

Becoming Social Justice Activists in Church:
An Account of Resources that Lead to Heightened Mobilization for Progressive Causes Among
White Suburban Protestant Congregations

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Abstract

Often unseen, faith-based institutions and organizations in the United States today mobilize for progressive causes in ways that vitally contribute to grassroots democracy. Most scholars approaching the topic of congregational mobilization do so through analyzing how clergy, outside organizations, or lay members push their church to act for a given cause. This thesis, alternatively, examines the role of specific resources in predicting a heightened level of mobilization for progressive causes among white suburban Protestant congregations. Through interviews with members of four churches in the suburbs of Philadelphia, I identify four resources (personal and collective identity, connections, and clergy tenure) that have an impact on the level of mobilization a church is likely to achieve for progressive causes. This mobilization occurs through what I label personal and political mobilization, both of which are of great value in fighting against inequality in the United States.

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Introduction

Driving through the suburbs of Philadelphia, one can see church after church through the car window. These churches differ dramatically from one to the next, with some massive stone edifices standing tall above the neighborhood, while more humble structures blend in with their surroundings. However, what might draw the eye more than the buildings themselves are the signs, banners, or flags that are displayed outside of them. Supporters of the Black Lives Matter movement, the LGBTQ+ community, or other social issues are easy to identify because of the prominent visuals outside of their church. Viewing these signs, I started to ask the question of why churches mobilize for these causes, the question that I would eventually take up in this thesis. This initially broad lens ultimately focused more closely on the specific resources that would lead to heightened mobilization for progressive causes among suburban Protestant congregations.

In the early stages of this project, from identifying my topic, conducting a review of the literature, and building my research design, I had worked solely with Haverford's Political Science department. However, at the beginning of the spring semester, I joined the Religion department as well, pursuing a double major with a joint thesis. While both of my advisors and the departments have been flexible and accommodating in allowing me to make this project a collaborative effort, there exists a tension between them that manifests itself in my final thesis project. I began this project focusing on secular politics as it appears inside of religious institutions, thus using secular frames to examine political mobilization. As the project continued, and I listened to the feedback I received from members of the Religion department, it became clear that this secularized analysis was not entirely adequate when describing a religious

phenomenon. My project began to shift to incorporate more religious frameworks, but I still needed to balance the secular analysis with the religious. Due to my beginning this project inside the Political Science department rather than the Religion department, I created a finished product that privileges the former type of analysis over the latter.

Stylistically, my final product also bridges a tension between the two departments regarding the presentation of interview data. My conversations and research were extensively guided by the people I was speaking with, but the presentation of those conversations attempts to bridge between more analytical or prescriptive modes of thought and the descriptive. I have tried to center the words of all those who participated in my study, but I also have needed to establish clear definitions and prescriptions that can, in turn, prioritize my own thoughts and conclusions over those who I am quoting. I do not believe that this tension of style and research topic has diminished the value of this project, but it is worth mentioning as a framework for understanding some of my thought process in the stylistic decisions I have made.

For any argumentative analysis or research, it must be clear why spending time on the given topic is worthwhile. The same goes for this thesis, a thesis focused on the resources required for the mobilization of congregations for progressive causes. Unlike many topics whose relevance may be abundantly clear, this may not be the case for all readers when they hear about a thesis that is focused solely on leftist religious activism. The religious left in the United States can feel diminutive on the political scene, especially when the reality of this country is that the religious right dominates the discursive field of politics through moral claims and organized outreach. This can beg the question that, if the religious right is so powerful, what is the point of studying the mobilization tactics of congregations that can be categorized as being in the religious left? Would not time and energy be better spent understanding more visibly powerful

phenomena than less? In this introduction, I want to contest this claim and make a case for the study of progressive religious activism because of both its importance in revitalizing American democracy for the future and its surprising capabilities that exist largely unnoticed in mainstream media today.

There are two scholars to which I will turn to elucidate the importance of the religious left in the American democratic tradition: Jeffrey Stout and Cornel West. In Stout's 2010 book, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*, he focuses on numerous case studies of both secular and religious broad-based coalitions that are attempting to make political change at the local, state, and national level. The future of American democracy looks bleak, Stout argues, with a political system so skewed to favor the rich that any program of citizen participation seems unlikely to tip the balance of power.¹ However, Stout resists the fatalist outlook and provides example after example of ordinary citizens gathering to combat prevailing inequalities, many times successfully. These citizens are organizing around the principles of grassroots democracy that include everyone to protect against domination.² If grassroots engagement in democratic systems is the best mode of resistance to rising inequality and injustice, the critical question becomes, "Where are the citizens who can do what grassroots democracy demands of them?"³

Citizens who can meet the demands of grassroots democracy can be found in many places, according to Stout's case studies, but religious institutions are one of the most predominant locations where grassroots democracy is being practiced. Faith-based organizations are impacting local, state, and national politics regularly, with survey data showing that individuals of faith who simultaneously identify as progressives are the most politically active group in American politics.⁴ Power in American democracy rests not in the hands of the many

but, rather, in the hands of the few, with faith-based organizations participating in grassroots democratic initiatives representing one of the most promising ways we can redistribute power back to the people.

This revitalization of democracy extends beyond organizational capacities and into the realm of the discursive, the field in which Cornel West situates his critique of Christianity in America. West argues that America has been dominated by imperialism, authoritarianism, and free-market fundamentalism,⁵ labelling some of Stout's conceptions that American democracy is held captive by the wealthy at the expense of the poor. West presents a critique of the dominant modes of Christian thought that pervade American politics and society, with conservative Christians occupying moral claims that are yet to be successfully contested since the rise of Ronald Reagan to the presidency in 1980.⁶

The Christian right uses their power in American politics to put forward claims to morality rooted in individualism and material wealth. West sees this as a misalignment with how Christian values have been used in American history to support the liberation of oppressed people.⁷ West argues for a reinvigoration of what he calls "prophetic Christianity," named after prophets who resist dominating powers to uplift new truths about what the human experience should be. This is a conception of the religious left that would reassert the morals of Christianity to focus on the well-being of all people, particularly the poor, to achieve collective liberation. This prophetic Christianity owes much of its roots to the Black church tradition which focused on questioning white supremacy and sustaining long-term commitments to a struggle for freedom.⁸ This movement towards the prophetic Christianity West describes is key in the fight for the grassroots democracy Stout is hopeful the United States can achieve.

I do not wish to make the claim that the Christian left is the only force in the United States capable of engaging in grassroots democracy and reasserting claims on the nation's morality, for there is an extensive body of literature (including Stout's own work) that demonstrate the capacities of numerous secular coalitions and organizations.⁹ However, Protestant Christians are a critical group in which this organizing work to create a grassroots democracy needs to be done and is already taking place.¹⁰ While the number of Americans who identify as Christian is on the decline, they still make up 65% of the population.¹¹ In addition, 43% of Americans identify with Protestantism. While secular organizations can engage in grassroots activism and assert moral claims that will guide our country, Protestant Christians still account for an extensive portion of the American populace and the causes for which they mobilize will have a dramatic impact.

This thesis is an entry point into the battle West and Stout describe and how the religious left can more effectively combat the growing threats to American democracy through their grassroots activism. By examining the dynamics of mobilization among congregations, critical lessons can be learned as to what kind of resources are needed to create a Christian counterculture that resists imperialism, authoritarianism, and free-market fundamentalism. By examining whiteness, this thesis will illuminate how Protestant Christianity can be practiced by non-Black congregations and how the group with the most political power can be tapped for activism. By focusing on the suburbs, this study is going to highlight an area that is increasingly decisive on the national political stage as it remains evenly split between the two predominant political parties.¹² If we believe Cornel West's and Jeffrey Stout's analysis, this thesis becomes a study in the battle for American democracy and may contribute to that fight by putting forward

ideas and frameworks on how best to use the resources available within Protestant congregations to combat the nation's greatest threats.

