on-ones at some point, the core team did not. Lacking time to conduct one-on-ones, the chair had difficulty developing others’ interest in MOSES.

I got kind of mixed responses because some of the congregation really didn’t know what MOSES did or what impact it had because they didn’t see any direct results in the church.

They didn’t see anything, well, not only impact, but they didn’t see a return on the investment that they were making. So it may have been impact or something that they could touch and feel or anything. Some of them didn’t understand it was totally about social change, change in policy. They’re getting that [now]. Like mass transportation.

Because churches pay dues for MOSES membership, congregants in that church saw it as an investment with returns. One role of the core team is to communicate what the issue-specific task forces are doing to influence policy. But apart from that, this congregation does not have its own team working on its own issues of concern. It sees MOSES as something others are doing for them; an investment in a good cause. When that is the case, the CBCO plays an advocacy or interest group role working for a single issue, rather than an organizing role.

Conclusion

This chapter explores how community institutions are still processing population changes that hit with full force thirty years ago. Those changes have had consequences for demographic and cultural changes in church membership. Individuals' choices to move out of the city and in many cases, leave their congregations, were rooted in race and ethnicity, wealth, and ideas of how to maintain and improve their quality of life. The evidence from interviews lends insight into the adjustments required of religious institutions and communities following large shifts in organizational memberships and affiliations. Given the time and effort it takes for community-level institutions to adjust to demographic change, shifts in religious congregational membership (particularly in mainline religious institutions) in the recent past should be considered alongside evidence that fewer Americans belong to traditional civic associations (Putnam 2000).

The increased concentration of poverty in the city, the delocalization of church membership, and the adaptation of churches to maintain their institutions in spite of and in light of those factors, has meant a movement toward a charity and service relationship of congregations to their neighborhoods. For MOSES member churches, there appears to have been a shift from internal core team organizing work to mobilization that is facilitated by the delocalization of churches from their neighborhoods. In addition, the effort to discover congregation members' interests, and focus on those interests for core team work, can eclipse the original purpose of one-on-ones: for people to connect with each other and discover common ground. The interests themselves become a singular goal for the "faithful few" to work on, rather than the value of shared discovery leading to shared action.

The delocalization of congregations in Detroit has ramifications for community organizing philosophy and practice. In his study of CBCOs in Texas, affiliated with the IAF, Warren (2001) noticed a similar phenomenon of delocalization and disconnection. As with those interviewed here, middle class members involved in church leadership and in IAF participation, were an asset to black churches. But delocalization weakens the IAF's "ability to tap the networks of the church's neighborhood." "The smaller size and less dense access to neighborhood networks helps explain why black churches mobilize, on average, fewer supporters than Hispanic Catholic parishes to the large public actions that provide the foundation for the political power of IAF affiliates" (Warren 2001, p. 204).

For community organizing groups, the lack of a shared localized interest removes a primary purpose of core team work, unless the pastor and/or active lay people are able to translate organizing practices into some action issue that fits their church culture and feels like their own.¹³³ If they are not going to conduct actions specific to the interests of their congregation members, core team members might as well belong to issue task forces bridging congregations, rather than build teams internal to their congregation. If that becomes the norm, congregation-based organizing may have difficulty attracting less-affluent members who face quality of life issues in their neighborhoods, and who stand to benefit most from the political training, experience, and the sense of efficacy that parochial actions develop.

This research begs empirical questions: do commuting church-goers participate differently than their peers who live nearby, either in typical church activities or in

¹³³ MOSES has had success involving non-resident church members in "Safe Zones" outreach, in which church members conduct informal door-to-door surveys in the church's neighborhood on crime and safety issues, and share their findings with local law enforcement.

political action? And, does percentage of commuting membership affect congregation-level neighborhood and political action (such as outreach activities, or membership in a CBCO)?

Having explored the external pressures on congregations, their adaptations to those pressures, and implications for community organizing methods, the next chapter turns to analysis of internal challenges, including power relations, within congregations and how community organizers navigate and respond to those challenges.

Chapter 5

“You see me but it’s not me:” The Interplay of Religious Authority and Lay Empowerment

Introduction

In the decades since Alinsky founded the Industrial Areas Foundation, community organizers have developed and honed the process of organizing to prioritize relational methods and leadership building from within congregations. Scholars and practitioners of community organizing have detailed these relational strategies (Osterman 2002; Rogers 1990; Warren 2001; Wood 2002). Organizers have found that purposeful relationship building and leadership training can develop agency in people otherwise marginalized from politics. These practices are attentive to individual experience and capacities within trusted organizational settings, while simultaneously connecting people to opportunities for collective action.

What can the organizing process tell scholars about the political capacity of community institutions, such as churches? Though not typically articulated by organizers, part of what the organizing process provides is an outline for working within and around the power relations within institutions—religious and political. This chapter explores how organizers and active lay people effectively organize within and around those power. Community organizing methods take relationships that currently serve one purpose (organization of religious worship), makes them more explicit for participants, and asks

that they be directed towards a new purpose: external political behavior. That process amounts to either an incorporation of new tasks into existing roles and organizational structures, or shifting roles and structures within the institution. By revealing the maneuvering of political actors in and around congregations, community organizing methods uncover political aspects, and further political potential, of civic relationships.

This chapter explores the interplay of clergy, lay people, and community organizers to better understand how power relations within congregations might matter as a support or limitation for political collective action. I argue that the internal navigation of congregations assists the development of efficacy among lay people and, therefore, helps move the congregation toward local political action. The same initiative by an organizer may have different implications and outcomes depending on the denominational structure, as well as actors' interpretation of their leadership roles in that structure. When organizers work with clergy and lay leaders, they are figuring out what is sacrosanct and what is malleable within each religious community. A denomination's traditions for clergy authority and lay participation, as well as the clergy and laity's interpretation and enactment of those traditions, both matter for how the bridging mechanism interacts with the congregation, and therefore, for their political impact.

This chapter also reveals how lay people make sense of authority within congregations in reference to salient inequalities in the larger society. Their stories point to forms of support and intervention that they felt they needed in order to get involved in politics, suggesting a complex relationship between traditional authority and lay empowerment. Support from the larger community and of the religious authority figure can operate almost as displaced efficacy for a person who is new to politics, or

marginalized from it. When people do not believe in themselves as political actors, the confidence and support of others makes a difference. In an organizing process that advocates learning on one's feet, action can actually precede the presence of extensive skills and political knowledge. The experience of political action supports the development of skills and knowledge as people learn about the political system through hands-on involvement.

Making sense of religious hierarchy and authority for participation

Most political science research on the power dynamics of religious institutions focuses on religious hierarchy. Existing research considers how the presence or absence of hierarchical structure (such as a Catholic diocese) matters for participants' individual civic and political engagement (Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). This section briefly reviews different scholarly approaches to studying the relationship between hierarchy and American lay political participation, and the kinds of evidence those approaches have produced.

In *Voice and Equality*, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) report that Protestants are three times more likely to report an opportunity to build civic skills in church compared to Catholics (322). They also report that Hispanics have lower rates of participation compared to Anglo-whites and African Americans, despite high rates of church attendance. The authors hypothesize that Catholics in general are not as active in church related activities in part because "most Protestant denominations are organized on a congregational basis with authority vested in the congregation itself rather than in a

church hierarchy.” Additionally, Protestants generally allow greater lay participation in the liturgy, enabling more skill-building opportunities.¹³⁴

In response, Jones-Correa and Leal (2001) argue that if Catholicism makes the difference, they would expect to find that Catholic Latinos are less politically active than their Protestant counterparts. Analyzing national surveys of Latinos, the authors find there is no significant difference between Catholic and Protestant Latinos’ non-electoral participation. In fact their findings indicate, “Latino Catholics may receive greater encouragement than their Protestant counterparts in electoral turnout.” Additionally, Jones-Correa and Leal found that church attendance matters more than religiosity for Latinos’ non-electoral and electoral political participation (757). The act of attendance, and whatever activities it entails, supports their civic and political engagement elsewhere.¹³⁵ Pointing to the centrality of the Catholic Church in the lives of Latino immigrants, and their relative isolation from other Catholics in U.S. parishes, the authors propose that Catholic churches “may serve as ethnic associations as much as they do religious institutions” for Latino immigrants (764).

Jones-Correa and Leal argue that churches matter politically because they function like other civic associations, and their characteristics of associations are similar across denomination (763). Therefore, denominational differences are not as significant for lay civic and political engagement as Verba et al. suggest. Instead, it is the people’s church attendance and their use of the congregation as a civic association that appears to

² While examining the difference between men and women’s participatory factors gained in church, Burns, Schlozman, and Verba (2001) report that denominational differences stand out more clearly than the gender differences. Their findings support Verba et al.’s hypothesis that Catholic churches are less “skill endowing” than Protestant churches, though Catholics are equally as likely to be politically recruited (238).

¹³⁵ Interestingly, the outcome is different for Anglos, whose reporting a religious experience correlates positively with civic participation but negatively with electoral participation variables (762).

make the most difference for individual measures of political participation. But aside from involvement in the congregation's civic activities, I think denomination may matter for direct political engagement in community matters, guiding beliefs about appropriate political views or organizationally supporting certain kinds of political behavior.

Historical evidence on population migration has demonstrated that the structure of denomination guides individuals' investment in the place-based community, and therefore shaped political choices and behavior in that community (Gamm 1999; Sugrue 1996). Taking into account denominational differences should help us understand actors' choices in the context of different traditional institutions. Church membership and attendees have agency to direct the use of their congregation's resources towards civic outreach or external political behavior. Unique navigation of, and approaches to, structural hierarchy by church attendees and other actors such as community organizers may lead to different civic and political outcomes. Additionally, relationships across congregations such as interfaith alliances or collaboration with other organizations must be affected by institutional structures' willingness and methods of collaboration. For a church to serve as an ethnic association, its chosen activities are partly a result of the structure of the denomination and religious beliefs, and also of the congregation's internal response to what is happening in the wider community and the effectiveness of the congregation at collaborating with other associations.

Recent sociological work on resource mobilization theory provides yet another perspective on hierarchy and lay political involvement, one which considers political action by the congregation or denomination as a whole rather than individual behavior. The theory posits that social movements emerge when groups have sufficient resources

(material, organizational) to act when political opportunities arise (McAdam 1982; McCarthy and Zald 1977; Morris 1984). Khari Brown (2006) reaffirms the significance of this theory in his comparison of predominantly white and black congregations, where he finds that the “principal resource constraint” on black congregations is their denominational affiliation (1598). Because black congregations are less likely to be affiliated with denominations that have strong bureaucratic infrastructures (e.g. the Roman Catholic Church), they are limited from costlier forms of political activism such as lobbying and protests, and more likely to engage in less expensive voter registration. Bureaucratic hierarchy provides specific directives, lines of communication, and consolidation of resources towards chosen aims. So certain kinds of political participation are more likely to be encouraged in hierarchical versus autonomous congregations based on their access to resources, probably with different implications for lay initiative, bridging opportunities within and outside of the denomination, and kinds of issues addressed. It is open to debate whether the role of authority figures in choosing issues or methods of engagement supports or undermines the democratic benefits of political participation. By looking at institution-level behavior, research can assess a larger political impact of congregations, but overlook internal dynamics as a resource or constraint on collective action.

One more approach to thinking about this quandary comes from ethnographic research on community organizing. Similarly to Brown’s findings, Mark Warren (2001) explains how community organizing groups in Texas have benefited from the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church: when bishops support an organizing project such as IAF affiliates in Texas or MOSES in Detroit, many priests are encouraged to

involve their congregations. Community organizing networks nationwide (including MOSES in Detroit) have benefited from grants by the Catholic Campaign for Human Development.

But then Warren describes another phenomenon that is as much about the different uses of religious authority within a congregation, as the hierarchical structure affecting all congregations of the same denomination. He suggests that, “in a surprising way, the authority of the parish priest often makes lay leadership in IAF efforts more likely.” Priest positions are appointed and do not compete for positions. Therefore they are usually open to lay parishioners taking on roles in community leadership (197). Across denominations, the combined authority of “faith traditions and pastoral direction play key roles in generating collective action, in motivating lay leaders and mobilizing supporters” (210).¹³⁶

Drawing on examples from interviews and participant observation, I first build on Warren’s research by analyzing how denominational differences seem to be relevant to community organizing practices, and therefore how their navigation is necessary for the translation of social into political capital. I argue that within both Catholic and Baptist churches, religious authority can be either an asset or a limiting factor for lay political empowerment. The next section shows how influence moves both up and down religious hierarchies, in these cases to the benefit of community organizing. Paying particular attention to lay people’s experiences moving into political involvement, I then analyze

¹³⁶ Warren points out that Verba and associates focus on skill development in individuals nationally, and therefore of course are “not looking at processes of political engagement and mobilization within church communities.” Warren argues that scholars should look at those community dynamics in order to understand how to expand democratic participation.

ways that marginalized communities depend on their religious communities and authority for secular purposes.

DIFFERENCES BY DENOMINATION

In my fieldwork and in interviews, organizers explained their challenges of working with clergy in terms of denominational differences. They do not view any religious structure as better or worse for organizing but as requiring different strategies. The next two sections describe how community organizers perceive and work with congregations' internal power relations to encourage collective action that benefits the congregation as a whole and the larger community. Congregations' internal political dynamics affect both the kinds of resources available for collective action and patterns of internal lay involvement. In turn, those pressures affect professional organizers' opportunities to develop relationships within the congregation and the avenues they can take to go about organizing. Because pastors face different pressures based on the structure of congregational governance, denomination matters for organizing outcomes.

In the following sections I highlight distinguishing characteristics of Catholic and Baptist clergy and congregations for several reasons. Broadly construed, these two groups comprise the two largest subgroups within MOSES congregations and, according to organizers, comprise the majority of congregations in the city. While Catholic churches continue to close in the city they maintain a large presence in suburban Detroit, with ramifications for a metropolitan political coalition. This discussion cannot do justice to the diversity of styles, beliefs, or structures within either denomination. This is especially the case for Baptist congregations that, through their structural autonomy, can

vary dramatically in style and substance.¹³⁷ The important point of this discussion is not to make arguments about characteristics of Catholics or Baptists but to show how organizers believe they must understand and adapt to different contexts. Comparing Catholic and Baptist churches offered the best chance for this research to illustrate that adaptation. I argue that the diversity of churches requires the work of thoughtful collaborators, from inside and outside the congregation, to support democratic political action.

Catholics

Organizers want clergy to use their authority within their congregations to encourage involvement in community organizing. Organizing work is stymied when pastors are reluctant or “afraid” to ask their members to do things or to be more active.¹³⁸ This can be a problem regardless of denomination depending on the particular pastor’s willingness to delegate, but organizers expect Baptists to be especially competent at involving their people in church activities, building teams, and delegating responsibility. Though contemporary Catholic churches have increased opportunities for lay participation since Vatican II, the opportunities do not carry the same urgency of self-reliance that they carry in the Baptist tradition. The following example, drawn from participant observation, shows how an organizer interpreted and evaluated a small core team meeting at a Catholic church.

¹³⁷ For a detailed discussion of the history of black Baptists churches in the United States, and the development of the major Baptist Conventions, see “The Black Baptists: The First Black Churches in America” by Lincoln and Mamiya (1990, chap. 2).

¹³⁸ Interview with Victoria Kovari.

Towards the end of the meeting, the priest entered and spoke to the group, shifting the meeting from a discussion to monologue for several minutes. He expressed deep concern that the core team had “fallen apart” and said that the parishioners have to work on rebuilding and sustaining it.¹³⁹ The pastor said that for his part, he would talk to other priests regarding the distribution and collection of yellow cards [information for the core team] during mass. However, he was worried about the timing of the process in mass, insisting that the cards not take more than three and a half minutes. Also he said several others will also be taking up mass time with announcements (various collections, taco sale fundraiser, etc.). Towards the end of the meeting a Sister (nun) spoke up to the priest when he asked her about next steps for the core team. She said something like, “Father we are going to do this and you are going to do that!” I remember being surprised by her gutsy response.

After the meeting, the community organizer and I discussed and evaluated the meeting. He said, “you would never hear a black pastor complain like this [priest],” because, “they would take more responsibility for the outcome of the team.” He argued that because in the Catholic Church the authority comes from the Bishop rather than from the congregation, priests do not have to prove themselves to the congregation to the same degree. Considering the nun’s intervention, the community organizer reflected that this meeting amounted to an unplanned, “action on the priest,” pushing him to become more invested in organizing and using his position of authority to assist the team.

Organizers can be just as enthused about the involvement of Catholic priests as Baptists, but they tend to appreciate different qualities of their involvement. In several interviews, organizers and lay people praised the hands-off approach of clergy who are

¹³⁹ Fieldnotes from Sunday, May 23, 2004.

publicly supportive of community organizing. Describing the core team at another Catholic church, an organizer explained,

They have a priest who is not so involved with MOSES but really, really, really gets urban organizing. And in that church, and I really think it's because – [...] That church is not so centered around the priest. I mean, I think that – the people within the church feel empowered enough to go on and do things without his, you know, approval or whatever.¹⁴⁰

By being supportive but not micromanaging, Catholic clergy can give lay people a space to take initiative. In his research on the IAF in Texas, Mark Warren observed the same phenomenon. He argues that because “their position in the parish is relatively secure, and their authority does not come from their talent as a community leader, they often let lay parishioners become the IAF leaders in their parish” (197). He found that in the local IAF affiliates, few Catholic priests were very active in community organizing, though they supported it and their congregations were active. In fact, “Catholic pastors often find it relatively easy to commit their parish to join the IAF, because membership does not necessarily mean extra work for them” (197).