I will begin with an overview of the literature on the religious left that offers insights into mobilization for progressive causes on the congregational level. Following that review, I will put forward my plans for studying this phenomenon, highlighting the value of an interview-based approach along with providing examples of my questions and rationale for my case selection. The bulk of this thesis will be dedicated to the subsequent sections where I will analyze the role of resources in each of my four case studies. I will first describe five resources one-by-one, highlighting why they seem to be of lesser relevance in my conversations, before moving into a deeper analysis of each case study where I identify four resources that were highly salient in each of my conversations. Finally, I will conclude this study with a summary of my findings along with a discussion of the study's limitations, implications, and prospects for future research.

Literature Review

When reading through the scholarly literature on the religious left, what becomes abundantly clear is that much of the work is dedicated to description. Describing who does and should make up what we call the "religious left," what kind of activism they undertake, how much political power they wield, how people become involved, the types of symbols and messages religious activists use, and their importance in modern American politics. These descriptions, particularly the ones found in full-length books, are usually ethnographic and rich in detail. Many scholars are not seeking outright to answer the question of what accounts for heightened mobilization for progressive causes among white churches. However, using the rich descriptions of the religious left from many scholars, one can find answers to this research

question. This literature review mines descriptions of the religious left for answers to the research question, describing numerous scholars who are inadvertently laying claim to why congregations mobilize for progressive activism even if that is not the primary thrust of their argument.

While many scholars are not seeking to answer this question specifically in their research, others do interrogate it with intentionality because it has been identified as an area lacking examination.¹³ These two types of research, those that are intentional and those that are inadvertent, combine to provide different answers to the research question of this thesis that can be organized into two schools of thought. I label these two schools *top-down* and *bottom-up*, each of which have a distinct idea of what leads to heightened mobilization among congregations by looking at the relationships and dynamics between clergy, laity, and organizations outside of the congregation. Within these two schools of thought are references to social movement theory and the ways in which it can provide insights into the mobilization of congregations. This literature review will break down each school of thought and go through the subschools within them one by one, illuminating the ways in which scholars have attempted to understand what accounts for increased mobilization for progressive activism among specific congregations.

The Top-Down School

The top-down school, as I have defined it, comprises theories and descriptions of ways in which the members of a congregation, the laity, become involved in progressive activism through the outreach of individuals or groups who are asking them to become engaged. Between the two main schools of thought, this is the area of literature that is most developed and descriptive with numerous scholars adding to the discussion. There are two ways the literature describes this occurring: the first is through the leadership of the clergy within a congregation

and the second is through the encouragement of outside coalitions, non-profits, or organizations. These two dynamics, the influence of the clergy and the outside organization on the laity, make up the two subschools within the top-down school of thought.

Examining the Role of Church Leaders

When thinking of religiously-motivated activism, be it progressive or conservative, one of the first dynamics that comes to mind is the role of the charismatic preacher or pastor who inspires and pushes people into action. In America, this viewpoint is in part so dominant because one of the most renowned individuals in our culture's history, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was a preacher-leader in what is the most studied and celebrated social movement of the past hundred years in the United States, the Civil Rights Movement. One influential author who confirms this idea that a charismatic leader is capable of moving people to action is Aldon Morris in his book *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*.¹⁴

Morris' research and description focuses less on the individual congregation and more on the movement as a whole, however, he can still provide helpful information into how a religious movement drew such massive participation. The Black church was the key site of movement activity, Morris writes, and it was charismatic leaders like Dr. King who were capable of drawing large crowds to various meetings, organizing protest actions, and connecting groups together to form mass-based indigenous movements. Charisma and influence were tied together in the Black church, with leaders having the capacity to mobilize their members for the cause of civil rights and collect financial resources that would make the broader movement possible.¹⁵ An important note is that these leaders of the Civil Rights Movement were already leaders within their church, demonstrating how the church is a critical site of mobilization and the clergy are largely the inspiring agent.

Another articulation of this dynamic of the church leader moving congregants to activism comes from Sharon Nepstad in a study that takes place in different, non-American cultural conditions.¹⁶ In her book *Conditions of the Soul: Religion, Culture, and Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement*, Nepstad explicitly attempts to re-examine traditional conceptions of movement mobilization that she characterizes as overly structuralist. Her focus, instead, is on the people and culture that make up the movement and specifically the individuals that lead them.

In studying the Central American solidarity movement of the 1980s, Nepstad discovered the rich role missionaries and religious leaders occupied within the dynamics of mobilizing for action. Missionaries were among the most prominent leaders within the movement and were viewed as the catalysts for transnational action. Nepstad highlights several different aspects of the missionaries' roles within society and their specific congregations that led them to be so successful at mobilizing individuals and groups for activism. The first was the credibility that congregation leaders had within their given culture, as they were viewed as trustworthy actors within their community. Another aspect of the power of the missionary was that their credibility was given special weight due to its moral nature. Missionaries had a certain credibility that was distinct from secular actors in that their theological knowledge gave them increased respect when they were claims of a moral nature. This moral authority translates into actual authority within their congregation and community, making people more likely to undertake actions that the missionary might suggest.

This cultural (rather than structural) analysis is a departure from many of the dominant theories in the social movement literature, including theories that will be discussed later in this review. Another author who presents similar ideas is John Delehanty, who writes extensively

about “comfortable culture” within churches and the role that that plays in activism.¹⁷ Delehanty examines how faith-based community organizing is done through congregations and how clergy (but not exclusively clergy, as will be discussed in the bottom-up school of thought) change their messaging to bring people together in an activist spirit. This is done through contesting a comfortable church culture, a culture that is typically defined by individualistic orientations toward religion that must be changed to a collective identity in order to engender activism. By reframing religious commitment as communal and focused towards social transformation, clergy are able to move their congregation towards activism because of their newly-formed consciousness about what it means to be a member of a religious community and belief that problems in society must be tackled on a systemic rather than individual level.

This claim, that clergy have a significant impact on church culture that can be leveraged with intentionality, shows up in Delehanty’s later analysis of “emotional management” in churches.¹⁸ Delehanty demonstrates through ethnographic work in a faith-based organization called ELIJAH how leaders within church communities actively work to shape activist cultures within their church by activating emotions among their congregants that help bridge across structural differences, leading to a shared sense of identity. By creating cohesive emotional narratives, people with disparate backgrounds can rally around the same cause, helping faith leaders to mobilize their peers. This resembles findings by Brown and Brown, who used empirical methods to study the relationship between political sermons and the opinions of those listening to them.¹⁹ Their findings are of special significance because they are one of few, if not the only, authors who discuss the specific racial differences at play when clergy attempt to mobilize their congregations for social justice.

Brown and Brown use data from the National Politics Studies undertaken in 2004 and 2008 to determine how politicized sermons affect the opinions held by different racial groups on immigration. Respondents to the survey were graded on how politicized their worship space was and what kind of policy attitudes they held toward immigration-related issues. Brown and Brown found that white individuals were more likely to be affected by politicized sermons related to immigration than either Hispanic or Black individuals. White people who had a leader within their church who was actively speaking about the need for immigration reform were more likely to support those policy agendas than their counterparts who were not receiving that messaging. Individuals who identify as white, Brown and Brown contend, are more likely to change their beliefs due to the ways their identity is held outside of the church as a dominant member of society. Anti-immigrant rhetoric is so pervasive in American society that white people may not hear other narratives until coming to a politically-motivated church, thus presenting an important opportunity to gain new information and change their minds. These findings around immigration policy attitudes among religiously-minded Americans could potentially be observed around other social issues from which white Americans are the main benefactor.

Another scholar who presents compelling accounts of how clergy inspire their congregants to activist action is John Cavendish.²⁰ Church leaders are, by many accounts, key to congregational activism according to Cavendish. In 1997, Cavendish wrote about St. Sabina Catholic Church in Chicago and how increased contact with church leaders from individuals increases the likelihood of participating in activist action around drug-related issues.²¹ In addition, Sunday services play an important role in shifting the ideologies of congregants and moving them to act through the messaging of those church leaders. In a much shorter work in 2001 that used some of this observational data from St. Sabina, Cavendish continued to hone into

how different Sunday services from the same pastor had a different effect.²² At St. Sabina, the presiding clergy would speak in dissimilar ways regarding their political plans at different Sunday services, with the 8:30 am service engendering divergent activist tendencies when compared to those who attended the 11:15 am service.