This is an interesting paradox: the tendency of Catholic clergy to involve lay people less in church affairs, can be either a benefit or an impediment to civic and political participation. Organizer Juan Escareño provided a very active image of Catholic lay involvement,

I think, first of all, as a Catholic myself, we're very lay driven, the lay leaders run ministries; they almost, [...] I don't know, can represent the church in their ministry and have, you know they can be creative, right? And the pastor is you know, he deals with the sacraments and we deal with everything else around that.

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Stephanie Hoffman.

Similarly, lay leader Alejandro Garcia said of his priest, “he keeps a low profile. He lets his people do what has to be done, and he goes about doing his business, which is the church.”

Whether clergy’s involvement is a motivator or not may depend on the presence of an effective bridging mechanism, such as a community organizers who want to understand and work with the congregation. When community organizers and lay people talk about effective organizing and mobilization, they perceive denominational differences from the perspective of someone serving that bridging role. Escareño compared the Pope of the Catholic Church to the pastor in Baptist churches. “So I cannot go into a Baptist church and say, would you like to be a member of the Core Team? Right? The pastor has to be the one that says, you should be a member of the Core Team. He assigns people to do the work.” In contrast, in Catholic churches, “I have to go in there and find the people.”

Escareño’s description of his organizing experience disputes the idea of priestly authority as a fundamental limitation for lay involvement or initiative. As a Catholic himself, he argues, “we tend to be very rebellious towards our pastors, so we end up doing some things, right? We end up taking on issues, outright, and the Baptist church is more, [...] they follow *Roberts Rules of Order*. [...] which, as a Catholic, is hard for me to follow, (*Laughter*) ‘cause we just do it.” This rebelliousness from within the congregation family means the capacity to “take on the priest ... if we think he’s wrong.” In his words, this would “never happen” in a Baptist Church because challenging the pastor could divide the congregation. “In the Catholic Church, we could take on a pastor and they can’t kick us out.”

The organizer explained that he has been in a few situations where the core team wanted to do something but the pastor was ambivalent or opposed the political action, and the team persevered. In one example the priest did not initially want his congregation to join the organization. Lay people kept attending meetings and trainings, and pushed the pastor to advertise events in the bulletin and announcements. Eventually the organizer and lay people sat down with the priest, and he acquiesced. “So we had to organize his church around him, first, for him to say yes.” Escareño suggests that this tendency shows in MOSES involvement; the Catholic pastors take a more laidback approach, and fewer are actively involved than Protestants. The priests “figure they have leaders doing the work anyways.”

These descriptions of Catholic churches as “lay-driven” may seem to contradict some political science scholarship on how hierarchy matters for civic and political participation. But the organizer is not saying that Catholics are more engaged compared to Protestants. Rather he suggests that when Catholics are engaged in an organizing project, they have unique opportunities to take initiative and challenge internal authority. The irony is that lay people can “take on” the priest exactly because everyone understands they have almost no chance of removing him. As another organizer explained, in any Catholic Church, the priest “is totally protected. There’s no way that a lay person could organize a movement to get rid of him. It just can’t happen.”¹⁴¹ The clergy’s sense of security allows lay people a certain degree of internal latitude—should they choose to use it.

Baptists

¹⁴¹ Interview with Bill O’Brien.

Newcomers to community organizing quickly learn that they will not be unattached “volunteers” in the organization. Community organizers consider all active participants “leaders.” Certainly organizers watch for lay leaders who have demonstrated some social organizing capacity or are well networked within their community (Rogers 1990, 107-109). Yet they also try to draw untapped talent into the core teams, welcome anyone who has interest, and use trainings and assemblies to attract new talent. Moving through the learning process of organizing, training, meeting, and strategizing makes participants into leaders as much as any previous achievement (Osterman 2002).

Most Protestant churches have developed their own methods of engaging newcomers and novices into their liturgy and practices. A particularly busy and orderly church, Mt. Zion uses seminars to train people who are elected as leaders of the church’s many ministries (choirs, deacons, nurses, ushers, Sunday School teachers, etc.). Rev. Joseph Barlow explained that a key message he tries to get across in these trainings is that leadership, “is not about you, it’s all about God. And you can’t make a leader out of individuals when they’re thinking of themselves. Jesus said, He that will come after me, let him deny himself.” Just as Jesus made leaders out of his followers, Barlow believes, “He has demanded that I go and make disciples, and those are nothing other than but leaders. [...] So that’s my responsibility, to make leaders. Everyone should. A father should always train his son to become a caretaker of the family.” In this worldview, each leader for a ministry or committee must lead the smaller group and understand their role within the bigger mission of the congregation.

If you’re presiding over a meeting, never sit in the middle of the table. You sit at the head of the table. And if too many people are around the table, get you a seat on another little table and set off at the head. Now, you ain’t never seen a bus

driver driving a bus from the middle of the bus. He's always at the front of the bus. [...] So, I teach leadership. Know your place.

Barlow uses the phrase “knowing one’s place” to convey that any person, leader included, must act in particular ways in order to fulfill his role. The church’s multiple ministries provide ample opportunity for participation, and those opportunities also provide multiple ladders to greater influence in the church community. From the pastor’s perspective, knowing one’s role prevents conflict from dividing the church. Lay leaders who understand this fill a need for authoritative decision-making in an environment where power is dispersed and multilayered. Barlow further illustrates the point with an example from his own development, reflecting his understanding of how he should act as the pastor.

Now, I didn’t get that automatically. God gave me that through memberships. Through people. One lady I’ll name – she’s gone on – Florence Campbell, give me the backbone to build leadership. I [...] asked three of my choirs to go on a visitation with me on Wednesday night, three of them turned me down. Well, we can’t go for one reason or other. Finally, an old woman, 80-years-old, said, “Brother Pastor, the senior choir will go with you Wednesday night.” The next Monday, Miss Campbell called me to her house, 3738 Annabelle, and said to me, “If my children were here, I wouldn’t say this. But since none of them are here, [...] Sit down, let me tell you something.” She said, “You are not an asker, you’re a teller. When you get ready for choir, you don’t ask no two or three choirs, you get up and announce, I want the pastor’s chorus to go with me on this visitation and fellowship.” And she said, “Out of thirty-some people, God left folks in there to follow their pastor. And if you don’t have but six people show up, that’s your choir.” She said, “Now don’t you ever let me hear you asking. You’re a teller. You’re up here in the pulpit. We’re down here. You tell us, we don’t tell you.” God has just blessed me to have some good folks around me.

In this narrative both the lay person and the pastor share a belief in the authority figure’s responsibility to the congregation. And the lay person demonstrates her own sense of responsibility by “acting on” the pastor. An apparent dependence of lay people on religious authority both in internal organizational affairs and in external political action

reflects the internal political dynamics of this Baptist congregation. Pastor and membership believe that strong leadership helps the community collectively achieve some greater goal (i.e. a reliable choir) and stave off chaos or apathy that benefits no one. From the perspective of both parties, to relinquish that responsibility would be to the detriment of the congregation. While the woman in the story may have had a personal interest in having the pastor's ear, and the pastor himself has an interest in telling this kind of story, both positions reflect a belief in religious authority in the community as serving a common good.

While Baptist pastors may more deliberately encourage their members' roles in administration, services and ministries, those roles are held in tension with the power relations in the congregation. The roles are politicized in part because they symbolize closeness to the pastor and influence over others.¹⁴² The intensity of internal relationships and responsibilities within Baptist congregations reflects the centrality of those institutions for many black communities, creating opportunities for personal growth and advancement as well as serving community uplift (Lincoln and Mamiya 1990).

I happened upon a window onto the issue of internal relationships at a Council of Baptist Pastors meeting in Spring 2006.¹⁴³ The keynote speaker for that week (a local Baptist pastor) spoke to the assembly on how pastors can better manage and work with associate ministers, their immediate subordinates in the church. He was also recommending and selling a booklet on that topic. The speaker referred to the fact that

¹⁴² In one study, charismatic clergy were found more likely to use multiple strategies to influence their congregations, including charismatic, traditional, and legal-rational strategies. In contrast, clergy who identified with models of authority coming from their own training or professional skills showed no pattern in their use of strategies to influence their congregations (Falbo, New, and Gaines 1987).

¹⁴³ Author's fieldnotes, Council of Baptist Pastors, Bethany Baptist Church, Detroit, Michigan. May 23, 2006.

many people in their congregations want to be involved and even want to be in charge of this or that activity. Many congregants also have hopes of joining a “ministry.” Because many Baptist congregations consider every program or service they offer a form of ministry, the would-be preacher has multiple potential ladders of experience to the pulpit. Therefore it was important to the speaker that pastors maintain the final say in who does what—specifically deciding who is qualified, committed, and reliable for the many tasks within and related to the congregation. And, he argued, this matter becomes tricky regarding lay people who want to follow in their pastor’s footsteps and become associate ministers. In his words, this is a struggle for the pastor who must consider each person’s capability and the validity of their “calling” from God. The speaker emphasized to the audience (which primarily consisted of pastors and associate ministers) that candidates for ministry in the Baptist Church “serve at the pastor’s behest.” In no uncertain terms he reiterated to the associate ministers present, “you have to be subordinate to the pastor,” which entails learning all you can about him and attending to his style and substance of ministry, including the way he likes to run the services. The role of the associate minister should be to release the pastor from some of his many duties, and to publicly support the pastor as much as possible.

As an example, the speaker praised a woman who is one of his associate ministers for doing exactly what he would do when he asks her to fill in for him. He trusts her because he is certain that she will run the service the way he would, and preach with a message in reflecting his style and interpretation of scripture. Simply put, a pastor does

not want to put someone in front of the congregation if he does not know what they are going to do.¹⁴⁴

Unlike Catholic churches, Baptist churches provide the opportunity for lay people to climb into ministry, but that climb can also be wrought with potential problems for the congregation. As the speaker at the CBP warned, “If you put the wrong person in the pulpit, you will be out of the church.” He suggested that in the pastor’s peripheral vision, there are always, “folk trying to run us out, trying to take over.” Implicitly in his speech, all present recognized the power of the pulpit, the will of the congregation projected onto the person who speaks in it, and thus the potential that the congregation may follow that person out of the church. Rev. Bullock noted wryly in an interview, “we multiply by dividing.” The speaker indicated his frustration at stories of dissatisfied congregation members speaking to “deacon so and so” about unhappiness with the pastor. Such practices must be “nipped in the bud.” Quoting his own former pastor and mentor, the speaker recounted, “God only sent one person to save the world, not any number of committees.”

While this speaker probably expressed a more extreme concern about takeovers than many pastors would, his main points resonated with my interviews and the manner of Baptists’ participation in MOSES and community organizing. Within congregations, tensions between dispersed influence and the pastor’s sense of responsibility for religious authority create unique challenges for community organizing, which has a primary purpose of building new leadership and empowering lay people.

¹⁴⁴ These statements were congruent with indirect comments I heard in interviews with MOSES clergy. When I asked pastors about sharing the pulpit with clergy visiting from other congregations (common among Baptists), they emphasized the importance of knowing the person, having heard him or her speak before, and making sure their perspectives on the Bible and worship styles are complementary.

One organizer noted that this is a challenge for recruiting Baptist clergy into community organizing.¹⁴⁵ “Yeah, it’s one of the things that they are very nervous about is we come in, how do we train leaders within the congregation? You’re training them to do what?” The organizer must explain their purpose is to train people not to become independent of the church, but rather, “to invest more in the church, to take the church more seriously, to take leadership roles in the church, to help the church grow.” Some clergy will respond, “Well, I already got my people in place.” The organizer sympathized with their concerns. “Let’s say you started a business. You’d be very careful about who you brought in to run the store. [...] Somebody could be organizing all the clients to get you out. And that happens. I mean it happens in African American churches all over the place that don’t have bishops.”

From the perspective of active lay people, the challenge is not so much preventing division within the church as accomplishing collective action in an environment where there are competing claims on everyone’s energy and attention, and others are advocating for their goals as the goal of the church. Lay leaders hinted at the challenge of developing a shared purpose within the congregation. A church that is already highly organized faces the challenge of moving their social capital toward some kind of specific political impact. As one leader explained,

I don’t care what day you come here, somebody here every day [...], and so that’s why I try to limit the things that I do with my core team now because everyone on my core team is a member of three or four other different auxiliaries and clubs.

Competition for resources, participants, and the pastor’s support among activities creates a challenge for participation in community organizing, and therefore for the political impact of congregations. That competition can also be complicated with internal politics.

¹⁴⁵ Interview with Bill O’Brien.

In interviews, a couple of very active core team leaders pointed to the tensions of organizing core teams within their congregations. One has been the core team chair since 2003 and in his experience, “it’s been a power struggle since day one.” The heads of various sub-committees of the core team often want those committees to operate like separate entities though the core team leader believes they must be accountable to the team and therefore to the pastor.

People want to be in charge of—like I have committees and the committees are a component of the core team so you’re supposed to give us reports on your progress and whatever. Well they don’t do that and it becomes “my thing” instead of a core team thing, and so it be a power struggle where “this is my territory.” [...] You have to answer to the core team and the core team has to answer to the pastor, and I’ve had situations where they use their power and disrupt meetings. They use their power to sabotage a project we’re doing.

The interviewee said he has had to “shut down” a committee or “change leadership,” which incurs resentment and hostility from other members. “And that’s when the sabotaging come in, the character assassination come in.” Socio-economic class status also shapes these dynamics. According to the interviewee, people who want to be involved also tend to be leading other ministries: “people who have jobs as far as supervisor positions and that’s just in their character, you know? So they’re used to being in control and maybe their education is better than mine. Their financial condition is better than mine and it’s a whole lot of dynamics that goes into that.”

Another interviewee, a long time core team leader at an African American Baptist church, suggested that elders on her church’s trustee board had limited enthusiasm for community organizing, and did not understand its relevance or potential for the congregation. She believes, “They need to be replaced with some younger people.” While the pastor appoints all board members, he is reluctant to ask people to step down: “they

don't vote you out, you just die out." She mentioned that among the "upstanding men" on the board, one of the trustees is one woman, who is also active in the MOSES Land Bank task force, but, "she's a young person fighting against those people." A congregation's membership in the CBCO network does not mean that all power holders within the congregation are on board with the mission of community organizing, or even understand its purpose and methods. That can be the case even if the pastor is personally involved and fully supportive of lay involvement.

In this example the core team is viewed as its own ministry within the congregation, and therefore is seen as belonging to or the responsibility of the team, just as other committees are responsible for their ministries or form of service. Because the congregation is involved in many activities, few are active in MOSES despite the pastor's support and the congregation's overall membership. While the pastor fully supports the congregation's participation in MOSES, he also seeks lay participation in other organizations, such as the Progressive Baptist Convention. "They [congregation members] look at the conventions like that's for the people in what we call the Christian Education Department. [...] And the same thing that they feel with MOSES, the core team." She is suggesting that most people in the congregation see outreach or political action as compartmentalized within particular committees. Members see MOSES as yet another ministry serving a particular instrumental purpose rather than as a broad based group open to their contributions and initiative.

After the interviewee mentioned the presence of one "lady trustee," I asked if the core team leader if she had ever experienced difficulty as a woman leader in the church. She was unequivocal.

No. We don't have that kind of problem, because most of the people in our church are women. *[Laughs]*. Nobody wants this job. The guy that had this job, he wanted higher things. He went on to – the Progressive Convention, he went on and did things in that.

In her interpretation, core team leader was not a coveted position and did not inspire competition from people who used the church to pursue personal ambitions. This small example suggests a caveat for interpreting women's leadership in congregations.

Women's positions should be understood within the context of an organizational culture and other opportunities for leadership within the institution and its networks.

From the perspective of community organizers, structural autonomy intensifies the responsibilities of clergy within Baptist congregations. Some clergy from autonomous congregations describe a worldview of engagement and leadership that emphasizes maintaining order and knowing one's place. Therefore the fact that there are more numerous opportunities for lay members to gain responsibility within independent Protestant congregations does not guarantee enthusiasm for political organizing and brings other kinds of challenges for democratic participation, such as internal competition.

OPPORTUNITY AND EMPOWERMENT

The fundamental task of the Alinsky method is to build organizations of organizations—not of individuals. Any individual's role in community organizing is to connect the their institution with the larger network. While this approach reflects Alinsky's instrumental view of community institutions, it has endured in part because it resonates with the way non-elites think of themselves as political actors. Throughout interviews and in their organizing work, lay people and clergy reflect a sense of shared

responsibility for their religious communities.¹⁴⁶ Their self-described task is to represent their congregation at meetings with organizers, public officials, and people from other congregations. Both clergy and lay people perceive their congregation's involvement in organizing as a shared endeavor. This endeavor effectively puts clergy and lay people on more equal footing in the secular public sphere, at the same time that it honors and reinforces aspects of religious authority.

Influence in all directions

While clergy's involvement in CBCO meetings and trainings is not wholly unlike that for lay people, they are approached somewhat differently by organizers because they are potentially symbolic as well as active participants, and because they act as gatekeepers. Their approval is sought for access to work with lay people. One organizer suggested that the best scenario for recruitment is when current member pastors recruit their peers, but, "it also helps if you can get to people in the church that are well-placed with the pastor, the pastor is much more likely to notice it—to have it on his radar screen if there are people in his church saying, I went to this great meeting..."¹⁴⁷ For example, Rev. Turman remembered his recruitment experience:

Well it seems to me that I entered MOSES through the clergy caucus, at the invitation of Reverend Stevenson, [...] and the agitation of one of my members who spoke very highly of a MOSES banquet that she attended [...]. But she said to me that this seemed to be an organization that had promise, and that I really ought to look into it. So it was kind of an inside and outside game.