One group was more likely to engage in marches or direct action than the other group, demonstrating how different sermons can change the chances of mobilization. Cavendish found that those who attended the 11:15 service were exposed to the preaching of Fr. Mike, the main pastor of the church, while associate pastors led the 8:30 service. Cavendish describes Fr. Mike's preaching as more charismatic than the others, but more importantly he analyzed how Fr. Mike was able to develop a feeling of efficacy among those listening to his sermons that they had agency in changing the local or city government. In addition, Fr. Mike's preaching helped foster a church identity where active participation in social justice causes was a part of being a member of the church itself. Both these aspects of Fr. Mike's work, telling people they could be effective change-makers and developing a church identity around participation in social justice work, led to higher levels of mobilization.

While the above articles and books describe some of the most detailed work in analyzing the role of church leaders on congregational mobilization, other scholars have contributed to the field as well. Joel Fetzer found, through data taken from political opinions of Anabaptist pacifist congregations, that anti-war attitudes from pastors were the most strongly correlated factor with the views of their parishioners.²³ Nteta and Wallsten found results similar to Brown and Brown where the pro-immigrant messaging of clergy changed the minds of congregants (although they do not elaborate if this spurred them to action) through studying immigration attitudes among religious individuals.²⁴ In a slightly less conclusive article, Michele Margolis describes how

clergy are unlikely to mobilize congregants to a side in which they hold opposing views.²⁵ However, her research is important in that it highlights the ability of clergy to change opinions and demobilize their members from being activists for an opposing cause. Finally, Ted Jelen succinctly describes the key ways in which clergy can be proponents of a political ideal, by virtue of their power in setting the agenda of their church, attempting to convert members to a different political opinion, reinforcing beliefs held by some their congregants to then attract uncertain members, and empowering their parishioners to turn their political beliefs into political action.²⁶ To do this most successfully, Jelen writes, both a congruent cultural identity of the church towards social justice issues and the pastoral ability to tie those issues specifically into faith are of great importance.

As demonstrated by this school of thought, clergy can and do play an influential role in the mobilization of their congregations. The skills of faith leaders allow them to frame social justice issues in a new light for their congregants, changing the way people think. Clergy have the authority, both moral and hierarchical, to be trusted and respected. Church leaders are one of the foremost shapers of congregational culture and their ability to set the agenda for services has wide-reaching influence throughout their parish. Clergy are, in short, a critical element to why congregations mobilize for activism. However, the literature falls short in analyzing some of the exact mechanisms and reasons faith leaders are effective mobilizers. While reframing issues, imploring congregants to act, agenda-setting, and changing church culture are identified as having an effect on the laity, the precise way this is done remains relatively unexplored. In addition, some of the literature that attempts to find answers to these unanswered questions, such as whether or not the educational attainment of the clergy is a significant factor for success, found inconclusive and mixed results.²⁷

The Role of Outside Organizations

Like the subschool of clergy-influenced mobilization, the role of outside organizations or groups is a phenomenon where the literature has many accounts. Many of these authors describe in compelling detail the kind of work outside groups are doing to influence congregations. Frequently, congregations are targeted by interfaith coalitions, non-profit organizations, or political campaigns to join their ranks and engage in political activist work collectively. This subschool fits under the umbrella of the top-down school because frequently these outside organizations are working hand-in-hand with the clergy of a given congregation, the clergy being a good first point of contact as the leader of their church.²⁸ When thinking about this subschool, it is largely impossible to separate it from the work clergy do to activate their congregation, but it is critical to examine it as a distinct aspect of this top-down dynamic because almost none of the scholars previously discussed included outside organizations as a part of their analysis.

Two scholars who have contributed mightily to a deeper understanding of the role outside organizations and coalitions play in mobilizing congregations are Mark Warren and Heidi Swarts. Warren, in his book *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*, analyzes the role of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in organizing religious communities.²⁹ After the founder of the IAF, Saul Alinsky, passed away in 1972, the organization began to deepen their involvement in faith communities beyond viewing them as a simple funding source, combining religious traditions with politics to create a “theology of organizing.” This theology revolved around building relationships with members of churches, committing themselves to action, and then holding each other accountable through religiously-motivated lenses rather than just the traditional notion of self-interest. Biblical scripture was re-

interpreted to actively promote the role of the church in public life, leading to congregations feeling encouraged to mobilize for progressive causes and sustain their commitment.

Heidi Swarts, in her book *Organizing Urban America: Secular and Faith-Based Progressive Movements*, echoes many of Warren's findings.³⁰ She also analyzes many post-Alinsky groups working with the IAF, demonstrating how mobilization happens when organizers work with congregations to turn them into "leaders" within the organization. These leaders help spur their institution to various forms of activism, with a similar focus on self-interest as how people are motivated. However, Swarts extends Warren's work by constructing the concept of collective identity among coalitions and its role in forming cohesive group practices and commitments. Organizing around faith-based tenets, even if they were not of the same faiths, helped build a common understanding of the group's purpose, helping them work together and mobilize consistently. Through a blending of altruism and self-interest, an assertion that faith-based groups should have a say in public life, and an emphasis on participatory democracy that appeals to many modern congregations, the IAF is successful in mobilizing churches and other religious institutions for progressive causes.

Another great example of this relationship and why the outside organizations need to be defined as their own subschool can be found in the book *Prophets and Patriots: Faith in Democracy Across the Political Divide* by Ruth Braunstein.³¹ Braunstein's interest in the organizing dynamics of faith-based political coalitions led to participant observation of two religiously-motivated organizations: a progressive group known as Interfaith and a conservative coalition called the Patriots. Her analysis of Interfaith found a political alliance of widely different religious congregations that had been originally formed by a couple of local congregations that wanted to work together. Here, we can see the role of clergy in the matter.

The leaders of the church were put into contact by a shared connection and together they formed a working group. While it is unclear what led those original few congregations to begin to talk together about how to be politically active, it is clear the clergy played a crucial role in establishing the formal multi-congregation coalition.

However, Interfaith began working with a national organization fairly quickly in their history that increased and expanded their mobilization. The PICO National Network (standing for “People Improving Communities through Organizing”) is a faith-based community organizing group that operates nationally to help communities through religious activism. PICO, now known as Faith in Action, provided key support to Interfaith and transformed some of the ways they recruit new members. Through the guidance of PICO, Interfaith now recruits many individuals to be “lay leaders” within their congregation, demonstrating an explicit divergence from the clergy-centered subschool. These lay leaders are trained by both PICO and Interfaith to have “one-on-ones” with other people outside the organization to try and recruit them to be a part of Interfaith. One-on-ones are focused on identifying the interests of people within the community, giving them the opportunity to speak about what they are struggling with in order to activate them into taking political action. These one-on-ones are how the vast majority of people involved in Interfaith come to participate in religious activism in their congregation. Rather than having the clergy tap into the laity and inspire them to act, it is an outside organization, in this case a registered 501c(3) non-profit, that teaches small groups of members specific strategies, such as the one-on-ones, to involve more individuals and congregations in their various mobilizations.

PICO, despite its transition into Faith in Action, is still a nationally functioning organization that wields power at both a national and local level.³² Their mobilization capacities

are captured by Richard Wood in his observation of Saint Elizabeth Catholic Church and their efforts with PICO to revitalize a local abandoned building.³³ This work was part of a broader PICO effort to generate jobs and economic development in Oakland, and PICO organizers were at every meeting of the lay leaders who were working to protest the current use of the abandoned building. When the pastor of the church was not being particularly supportive, the PICO organizer assigned to the lay leader meeting helped facilitate a conversation about how to bring the pastor back into the fold. As the campaign moved past the strategizing phase, PICO's network combined with Saint Elizabeth's lay leaders were able to recruit five times the number of people to their organizing meetings as had been previously there.

Another author who provides critical insight into the role of coalitions on mobilizing congregations is Kristin Geraty in her work with Lake County United in suburban Chicago.³⁴ Lake County United (LCU) is identified as a broad-based community organization because of its large reach, with 35 dues-paying religious institutions in their constituency. Like Interfaith, however, LCU is affiliated with an even larger, national coalition, in this case the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF). LCU gets many of its organizational tactics from IAF and specifically from IAF's founder Saul Alinsky, tactics that involve recruiting other congregations in Lake County for membership. One specific aspect of the IAF's involvement in LCU is the way recruitment within congregations is required as a part of membership. Leaders, which can be both clergy or laity, of congregations that are members of LCU have an expected turnout from their congregation for public LCU meetings. LCU, and by extension IAF, provides leadership training for affiliated congregations so that they can actively mobilize their members more effectively, with their focus being on issues of poverty, housing-affordability, education, and workforce development.

We have seen two compelling descriptions of how coalitions impact the way congregations mobilize for progressive action, but what about political campaigns? In 2008, Rebecca Sager conducted participant observation of the congressional campaign for Democratic candidate Tom Perriello in Virginia.³⁵ This campaign took place in Virginia's 5th district, one of the most religious districts in the country, and was the site of a new style of outreach and mobilization from Perriello's campaign team. Sager writes that the Perriello campaign was explicitly religious, with messaging (such as the usage of the religiously-loaded term "common good" for his slogan) and practices (detailed below) designed to recruit local Christians. If voting and volunteering for a candidate is a form of political activism, then Perriello's campaign is an interesting site for examining what mobilizes congregations for progressive causes.

Perriello conducted "listening sessions" with local pastors to hear about their problems and let them know that the Democratic party had not abandoned faith-based leadership. His entire staff created a "tithing" campaign where they spent 10% of their time working for Perriello doing volunteer work for the local community instead. Most critically, Perriello made regular visits to congregations, even if he was not speaking publicly from the pulpit, to meet with and talk with ordinary religious folks. While Sager does not have exit poll data that demonstrates the explicit correlation between these efforts and the outcome of the election, Tom Perriello narrowly beat a six-term incumbent for the congressional seat, leading Sager (and the Democratic party organizers she interviews) to claim that the faith-based campaigning was a viable political strategy. This outreach had mobilized congregations, which are described as being "at the heart of the strategies employed to sway religious voters,"³⁶ to become Democratic party voters and, for some, volunteers or activists.

Through following the campaign and her interviews, she found a clear line in the activism that could be traced back to the 2004 presidential election. In that year, the Catholic John Kerry lost the Catholic vote to the Evangelical incumbent George Bush. As the Democratic party looked to evaluate their trend towards secularism in the wake of that loss, many activists saw it as an opportunity to refocus the Democratic party on asserting its claims on moral issues through faith-based activism, resulting in a rise of progressive religious coalitions between 2005 and 2007. This is a moment where we can see social movement theory providing insights into congregational mobilization. The political opportunity structures created an avenue for activism to be effective, in this case in the election of a political campaign. Organizers seized on this opportunity to make political change and worked to mobilize local congregations.

Throughout the analysis of the literature in this subschool, we have seen how outside organizations can shape congregational activism. By reaching out to individuals and congregations, coalitions, non-profits, and political campaigns can recruit new activists. They do this through both outreach to both the clergy and the laity, blurring the lines of what clergy-inspired or laity-inspired activism looks like. By training newly-minted activists in their ranks, they are able to further their recruitment and increase participation in political actions.

The Bottom-Up School

The bottom-up school of thought represents a divergent set of scholarly opinions from the top-down school. Where the two subschools within the top-down school, that of the roles of clergy and outside organizations, demonstrated the ways in which the members of a congregation were mobilized for action by people pushing them to do so, the bottom-up school will show how congregants themselves are the mobilizing agents for action. These scholars describe how the laity within a congregation encourage and inspire other members, if not the whole congregation,

to mobilize for progressive activism. This school of thought is smaller in comparison to the top-down school, with fewer scholars finding evidence of this phenomenon. However, there are some critical findings from influential scholars that differ from the top-down school and provide compelling evidence to why the bottom-up school, as I have called it, matters.

Perhaps the most important article in this school of thought comes from Beyerlein and Ryan in their analysis of the Women's March on Chicago (WMC) on January 21st, 2017 in response to President Donald Trump's election.³⁷ Beyerlein and Ryan sought to examine the way religious institutions, of which there were 30 officially listed and many more unregistered ones that participated, showed up and engaged in the march. They interviewed individuals from 44 congregations in the Chicago area, generally speaking to approximately three people from each congregation (including the clergy). Through their analysis of the interviews, they coded each of the congregations into three categories: clergy-driven, jointly-driven, and laity-driven. Each of these labels attempts to explain, in broad strokes, the dynamics of the congregation that led to its participation in the WMC.

The labels of clergy-driven and jointly-driven were applied to a significantly smaller portion of the congregations, with five and six congregations being labelled as such respectively. For the five congregations that were mobilized by their clergy, Beyerlein and Ryan found it to be within the typical lens through which congregational mobilization is viewed in the literature, with clergy speaking during services, holding separate sessions to talk, and signing people up to participate. The jointly-driven congregations, of which there were six, were viewed as having a collaborative relationship between the clergy and the laity, where support and encouragement was given back and forth. While this may seem like it could be a separate school of thought, I have included it here because of how clergy are not activating their members for action but rather

collaborating with them to support their endeavors, marking a distinction between this jointly-driven conception of mobilization and the top-down school of thought.

Finally, Beyerlein and Ryan found that, out of the 44 congregations, 33 were mobilized due to the persistence of their laity. While their description of clergy-driven mobilization belongs within the top-down school of thought, Beyerlein and Ryan discuss how the activism of the large majority of congregations at the WMC were driven by the opinions, desires, and passion of the laity within their congregations. The egalitarian norms of the modern congregation (elaborated below), write Beyerlein and Ryan, allowed for the parishioners to lead themselves and not rely on their clergy to cultivate grievances within their congregation or push them to act. This article is one of the most important pieces of analysis in determining what dynamics within the congregation cause it to mobilize for progressive causes, finding that 75% of congregations were led by their laity to do so.

This concept of egalitarian ideals in modern congregations is described in the writing of Nancy Ammerman.³⁸ Ammerman's team of researchers conducted interviews with members of 549 congregations in seven areas across the United States that made up a representative sample of religious institutions nationwide. Their findings included the idea that mainline Protestant congregations, which engage in double the civic activity of other religious institutions, are the most likely to highlight and emphasize the democratic nature of their congregation. In mainline Protestant congregations, the laity is frequently involved in decision-making and have a desire to have their faith show up in their everyday life. This orientation towards democratic ideals and engaging with faith in the day-to-day help explain why lay leaders can and do show up as mobilizers for their congregations.

While Beyerlein and Ryan and Ammerman seek to explain the importance of laity-driven mobilization for progressive activism due to the democratic and egalitarian ideals of many modern congregations, other authors attempt to de-emphasize how crucial other scholars have viewed clergy to be in shaping church culture. In their book *The Political Influence of Churches*, Djupe and Gilbert highlight how critical social networks are to political mobilization within congregations, with the laity playing a principal role in developing political consciousness and attitudes towards activism.³⁹ They argue that social networks tie people's faith to their daily lives, a key component that leads to political mobilization. Beyerlein and Hipp put forward a similar idea, that the networks within churches created by the laity help move other members in the congregation to engage in civic actions outside of the church.⁴⁰ In his aforementioned research on the "comfortable culture" that is being combatted within churches, John Delehanty describes how lay leaders can be at the forefront of changing the culture of their congregation to focus more on the collective than on the individual.⁴¹ While his analysis does not focus on differences between those leaders in their effectiveness, he shows that contesting the comfortable culture is an important step in mobilizing congregations for activism, and a step that is many times being taken by the laity rather than exclusively the clergy.

In addition, the concept of resource mobilization from the field of social movement theory can be viewed as an important factor in determining why a congregation will mobilize. Resource mobilization theory analyzes social movement formation through its access to resources, arguing that social movements will occur when disgruntled groups have adequate resources to engage in disruptive action. These resources do not need to come from the group themselves because they can be aided by actors who are supportive to the cause. The most

obvious resource that can be given and used is financial support, but time, connections, and other intangibles can be leveraged as well for the benefit of a social movement.