¹⁴⁶ The tendency of people who are active within religious congregations to think of themselves as community members first is so strong that organizing trainings purposefully encourage individuals to think about their own self-interests and motivations in order to be reflexive political actors. That is, many people need to realize, "I count" (Rogers, 62). Otherwise, civically active religious people tend to be drawn toward "selfless" thinking, which organizers believe leads people to avoid political action and positive definitions of power. Community organizers define self-interest within a community context of shared experience: "self-interest bridges individual interests and the common good" (Wood, 190).

¹⁴⁷ Interview with Victoria Kovari.

An organizer related that some of the clergy understand the purpose and benefits of involvement in community organizing for the congregation.¹⁴⁸ In those cases, for example, the priest will say, “we need to do this,” and he will encourage lay leaders to get involved. In other churches joining MOSES was an initiative of the leaders and “they’ll push for it.”

Organizer Stephanie Hoffman described how she saw the initial organizing process, both as intended and as practiced.

MOSES’s approach to it is to sit down with the pastor, find out what the pastor needs from a core team, what he wants to get out of the core team, he or she - mostly he though. And then so they develop the core team around whatever the pastor wants. That’s not exactly how it always happens. In [a particular Catholic church] the pastor has refused to sit down with me on several occasions and I’ve worked through the lay people there. With [an African American non-denominational church] they have a lot of people who claim to be members of the core team but they haven’t really done anything and so it’s taken my relationship with the pastor to really get them to move beyond just meeting once a month to announce various things that are going on.

Two points come across here: the pastor is central to any organizing endeavor but the organizer will not be dissuaded by clergy’s resistance. So the realness of the clergy’s authority to the community also makes it something to work with, and even a challenge around which to organize with lay people. Characteristically, organizers view just about any challenge as a learning and team-building opportunity.

The development of lay organizing capacity is a central goal of contemporary community organizing, and this comes across when interviewees highlight the significance of lay people’s role in maintaining participation in MOSES, across denominational differences. In many cases key lay members keep the congregation connected more so than the pastor—but they describe their involvement in terms of the

¹⁴⁸ Interview with Juan Escareño.

pastor's needs and support. Mr. James Smith, wearer of many hats including core team leader at Greater Apostolic Faith Temple, explained,

I think in our church, the lay people may be kind of driving the involvement. Our pastor is busy. [...] He has a diocese in Florida and South Carolina that he has to deal with. He's one of our national bishops, so he's pretty busy in his own right.

But he gets involved in MOSES, you know, at their big meetings and different things like that. I think he has a representative come to the pastors' caucus when he can't make it. So I mean, he's very concerned about it. But you know, with his agenda, it's almost impossible for him to do all the things they want him to do. That's why he asked, you know, us, his key people, to kind of help out.

In this relationship, the clergy and congregation members develop an understanding about where lay people can take initiative on behalf of the congregation, and how to ask for approval from or report back to the pastor. At Greater Southern Baptist, long time core team leader Henrietta Rogers generally has the go-ahead on MOSES projects.

So pastor just more or less gave it over to the core team, and I handled it. Gave my people whoever's the best suited for this, and so they take it and they run with it. And he say, "Go for it." Well, so far for eleven years, he say, "Go for it," everything. [...] It's whatever I could come up with as far as community involvement, so far he has not turned me down, 'cause I'm not gonna bring him anything that's not to benefit people.

In part because she anticipates his opinion, the pastor trusts her as core team leader and is open to her proposals. She maintains her position by checking in with the pastor and keeping him abreast of current activities.

The mobilization of political capital in congregations depends on the support of the clergy and the arrangement of relationships within the congregation. The main idea in this section has been to show how the means and character of involvement is one of shared responsibility between clergy and lay people, and developing that responsibility accounts for a large part of the initial work of organizing. Community organizing practitioners accept religious authority as a given, and work with both clergy and lay

people to develop their leadership skills at influencing each other within the limitations of their institutional roles.

Lay empowerment in community context

Relational community organizing methods comprise a comprehensive approach to political participation because they engage people directly in political discussion and action—including people who were not otherwise interested in politics, lacked the confidence, or felt they lacked the capacity or knowledge to be politically influential. The fact that civic skills and knowledge are predictive of political participation does not mean that skills and knowledge must precede action or that they cannot be developed in the process of political action. The unique context of relationships within religious institutions and their inclusiveness helps enable action by people who lack experience or efficacy. In the following examples from interviews with active lay people in Detroit, interviewees explore how they see involvement in community organizing as transformative for themselves and others, particularly in relation to the supportive context of their religious institutions.

Looking back at his last two years of participation in MOSES, Alejandro Garcia marveled at how a self-described “shy person” who “never communicated very well” became the chair of the Ste. Anne’s core team. Garcia explained that he first learned of MOSES when an organizer was recruiting people from Ste. Anne’s to discuss the Detroit-Windsor bridge encroaching on the historic church’s neighborhood.

In January of 2005 when someone gave me a call and said, “St. Anne’s is having a problem with Ambassador Bridge,” I said, “Okay. No thanks.” Click. And the person gave me a call again. He was persistent, needless to say, so again I said, “No thanks,” and hung up the phone again. The third time, I said, “This young

man is not gonna leave me alone until I attend a meeting,” so I attended a meeting, and the young man became Juan [MOSES staff organizer].

He was persistent, and plus I never did anything like this in my life. Normally I’m just a couch potato. Literally come home, sit on the couch, put on the tube, and watch T.V., so it’s turned my life around, literally. I don’t remember exactly what occurred the first meeting, and then the second month, they decided to have an election of officers, and I became the chairperson of the St. Anne’s core group, and I was literally shocked.

Interviewer: Why were you shocked?

Well, because I was in a cocoon. I didn’t know much of anything. I was just amazed that they would go ahead and vote me in.

As a newcomer to community organizing, Garcia learned about the political problem (in the case, the expansion of the bridge into the neighborhood) and options for addressing it, in the process of trying to have an impact with others from his congregation. Support from the priest, the core team, and more than a little nudging from the professional organizer, all encouraged Garcia to take a leadership role that maximized his involvement.¹⁴⁹ In community organizing, an individual’s lack of experience communicating with public officials or lack of formal knowledge about an issue is balanced by lay leaders in the group with more experience, and the coaching presence of the community organizer. So the newcomer enters a dynamic where he or she is able to contribute and learn simultaneously.

Understanding what people gain from involvement in community organizing also suggests what they were missing without it. When interviewees described their engagement in politics through their congregations and through MOSES, some were also explaining something deeper: their movement out of previous disengagement, alienation from, and even fear of the political system.

¹⁴⁹ For a similar story of persistent and successful recruitment, see “The Organizer’s Tale” by Cesar Chavez, *United Farm Workers*, July 1966.

Loretta Roldan is an activist in the Latino community: she previously organized the Hispanic Women's Center in Southwest Detroit, which provided ESL and business training, spiritual activities, and a culturally-sensitive safe space for women. In our interview, Roldan mentioned that she initially got involved in community politics and social services by advocating for her children. In her words, the beginning of her community involvement was necessary; it was "not by choice. Because you've got to be involved with your children." She was told to leave parent association meetings because parents were not allowed to bring children. "The school wanted me to be participant for my parent's club [...] and so I would get together all my children and go, and they would reject us, and then I began to say hey, wait a minute. That's why the people are not coming out." Roldan felt rejected as part of a family unit because her sense of her public role included her kids.¹⁵⁰

The openness of religious institutions to people of all walks of life, and all sectors of society, makes them some of the most accessible organizations for developing civic skills and networks (Burns, Schlozman, and Verba 2001; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). That inclusiveness is particularly central to developing social capital among people who experience marginalization by residential and occupational segregation and discrimination. Roldan explained how she sees the Catholic Church's centrality in her community for engaging people politically.

¹⁵⁰ The significance of family participation also came up in an interview with a community organizer. Juan Escareño explained that when he started working with the Detroit Latino churches he had to learn to plan meetings with the expectation that a lot of children would be there. In addition to the centrality of family in immigrant communities, Escareño explained that many people who work long hours and have little leisure time will not attend meetings if they cannot bring family, and they probably see church-related meetings as a family affair.

The people, they look up at the church. They respect it. If the church does not empower the people to take care of themselves and encourage them to working for their rights and all that, who else?

Without the church a lot of people probably wouldn't be involved, because we wait for the priest to tell us, you know, it's okay, do this. Permission. Even though if you really shouldn't be waiting for permission because it's our life, right? But I've noticed that even myself, I know, no, I don't wait. I know that it's wrong and I fight for it. But then I'm a citizen. You're a citizen; you've got your rights. For a person that doesn't have no rights in here how do they feel, you know? So they look up at the church to say hey, well, they said it's okay, let's go; they're supporting us, they're backing us up.

For recent immigrants, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church provides some assurance that someone important is “backing us up” in the public sphere. In her reasoning, immigrants look to the Church for guidance in political matters because of uncertainty about their security in the U.S. political system.

An interview with another Latina activist further explicates immigrants' perceptions of their role within the political system. Isabella Ramirez, a life-long member of Holy Redeemer Catholic church in Southwest Detroit, is an active member of the church's core team, as well the MOSES Civil Rights for Immigrants task force. She believes involvement in MOSES improves the learning curve of both immigrants and citizens for influencing political institutions.

But as far as what I've gotten from MOSES is the training to be more assertive in things that we didn't think we were able to do. Because I've seen my other core team leaders that went to the same training, and before they weren't vocal, and today they are vocal. They feel more certain of themselves. And the more training you get, the better you get.

This confidence-building comes in part from learning about the American political system through action. She suggests that what prevents immigrants from being more politically engaged includes a lack of understanding how the system works, and a need for points of access and a process through which to communicate with public officials.

To illustrate this point she used an example from her job as a translator in the local court system.

This gentleman says, “Well, why can’t I just pay the fine and get it over with?” I said, “Why are you gonna plead guilty if you don’t know if you’re guilty?” ‘Cause that’s the way in Mexico they do. They go and pay the magistrate, and the case gets thrown out and they don’t waste that much time. Here, it’s a different ballgame.

I says, “Well, this is how our system works,” and I explained to him and then he kinda got the idea. You don’t just walk in and say, “Here, have \$20.00 and throw my case out.” He was surprised. He said, “Well, I didn’t know.” Well, now you know.

Ramirez applied that example of her role in the courts, interpreting both language and law to immigrants, as an analogy to explain how the MOSES organizing process operates, “to open our eyes as to how to go about doing things.” She continued the analogy with an example of how the CRI task force and core team members, many who were undocumented immigrants, attended a rally in Washington, D.C. The group visited offices of Representative and Senators in order to advocate for comprehensive immigration reform.

And my goodness, they were so thrilled. They were just overwhelmed by being there. Well, we’re trying to see how many congressmen and senators supported the bill of Kennedy and McCain. [...] And it makes them feel — how you say — the training that we had at MOSES is for people to be more assertive and to feel free to comment and to add on.

Lack of efficacy and outright fear are a significant limitation to immigrants’ participation. Because several participants were undocumented, she had to assure them that the staff would not call the police and report them. Ramirez told the participants that she would translate to the staff and officials, but that the core team members should describe their experiences of crossing the desert and the perils they faced. She gave an example of how one man explained his journey to the congressional staff.

For instance, this [immigrant] man was saying there's bad and good in every country. He says, "First of all, we have to be careful of the robbers when we cross. They rob us, and the immigration looking on. And then when we get to immigration, instead of them helping us with the robbers or the people being raped, they come and arrest us instead of arresting or doing justice to the perpetrator." So the representatives of the congressmen says, "But how?"

I said, "Well, see, [the border guards] stand for law and order and they're violating their own law and order by not help out. If you see someone being raped by these bandits, why would you stand there? You have the authority and the power to help these people.

So these core teams are [...] for them to be able to feel assertive enough that they are worthy enough for them to be heard no matter what the circumstances are."

Involvement in community organizing, including discussion with other lay people and organizers, guided these recent immigrants to points of access and responsiveness in the political system that were unimaginable in their previous experiences with law enforcement. It provided them the opportunity to point out contradictions in the behavior of border guards and protections that the law is supposed to provide. In this case trust in each other and in bridging leaders like Ramirez enabled them to confront what seemed a hostile and impermeable state. Their experience underscores Jones-Correa and Leal's (2001) argument that immigrant communities' isolation from the political system creates a need for bridging mechanisms to facilitate immigrants' recruitment and engagement in politics. For those travelers, the act of political advocacy was a risk but it and gave both them and the congressional staff a more nuanced understanding of selective accountability and selective justice in the political system. In order to act they needed logistical assistance and assurance of their safety, and the bridging leader's conviction that they had something to offer. In the process of the action they developed efficacy.

While the role of a supportive community is most apparent for enabling political action by undocumented immigrants, such supports are also necessary for citizens who

are marginalized from politics by virtue of group identity or socio-economic status. At a rally held at a Catholic church in spring 2006, Walter Jones, from Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church, stood at the podium and asked a Detroit City Council member to support MOSES' efforts promote civil rights for immigrants and end racial profiling.

Representing his church, Jones effectively connected the CRI campaign to the larger ongoing struggle for civil rights. In an interview the following week, he reflected on how he felt speaking to the public officials and the audience.

I get a lot of respect and a lot of accolades but then those are only accolades because I'm the one in the front. You ever see that commercial, the Verizon commercial where this guy walks into this field with these gangsters and they tell him, "I thought I told you to come by yourself" and he looks back and says, "Oh, that's my network." See, that's how I feel when I'm up on the stage like Sunday. You see me but here's a guy who I trust with my life, Reverend Barlow, who's been my teacher and my guide. Here's my core team that does all the little work. They're the worker-bees that put things together so I can do things. Here's my Zion membership so whenever we need things they come and they support us. Here's MOSES, who we work with on a daily basis. There's Gamaliel. So I've got this whole network every time I go somewhere. That's what that commercial reminds me of and so that's how I look at things. You see me but it's not me.

Jones's explanation contrasts liberal notions of autonomy as necessary for reasoned political behavior. In this example, he describes an understanding of his interdependence as enabling political action. Without his "network," Jones would not be on the stage.

Attending to this fact is not mere modesty on his part but a reflection on what was necessary in order for him to be engaged politically. Recovering from years of drug and alcohol addiction and a "criminal career," as well as triple-bypass surgery and emphysema, Jones described his involvement in the church and MOSES as a "bio-support system" that gives him "a sense of purpose and a significance in life." Before joining Mt. Zion church and MOSES, Jones had a completely different perspective on public officials and his relationship to public life: "whereas before, I met Sherriff Evans,

if he reached for my hand and I reached for his hand it wouldn't have been for shaking it.”¹⁵¹

This past section explains how a religious community, with the organizing group acting as a bridging mechanism between religious groups and politics, can bring formally disenfranchised people to public influence. It also describes how political engagement is a decision with implications for community relationships that (from the individual's standpoint) must be maintained and navigated. A decision to participate or not, and how, reflects the individual's sense of responsibility and commitment to his or her community, as well as the arrangement of power relations within that community.

Democratic scholars may be hesitant to view unequal, traditional relationships as a resource for democratic initiative and participation out of concern that such relationships undermine independent, autonomous political behavior.¹⁵² But support from community allies may be necessary if a person's participation in mainstream politics is challenged as inappropriate or illegitimate (consider criticism of participation by less-education people, undocumented immigrants, ex-felons, or even people who need to bring their children to public meetings). More generally the ideal of an autonomous democratic actor also presumes that every person will find political action desirable or meaningful apart from their experience within a community that accepts forms of traditional religious authority. Community organizing methods assume that people take support and meaning from communities, and therefore use local relationships as a primary resource for collective action. But their focus on relationships should not suggest

¹⁵¹ Jones is now the chair of Mt. Zion's core team, which boasts around forty members, the largest team among MOSES congregations.

¹⁵² For example, see Mark E. Warren's (1996) discussion of scholars who argue that democracy and authority are incompatible, based on the assumption that authority, "requires a surrender of autonomous judgment" (Arendt 1961; Warren 1996, 51-52; Wolff 1970).

to observers that they are unconcerned about the arrangement of power within and among those relationships. A goal of this chapter has been to show how part of the work of organizing is the navigation of authority, for common ends.

CONCLUSIONS

“Organizing” is the development of actionable political community, which necessarily incurs social and political consequences for community members. Community organizers must navigate internal power relations and clergy’s different approaches to leadership in order to translate the congregation’s social capital into political action. The different opportunities for lay-driven ministries across denominations means a somewhat different job for community organizers working with clergy and lay leaders in congregations. In order for religious communities to take on inequalities in the larger environment, they must work within and through these structures. In doing so, their work makes visible how power is organized within community institutions. Congregation-based community organizations teach and facilitate practices by which churches can create more democratic spaces for discussion, decision-making, and political action by their members. But most of the time there is little organizers can change about particular institutions, and they work within the congregations’ existing roles and patterns in order to build momentum for external political action.

In this study, organizers described power relations within black Baptist churches as particularly condensed in response to limited opportunity for public leadership in mainstream society. This translates into a propensity for lay involvement in church

activities. Lacking supportive resources from umbrella bureaucracies, Baptist pastors are understood to be effective team-builders, overseeing multiple committees for services and programs. Internal committees and ministries teach civic skills, give many lay people a role and responsibility to the congregation and to the pastor. A proactive “hands on” approach by Protestant clergy can recruit and encourage lay involvement in concert with community organizers.