Nancy Ammerman, in addition to providing insights into the concept of the “democratic ideal,” also demonstrates how important financial resources are to being civically engaged.⁴² Ammerman found that institutions are more likely to connect with outside organizations in the public sphere than their counterparts if they have financial resources to support that connection. The correlation Ammerman found was simple: the more money a congregation had, the more connections and partnerships they were likely to make outside of their congregation. These outside relationships do not always lead to contentious activism, Ammerman writes, but civic engagement itself may be a form of activism on its own, just of a different degree.⁴³ In their book *A Shared Future: Faith-Based Organizing for Racial Equity and Ethical Democracy*, Wood and Fulton echo this finding on a national level, showing how increased financial resources are a key reason that accounts for the rise of progressive faith-based organizing that is impacting change above small localities.⁴⁴

Finally, I will turn to the concept of grievances within social movement theory to explain why bottom-up mobilization might occur. Grievance theory is the most conceptually simple of the theories scholars of the religious left discuss, with it describing situations where heightened grievances with the current state of affairs leads congregations and religious individuals to engage in action to change the status quo. Many of the authors who conduct research on the political mobilization of the religious left describe the catalysts that led congregants and coalitions to become activists. Some of these scholars have already been mentioned in this literature review in either the top-down or bottom-up school of thought, so I will be brief in my

description of what they found when interviewing faith-based organizers about what led them to act.

Richard Wood described how the neglect of communities in Oakland led congregations to pressure city councilmembers to act favorably for job creation and economic development.⁴⁵ Jack Jenkins provides compelling accounts of how the police killings of Black men, climate change, and the embrace of Donald Trump by the religious right compelled religious congregations and faith leaders to mobilize for progressive action.⁴⁶ Grace Yukich analyses the New Sanctuary Movement and how increasingly harsh immigration laws and raids have spawned new religious activism on behalf of the undocumented. Helene Slessarev-Jamir highlights unjust urban restructuring, workers' rights violations, and colonialism's aftermath on global poverty as all being grievances that spawned action from religious progressives.⁴⁷ Finally, Beyerlein and Ryan put forward strong evidence as to how the "moral shock" of Donald Trump's election immediately compelled congregations to act in ways they had not before.⁴⁸ Each of these scholars have described different grievances that religious actors have had with society at large and how those grievances pushed them and their peers to mobilize for progressive causes.

Throughout the bottom-up school of thought, we have seen authors demonstrating how the laity within a congregation can be responsible for mobilizing their peers for progressive activist action. In some congregations, this can be as explicit as laity leading the way in planning to attend and bringing their peers to a protest event, such as the Women's March on Chicago. In other congregations, this shows up with the laity having an active hand in changing their church's culture to being more outwardly oriented and civically engaged. Lay members of a congregation can also gain access to resources or be mobilized through their grievances with the

status quo. All of this is done through a democratic ideal within congregations, particularly mainline Protestant institutions that frequently engage in progressive activism, that allows for increased participation in decision-making from the laity.

Summary

Throughout this literature review, we have seen the diverse ways and reasons congregations mobilize for progressive activism. The scholars of the top-down school of thought offer arguments that focus on the role of the clergy and outside organizations in tapping the energy of their congregations to act. The bottom-up school offers evidence from scholars who found ways in which the democratic ideals of many religious institutions provide avenues for the laity to act as the mobilizing agents for their congregation, both recruiting and mobilizing their peers. With all these scholars put together, we can see a wide array of compelling arguments as to what accounts for heightened mobilization among congregations for progressive causes.

Research Design

What accounts for heightened mobilization for progressive causes among some suburban white Protestant congregations? This question may feel simple in its phrasing but is complicated by the review of the literature conducted in the previous section. Many scholars posit many different answers, but what is clear is that mobilization can happen both from the top-down and the bottom-up, providing a portrait of who is making the call to mobilize. Knowing that the push for action can come from both directions, this thesis seeks to examine something different: what resources would predict that this push, either from the top-down or the bottom-up, be successful? This focus on resources will allow for a broadened understanding of congregational-level

mobilization for progressive causes because the goal is not to understand *who* is making the push, but rather *why* that push worked.

Why focus on resources? As mentioned in the literature review, the three areas of social movement theory that appear relevant in studying congregational mobilization are political opportunity structures, grievances, and resources. First, it became clear through my preliminary conversations with local clergy that they were all operating from very similar grievances. The election of President Trump, the death of George Floyd, the refugee and immigrant crises throughout the late 2010s, and other common progressive talking points were all mentioned fairly equally. Second, the concept of embracing a political opportunity was never brought up in any of my conversations, leading me to believe that congregations were not choosing issues based on their understanding of present politics and their ability to make change. If grievances appeared fairly constant and political opportunities were not a focus for congregations, resources make for an excellent site of inquiry because they are an aspect of every congregation at different levels.

In addition, within the literature review, we saw little emphasis on resources beyond the realm of the financial, leading to an opportunity to potentially offer new insights into congregational mobilization. Establishing an understanding that different levels of resources might lead to different levels of mobilization would be a substantive addition to the current scholarship on the religious left in the United States. With this in mind, I developed the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis: If both the clergy and laity are supportive of mobilizing for progressive causes, the more resources they have at their disposal the more likely they are to mobilize.

The above hypothesis is much simpler than the one that I had originally intended to study, but I still hope that I am able to examine congregational-level mobilization at least somewhat holistically by taking many resources into account. Based on my survey of the scholarly literature, I identified eight resources that a congregation might have that could predict how likely they were to mobilize for progressive causes. I have listed those resources below, along with the rationale for why this would increase mobilization:

Time	People who have more free-time will be able to devote that time to mobilizing. Congregations with many non-working adults will have the highest levels of mobilization.
Money	Wealthy congregations will be able to financially support progressive causes. In addition, they can remove barriers to mobilization, such as funding transportation or childcare.
Previous Work Experience	Working as community organizers, in politics, or on specific issues will help lay members mobilize their community by giving them valuable expertise in those areas.
Education	Members with educational experiences that deepen understandings of traditionally progressive issues (race, gender/sex, immigration, etc.) will be bring that experience to church, educating others.
Personal Identity	If members of the church have personal identities related to progressive issue advocacy, they will be more invested in working on those issues and capable of relating that experience to their peers.
Strong Connections	Established relationships to individuals, other religious institutions, or organizations (political advocacy groups like PICO) will help bring to light new issues for the church and encourage them to act.
Average Age	Younger members of a congregation will be more inclined to mobilize for progressive causes given the growing trend of a generational gap in “liberal” and “conservative” values. ⁴⁹
Clergy Tenure	The more time a clergy member has had in their role at the church, the greater their ability to shape the church’s agenda and the orientation of the church towards progressivism.

In addition to defining each resource, it is valuable to build a definition for what “progressive religion” is in this context. The term “progressive religion” is complex and the practice of distinct congregations even moreso. In my research, my goal was to largely center how each church would describe itself, and each case study I chose had a clergy member who would characterize their church as being further towards progressivism than conservatism. However, having a definition for this term is also helpful, simply to orient this study and conversations that revolve around progressivism. For this, I will borrow from Braunstein, Fuist, and Williams and their excellent introduction to *Religion and Progressive Activism*, where they articulate a working definition for progressive religion.⁵⁰

Braunstein, Fuist, and Williams describe four overlapping dimensions that exist within progressive religion, of which any can be used to identify a progressive institution. The first is related to action, with a congregation participating in activism related to greater economic, political, or social equality. The second dimension are the values of the group, with a “commitment to reform-oriented change and/or social justice” signaling progressiveness. Holding progressive identities is the third dimension, where a religious group actively identifies with other groups generally accepted to be progressive. Last, a theology that seeks to reform and challenge traditional faith traditions to make them more inclusive is a progressive act. Each of these four dimensions can overlap in any number of ways to help describe progressive religion, but it is important to note that the multi-faceted definition demonstrates the difficulty in labelling all progressive religion under the same values. In this thesis, I am broadly examining this notion of progressive religion, while placing specific emphasis on studying the action portion of Braunstein, Fuist, and Williams’ definition.

Last, it is important to explicitly note how I will be describing both my independent and dependent variables. The independent variable within this project are the nine resources I will be studying, but every resource might not be applicable in the context of a given congregation. My goal is to let the people I am speaking with define how important various resources are to them, allowing their words to be the deciding factor on what resources are most relevant in their congregation. The dependent variable is the level of mobilization for progressive causes a given church achieves. While this variable will be extensively guided by my lay and clergy members' self-description, I will also seek to contrast their level of mobilization with the other churches in the study.

Based on my preliminary conversations with local pastors, I determined that this dependent variable of mobilization for progressive causes can best be broken down into two categories: personal mobilization and political mobilization. The concept of personal work is the type of activism that engages the immediate community by providing educational opportunities aimed at changing people's opinions, improving local practices, or responding to basic needs. Personal work focuses on oneself and one's proximal neighbors, be they in church or the surrounding neighborhood. Examples include starting a reading group on the history of racism in the United States, installing solar panels on the roof of the church, providing housing and support to local refugees, or establishing a food pantry open to the neighborhood. Engaging in the personal provides much-needed assistance to communities and can change people's opinions, making them open to new types of political engagement.

If an aspect of personal work is helping the community with needs that are unmet, political work identifies the underlying causes of those needs and seeks to change them. Political mobilization differs from the personal in its focus towards making systemic change, most often

through legislative processes. Examples of political mobilization can include writing letters to elected officials, journeying to legislative offices to demand policy change, visibly protesting specific injustices, or joining coalitions aimed at lobbying politicians or corporate entities. I make this distinction between the personal and the political because I do not wish to privilege political mobilization over the personal. While making systemic change can feel like the most desirable result and the goal to which congregations should aim, personal mobilization has a direct community impact and frequently creates immediately tangible benefits along with long-term effects. During the case section for each church, I will strive to describe both of these different types of mobilization and the resources that can contribute to them.

Case Selection

Having identified the eight resources that could all potentially lead to an increased likelihood of mobilizing for progressive causes, I needed to determine the best way to study these resources. As many of the scholars who occupy prominent positions in the literature, I chose an interview-based approach that would involve speaking with the laity and clergy of local churches about their work on progressive causes and the role of these eight resources within it. Selecting cases to study became a daunting task, for throughout the suburbs of Philadelphia there are a number of churches that contain seemingly progressive websites, particularly aspects of their advertising that appear to be LGBTQ+ inclusive. I began contacting local churches to set up preliminary interviews with members of their clergy. My stated goal was simple: have an informal conversation about the social justice work that the church was doing to understand if they could be a part of my project. In the process, I was also building relationships that would be invaluable due to the clergy members' ability to assess the resources I was hoping to analyze, provide feedback on my interview questions, and put me into contact with other churches in the

area pursuing like-minded work. This is a prime example of how research, particularly efforts that are ethnographic and people-focused, should be a collaborative project because the “subjects” of the study frequently have incredibly helpful insights and wisdom to share.

As I was selecting cases, I was also looking specifically at the resources these churches had at their disposal. The goal was to find the existence of these resources in each congregation at different levels than each other so I could conduct a comparative analysis. One important caveat is that I was seeking to study what majority-white spaces look like and how people with non-majority identities influence others. So, while there are a great number of historically Black congregations in the suburbs of Philadelphia, this was not the focus of my outreach.

My preliminary conversations began with three institutions: East Presbyterian, West Episcopal, and North Baptist. I spoke with clergy members from each of these institutions that have become my central points of contact for communicating with other members of their church. At East Presbyterian this was Associate Pastor of Adult Education and Mission Eliza. At West Episcopal this was Reverend Austin. And at North Baptist these were Co-Pastors Lydia and Michael, a pair who operate in the same capacity right down to the salary and job descriptions.

Fortunately, each one of these three institutions were a perfect fit for a case study on progressive activism in predominantly white suburban congregations. Not only are they engaged in some aspect of social justice work, they are doing so in different ways and utilizing different resources. East Presbyterian is unique in its size in the suburbs of Philadelphia, with over 2,300 members. This is roughly ten times that of either West Episcopal or North Baptist. Not only due to their size but also to the type of congregants they attract and retain, East Presbyterian has financial resources that are unmatched by any other local church. Another identifiable difference

between these three churches are the demographic identities people hold within the congregation. North Baptist has a small number of Black members who are willing to speak to their experience with racism and immigrants representing over a dozen different nationalities, while East Presbyterian has very few non-white congregants. Interestingly, West Episcopal seems to situate itself somewhere in the middle, with everyone I speak to mentioning how they have many multiracial individuals and families but not many people who speak directly to their experiences.

In terms of age differences, it is important to note that the average age of Mainline Protestant churchgoers in America is older than most other faiths and the cases I have selected largely follow that trend. Therefore, I am looking for an active (albeit small) youth contingency in these churches that may be a proponent of engaging in more progressively-oriented activity, because younger people tend to trend more “liberal” on these issues. With regard to the clergy tenure at the church, it is easily identifiable which clergy have been in their roles longer. Reverend Austin of West Episcopal is very new to the position, having been hired about a year ago when our conversations began. This is an exciting opportunity to learn more about a church community that has actively chosen to have a young, queer man become their pastor and how he may or may not be shaping congregational culture. Reverend Eliza came to East Presbyterian in 2015 while Reverends Lydia and Michael stepped into their roles at North Baptist in 2011 and 2006, respectively. As one can see, this creates roughly five-year distinctions between each clergy member and the assumption of their position.

This brings us to our fourth and final case study, South Methodist. I heard about South Methodist from Reverend Austin, as he described their pastor, Reverend John, as more “radical” than himself and mentioned that they were an active part of POWER Metro, a coalition of interfaith institutions engaged in political advocacy. I suspected that they would be a great

addition to the study, and when I was finally able to get the correct contact information for Reverend John, that initial thought was confirmed. South Methodist provides another exciting opportunity to examine progressive activism at work in a congregation that differs from the other case studies. They are actively involved in the most prominent interfaith coalition in the area, have a slightly younger group of people taking on leadership roles, have a pastor who has been there for 25 years, and pursue most of their activism as a collective rather than in smaller committees.

Ultimately, I conducted between two and four interviews with lay members of each church participating in this study and two interviews with each clergy member, one before speaking to their congregants and one after. This led to a total of twenty conversations, almost all of which were recorded and later transcribed.

Interview Questions

These basic differences between cases were enough to initiate more in-depth conversations with lay members of each institution to start learning about the resources I could not immediately see and gain deeper insights into the ones I had initially identified. An important note: in general, each person I spoke with in this project was several decades my senior, meaning that they had wisdom to share that I may not have readily seen. And, as someone who is not an avid churchgoer, there is much about congregational life that I could miss. Therefore, in these conversations I wanted to be as open as possible to having them steer me in new directions. I say that simply so that it is understood that these conversations did not follow a formula, they went in various directions and I did my best to ask questions and learn about resources within a normal discussion. Below, I have created another table with each resource and the type of

questions I would ask to initiate conversation, acknowledging that the discussion then went in a myriad of directions:

Time	Do members of the church have free time to volunteer/participate? Do clergy have the capacity to take on new responsibilities in supporting/leading mobilization for progressive causes?
Money	Does the church have finances that can be leveraged to support progressive causes or support themselves in engaging with those causes? Where is the support for social justice causes reflected in the budget of the church?
Previous Work Experience	Have members of the church had jobs/roles that helped them understand certain issues and bolster their ability to organize their community?
Education	Have you or anyone else you know of participated in literacy programs around certain issues? How does the church initiate its own education programs? On what knowledge does it draw from?
Personal Identity	Who leads initiatives the church undertakes for progressive causes? What is at stake for them personally? Do members of the congregation speak from their experience to encourage others to act on certain issues?
Connections	Do you affiliate or partner with any groups outside of your church? Are you a member of any coalitions? What relationships do you or other people in the church have with people from other local congregations? Has that influenced the work you all do?
Average Age	How old is the typical member of your congregation? Do you have a youth group that gets involved in advocating for progressive causes?
Clergy Tenure	How long have you held this position? What are some of the insights you have gained at this institution in your time here?