In contrast, organizers describe a hands-off approach among many priests that provides opportunity for ideas to come from the laity, but that approach may not offer as much direction as organizers would like. For Catholics, there is more a sense of internal freedom and a sense of “working on” the priest to gain his involvement. Community organizing methods fit Catholic structure because no matter how influential a lay Catholic becomes, they cannot usurp their priest or break off into a new congregation—and remain Roman Catholics. In the context of different organizational structures, taking responsibility can mean controlling or enabling lay involvement. In practice a *laissez-faire* approach by clergy can amount to more internal freedom or a lack of leadership and support. Regarding both Catholics and Protestants, interviewees mentioned instances where pastors take on too much due to a sense of personal responsibility, do not effectively delegate in the workings of the church, or behave parochially rather than collaboratively with other organizations. In such cases, clergy are unprepared to “realize” the potential of their congregations for political action.

These findings suggest that denominational differences in congregational structure may encourage participation in different types of civic and political engagement. Further research is needed to explain how, apart from community

organizing networks, norms and roles of authority within religious institutions matter for participants' opportunity for skill-building within their congregations, confidence to act in the public sphere, and recruitment into inter-faith, issue-based or electoral politics.

The inclusiveness of religious congregations provides space and opportunity for people to work together for civic and political goals, in the supportive context of the traditions and relationships they develop and maintain (Evans and Boyte 1986). But that potential in congregations goes unfulfilled without access to a bridging mechanism, such as a broad-based organizing network. Such a mechanism is essential for linking individual concerns, and religious social capital, to shared, political problems. That mechanism is also valuable for the development of individual leadership skills, political knowledge, and efficacy, with currency outside of the church walls. As discussed above, the congregation's process of joining and becoming active in collaborative bridging projects entails internal discussion and negotiation of authority. By understanding lay people as engaged in negotiation and influence within institutions, scholars can avoid theories that over-determine the power of religious authority, yet take it seriously as a contextual factor shaping opportunities for political action in communities. Even when congregations belong to a community organizing network, participation is a struggle to maintain, in competition with the inward pull of internal debates and other priorities.

This chapter begins to suggest a redefinition of bridging social capital, which implicates the role of a community or institution in supporting and characterizing individuals' political participation. The next chapter interrogates the meaning of bridging across institutions and communities, to reflect the experience of organizers and clergy collaborating for political outcomes.

Chapter 6

The Challenges of Bridging: the Intersection of Race and Religion

*I have become increasingly disappointed in the content and the quality of what generally passes for 'interfaith dialogue.' And while I do not want to disparage or discourage such interfaith projects as community Thanksgiving celebrations and Martin Luther King commemorations, we ought not think that these worthwhile endeavors are anything more than transitory feel-good moments, that cannot, in and of themselves, produce meaningful inter-religious relationships, nor create committed and sincere interfaith partners...*¹⁵³

This speech from a MOSES Interfaith Program presents a challenge to current social science conceptions of bridging social capital, its purpose and political significance. Rabbi Joseph Klein argues that the mere existence of interfaith dialogue should not be interpreted as evidence of community transformation. The showcase of groups bridging difference for its own sake is not inherently transformative and cannot be sustained absent deeper conversations about difference.¹⁵⁴

Scholars point to bridging social divisions as the means of overcoming negative aspects of bonding relationships (Putnam 2003). Bonding social capital within religious institutions is problematic for democracy: it supports civic engagement and capacity, but promotes parochialism and exclusionary behavior in politics (Portes 1998; Putnam 2000; Sampson et al. 2005; Sugrue 1996). Therefore bridging relationships across social divides are necessary to undermine these negative effects, and to broaden political access for

¹⁵³ Rabbi Joseph Klein, May 1, 2007, www.mosesmi.org/index_files/Page5179.htm

¹⁵⁴ In the speech the rabbi goes on to focus on the need for clergy's sincere communication about fundamentally different religious beliefs. But the point also holds for racial, ethnic, or cultural differences that arise in inter-faith and interracial political alliances.

marginalized groups. But what does bridging entail? Why is it more difficult than bonding? And what are indicators of bridging relationships, beyond superficial diversity?

In this chapter I argue that bridging social capital should be re-conceptualized as qualitatively different from bonding. Bridging relationships are not necessarily equally beneficial to all parties, due to unequal power dynamics across organizations and communities. Understanding this point helps explain some groups' hesitancy to join formal bridging relationships, even when they are resource-poor and stand to benefit from collaboration with economically advantaged communities or organizations. Bridging creates new opportunities but also exposes participants to risks, both for themselves and the communities they represent. Given these caveats, effective "bridging mechanisms" are necessary to assist community institutions in redirecting bonding social capital toward political action. A working theory of bridging social capital must acknowledge the challenges facing bridging relationships, yet be able to explain the development of effective bridging relationships even in contexts of mistrust. Environments with low bridging social capital cannot change overnight as a result of interracial or interfaith collaborations. Such cases require collective action that will challenge structural inequalities in spite of mistrust. Working across institutions, communities, and policy levels, bridging mechanisms can assist marginalized communities by navigating internal hierarchies, translating between communities, and encouraging collaborative action (Saegert, Thompson, and Warren 2001).

The primary goal of this chapter is to redefine bridging based on evidence from community organizing. The first section below explores the difference between bonding and bridging and makes the case for a more nuanced understanding of bridging. Then I

turn to evidence from community organizing efforts to bridge racial divisions in Detroit that supports this politicized understanding of bridging. The experiences of community organizers and clergy actively engaged in multiracial, interfaith collaboration provide a realistic portrait of the challenges that arise in bridging efforts, and the importance of recognizing power relations among civil institutions.

Redefining Bridging

Social capital theory contends that relationships bridging prominent social cleavages assist homogenous organizations in serving a public purpose. According to Robert Putnam (2000), ecumenical organizations are a good example of how groups may develop bridging social capital. By their efforts to bridge a cultural or ideological gulf they, “are outward looking and encompass people across diverse social cleavages.” These weaker ties “are better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion” compared to tight-knit, culturally homogenous groups (22). Bridging social capital is characterized as a better resource for democratic participation than the bonding variety because it counters ethnocentric tendencies and opens possibilities to conceptualize and work toward greater public goods. Warren, Thompson, and Saegert (2001) distinguish between four types of bridging ties that can bring greater resources and opportunities into poor communities (11). These include: cooperative connections across institutions within a community; between different low-income communities or neighborhoods, which may otherwise compete for public resources or economic opportunities; between poor and more affluent communities; and between people and communities locally, regionally, and nationally. Apart from research by Putnam, and by Mark Warren and colleagues, little

has been written to empirically distinguish bridging from bonding social capital. And existing descriptions do not theorize what bridging race, culture, or ideology entails (Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen 2003, 279).

The current definition of bridging social capital focuses on the ideal outcomes of bridging relationships and cannot account for the challenges of building actionable community that are perpetually confronted in community organizing. In studying organizing processes, it becomes apparent that the building of trust and reciprocity across social cleavages requires something different than bonding relationships. Yet bridging has been conceptualized as essentially the same as bonding but with different people, and therefore collaboration across racial cleavages seems more difficult than bonding (Putnam, Feldstein, and Cohen, 3). Bonding relationships benefit from a known shared identity on which people assume trust. Shared identities are reinforced through common experiences. To the extent that bonding relationships are unquestioned and accepted as the norm, they are by definition easy to develop and maintain. In contrast, bridging relationships call to mind all the reasons “bridges” are necessary. Bridging is qualitatively different because it implicates the political presence—immediate or implicit—of not only a particular individual, but of an entire organization or community, with its own history, priorities, hierarchies, norms, and ways of making decisions. Therefore the challenges of developing bridging relationships across race, ethnicity, or class, carries political implications that are not only the work of individual preference or prejudice. Given that social cleavages are historically constructed and reified through, “public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms,” political bridging efforts will confront institutionalized differences in the way

organizations and their representatives choose to act collectively, as well as individual preconceptions, mistrust, or overt ethnocentrism.¹⁵⁵ Therefore effective bridging requires getting beyond superficial differences and acknowledging distinct and possibly contradictory communities of meaning (Yanow 2006).

Effective bridging can lead to bonding relationships, but bonding is not the point of political behavior. A key difference in bridging is its purpose: bridging relationships do not exist only for their own sake but to provide access to different networks, ideas, and opportunities unavailable to homogenous communities and to enable more innovative and effective collective action. Participants must find ways to collaborate that won't undermine their separate bonding relationships. Andrew Sabl (2002) alludes to this point in his explanation of Alinsky's organizing strategy. Organizing through institutions, "helped diversify citizens' contacts and teach them how to influence the larger world but avoided passing judgment on their existing 'primary' associations [churches, unions, etc.], which remained unmolested as long as they answered felt needs. No primary association, in turn, stood or fell on the larger group's decisions or reputation" (15). Evidence from this chapter suggests that diverse participating organizations believe they are subject to professional or political risks as a result of the larger group's decisions or reputation, and that possibility creates a challenge for recruiting participants into any bridging network.

Different forms of collaborative relationships require different approaches to bridging. The approaches vary based on what individuals or groups are represented in the

¹⁵⁵ This definition of bridging reflects an understanding of race as historically and socially constructed. The Aspen Institute Roundtable on Community Change has defined structural racism as, "a system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity" (Lawrence et al. 2004, 11).

collaboration and what they hope to accomplish. In the case of community organizing, the collaborative relationship includes an implicit commitment to support the efforts of others in the alliance, including efforts that may not interest all participants. Within CBCO, bridging operates at a representative level when congregations join a group such as MOSES. Joining an organizing project implies an open-ended commitment and involvement in the CBCO, primarily through a representative, such as a clergy member or lay person. As the representative learns more about the organization and other members, they connect their congregation members to the CBCO through bonding (including internal core team work that reflects CO methods) and public events across congregations. The clergy caucus which collaborates on MOSES-wide issues and events in particular is an example of representative bridging. When acting as representatives of a community or organization, participants feel responsible for more than their own opinion and actions. In addition to the responsibility of representing different religious congregations and their members interests and concerns, participants represent (substantively and/or symbolically) their various racial or ethnic communities that intersect with religious difference.

Bridging within institution-based organizing also operates at an individual level, such as when lay people or clergy join an issue-focused task force. Though representing their congregation in the sense that they have their congregations in mind, and report back to clergy or congregation, task force members operate primarily as individuals working with others in the task force. Individuals are doing the public work and participating in actions, inviting others from their congregations as needed or generating interest. Because the clergy of congregations serve as gatekeepers to their congregations,

participants in task forces are freed in a sense to represent themselves. The task forces also include representatives of non-religious organizations such as unions, advocacy organizations, and independent actors including former public officials or professionals such as lawyers who are connected through a member congregation but act primarily as individuals. So task forces bridging across novices and professionals, or other divides such as between private citizens and public officials. Lay leaders and clergy who are active in both their church core teams and on issue task forces do much of the bridging work.

In any alliance or working relationship, different racial and ethnic groups bring their own priorities, fears, and pressures to the table. The work of community organizing, by professional organizers or by leaders playing that role, is to analyze and act on the arrangement of social capital within and among congregations, in order to democratically move the traditional leaders and the congregation democratically toward public action. A crucial job of the community organizer is to learn about those unique positions and histories, so as to act as a conduit of information and trust, while encouraging people to maximize their circles of influence.

The challenges of this work demonstrate there is nothing automatic about congregations working together for community improvement or policy change, even if congregations are activist-oriented or predominantly of the same race or religion (Cohen 2001; Portes 1998, 3). Bridging is difficult in part because of individual mistrust each other based on past experience, but also because segregated communities find their own ways of responding to community problems and institutionalizing their organized responses to problems, in ways that prioritize particular values and methods of political

action. Their institutionalized responses typically fall along lines of race and class that steer people into styles of worship, denominations, and geographical areas, reaffirming existing alliances.

Ideally a bridging alliance will develop relationships across social boundaries, contributing to all represented communities' resources and access to power. But a purely associational idea of bridging suggests an equality among participants that does not exist across institutions. Historian Angela Dillard (2007) provides a particularly stark example of how bridging relationships may create as many problems as they solve. In 1930s Detroit, when about one-quarter of the city's black population depended on jobs from Ford Motor Company, clergy were put in the position of deciding between support for unionization and their congregants' employment. Black workers needed a letter of recommendation from their ministers in order to gain employment with Ford, and the company used "political intimidation and economic terrorism" in order to prevent black ministers and congregations from supporting the United Auto Workers (7). This relationship between Ford and religious communities was a *bridging* relationship across types of institutions and racial groups that provided opportunities for marginalized workers. But unequal power relations drove the terms of the relationship, keeping African American workers in the least-paid and most dangerous industrial jobs. Clergy who maintained independence from Ford risked their own legitimacy and financial solvency.

Religious congregations do not hold that degree of influence and potential for coercion over each other, but clergy are influenced by their professional networks and the local political climate. Some community leaders have more at stake and more to lose in bridging endeavors. The willingness of clergy to develop relationships across race

depends on their personal and professional inclinations, as well as past experience, and what they believe can be gained from those relationships. Evidence presented in this chapter suggests that some pastors feel they risk losing independence by working in certain forms of multi-racial or inter-faith alliances, and risk influence that they value within their own denominational and political circles.

In summary, I characterize bridging relationships, those generating bridging social capital, as developing between organizations or communities with their own priorities, hierarchies, norms, and ways of making decisions. The work of an individual or group serving as a bridging mechanism entails understanding those different priorities, values, and concerns, and working across institutions or communities to develop a common purpose. Bridging is particularly distinct from bonding relationships in its instrumentality. As noted earlier, the purpose of bridging is to gain access to new networks and opportunities that are not available to homogenous communities. While lasting bridging relationships have the intention of instrumentality, they must be flexible about particular short-term goals. This requires patience for initiating relationships that may not lead to the immediate goals of the organizer or leader (Sabl 2002, 13). Bridging efforts must take account of how relationships entail unequal risk as a result of the power dynamics that individuals and institutions bring to the table.

Like bonding, bridging relationships are not solutions in themselves but create opportunities for new formulations of solutions, as well as new potential tensions and problems depending on how effectively the relationship serves the needs of all participants. Bridging is the first step in the development of democratic solutions to complex community problems generated by multiple, diverse institutions and actors. But

the presence of bridging relationships does not guarantee better outcomes for communities.

Though it cannot offer guarantees of ultimate success, congregation-based community organizing offers a strategy for developing bridging relationships that are capable of winning more equitable outcomes for communities. In CBCO, bridging is an intentional process of public-oriented relationship building. CBCO methods purposefully draw attention to power relations in the process of building relationships in order to avoid, “the fallacy of building community through intimacy and co-dependency.”¹⁵⁶ The community organizing process highlights and analyzes power relations at every turn. The fact that organizers and leaders intentionally recruit diverse participants creates opportunities for discussion of different perspectives, priorities, and tensions. In trainings and one-on-one conversations organizers explicitly acknowledge issues of inequality across race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status to encourage participants to reflect on their own experiences. Trainings include discussion of the meaning of self-interest, distinguished from selflessness and selfishness, and of the difference between private and public relationships. Participants discuss the meaning of power and any discomfort with the idea of building power themselves and in concert with other community members. Organizers provocatively ask, “Are you power-hungry? Why not?” In core team or task force meetings, participants learn to conduct a “power analysis” that includes identifying assets and strengths in the group, potential allies, and key political actors on the issue of concern. The openness about social inequality and individuals’ personal experiences, and

¹⁵⁶ “Church-Based Organizing: A Strategy for Ministry,” Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, first folder, pg. XI.

the emphasis on power as a desirable quality make community organizing trainings a life-changing experience for many participants.

What does this have to do with bridging social capital? Community organizing is not synonymous with bridging; the process of organizing offers one philosophy of what is necessary for effective bridging and a strategy for achieving it. The training emphasis on acknowledging and assessing power relations enables participants to initiate bridging relationships that are pragmatic and respectful of different communities and diverse individual experiences. Reflexive discussion of inequalities and personal experience, as well as an inclusive understanding of power, gives political collaboration a chance of greater success (Lichterman 2005). Without explicit attention to power relations and public over private relationships as a resource for political action, well-intentioned bridging efforts risk reifying inequalities and compounding mistrust.

The following sections of the chapter illustrate key points defining bridging. I first describe how recruitment across race has been fundamental to MOSES's organizational development. The chapter then explores institutional roots driving clergy's resistance to bridging, and in particular, challenges to bridging for Alinsky-style organizing methods as compared to other organizing methods used among politically active congregations in Detroit. The chapter concludes with implications of this definition of bridging for future research on the relationship between religious social capital and political action.

Building Political Relationships in a Racially Divisive Climate

The benefits of joining a community organizing project are a regular topic of discussion among leaders in MOSES, as participants consider their own self interest in

the project and how to recruit other clergy and congregations. That is to say, the benefits of bridging are not self-evident, even among clergy with a proclivity for political reform social activism. In addition to the time and energies necessary for bridging work, the political context matters for actors' interpretation of the costs and benefits of working in bridging relationships for common ends. Activist efforts to create bridging relationships are conditioned by the larger political climate and participants' existing relationships and opportunities. For example, in their comparative study of activist women of faith in Chile and Brazil, Drogus and Stewart-Gambino (2005) found that the degree of ecumenical cooperation in each country was affected by shifts in the political climate such as the suppression of activism under dictatorships. In Chile, ecumenical cooperation actually became more prevalent during a period of state oppression because, "political parties and other traditional channels for citizen demands were driven underground," and typical lines of partisan and religious identity were blurred (150). The return to "normal politics" meant that that religious authorities withdrew from social and political commitments and once again treated other religions as competition (151). As a result, boundaries of religious identity hardened, spaces for "fluid alliances" disappeared, and ecumenical political action became less likely.

In Detroit, the local political context in which recruitment takes place matters for how community organizers and the interracial organizing strategy are received. MOSES predecessors, WDIFCO and Jeremiah, were founded in a particular moment of racial symbolism and power transition in Detroit. Coleman Young's mayoral reign was coming to a close. Throughout Young's controversial tenure, Detroiters disagreed over how to revitalize the city and over support for the administration's approach (Darden et al. 1987;

Young and Wheeler 1994). Activists who wanted the city to prioritize neighborhood conditions challenged those—including the Mayor—who emphasized the downtown business district. Young could be counted on to speak bluntly and unapologetically on behalf of African Americans as a group, although as Todd Shaw (1996) argues, that did not necessarily correspond to policies benefiting the poor and homeless. The mayor regularly used symbolic language to consolidate support along racial lines. For example, multi-racial housing coalitions had to, “deflect the peculiar charge that due to their oppositional politics they were either, in the words of one observer, ‘racist or disloyal,’” to the Young administration (389).

Pro-public housing groups and homeless unions were among the organizations Shaw interviewed for his dissertation on political accountability in 1980s Detroit. Two of these groups discovered that some influential, “churches and clergy were hesitant or unwilling to associate with their cause quite possibly due to the politics of challenging the Young administration” (452). Similarly, a MOSES organizer described African American clergy in MOSES as “taking a big risk” by being “out front” in multi-racial political organizing. He explained how he viewed the difference between the relationship of Catholic urban churches and Protestant, African American churches to the Detroit mayor’s office.

If the mayor is pissed at the pastor of [a Catholic parish], really who cares? Because the Catholic Church has a lot more power in higher places than the mayor. You know, that’s the way it is. And even if [a church] pisses off mayor Kilpatrick for some reason, one phone call from that priest to the cardinal to say could you get [an influential businessman] back on our side, that’s all it would take. Whereas ... if the mayor decided to trash an African American pastor, imagine the repercussions. You know, the middle class base in Detroit is flimsy enough, but if the boss, the mayor is telling his workers that that guy’s a jerk, it’s over. And that’s what we’re trying to insert ourselves in, this really very difficult situation.

Pastors take political risks when they join multi-racial organizations, based on the dynamics within their political and denominational communities. Therefore the creation of bridging social capital requires greater risks from some participants than others, depending on their community's dynamics, beliefs about responsibilities of leadership, and the political climate. In her research on activist pastors in Philadelphia, Katie Day (1998; 2002) compared ten ministers involved with community development projects. Half participated in the local CBCO city-wide coalition, and the other half followed what Day called the traditional model of the "entrepreneurial pastor," who operates independently to provide social services and opportunities through economic development. She described key differences between the two groups. Pastors who decided to join the CBCO coalition tended to have less clout or political capital within their local professional community and tended to have more experience with multi-racial work. Entrepreneurial pastors in contrast did not feel like they needed to work in coalition, due to personal and institutional resources to conduct development work on their own for more "parochial" outcomes. For all of these clergy the decision whether to act alone or in-coalition was pragmatic and not a result of differences in political or theological ideology.¹⁵⁷

Community organizers in MOSES typically initiate bridging relationships by meeting with clergy in their area to learn their concerns and potential interests in political action. Organizers seek to recruit congregations into the organizing project but cannot

¹⁵⁷ Day explains that clergy rarely collaborate on service delivery but usually treat it as a responsibility of the individual congregation and pastor. There is an intersection between cultural history, a sense of responsibility to the city, and the service relationship to the neighborhoods around churches. While churches help poor communities survive, committed to populations abandoned by many other institutions, community organizing seeks to build a different kind of power within and among congregations and their surrounding neighborhoods. Organizers argue that congregations could help the city thrive if they more fully engaged members in collective political action.

expect that most relationships will become formalized. O'Brien described how he initially arranged meetings with clergy to develop interest in the Jeremiah Project.

And I probably met of total of maybe 40 pastors, of whom probably 15 were African American, some of whom said, we don't need you. I mean they never would say, "we don't need you." It's hard for somebody to say to a white guy who's coming from a church, we don't need you, but I knew there were pastors that were inside the Council of Baptist pastors and who would be – had to be accountable to the Council of Baptist Pastors. And then I knew there were some, they were in the council but they weren't that into it. [Jeremiah] was not city-wide. It was just southwest Detroit, so they could be free to do what they want.¹⁵⁸

The Council of Baptist Pastors [CBP] is a longstanding association of ministers in Detroit which meets every Tuesday morning for fellowship, professional networking, as well as social and political coordination on issues from pastoral counseling to anti-discrimination suits.¹⁵⁹ The CBP drew media attention during Coleman Young's mayoral tenure because he often attended their meetings and publicly sought their support. While all Baptist congregations are structurally autonomous, some pastors are politically more independent due to their own local support base.

O'Brien was recruiting pastors for the Jeremiah Project in the context of a highly charged political season: Coleman Young was leaving office.

There was a new election for a new mayor in 1993 when I was doing this building work, the council had its own problems. You had some that were very pro Dennis Archer and some that were very pro Sharon McPhail. And it split the council in two. There were [newspaper] articles of a walkout where half the Council of Baptist Pastors walked because the council had an official vote for [Dennis Archer].

In any case, we went ahead with our organizing and in 1994, we had a big public meeting. Now Dennis Archer, the new mayor, didn't have a whole lot of support from some of the churches, the churches that had supported Sharon McPhail. There were a lot of churches that were not into protecting Dennis Archer. But we had our public meeting. There were [...] ten African American churches, ten

¹⁵⁸ Interview with O'Brien.

¹⁵⁹ For a fuller description of the CBP, see Brown and Hartfield 2001.

white, and we really challenged Archer -- heavy, heavy, public. "We're gonna get you out of office," that kind of thing, if you don't fix our neighborhoods.

The public meeting is key element to faith-based community organizing. These meetings are not open-ended forums; a great deal of collaborative preparation goes into organizing the meetings and that preparation serves as a training ground for participating clergy and lay people. The meetings are scripted in advance to focus on the concerns of the member congregations. Public officials are usually asked to give 'yes' or 'no' answers to policy questions, and are limited to a very short response.

The purpose of this meeting was to address the lack of a comprehensive development plan for southwest Detroit and the quality of life in their neighborhoods – including crime, abandoned housing and recreation ("Archer to speak," 1994; Askari 1994). As O'Brien tells it, Archer attended Jeremiah's first public meeting reluctantly. And his staff did not prepare the candidate for what he was getting into.

So when he walked into the building, and there was 2,000 screaming people cheering for our stuff. And he walks down the aisle and he starts to perspire. I mean it was visible. And I'm sure his staff got some flack for not warning him, not preparing him. [...] So anyway, when we challenged the heavy challenge to Archer, [it] caused some particularly African American pastors to think that we were pushing too hard.

A community organization seeking to hold public officials accountable can alienate prominent religious leaders due to unintended racial symbolism. The challenge for bridging community organizations is to build public relationships that can survive those tensions. Though burned in that meeting, Archer and his staff continued to meet with Jeremiah, whose members continued to pressure the administration to tear down abandoned buildings as promised.

Some prominent clergy maintain connections to MOSES organizers or members, but do not formally join the organization due to MOSES's reputation for a confrontational approach to public officials. To one nonmember clergy I interviewed, MOSES's public criticism of elected officials seemed like "shaming." He believed that the role of the pastor as politician was to use their skills in "reaching out" to people, "holding the hands" of business leaders to reassure them, and become like "pastors to the city." His concern was not just that MOSES is confrontational, but that it is confrontational with public officials who have relationships with (and in some cases are) prominent ministers. Organizers are impatient with the idea of hand-holding elected officials, who they view as partially responsible for failing policies in the city. Executive Director Ponsella Hardaway said that some perceived, "our tactics were too strong, and in the black culture there was not a willingness to challenge other black leaders." She suggests that this unwillingness may have changed in recent years, as new administrations move through the mayor's office,

But there is always that resistance. And it's also, political leadership in the city build relationships with the Black clergy. [Clergy] want to be a part of those tables, and they figure just in their own right as a pastor and being a part of other [organizations], like the Baptist Pastor's Council they have this [...] entrée into relationships with the mayor or city council people or governor. So there's always this, saying we don't need an organization like MOSES to help us to get what we need.

In interviews, other clergy clearly distinguished their role from "pastor as politician."

They described their role as prophetic, where the church maintains separation from the state in order to watch officials and critique them in the name of a higher power.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Two pastors, one a MOSES member and the other not, described this role as supporting a "theology of the cross" in contrast to the "theology of prosperity" which promises individual success and fortune to believers. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) describe the differences between priestly (worship functions) and prophetic roles of clergy.

Ideologies of the role of the pastor as a politician or as a prophetic voice are not completely incompatible. Both are rooted in a sense of responsibility to public action beyond the sanctuary. However they suggest that even clergy open to political activism can choose different methods of action and will not necessarily be interested in joining a community organizing project.

In an atmosphere of general mistrust among racial and ethnic groups, the organization's controversial reputation made recruitment a challenge. MOSES President Rev. Turman reflected in an interview, "The dynamics of metropolitan Detroit, are such that anybody is met with suspicion, and virtually everybody. I mean, it's an amazing environment because blacks treat each other with suspicion, blacks treat whites with suspicion, whites treat blacks, and the other ethnic groups, with suspicion, as well as each other with suspicion. So we're all – it's kind of a psychotic atmosphere, which, from the pastor's perspective, reflects a target-rich environment for the work of the Holy Spirit."

Despite the fact that MOSES's predecessors were multi-racial and multi-faith from inception, and the fact that both MOSES presidents and the current executive director are all African American, MOSES has faced a reputation of being a white-led organization. This was probably due to their initial staff: WDIFCO's first director, Cheryl Liske, the first executive director, Bill O'Brien, and the national director Greg Galuzzo, all white Catholics, conducted initial meetings with many clergy to build relationships in the city and stir up interest in the organization. Rev. Johnnie Saulsbury of Greater Southern recalls how he met Gamaliel's director soon after his introduction to WDIFCO.

Then we had a meeting at our church, and Greg Galuzzo, who is the, I call him my fearless leader. He came in town and we had a meeting at our church and they explained it to me. Greg and I, he came back here in the office.

But I had Martin Luther King and Christ around the wall. And Greg he looked up and he says, “Where’s Malcolm X’s picture?” I said, “I have it at home.” He said, “Why don’t you have it here in the church?” And I was challenged by that and I felt a little of Greg then and there [*laughs*]. Because I’m an old civil rights person. Here’s this white guy asking me about Malcolm X and getting on my case because I didn’t have it.¹⁶¹

Undeterred, the pastor continued to talk with Galuzzo and agreed to attend the foundation’s weeklong leadership training, bringing along eight lay people. The organizer’s role in catalyzing the congregation’s involvement requires a balance between agitating the pastor to participate without undermining the relationship.

In a WDIFCO memo to the MOS Steering Committee in August 1995, Liske wrote, “With the exception of the southwest region, none of the regions are anywhere near where we had hoped eight months ago. The southeast region especially is way behind the schedule. It in essence doesn’t exist except in a few (but determined) pastors’ minds.” She added, “We are not reaching the African-American pastors the way we should be.”¹⁶² NOAH, covering eastern and central Detroit, never seemed to achieve the grounding that the west side groups had. Perhaps NOAH did not have enough time to establish its own relational base before the three districts decided to officially join forces. The district lost some member congregations due to poor relationships or racial tensions. O’Brien recalled a NOAH public meeting held in a church on Woodward that was “not Baptist.” O’Brien believed this was a tactical error, especially in light of an incident during the meeting that hurt the organization’s legitimacy.¹⁶³ “One of the Catholic pastors made a comment about the treasurer, kind of questioning his competence. The treasurer was a young, but very respected Baptist pastor [...] He took offense.” O’Brien

¹⁶¹ Interview with Rev. Saulsbury.

¹⁶² Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board 1998 folder, letter dated August 2, 1995.

¹⁶³ Interview with O’Brien.

added that by this time another pastor who had been a part of the original group, Reverend Horace Sheffield III of the Detroit Alliance of Black Organizations, also ceased participation.¹⁶⁴ “And I think he realized that he could – you know that hooking up with NOAH was probably hooking up with a white thing or too many white people and that in fact, his real self interest was having a black movement.”¹⁶⁵

Urban and suburban MOSES clergy did not gather formally as a combined caucus until December 2000, more than ten years after the Gamaliel Foundation began working with congregations in Detroit. Prior to 2000, few suburban and urban clergy had working relationships, and they participated in MOSES through “distinct and mutually isolated groups.” Notes from a 2001 staff report explain, “This isolation extends even within denominations, where for instance the Catholics and Lutherans convene clusters and deaneries along city/suburban (read racial) lines.” MOSES staff reported that the first two combined caucus meetings were “breakthroughs” for the organization.¹⁶⁶

As described by community organizers, effective bridging relationships may take years to develop and may never be formalized. Bill O’Brien recalled how he has developed a relationship with a senior Baptist pastor. This pastor is known for leadership in economic development, housing and services for decades, work he accomplished, as he said, without any help from “a MOSES.” O’Brien reflected, “He likes me, but it’s taken me ten years.”

“We [MOSES] started in 1996. By ’98, we knew we’d need a metropolitan a regional analysis, a regional power base. And I went to Rev. _____ and I tried to interest him. That was probably the first time I sat down with him, 1998. My father died in 1999 and I just happened to meet Rev. _____, I was coming in. He

¹⁶⁴ DABO was founded by UAW union leader Horace Sheffield II.

¹⁶⁵ Interview with O’Brien.

¹⁶⁶ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, M.O.S.E.S Collection, Box 1, Folder 2 of 3, DRAFT “Clergy Caucus of MOSES - 02/10/01.”

was going out. And there was a moment there of, you know, why are you here? Why are you? Well, my dad's dying. Oh, I'll say a prayer for you. Boom – I mean like that. And I went to thank him for saying a prayer. And I just went to see him a couple of times, just to say hi, how are you doing. Always trying to – and he would laugh. And so the last time I went to him and he had just had John Powell talking to him, and I just stopped by. [...] I said I just wanted to come and see you. So he said, well come on down and have some coffee. [...] And he said, do you think it could work? I said, what's that? Well Black and white churches together. And I said well, Reverend, I don't know but what else am I gonna do. I don't know if it'll work, but what else is there? What else are you gonna do? Give all the white churches to the religious right? What's the alternative? So then that's what we talked about and I said to him, do you know Reverend Turman very well? And he said no, not really. You don't? I said, well, let's – so then I called him up. And I got Reverend Turman. I just set up the one-on-one and I sat there and I listened. And at the end of the conversation they turned to me and they said, okay so are there any white guys worth it. [...] That we could trust.

In late Spring 2006, the organizer and the pastor agreed they would plan a meeting of “six and six,” six clergy of each race to meet and discuss possible future collaboration.

The first time they met, the pastor was not sold on the organization and did not join MOSES. But a personal connection provided the opportunity for further communication. The community organizer made the most of that connection to develop the relationship. That respect is necessary for the pastor to believe a political relationship is possible and worthwhile. The organizer then developed the relationship further by introducing the pastor to the president of MOSES. In doing so he expanded their circles of influence. The pastor has not become a formal member of MOSES but that does not mean that bridging efforts failed; the organizer is primarily interested in maintaining the relationship and figuring out how to involve this figure who is powerful in his own community in a way that will support their shared goals.

In summary, throughout MOSES's organizational development the local political climate, the atmosphere of mistrust, and the organization's reputation for confronting politicians have created challenges for interracial and interfaith bridging. The next

sections will analyze how institutionalized differences, intersecting with race, underlie those challenges. Institutional differences affect clergy's interpretation of their appropriate political roles, their expectations for others' actions, and preferred approaches to political engagements.

Propensity for involvement in politics

CBCOs create political connections between community institutions and government institutions that are public and visible for accountability. They pose a challenge to politicians who use racial symbolism to gain votes, rather than responding to community problems through policy change. Interviewees brought up hesitations in joining interracial CBCO, as a result of churches' different approaches to political engagement. One concern is white congregations' past failures to commit to working on issues related to race. A second, related factor is the different relationship of black and white congregations to political action.

One concern of African American pastors who want to build political coalitions is the expectation that white clergy will not be reliable partners in politics. Previous bridging failures has made some pastors wary of alliances. The reason is not necessarily hostility on the part of any individual, but the anticipated responses from their congregants, and the varying approach of black and white pastors toward political involvement of the church. In interviews black ministers expressed a sense that white ministers may not understand their unique roles and responsibilities in the community.¹⁶⁷

Rev. Edgar Vann elaborates,

¹⁶⁷ Lincoln and Mamiya provide reasons why Black churches are more likely to participate in community outreach programs compared to white peers, pg. 188.

Our role, as black preachers is normally, totally different than a white preacher's role is. [...] You know my sermon is only 20 percent of what I do. ...

We can't live in an area where 34 percent of the people are in poverty and 70 percent of the kids in the Detroit public school system are added below poverty. Those kids belong to our churches. We can't live in that kind of environment and not address poverty. You see what I'm saying?

Mentioning the importance of maintaining a distance from formal politics to keep their non-profit status, Vann says that the separation between church and state, "just does not exist in our minds and in our spirits, though we do our very best to abide by the law."