As mentioned, a key part of my conversations was a willingness to let those I was speaking with guide me in new directions. The more I spoke with people, the more it became clear that I needed to be thinking about another factor. So, I chose to add another resource into my analysis: collective identity.

Collective Identity	A congregation with a history in progressive action, embraces the label of “progressive,” and emphasizes putting their faith into action will be more likely to mobilize.
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Like any resource, collective identity is one that can be leveraged to help mobilize for progressive action and can also be cultivated for future use. In the following section, I will move into an analysis of five resources I found to be less relevant in terms of predicting mobilization followed by the four case studies and four resources I found to be most salient.

Individual Resource Analysis

As established in the research design, I set out to analyze eight different resources a congregation might have at their disposal to pursue progressive causes, adding an additional resource based on my interviews with the clergy and lay members of each congregation. As mentioned, the intention was to take a more holistic look at the four case studies I had chosen, trying to bring as much into consideration as could reasonably be done for a project of this size. With that goal in mind, I now have the task of presenting this research to the reader in a digestible way that also provides descriptions of each resource, analysis of its role in the congregation, and conclusions as to which resources seem to matter the most or are in need of the most elaboration.

All of the resources I chose to examine generated worthwhile insights from those who agreed to speak with me, but after concluding my interviews with each of my cases, it slowly became apparent that some resources were more relevant than others, or at least relevant in a non-obvious way worthy of explanation. I then began the task of dividing the resources into two groups, those of lesser relevance and those worth taking a deep-dive into. I found that the resources of time, age, money, related work experience, and educational background to be less

salient in terms of predicting progressively-oriented outcomes than those of personal identity, the tenure of the clergy, connections, and collective identity. I will briefly examine each of the less-relevant resources on their own, pulling in the voices of every case study. Then, I will move into a more detailed discussion of each case study, analyzing the four most important resources within each case. By doing so, I hope to draw meaningful conclusions about the role each resource plays and its relevance in pursuing progressive causes by comparing the different levels of resources and mobilization among each case study.

Time

How much time do members of the congregation have to devote to progressive causes? This was a typical question within my interviews that frequently received the same response: “not a lot.” That response, however, was surprising. One would assume that, to become engaged in social justice work, you need adequate time to do so. However, what became clear during my interviews was that everyone struggled with competing time commitments, especially those who worked full-time jobs or had younger children. The two members of South Methodist I spoke with, for example, both had full-time jobs and were still leading initiatives at their church. Carla, a member of East Presbyterian who chairs their Environmental Justice Committee, said it better than I can:

My theory on this is it's like a puddle and a puddle always fills up regardless of what it fills up with. So, people are always busy with other things because the puddle is always full. And sometimes, with each of these people that you're talking to at East Presbyterian, I think it's hard to get space in the puddle. It's hard to get space in the puddle.

Carla went on to doubt whether the puddle was the best analogy, but I think it wonderfully describes her point. Everyone is preoccupied with any number of things, so finding the time to engage with her on environmental justice is difficult. Having some time they can dedicate to

progressive causes is needed, but as many other congregants also noted, it is frequently a small handful of people doing almost all of the work. This dynamic was not unique to any congregation, all had a dedicated core who were always trying to pull in others. Frank is one of the leaders of the Ecology Faith in Action Team at North Baptist and he described the same phenomenon:

We're finding as a church that as we have a number of boards and a cabinet, we've had to restructure those in order to reduce the number of boards and reduce the number of members required to operate each board, because people do not have the time. All the younger families, you know, trying to raise children, trying to hold down a couple jobs, or at least even one job for each couple in the family. Having available time is an issue.

This is a typical dynamic within the church and theme within my conversations- dedicated and passionate individuals like Carla and Frank are doing tremendous amounts of work for their congregation and are frequently looking for others to help them. However, even with people having limited time, all of these congregations are actively working through many committees or as a whole to pursue various social justice causes because there is a contingent of people who, while it may not be easy, can find the time and energy to accomplish many of their goals. Thus, time becomes an obvious resource congregations need at their disposal to engage with progressive issues, but not one of particular note because all congregants have a full schedule. Instead, it is a matter of commitment and interest in participating.

Average Age

The examination of free time is, in many ways, also an exploration of the way age plays out within a congregation. My original thoughts on age was that youth participation would be a driving force within a congregation when pursuing progressive goals, as younger generations are trending more “liberal” in their views.⁵¹ However, my conversations illuminated an entirely

different dynamic, one where those who are retired are the driving force behind much of their congregations' work due to their increased access to time, the experiences they bring to the table, and the power their opinions hold in the congregation. When I spoke to Jim, a parishioner at West Episcopal, he described the different time constraints on him in comparison to many other parishioners, including his wife:

A large portion of the church, myself included, are retired ... I can have a "job" at West Episcopal and have it not really feel like a job ... My wife, who is just a couple years younger than me, still has a full-time job. And her ability to connect to West Episcopal is much more short term, episodic. Maybe something will happen for her, but she can't be the continual presence I could. And that's not uncommon. The people who are below the age of Medicare and are active in the church really do a lot of juggling ... Jobs don't have borders, jobs don't even pay attention to the church's calendar.

Jim's ability to be a leader in the church in multiple outreach groups, from the Immigration Action Group to the Guatemala Companion Ministry, is aided by the time he has due to his retirement. This bolsters the previous claim that free time is helpful for congregants. However, it is important to remember that free time alone does not appear to increase the likelihood of mobilization for progressive causes. Outside of the time retirement grants you, the older you are the more depth and breadth of experience you can draw from in turning your faith into action. Someone who articulated this beautifully was Bill, the leader of North Baptist's Peacemaking Faith in Action Team:

I'm the generation of the Vietnam war. I was in college in the mid sixties [and] seminary in the late sixties, peace or peacemaking was a very important part of how I played out my faith. So, I was a part of demonstrations. I was a part of the anti-war movement. And so as I was getting my education, that was a very strong element of how I played my faith out, not only through my local church or through faith relationships, but how I saw what it meant to be a Christian was to be on the front lines of antiwar.

Bill is bringing not just the organizational experience of being a part of the anti-war efforts of the sixties, but also the theological tools to explain why this matters to him. Those tools, acquired

over time, come not just in the form of experience in community organizing and deeper understandings of theology, but also as critical knowledge of how the specific church functions. Mary, another member of North Baptist, in describing her soon-to-be ninety-year-old father's role in the church, highlighted this idea of "institutional knowledge and wisdom" that so many elders are bringing to the congregation:

I feel like he's got so much historical knowledge of the church dating back to, actually, even before we moved here in 1969, because he was doing studies of churches for the American Baptist headquarters and he had done the church study. So, you just don't have that in younger people. You, you don't have that institutional knowledge and wisdom.

However, despite these benefits that age brings to the congregation through added time and knowledge (inside and outside of the church), many people I spoke to were seeing this as less of a benefit and more of just the reality of their institutions. All four of these case studies have an older population, so their efforts to engage in progressive work almost always must be done by those older folks. The variable for age, then, becomes difficult to comparatively analyze because each congregation is roughly the same, including those leading around progressive issues.

Returning to Carla from East Presbyterian:

The thing that I would say is I've been head of the Environmental Justice Committee for as long as it's been an existence. They need somebody else to come in and do something. So it's done differently in creative ways that I'm not doing things, with a different vision. I mean, cast a different vision, do it. And there's nobody to do that.

Many of the congregants I spoke to echoed Carla's sentiments, that they want to have a deeper engagement from a younger contingent but are stuck as the ones in their faith community who are passionate about the work. However, in addition to the older age of these congregations being a reality to work within rather than exclusively a resource to call upon, there are a few important outliers within the case studies that demonstrate how those still holding full-time jobs

or young people can become catalysts for action. One such example can be found in South Methodist and their lay leader, Emma. While working full-time and only being a member of the church for less than five years, Emma has become the lay leader of South Methodist and is working closely on issues of domestic violence, a topic that will be discussed further during South Methodist's dedicated section in this paper.