Community organizer O'Brien explained in an interview why he believes black pastors may be hesitant to collaborate with white churches for political action. He refers to a clergy member of MOSES.

You know as Reverend ___ says, why should black people trust white churches? White churches stick around for a year or two, and either it gets too much of a prolonged struggle or they – something happens that's more juicy, exciting somewhere else -- the environmental movement. But for whatever reason, why should black pastors trust white organizers, or white churches, who by the way, the white churches cannot deliver on anything that's even remotely considered race. [...] If there's a racial fight, there's some race thing, the white pastor of predominantly white churches cannot get his people to go along.

Examples of white churches who lost members to flight and "panic pedaling" real estate agents thirty or more years ago still factor in organizer's and clergy's memories.¹⁶⁸ One pastor said in an interview that suburban white pastors cannot tell their members to "love and accept" all people because of racism. He did not expect a fair coalition with non-black clergy even if they are well-meaning as leaders, because in the end they will not or cannot challenge their members' predispositions on race.

¹⁶⁸ O'Brien described the example of retired Lutheran pastor Reverend Terry Daly working in Flint in the 1960s. "His people lived in the city. And he preached at the key moments he kept saying, you know we Lutherans, we believe in faith and values, brothers and sisters, race isn't bad. So we're gonna hold the line. Even if all these panic pedaling real estate people, we're not gonna sell out. We're gonna stay, right church? Yeah pastor, yeah, yeah! Well, a month later, they were all gone."

Rev. Joseph Barlow, Jr. of Mt. Zion MBC was president of a multiracial ministerial alliance among smaller municipalities bordering Detroit, following the riots in the late 1960s.¹⁶⁹ However the alliance did not last because several of the white ministers would not agree to endorsing candidates. His larger point in remembering that experience was not about the appropriateness of endorsing candidates, but rather the centrality of the church and the pastor to African American communities and politics. “We have no television stations to amount to anything. We have no country clubs. So how are we going to get our information out except through our church? Our church is the foundation of our community.” Religious leadership from different racial, cultural, and denominational backgrounds bear different kinds of responsibilities. When some white clergy did not share or could not commit to the same responsibilities, they left the alliance. Given that experience, it is notable that Rev. Barlow went on to join Jeremiah, and brought several other pastors to join the organization.¹⁷⁰

Persistent mistrust across racial or ethnic groups can be a rational response to past experience of discrimination but creates a cycle that impedes democratic collaboration. A prevailing climate of suspicion requires individuals or organizations to act proactively as bridging mechanisms, watching for opportunities for constructive collaboration.

¹⁶⁹ The clergy came from several municipalities, including Lincoln Park, Melvindale, River Rouge, Ecorse, and Wyandotte.

¹⁷⁰ A few years later Barlow became the first President of MOSES, and advocated for it at the Council of Baptist Pastors. Interviews with Kovari and with Rev. Barlow. Also see Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board 1997-98 folder, MOSES Board Minutes, August 13, 1998.

Different Organizing Styles

The development of bridging social capital is necessary to forge mutual understanding and to support more enduring cooperative efforts, based on both shared interests and a larger concern for the public good. Mark Warren (2001) argues that such interracial cooperation, “requires a process that builds trust and mutual understanding over time,” including a dynamic of inclusive talk and collaborative action (99-100). Congregation-based organizing offers an alternative to the dominant institutional model for multiracial collaboration: coalitions supporting particular candidates for elected office (Browning, Marshall, and Tabb 1997). While those coalitions create opportunities for policy change, “top heavy cooperative arrangements lack deep roots in communities and remain limited to the particular issue around which they were formed” (Warren, 99).

Organizations like MOSES offer politically consequential bridging opportunities across race, ethnicity, and class, both horizontally across institutions, and vertically within institutions—opportunities that do not exist in most civic and political organizations. Civic organizations known for inter-faith and inter-racial dialogue, such as NCCJ,¹⁷¹ do not focus on political action. Other organizations may focus on political action for racial justice but do little relational work to improve skills and opportunities for lay leadership. Detroit’s church-based political action committees (The Black Slate and the Fannie Lou Hamer PAC) distribute information to the black community, promote chosen candidates, and support voter registration and turnout activities. These groups engage in ecumenical bridging and some engage in multi-racial bridging with the Democratic Party (Brown and Hartfield 2001). While these church-based PACs offer

¹⁷¹ The National Conference for Community and Justice, previously the National Conference of Christians and Jews assists communities and institutions through conflict resolution, diversity training and advocacy. It has regional offices around the nation, including Detroit.

volunteer opportunities to serve as delegates or work at the polls, they focus on funding voter turnout and campaign advertisements, and therefore generally do not build lay leadership capacity within congregations.

In his research on the IAF in Texas, Warren (2001) describes an incident in 1993 Fort Worth, Texas, where more than ten thousand people marched following a verdict of probation and no prison sentence for skinhead William Brosky, who shot and killed an African American man. The ACT organization, an IAF affiliate, did not officially participate in the protest, incurring resentment from African American members. Describing the event and aftermath, Warren explained that “ACT’s structure does not easily allow it to respond quickly to new issues” and “ACT does not see itself as a ‘protest’ organization, so does not normally address this kind of issue. Several ACT leaders described the Brosky protest as a ‘movement’ issue, by which they mean it is a single-issue campaign that does not lead to long-term change. Yet the protest did lead to pressure to raise new charges against Brosky, to consider changes in sentencing guidelines, and to hire more black lawyers in the District Attorney’s office” (119). To Warren, it appeared in this case that, “Anglo and Hispanic leaders, and the white-led organizer, may not have grasped quickly enough the unique importance of the verdict to the black community” (119). ACT leaders had worked collaboratively on projects of central importance to the black community, including a campaign for increased parental involvement in local schools, and job-training programs, that fit more in the community organizing model for longer term change.

This example from a comparable community organizing project demonstrates how different organizing methods fit with different institutional and political church

cultures. Politically inclined churches in Detroit have other options for influence and action than MOSES. The Black Slate committee and the Fannie Lou Hamer Political Action Committee, “attempt to convert social capital into potential volunteers by producing church-based political communities that have a high degree of social trust, group identity and pride, and, equally important, a commitment to black political advocacy” (Brown and Hartfield 2001, 13). The Council for Baptist Pastors has organized clergy for social and political action since long before MOSES formed. CPB members join together in issue-based committees and challenge employment discrimination, boycott corporations, or otherwise advocate on behalf of their church members. For example when Rev. Jordan was President of the Council of Baptist Pastors there was controversy over closing of the receiving hospital. “We took about 70 pastors out at the Board Meeting and changed their dynamics and changed their thinking of it. We worked with the NAACP.”¹⁷²

Rev. Charles Williams, formerly a MOSES organizer, serves as current president of the Detroit Chapter of the National Action Network (NAN), led nationally by Rev. Al Sharpton.¹⁷³ In comparison to Alinsky-style organizing, Williams understands what he calls "traditional" civil rights organizing in the NAN to be about drawing public attention to inequalities and having events around those issues.¹⁷⁴ Therefore their work is not “process based,” and the NAN staff does most of the organizing work in collaboration with clergy. Their purpose is not to build lay leaders out of congregations, but rather to work with black pastors on prominent issues of concern to their communities. The

¹⁷² Interview with Rev. Joseph Jordan.

¹⁷³ Williams is also president of the Mary Church Terrell National for Community Empowerment in Detroit, www.im4justice.com.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Rev. Charles Williams.

churches agree to collaborate on particular issues but they do not pay dues, maintaining a sense of autonomy. Through this approach, some clergy feel they have more flexibility to work on issues as they arise, which have included employment discrimination, insurance rates, voter education, and affirmative action.

While in theory MOSES member congregations can work on whatever they care about, there is continuity to what the organization has worked on over time. Newcomers to MOSES typically find out what issues are already the focus of organizing efforts, and learning about ongoing issues helps define the organization for them. Then those members who go through training and whose interest increase may be in a position to notice a problem and use the MOSES core team or network to work on a new issue. The task forces and participating members build knowledge and experience working on particular issues. Issues evolve as progress is made. A victory, such as a politician's promise, must then be monitored for follow-through. Therefore, while in theory the process is open to any issue of concern to its members, realistically the attention that the organization can offer to any particular issue is limited. This internally and externally builds the organization's identity, and makes it less flexible to new issues because of how it is perceived by other political actors and its own members.

Some MOSES clergy are active in multiple methods. For example, Rev. Bullock is current president of the CBP and was one of the founding members of WDIFCO. Others articulate what they view as limitations of the clergy-focused methods of political influence. While that approach draws attention and can create public outcry on salient concerns, it tends to only respond to immediate crises and not the perpetual sources of those crises. Rev. Robert Dulin, co-chair of the MOSES clergy caucus, explained his

concern that black churches do not come together enough ecumenically for effective coordination and long-term planning.

So much of what I see churches doing in Detroit across ecumenical and interfaith lines is crisis-oriented. You know someone gets shot in the school we come together to figure out how we're gonna deal with this. [...] But the plot or plan for dealing with redlining or the plot or plan for dealing with housing to and what is the church's long range involvement in education. What is the church's long range involvement in dealing with racism and all these other things that we're not doing?

The things we do we want to get done in our lifetime and the issues that face Detroit aren't going to be solved in any, in any of our lifetimes, in my lifetime or in yours. It's going to have to be a long range plan where we keep working at it across generations, so many of our churches aren't geared to doing that other than in their own local setting.

By working through standing task forces that bridge social cleavages, MOSES congregations have an opportunity to collectively develop long-term evolving campaigns that address structural inequality in the region.

Members who appreciate MOSES's unique contributions still express concern over the ability of multiracial alliances to equally incorporate and represent all members. Rev. Marsh applauds MOSES efforts and direction, because "let's face it, one race is not going to be able to do this alone." But he understands his life work as encouraging black people to have "a healthy sense of themselves and who they are" in order to "come to the table as equals."

If we aren't careful, the solutions that we're seeking for our problems are gonna mimic the problems.

[...] I know that the solutions are indeed multiracial, but every community has to be considered a community of strength and have to come the table like that, not to be able, you know, to – well, I want to say not so much to be able to bash each other over the head with clubs of equal weight, but to be able to speak to each other as equals and to respect each other as equals and to work out this situation as equals, and that's not always the agenda.

This gets to the heart of the challenge for translating social capital within religious institutions into collective action that is broad enough to influence larger public agendas and shift policy. Because the organizing methods begin pragmatically with parochial concerns, getting all members to eventually agree on shared concerns to address collectively is a major challenge. It is easier for congregations' representatives to make those decisions than to test the choices and potential ramifications on their church members, many of whom are uninterested in their churches' political activities. Aside from the issue task forces, most bridging in the community organizing process operates through clergy and a few leaders engaged from each congregation. The rank and file in the congregations often do not work across congregations and discover shared concerns. While task forces present that opportunity, few individuals realize or take advantage of it. This limitation enables ongoing misunderstanding, such as between black and Latino communities in Detroit. In an interview, one lay leader expressed concern that non-immigrant laity in his African American church do not necessarily support the Civil Rights for Immigrants task force, and feel they did not have a role in choosing immigrant rights as a major MOSES campaign. Most lay people lack opportunities to discuss issues of racism and immigration directly among diverse individuals, and typically learn of MOSES-wide initiatives through clergy or lay representatives.¹⁷⁵

Bridging at the representative level enables access to the congregation and inroads into clergy's professional and political networks. As representatives of their congregations, the role of clergy is both symbolic and instrumental. But they also carry institutional responsibilities and risks in the representative role. The development of

¹⁷⁵ On the challenges for interracial understanding in CBCO structures, see Warren 2001, p. 120.

active lay leaders is essential to the CBCO process, and sets it apart from other church-based methods of political action.

Conclusion and Implications

Community groups face both the fragmentation of groups that ultimately have shared interests, though they may not realize it, and the fragmentation of policy venues that must be strategically targeted to impact region-wide outcomes. The first challenge requires bridging socio-cultural and political worldviews among community level institutions. Those bridging efforts reveal but do not necessarily “solve” ongoing tensions, including different interpretations of whether and how religious congregations collaborate, different views of the appropriate relationship of religious congregations to public officials, and lingering impressions from past failed attempts at collaboration across race or religion. The second challenge requires achieving access to and developing a working relationship with policy professionals, without becoming beholden to any particular government office or individual.

Given the institutionalized separation of religious communities, bounded by racial, ethnic and cultural differences, how can congregations’ understanding of their interests change? Without an inclusive, ongoing dialogue across communities, a group’s understanding of their interests remain narrow, and they will be less likely to incorporate other communities’ experiences into their formulation of what is needed from political solutions.¹⁷⁶ The challenge is to build a collective purpose without losing the motivation that instigated participation and without exposing any particular participant to

¹⁷⁶ Bridging efforts motivated by what Boyte and Kari have called enlightened self-interest, “a desire to build a society in which the serving citizen wants to live,” enable the translation of private concerns into public issues.

unmanageable risk. This chapter has sought to understand the politics of bridging social capital—that is, the relevance of inter-group power relations to bridging—by exploring a community organizing group’s interactions with Detroit clergy acting as representatives of their congregations. To challenge persistent inequality, contemporary Alinsky-style organizing is interested not only in building working relationships across race, ethnicity and class for their own sake, but doing so with the goal of developing a common purpose among interested parties to achieve political impact. Community organizers seek to identify and help develop community leaders with a political stake in the bridging relationship. Through this bridging work, community organizing helps develop a public role for congregations, beyond parochial or short-term wins for particular groups.

The revised concept of bridging proposed in this chapter suggests implications for future research on the path from civic to political engagement. Community organizing processes include several ways of thinking about bridging social capital that may help clarify the purpose, motivations, and potential of any bridging endeavor.

First, bridging is best understood as a process of working towards instrumental outcomes, not because bridging relationships are not valuable for their own sake but because the self interest and community interest of participants is the driving force behind any relationship. Participants in any bridging endeavor probably have some instrumental purpose beyond getting to know others, and sharing those hopes or expectations sets a public tone and leads to a more honest relationship. Given the potential for institutions, communities, and individuals to take advantage of each other particularly in the context of unequal power relations, diversity alone is not an adequate indicator of effective bridging.

Second, rather than focusing on evidence of trust among diverse groups as indicative of successful bridging, scholars might look for an ongoing commitment to a working relationship. In this research, active participants express healthy skepticism about the outcome of their interracial endeavors. Most continue to participate because they ultimately believe that bridging is necessary to address shared, regional problems. Hope, and ongoing communication, may be better indicators than trust of effective bridging social capital. Third, new tensions among diverse groups should be expected in any bridging endeavor, and evidence of tension should not be immediately interpreted as a bridging failure. If there are no tensions, the collaboration is probably not moving toward any action of political significance. Finally, unlike bonding social capital, effective bridging social capital should lead to the articulation of common policy frames across diverse groups, and to increased political influence and access for marginalized groups.

Actors and organizations can behave as “bridging mechanisms” to navigate and translate between different bonding communities such as religious institutions. Those individuals, such as community organizers, carefully cultivate relationships across social divides, and seek to understand the roots and practices defining community differences in order to act. Most institutional representatives such as clergy cannot take on those bridging roles on their own, due to institutional responsibilities and priorities. In community organizing, lay leaders play significant bridging roles, sharing information and methods between the organizing network and their congregations. That bridging role should not be confused with interracial dialogue on the level of parishioners and churchgoers, which is not a primary goal of community organizing. However, opportunities to

understand one another for understanding's sake could complement community organizing methods and goals. Though it may not lead to direct action for policy change, such dialogue may inspire participants who are not interested in explicit political behavior and could build a stronger base of understanding for the church's involvement in interracial, interfaith community organizing.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ For example, groups such as the Study Circles Resource Center support inter-group dialogue. See Walsh (2004) and Lichterman (2005).

Chapter 7

Conclusions

“As for chronicling past events, please know that much of what developed was as much the work of the Spirit as it was of any planning committee. Which is to say, we seized on developments as they occurred and made ways where we needed to.”

Cheryl Liske, Director of MOS, 1995¹⁷⁸

Key Challenges for Community Organizing

This research was inspired by community activists in Detroit who organize to improve local conditions and to build a power base for equity throughout the metropolitan area. An underlying purpose for the dissertation has been to understand the challenges that churches and organizers face in their efforts to collaborate for political change. Given that organizing practices offer what are basically democratic skills in an advanced democracy, why did community organizing on the ground feel like a perpetual uphill battle? Based on this research and existing scholarship on community organizing, I outline below several related theories as to why organizing congregations is challenging, in general, and for Detroit, in particular.

First, this dissertation makes the argument that because social capital within religious institutions is not developed or organized for political action, those institutions require bridging mechanisms to coordinate for democratic political ends. In community

¹⁷⁸ Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 3, Executive Board 1998 folder, WDIFCO letter draft, dated March 17, 1995.

organizing this responsibility falls on the shoulders of lay leaders, clergy, and professional organizers who act as those mechanisms in addition to all the other work that active participation in a religious community demands. The language of social capital can imply that relationships are as transferable as money and are accessible for any purpose. They are not. Competing responsibilities and projects within congregations limit the availability of people and resources for organizing, support from clergy or other authorities may or may not exist, and even with supportive leadership the development of internal teams for political action requires concerted effort and time with no guaranteed results.

Second, congregations are living institutions, and Detroit's religious institutions have had to adapt in the face of population decline and transition. While their capacity to adapt is part of what provides stability for their communities in times of change, religious institutions bear the brunt of social needs in poor neighborhoods, and most of their energies are spent maintaining and rebuilding their own spiritual communities. When institutions close, move, or change leadership (e.g. a priest is moved by the diocese), the capacity of the institution to participate in political activities is limited and bridging relationships must be developed with new actors who are themselves getting accustomed to new circumstances.

Third, CBCO purposefully bridges race, ethnicity, and religion as a means to common goals. This practice is especially important for Detroit, where a history of racial discrimination, redlining, and hostility lives on in mutual suspicion across race and ethnicity and where the overlap of municipal boundaries and de facto segregation affords residents few opportunities for interracial communication and understanding. For

MOSES congregations and organizers, interracial political collaboration is a moral and political necessity that raises tensions and creates multiple challenges – relating to recruitment, criticism of public officials, representation of diversity on the MOSES staff, and to participants’ sense of organizational control and ownership. While I argue that those tensions are evidence of more honest and reflective bridging relationships, I also suggest how interracial and interfaith bridging creates more risks for some actors than others depending on each person’s professional networks and the political climate. For non-white clergy, the possibility of exposing one’s congregation to racism unnecessarily through participation in a coalition (however well-intentioned) is another potential risk.

Fourth, the fragmentation of municipal governments presents yet another challenge for community organizing in metro-Detroit. Multiple venues provide many potential targets for public action, but significant policy change requires collaboration across those governments. Developing relationships with public officials and determining strategy for policy change is especially challenging in a region characterized by city-suburb conflict. Activists’ decisions about how and whether to act often depend on where and who to influence. Additionally, success in one venue is often challenged or undermined in another. Pieces of the MOSES agenda have been stymied by the former governor, by challenges from unions, by uncooperative local governments, and by court action. Task forces have proven adept at working with broad coalitions and at switching gears when confronting a political dead-end, but MOSES runs the risk of becoming more like a collection of interest groups if it cannot maintain a church and neighborhood base with ownership of tangible successes.

Finally, the flexibility that is central to the organizing process itself creates tensions. Organizers and leaders are challenged to develop new relationships and maintain the involvement of existing participants once their issue agenda has evolved to incorporate new interests and members. Frustrated with local limitations and encouraged by the movement for regionalism, MOSES congregations took on the challenge of building a metropolitan coalition, first expanding city-wide and then recruiting from neighboring municipalities and suburbs. Given the aforementioned challenges for city churches and the hesitations among Detroiters for interracial collaborations, this was a risk and the project lost some participants along the way who would have preferred to focus on neighborhood-level action. It would have been hard to advocate for a regional agenda without a regional coalition, however, and thanks to their efforts, for the first time in many years mass transit seems like a possibility for Southeast Michigan. Though challenging to build, the diversity of the coalition helped MOSES congregations claim the high ground in public discourse. Together they claim this public space more convincingly than apart.

Community organizing projects engage ordinary people in political action on issues that are not being addressed by public officials. Therefore it is not surprising that attempts to take on seemingly intractable problems would be challenging, and organizing projects generally divide up larger goals into achievable victories. But when those larger, intractable problems also undermine even self-interested political action they present a more fundamental problem for democracy. The challenges described above include examples of how conditions of the context, the depopulation and decline of the city, the segregation and mistrust, the multiple policy arenas and fragmentation, all impact the

ability of people to democratically act to address and overcome those problems. The context is problematic both for overcoming social cleavages (segregation inhibits political collaboration for shared goals which enables policy perpetuating segregation) and for challenging specific policies (only people with access to transportation can attend meetings to challenge the lack of adequate public transportation). The cycle of inequality and decreased political capacity perpetually inhibits the potential of marginalized groups to organize in their own interests.

The enormity of that cycle suggests that carefully tended bridging relationships and organizations, built out of self-interest and faith, present little challenge to seats of power. Some have convincingly argued that mass disruption in pivotal moments is the only solution to entrenched systems of inequality (Piven and Cloward 1977). Community organizers today would argue that those opportunities are few and far between, and that building a common purpose across segregated communities and drawing on their common values is perhaps the only way to inspire the political will for a more equitable region.

Along with research documenting the successes of other organizing networks,¹⁷⁹ my description of MOSES's successes in chapter two provides evidence that these methods deliver tangible outcomes. And policy outcomes are not the only success: participants' learning in the process is also valuable as a source of individual and collective efficacy for future endeavors. Organizing works to develop leaders from within community institutions so they will be prepared to take advantage of rare opportunities. In community organizing the purpose of building organizations is to impact policy but

¹⁷⁹ See for example, books by Mark Warren (2001), Richard Wood (2002), Peter Medoff and Holly Sklar (1994), and Dennis Shirley (1997).

also to maintain a democratic laboratory where participants experiment with political action and evaluate their results. Disruption and contention are one of the tactics of this model, but they tend to arise in controlled settings where participants have planned together how to respond to public officials. The combination of skepticism of public officials and the desire to get a seat at tables of power means that the organizing project holds public officials at arms length at the same time that they try to develop working relationships across policy topics. This quality of organizing may lose some of the impact of disruption but it makes inroads for policy goals in periods when mass mobilization is unlikely. Also the continuity of relational organizing gradually works toward a more accountable public culture by developing relationships across otherwise isolated communities and between public officials, citizens, and residents.

Contributions and Implications

The core question underlying this dissertation is whether and how religious institutions can support democratic or “public spirited” collective action, in addition to their contributions to nonpolitical, associational life. This question matters because intentionally political institutions, such as political parties, unions, and interest groups, have not been up to the task of engaging less-educated American citizens and residents in politics. Parties and interest groups in particular fail in quality as well as quantity of participation. They typically mobilize for a pre-determined end (e.g. election day), offering little space for collective reflection, learning, and strategizing that teach participants about the political system and awaken possibilities for future action.

Community level organizations of the civic sector, including religious institutions, offer a rich, inclusive arena for meaningful, ongoing civic participation that can lead directly or indirectly to political action. Citizens are prepared for politics through their nonpolitical experiences in civic life, and their wealth of relationships (social capital) provide connections for recruitment into political behavior. As explained by Edwards and Foley, “It is precisely [the] socio-cultural component of social capital that provides the context within which it acquires meaning and becomes available to individuals or groups in a way that can facilitate individual or collective action not otherwise possible” (1997, 671). Despite all the benefits of “organizing the organized,” bonding institutions bring their own challenges for participation in collective action. In this dissertation I have described two kinds of problems for collective action among religious congregations: external pressures and internal priorities. The development of bridging social capital, while a challenge unto itself, is the primary method community organizing uses to overcome those challenges.

External Pressures and Adaptation

“Movements are evanescent; the church abides.” R. Stephen Warner (1988, xii)

Many observers have argued that the stability of religious institutions is in part what enables their membership to gain civic skills, build relationships, and be recruited for civic and political action. These activities require time and ongoing connections among community members—which stable religious organizations provide. For example, Paul Osterman (2002) writes, “Institutions, particularly churches, are inherently more stable than individuals...Churches, by contrast, will always be there” (41). Howard

Gillette, Jr. (2005, 164) cites a report evaluating institution-based organizing in Camden, New Jersey, stating that the religious basis of organizing efforts provided much needed stability to neighborhoods where “congregations are the only social glue preventing a total unraveling of the communities’ social fabric” (164). Richard Wood (2002) identifies maintaining stability along two dimensions as necessary for faith-based groups to be successful, including organizational continuity and individual continuity of involvement (199). Yet continuity is a challenge for many congregations. While churches unquestionably provide long-term vision, guidance, and stability to organizing projects, religious institutions are also subject to their economic, demographic, and political environments (Wood 1997, 603). Their authenticity in community life and therefore their legitimacy stems in part from their responsiveness and ability to adapt to new populations and cultural transitions. The ways that congregations sustain themselves, or fail to do so, has consequences for the community’s political capacity.

In chapter four I explored how some Detroit congregations are still internally processing population changes that hit with full force thirty years ago. Those changes have had consequences for demographic and cultural changes in church membership. Individuals’ choices to move out of the city, and in many cases leave their congregations, were rooted in their race and ethnicity, wealth, and ideas of how to maintain and improve their quality of life. The evidence from interviews lends insight into the adjustments required of religious institutions and communities following large shifts in organizational memberships and affiliations. Given the time and effort it takes for community-level institutions to adjust to demographic change, shifts in religious congregational membership (particularly in mainline religious institutions) in the recent past should be

considered alongside evidence that fewer Americans belong to traditional civic associations (Putnam 2000). Encouraged by policies supporting urban sprawl, Americans have uprooted their community institutions or loosened connections to existing associations rather than bridge racial or ethnic differences in neighborhoods and pews (Ammerman 1997; Gamm 1999).

The vagaries of local economy and population movements affect membership and lay involvement in remaining congregations (Cohen and Dawson 1993; Gamm 1999; Livezey 2000; McRoberts 2003; Wilson 1987). Congregations in poor areas struggle to fulfill immediate needs in the community. Increased concentration of poverty in the city, the delocalization of church membership, and the adaptation of churches to maintain their institutions in spite of and in light of those factors, has meant a movement toward a charity or service relationship of congregations to their neighborhoods. Charitable efforts by middle class church-goers fill the gaps left by government and market failures but do not urge political accountability.¹⁸⁰ For community organizing projects, the lack of a shared neighborhood interest between church members and residents undermines a primary purpose of core team work, unless the pastor or active lay people are able to translate organizing practices into some action issue that fits their church culture and inspires a sense of ownership or responsibility on the issue. If they are not going to conduct actions specific to the interests of their congregation members, core team members might as well belong to issue task forces across congregations, rather than build teams internal to their congregation. If that becomes the norm, congregation-based organizing may have difficulty attracting less-affluent members who face quality of life

¹⁸⁰ The role of religious institutions in service delivery is part of a larger trend in the growth of the independent service sector since the 1970s, including the outsourcing of previously government-run programs (Katz 1996, 270-72).

issues in their neighborhoods and who stand to benefit most from the political training, experience, and the sense of efficacy that parochial actions develop. As active members in MOSES have grown older or burned out, core teams appear to shift from organizing work to mobilization, a process that is facilitated by the delocalization of churches from their neighborhoods.

Like its institutional members, MOSES also adapted to survive and have greater impact, expanding to include suburban congregations and developing issue task forces that include the experience and expertise of diverse individuals. This expansion was not without costs for the organization. Increasing staff responsibilities and reframing issues for a regional focus meant some congregations lost a sense of ownership over issues, compared to their earlier actions addressing immediate local conditions. The quandary faced by the organizing project was that immediate actions on neighborhood conditions could not stem the tide of resources and people from the city. By inviting new participants into the fold and the information and contacts they bring, the organizing project simultaneously revises its goals and considers new means of addressing them. New participants and new goals require an ongoing process of discussion and reckoning.

Given these challenges, Detroit presents a tough test case for community organizing methods and the metro-equity agenda. Scholars David Rusk, Myron Orfield, and John Powell advise MOSES and other community organizations in advocating for metropolitan equity (Orfield 1997; Orfield and Luce 2003; Powell 2000; Rusk 1999). They argue that the solution to divided cities and suburbs is a regional policy agenda to overcome the isolation of the urban poor and prevent inner suburbs from following the same fate of disinvestment and decline. The regionalist agenda varies somewhat by

scholar but includes policies such as revenue-sharing between cities and suburbs, requirements for affordable housing throughout the region, and improved regional mass transit. The potential for a coalition between city neighborhood groups and suburban environmentalists is a hopeful prospect for regionalism. Advocates argue that the regionalist agenda requires activism from the grassroots through city-suburban coalitions because political parties offer little leadership on the issue. Both parties cater to limited expectations of what suburban voters will support.¹⁸¹

In his book *Camden after the Fall, Decline and Renewal of a Post-Industrial City* (2005), Howard Gillette, Jr. describes the benefits and the limits of parochial neighborhood-based organizing. “Much of the social capital that had been weakened or destroyed in earlier years was refurbished through hard organizational work. Talented, dedicated, and persistent as the community organizers were, however, they could not pull Camden up by its own bootstraps. The broader economic and political forces mustered against them were simply too great” (168). To challenge what Rusk (1999) refers to as the sprawl and poverty “machine” constructed by tax, housing and transportation policies and mortgage markets, metro-residents must build their own power base that can alter the rules of the game. Yet building political constituencies for metropolitan equity is a slow process, in part because of the limitations of the very contexts activists organize to change. Faith-based organizers in Camden won the formation of a regional impact council to work for smart growth, but the suburban mayors on the council did not live up to its intended purpose. Not unlike MOSES’s experience with the passage of the DARTA bill, the attempt to form a transportation authority, and SEMCOG’s intransigence,

¹⁸¹ Howard Gillette made this argument during a roundtable discussion at the Metropolitan History Workshop, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, December 7, 2007.

Camden's regional coalition met the "limits of electoral politics" and neighborhood groups turned to court action (Gillette, 248).

While metropolitan-wide coalitions may be the best approach to better regional policy, it is important to acknowledge the challenges of that strategy for local actors. The strategy of targeting regional policy makers to impact both local conditions and regional inequities puts extra pressure on organizers and leaders. MOSES leaders keenly felt the trade-off between maintaining and developing the base of member congregations and the belief in the need to expand to be more influential, and therefore more effective, in reaching policy goals. The language of organizing puts responsibility on clergy and lay people, and organizers to step up to the challenge and expand their scope of influence, courage, and capacity as leaders.

The way MOSES progressed as an organization reflects the belief that system-wide problems require collaborative action with participants who mirror the scope of the problems. However, as noted above, the fragmentation of regional interests in areas such as Detroit, institutionalized in economically and racially segregated municipalities, makes collaboration more difficult because multiple decision-making institutions and actors determine final outcomes. Choosing a course of action to impact policy therefore is not a simple matter but requires access to relevant professional networks and community research on solutions involving access to a wide array of actors, as well as a great deal of patience and persistence.

Internal Priorities and Bonding Social Capital

The second key problem for collective action among religious institutions is that the ultimate source of their strength and legitimacy—their inward-focused priorities—is not organized for public politics. This is the case even among congregations like those in this study whose leaders believe some political impact is part of their social mission. For example, traditional roles of authority are primarily directed toward internal purposes: religious teaching and cultural transmission. Even congregational structures that are meant for outreach reflect internal norms and roles and are designed to fit institutional definitions of ministry. As described in chapter four, neighborhood population change can create internal upheavals because the religious culture is forced to manage difference and the power relations implicated in difference, when its real purpose is to recreate itself and celebrate a shared identity. Those internal purposes, the work of bonding social capital, tend to reinforce homogeneity and can encourage exclusionary, undemocratic politics if mobilized unreflectively for political goals (Portes 1998; Putnam 2000; Sugrue 1996).

Community organizers navigate internal power relations and clergy's different approaches to leadership in order to help leaders redirect their congregation's social capital toward political action. The varying opportunities for lay-driven ministries across denominations means that the job of community organizers changes somewhat across congregations. In order for religious communities to address inequalities in the larger environment, organizers and leaders must work within and through structures organized for religious and social purposes. In doing so, their work makes visible how power is organized within community institutions. Congregation-based community organizations

teach and facilitate practices by which churches can open up spaces for discussion of community concerns and encourage new leadership roles and political action by their members. But participation in community organizing does not significantly shift the internal dynamics of member congregations. Organizers and leaders work primarily within or around a congregation's existing roles and norms.

Existing research in political science considers how religious hierarchical structure matters for the civic engagement of individuals (Brown 2006; Jones-Correa and Leal 2001; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). There are many internal dynamics and choices mediating between institutional structure and political action, however. Different structures may lead to similar political outcomes for different reasons. The ways organizers interpret working with Baptist and Catholic pastors suggest that denominational differences may encourage participation in different types of political activities, depending on how roles and responsibilities are interpreted and enacted by clergy and lay people. By understanding lay people as engaged in negotiation and influence within institutions, scholars can avoid theories that over-determine the power of religious authority or hierarchical structure, yet take those contextual factors seriously as shaping political action in communities.

Future research might consider how norms and roles of authority within religious institutions matter for participants' opportunity for skill-building within their congregations, confidence to act in the public sphere, and recruitment into inter-faith, issue-based or electoral politics. Additionally, given that community organizing entails intensive training and learning in action I expect that participation in organizing develops leadership skills, political knowledge, and efficacy over and above the benefits accrued

from church membership. A systematic comparison between otherwise similar congregations that are and are not members of a community organizing network could reveal any added contribution of organizing and any differences in the accumulation of those qualities across participating denominations.

Religious Institutions and Secular Politics

While this research centers on the political potential of religious social capital, it does not interrogate the religious content of community organizing work. Despite the centrality of religious social capital to congregation-based organizing, religious content is not a focus of this research. The research questions are not about changes in religious beliefs and practices, the balance of popular religion with mandates from religious authorities, or trends in theology. Other scholars have carefully described how *religious* traditions and trends have political implications: for lay people's empowerment and efficacy, for the shape of civic action taken by religious people, and for community organizing in particular (Levine 1992; Pattillo-McCoy 1998; Wood 2002).

Broaching the intersection of religion and politics from the politics end, as I have, risks undervaluing the nonpolitical aspects of religion that make belief and practice personally compelling, and that also have political significance though not motivated by political outcomes. Part of this omission stems from the fact that I did not hear much discussion of religious trends or debates during fieldwork. The monthly clergy caucus begins with a reading from scripture and brief discussion but usually moves quickly to a practical agenda. In interviews, some clergy brought up trends affecting their work, including the rise of non-denominational churches, preaching that emphasizes

“prosperity” over suffering, and competition among institutions to provide unique services to congregants.¹⁸² The relative lack of discussion of religious issues is a point of contention for some clergy and lay leaders in MOSES who would prefer that organizers talk more about faith and less about politics. It may reflect the desire of most leaders and clergy to focus on what they have in common and of organizers to avoid issues that might distract from shared goals. In meetings and events, religious themes and prayers are chosen to unify participants and highlight the shared values motivating their efforts.

Avoiding issues of difference across religion may be a missed opportunity for community organizing projects, especially for developing deeper relationships among clergy. MOSES clergy Rabbi Klein recently argued for more genuine inter-faith dialogue among members, including deeper discussion of doctrines and scriptures across faiths that do not always recognize each other as engaging in an “authentic covenant with God.”¹⁸³ He said, “In challenging each other to think differently about our own religious values and ideas, in seeing ourselves through the eyes of others, we have a unique opportunity to not only appreciate the beliefs of our neighbors, but more importantly, to better understand our own.”¹⁸⁴

The attention of organizing practices to diversity offers an opportunity for private institutions to be publicly accountable for their beliefs and actions. According to IAF Organizer Ed Chambers, part of the value of organizing is, “to keep the Catholic and Protestant churches honest.” He warns,

¹⁸² The omission also reflects the focus of the research questions on political capacity. In interviews I used basic questions about religious traditions as a point of departure but otherwise focused on issues of community change, salient issues, and involvement in organizing.

¹⁸³ Rabbi Joseph Klein, May 1, 2007, www.mosesmi.org/index_files/Page5179.htm

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

If left to themselves, they'll get righteous about being Christians with all those clean unadulterated values. They'll say, 'we are right and everyone else is wrong.' *You need the diversity of our organizations to keep people accountable.* Without it, we'd only be building a working-class Christian political party" [emphasis added].¹⁸⁵

This statement does not refer to accountability in the way that elected officials must answer to their constituents. Rather community organizing provides a process through which religious institutions voluntarily take on moral responsibility for public outcomes and choose collective action to affect those outcomes. Chambers calls attention to the way that diversity can challenge religious groups to acknowledge what they otherwise take for granted and act politically based on pragmatic interests rather than a sense of righteousness that excludes others.

Bridging Elaborated

Given the external and internal limitations on institutional political capacity, I argue that religious institutions can contribute to public-spirited collective action if they have access to bridging mechanisms to help overcome those limitations. Interracial, interfaith community organizing is an effort to develop those bridging mechanisms in ways that both respect the religious community's priorities and support a democratic politics, rather than serving narrow interests or religious mandates. Along with the accountability afforded by diversity, community organizing projects have cultivated a routine of evaluation and of challenging each other to expand circles of influence beyond current comfort levels at the same time that they work for concrete public goods.

A close study of community organizing practice reveals the complexity of collaborative bridging relationships and informs social capital theory. This dissertation

¹⁸⁵ Quoted in Rogers (1990, 154).

proposes an un-idealized definition of bridging and directs attention toward the inter-group power relations inherent to any bridging relationship. I characterize bridging relationships as developing between organizations or communities with their own priorities, hierarchies, norms, and ways of making decisions. Therefore the concept's emphasis is on the institutionalized differences that make collaboration challenging. Bridging social capital is not always normatively desirable or at least not neutral, depending on its terms and conditions. At the same time, attempts at bridging and effective collaboration are normatively desirable for democracy. The primary purpose of bridging is to gain access to new networks and opportunities that are not available to homogenous communities. I argue that bridging is best understood as a process of working towards instrumental outcomes, not because bridging relationships are not valuable for their own sake but because the self-interest and community interest of participants is the driving force behind any bridging relationship. Organizing practices do not create self-interest; they help participants recognize and clarify their interests through conversations within their congregations and with diverse others. Organizers expect that actors in any bridging endeavor have some instrumental, self-interested purpose beyond getting to know others, and sharing those hopes or expectations sets a public tone and leads to a more honest relationship. Given the potential for institutions, communities, and individuals to take advantage of each other, particularly in the context of unequal power relations, diversity alone is not an adequate indicator of effective bridging. To be effective, I expect that individuals or groups serving as bridging mechanisms must understand those different priorities, values, and concerns, and work across institutions or

communities to develop a common purpose. Bridging efforts should take account of how relationships entail unequal risk as a result of the power dynamics in the larger context.

As with bonding social capital, bridging relationships are not solutions in themselves but create opportunities for new formulations of solutions, as well as new potential tensions and problems depending on how effectively the relationships serve the needs of all participants. Though it cannot offer guarantees of ultimate success, congregation-based community organizing offers a strategy for developing bridging relationships that are capable of winning more equitable outcomes for communities. In CBCO, bridging is an intentional process of public-oriented relationship building. By intentionally recruiting diverse participants and directly addressing issues of inequality in trainings and meetings, CBCO methods purposefully draw attention to power relations in the process of building relationships and coalitions. Organizers seek to identify and help develop community leaders with clear self-interests and a political stake in the bridging relationship. Encouraging participants to articulate their own self-interests and to discover that of others also draws attention to power relations. The emphasis on acknowledging and assessing power relations enables participants to initiate bridging relationships that are pragmatic and respectful of different communities and diverse individual experiences. Without explicit attention to power relations and public over private relationships as a resource for political action, well-intentioned bridging efforts risk reifying inequalities and compounding mistrust. Bridging work can fall into conciliatory or superficial symbolism if the self-interest and goals of participants are not clear to themselves and others.

Some degree of conflict and tension is unavoidable in the bridging process.

Trainings in community organizing remind participants to expect tensions to arise in their work and MOSES organizers explicitly probe for tensions during evaluation sessions. As explained by Richard Wood (1997),

Political conflict is a constitutive element of the organizing process, underlying much of the success such efforts have found – including their collaborative relationships with political partners ... *The benign public face of mutually beneficial political collaboration often belies – and from the point of view of community organizations relies on – a deeper reality of conflict and strategic positioning* (1997, 602) [emphasis added].

Wood goes on to argue that efforts to regenerate social capital will fail unless “analysts, funders, and community organizers” appreciate the centrality of conflict to effective democratic organizing. Bridging efforts do not necessarily “solve” ongoing tensions, such as different interpretations of whether and how religious congregations should collaborate, different views of the appropriate relationship of religious congregations to public officials, or lingering impressions from past failed attempts at collaboration across race or religion. The challenge is to build a collective purpose without losing the motivation that instigated participation and without exposing any particular groups or individuals to unmanageable risk.

As mentioned in the second chapter, there is a persistent tension in community organizing strategies between developing dialogue across social divisions for the sake of better understanding—for a more equitable culture—and collaborating on particular actions for improved quality of life. Honest dialogues about race or religion air misunderstanding and resentment and provide opportunities to discover common ground. However, dialogues that do not lead to any concrete gain can be perceived as a waste of time or, worse, a manipulation, especially by groups under significant resource

constraints. Action towards a shared instrumental purpose inspires efficacy and may develop bonding relationships in the process of action, especially if opportunity and responsibility for developing the action genuinely reflects collective vision and design. On the other hand, diverse groups that are organized across communities only for instrumental purposes may be vulnerable to wedge issues activating in-group resentments or fears. A challenge for any bridging effort is to simultaneously develop shared purpose and patience for understanding. Community organizing groups must balance a sense that future action is imminent, yet open to diverse contributions.

Appendix A

Lists of Respondents from Fieldwork

Focus Groups

The following clergy participated in one of two preliminary focus groups that helped clarify the research project and develop interview questions:

Rev. Wes Babian	First Baptist of Birmingham, Berkley
Rev. Joseph Barlow	Mt. Zion MBC, Ecorse
Rev. Bart Beebe	First English Lutheran, Grosse Point
Rev. Emmanuel Cain	Waterfall MBC, Detroit
Rev. Barbara Clevenger	Church of Today West, Farmington Hills
Rev. Douglas Gallager	Birmingham Unitarian, Bloomfield Hills
Rabbi Joseph Klein	Temple Emanu-El, Oak Park
Rev. Pat Thompson	Erin Presbyterian Church, Roseville

Interviews

I was also fortunate to conduct preliminary interviews with the following pastors while developing my interview questions:

Rev. Edward Zaorski	Ss. Andrew & Benedict Catholic
Rev. Joseph Gagnon	St. Conrad Catholic

I conducted a total of forty-nine formal, semi-structured interviews which lasted from approximately forty minutes to an hour and a half.

Glennie Barber	Ss. Andrew and Benedict Catholic
Rev. Joseph Barlow Jr.	Mt. Zion MBC, Ecorse
Rev. Samuel Bullock	Bethany Baptist
Rev. Fr. Victor Clore	Christ the King Catholic
Lenarda Collier	St. Luke's Catholic
Leslie Rae Denard	Conant Avenue UMC
Rev. Robert Dulin	Metropolitan Church of God
Imam Abdullah Bey El-Amin	The Muslim Center
Bishop Rev. Charles Ellis with Assistant Juanita Bass	Greater Grace Temple, Apostolic
Juan Escareno, Organizer	MOSES
Rev. Patrick Gahagen, Patrick Alejandro (Alex) Garcia	Immanuel Lutheran Ste. Anne's Catholic

Rev. Sandra Gordon, Asst. Pastor	Greater New Mount Moriah
Ponsella Hardaway, Executive Director	MOSES
Stephanie Hoffman, Organizer	MOSES
Rev. Nichoals Hood III	Plymouth United Church of Christ
Walter Jones	Mt. Zion, MBC
Rev. Joseph Jordan	Corinthian Baptist, Hamtramck
Lisa King	Greater Apostolic Faith Temple
Rev. Fr. Robert Kotlarz	St. Raymond's Catholic
Victoria Kovari, Organizer	MOSES
Sr. Eileen Lantzy	All Saints Catholic
Sr. Cheryl Liske, Organizer	MOSES
Mary Malone	Unitarian Universalist
Rev. Stephen Marsh	ELCA Synod (Lutheran)
Bishop, Rev. Bill McCullom	Bride of Christ
Bill O'Brien, Organizer	MOSES
Rev. Fr. Theodore Parker	St. Cecilia's Catholic
Isabella Ramirez	Holy Redeemer Catholic
Professor Frank Rashid	Marygrove College
Rector, Rev. Pamela Redding	St. Christopher-St. Paul Episcopal
Henrietta Rogers	Greater Southern MBC
Loretta Roldan	Hispanic Woman's Center
Sandra Samuels	Eastern Star/Trimphant Life
Rev. Johnnie Saulsberry	Greater Southern Baptist
Rev. Fr. Tom Sepulveda	Ste. Anne's Catholic
James Smith Jr.	Greater Apostolic Faith Temple
Bishop, Rev. Nehemiah Smith	Greater Apostolic Faith Temple
Rev. Valmon Stotts	Unity Baptist
Rev. Fr. Norman Thomas	Sacred Heart Catholic
Rev. Kevin Turman, MOSES President	Second Baptist
Rev. Fr. Stanley Ulman	St. Ladislaus/St. Mary's of the Hills
Sr. Jolene VanHandel	Nativity Catholic
Rev. Edgar Vann	Second Ebenezer Baptist
Rev. Charles Williams	National Action Network, Detroit chapter
Kara Williams	Second Baptist

Three additional interviewees did not wish to be identified in published reports. They included a Catholic priest, a MOSES staff member, and a union representative working primarily with immigrants.

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Introduction to the congregation

1. How long have you worked at (name of church)?
2. Tell me about (name of church) – the history, size, make up of the congregation.
3. How would you describe your church's theological orientation? Style of worship?
4. What you consider the boundaries of the church's neighborhood?
5. What do you see as the role of (name of church) in the neighborhood?

Population Changes

- What are the most important issues facing this neighborhood?
- Has the population of your church's neighborhood changed in recent years or has it stayed the same? (If yes) Has the church changed services or programs in response to changes in population? How so? (number of masses or other services, masses in different languages – what days and times, liturgy, roles of people, traditions)
- (If not already indicated) Are there new immigrants moving into the neighborhood? Is there communication across race/ethnic groups? Do language differences affect the community?
- Do most of your church members live in this neighborhood or commute from a different neighborhood?
- Are neighborhood residents or commuters more active in church activities, or is there no difference? Who are the most active members of your church?
- For Catholics: (If not already indicated, and if the parish has been clustered) How did you and your congregation respond to the change of being closed by the Archdiocese? How has clustering changed your work in this parish?

Community Action and Vision

- ❖ How did you get involved with the MOSES organization - who contacted you or told you about it? Why did you get involved?
- ❖ Has your congregation conducted one-on-one campaigns? Why or why not? (If yes, when): Were there outcomes of that/each campaign for the congregation or the neighborhood? (i.e. better relationships, work together on political issues like crime in the area or youth) Or do you think there weren't really any outcomes?
- ❖ Since you've been involved with MOSES, have you spoken or given sermons at any other MOSES churches or has another MOSES pastor spoken at your church?
- ❖ Has your church collaborated on any neighborhood or local action with another MOSES congregation? (i.e. voter registration or an issue like crime)
- ❖ Does your church engage in other ecumenical activities or organizations in addition to MOSES?
- ❖ What sorts of political activity occur in (name of church)? How frequently does political activity occur? Are you more concerned with local or national political issues? Do you allow candidates or groups to come to speak to members of your church?
- ❖ Do you ever talk about politics in your sermons? Do you talk about politics with members of your church? How would you describe your own political views?

Closing

1. Do you think that there is anything else that I should know?
2. If I think of other questions would it be Okay for me to ask you in the future?

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Internal Review Board, University of Michigan
Faith-based Organizing in Metro-Detroit

Note: This form is required by the University of Michigan, in accordance with federal regulations governing the use of human subjects in scholarly research. These interviews are to be used as part of Lara Rusch's dissertation on religious responses to community change, with additional usage only with signed consent. The purpose of these interviews with community leaders in Detroit is to understand what challenges they face in response to population changes in recent years.

- A. The subject agrees to participate in an oral interview conducted by **Lara Rusch**, graduate student, Political Science Department, University of Michigan

Contact Information:

Address: 5700 Haven Hall, 505 S. State Street, Ann Arbor, MI 48109-1045,

Email: lrusch@umich.edu, Phone: 734-604-4289.

- B. The subject affirms that he/she is not a minor.
- C. The subject has the right to withdraw from the project at any time. The subject can skip any question which he or she prefers not to answer.
- D. The interview will last about 1 hour, and will address your experiences working in this community and your observations about changes and problems in Detroit.
- E. Your answers will be held confidential by the researcher, unless you would like to be identified in published reports.

Should you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in research, please contact:

Kate Keever

Institutional Review Board

540 East Liberty Street, Suite 202

Ann Arbor, MI 48109

734-936-0933

Email: irbhsbs@umich.edu

I have read the informed consent form and agree to be an interview subject in this research project.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

F. If the subject agrees, this interview will be recorded on a digital voice recorder for the benefit of the investigator. **The recording will be kept for no longer than the completion of the dissertation, within the next two years, then deleted.** Please sign below if you are willing to have this interview recorded. You may still participate in this study if you are not willing to have the interview recorded.

I am willing to have this interview recorded.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

G. Sign below if you would like to be identified in published reports.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Appendix D

The Declaration of Interdependence

October 18, 1998

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for one people to object to the conditions which separate them, and to object to policies which create political and economic separation, then the people are required to declare the causes which impel them to such objections.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all people are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among those are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. To secure these rights, governments and policies are instituted, deriving their just power from the consent of the governed; whenever any policy becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new policies and provide new laws for our future security.

We declare that patterns of concentrated wealth and poverty are the result of policies driven by greed and race and class prejudice. The effect of those unjust policies causes the citizens of the Metropolitan region, both in the central city and the surrounding suburbs, to pay for roads and sewers in new communities while the infrastructure of their own communities declines. Competition among cities for scarce resources prevents the region as a whole from effectively competing in the global economy. Further, these policies have fueled the rhetoric of hate and ignorance, interfering with our responsibility—our duty as people of faith—to conquer our fear and come together for common good.

To prove this let the facts be submitted to a candid world:

- Farmland and other natural areas in the State are being lost to development at the rate of *10 acres an hour*, seriously undermining agriculture and the environment.
- State transportation policies reward cities for building new roads, while under funding older roads in greater need of repair. Most (77%) of the gas tax dollars collected in southeast Michigan for transportation are spent on building or expanding roads in northern Oakland, northern Macomb and Livingston Counties. Less than 3% of all funds are spent on public transit.
- Changes in state revenue sharing policy would increase funds to newer suburbs with high priced housing and increasing populations, while funds to older suburbs and cities with decreasing populations would be cut.
- Local zoning laws in many higher income suburbs do not permit the construction of low and moderate income housing; this keeps poverty concentrated in certain

areas and prevents many workers from living in areas where most new jobs are located.

We, the undersigned, hereby commit ourselves to create a powerful organization of the people who will pursue policies which achieve greater metropolitan equity and strengthen the region as a whole. Therefore, in the name and by authority of the congregations of MOSES, acting in concert with their allies in the religious and academic community, government, labor, business, non profit sector and other entities in the public and private arenas, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do solemnly publish and declare that all peoples and municipalities of this entire metropolitan area are, and of right ought to be, INTERDEPENDENT ENTITIES;

That our destinies are bound together in a web of interdependence; and as interdependent people we have the power and responsibility to work for peace, racial reconciliation and regional cooperation, toward the remedy of existing metropolitan inequities, and to do all other acts and things which interdependent people may of right do. And for the support of this declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honor.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ Transcribed by the author from a MOSES meeting handout, archived at the Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, MOSES Collection, Box 1, Declaration of Interdependence folder.

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