Another example is with North Baptist and their support of the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2015 through a vigil and the placement of a banner at the front of their lawn. I will leave it to Reverend Lydia to begin explaining:

A young adult participant, not even a member of the church, a participant went to a peace conference and came back. She came back and it was after the Charleston shooting. Michael and I called a meeting of the entire congregation to talk about what we were going to do. And she spoke up and said, the one-year anniversary of the killing of Michael Brown is coming up and I want to hold a vigil.

We will pick this story back up later during the section to examine North Baptist more thoroughly, but it is worth mentioning this starting point as a moment where youth energy and interest initially activated the congregation to act on an issue. Of special note, as well, is that this was roughly five years before many other churches began to embrace the language of the Black Lives Matter Movement in 2020. While we have seen the many ways that an older population can be incredibly beneficial to a congregation's progressively-oriented efforts, the youth members of a congregation can act as catalysts in different ways, leaving this as a resource that can be utilized but is not necessarily needed to mobilize for social justice.

Money

The amount of money at a congregation's disposal is an immediately obvious resource that would seem to predict increased mobilization/involvement in anything, including social justice issues, the rationale being that money buys you more time, better educational experiences,

and the ability to pursue more projects. In addition, redistributing the wealth of your congregants to others is a legitimate form of engagement and support that many progressive organizations need. As described in the case selection section, East Presbyterian is far and away the wealthiest congregation in this study, with some of the largest parts of the work they do going into managing the financial support they provide outside organizations.

However, having the ability to donate large sums of money to various groups can be a limiting factor in many ways due to the interests of the wealthier members of the congregation taking a front seat, with Reverend Eliza describing a situation where the Refugee Committee at East Presbyterian wanted to do something about the development of detention centers in Philadelphia:

Devereux was the company that was going to be building it, or managing it ... And so we had somebody here that brought it up, and everyone said, "Tell us more. It sounds horrible, what can we do? Can we march? Can we protest?" and all this kind of stuff. And then I got pushback from someone who doesn't have financial interest in it, but said there are a lot of families in this congregation who would be financially connected to that. So, if you're going to push this further, you're going to get in trouble. There are those dynamics sometimes in a congregation like ours. We can push this issue right up until it runs into the financial interests of the members of our congregation.

This part of our conversation happened with a light-hearted attitude and chuckling from Reverend Eliza, but it underlies a real dynamic that can make it difficult for a wealthy institution like East Presbyterian to fully engage in all issues. With well over two thousand members, many of whom are highly affluent, there is the real possibility in running into conflicts of interest that prevent committees, and certainly the congregation as a whole, from pursuing all aspects of progressive activism they may wish to pursue.

When I asked Carla about whether she sees the financial interests of congregants “butting heads” with the desires to be progressive, her response was simple: “Every, every day.” She elaborated after clarifying that this would not paint the best picture of East Presbyterian:

We're really good at writing checks. But, getting people to participate... So, if you say, “Okay, we're going to support this project and we're going to give them X number of dollars, and we're also going to get involved and we're going to do stream cleanups. We're going to plant trees and we're going to weed inner city gardens.” Right? It'd be easier to get people to write the check. It would be like pulling teeth to get people to go out and do those things. This is absolute, this is fact. This is fact because it interrupts people's lives. And that's, I think what we're called to do, I think we need to interrupt our lives.

For Carla, a huge part of her work becomes interrupting those lives of people at East Presbyterian to engage more deeply in the issues of the local community because writing checks is the way they have done things for a long time. There are many ways to mobilize for progressive causes and redistributing money to those causes is one of them, but that is seemingly the main (but not only, as will be discussed later) way that East Presbyterian engages in many of these issues because their congregants are used to using their money and not other resources to impact change around them. In some ways, it feels as though their will to personally engage is limited because of the ease in which they can engage solely through monetary contributions.

The last point I will uplift regarding money as an unnecessary (but, of course, still helpful) resource is that the other churches within this study have far less financial power than East Presbyterian and still manage to mobilize for progressive causes as much or more than East Presbyterian. Ultimately, considering the suburban context regarding money is exceedingly important, because all of these churches have the financial stability to have a small full-time staff and their future in safe hands. Perhaps in other settings, where money is much more scarce and clergy are unable to work full-time, we would see the economic distinction between churches be a more prominent factor in their ability to pursue progressive causes, but in this suburban

context, this is seemingly neither a large contributing or detracting factor. In sum, money is helpful to have because it allows a congregation to have increased avenues of support, but it can also be limiting due to the repercussions of a wealthy culture.

Related Work Experience

The original assumption I operated with was that previous experience in specific fields (community organizing, lobbying, etc.) would have an effect on people's skill and ability to engage in social justice work in their congregation. Through my conversations, this proved to be a more elusive resource than anticipated to study because many people struggle to pinpoint exactly where their past experiences have informed their present practice. However, it is clear that for some people, their current or past careers have a deep impact on the work they do at church. A perfect example of this is Frank, the Ecology Faith in Action Team leader at North Baptist, who described his past jobs when I asked what experiences he was drawing on in his current work on the committee:

I have to go back to my career. I was an environmental consultant for 20 or 30 years. And so I brought with the church a lot of knowledge about the environment and climate change. When I was at Drexel in the 1970s, we studied the greenhouse gas effect ... We calculated a carbon dioxide emission inventory from all the operations of the church. And we included in that and those operations, the driving to and from church in vehicles.

Frank's work is truly impressive and draws deeply from his past experience in a way that was even evident from my conversations with other congregations. If I ever mentioned that North Baptist was off-setting their emissions, including those driving to and from church, other clergy members would be impressed. As an environmental consultant, Frank learned skills that, when he brought them to North Baptist, allowed the church to

pursue environmentally-focused change that no other congregation that I spoke to can match.

Emma, from South Methodist, is another example of someone whose work outside the church is tied to her work within it. When I asked her about her past work experience and its relationship to her current faith-based organizing around domestic violence, she said:

My job is mostly prescribing, but I work with teams of therapists and case managers and we see a lot of trauma. Trauma informed care is essential ... I do find that it all ends up being pretty intertwined. I mean, you know, anybody dealing with domestic violence is traumatized. So, I do find that it's all kind of integrated.

Both Emma and Frank are bringing a certain level of experience, if not expertise, to the social justice work they are doing and without them it seems likely that the work would not happen at all. However, Emma and Frank are outliers in this study with regard to how targeted their career experiences are in relation to their work at church. Most individuals I interviewed did not usually have jobs that were directly related to the work they were then pursuing in church. While certainly it is likely that they are drawing from lessons learned during their careers, most did not make that link between their old jobs and their present participation in anti-racist initiatives or immigration advocacy, for example.

When I spoke about this with Evelyn, a congregant from West Episcopal, she put it succinctly, "I don't know if I can really put my finger on people who are organizers per se, but people sure pick up the mantle and make things happen."

Someone who is picking up that mantle is Olivia, a member of North Baptist, who has transitioned from being a public school teacher to a faith-based environmental activist during her

retirement. I regrettably forgot to record her interview, however, she kindly re-articulated one of her points for me over email, describing what one needs to become an organizer.

Organizing is organizing. When you have a passion, to get action, first you need to find someone else who shares that passion that you can talk to and trust to be helpful. Together you strategize, form a vision, articulate a mission. Then you find a few others that want to work with you. You decide on an action that you want to do, whether it's demonstrating or educating, holding an event or planning a series of events. You reach out to those sectors of the community that you can, and start small ... And I think it's really based on developing respect for all the team members and all the volunteers, allowing each to give what they can and valuing what each can give. I think nothing kills a movement like disrespect for the people you're working with.

I have cut down some of Olivia's insights in an effort to keep this section short, but hopefully the point comes across that she has, during retirement and through the church, become a community organizer that is well-versed in all that role encompasses. She "picked up the mantle" as Evelyn described to take on the work she wanted to do, mobilizing other members of her congregation to do it with her. Through the examples of Olivia, Emma, and Frank, we can see how related work experience can function as a valuable resource for people to draw on, but is not necessary in mobilizing congregations for progressive causes because many people are capable of learning along the way and becoming very successful. This includes leaders like Olivia who had little to no experience as environmental organizer prior to her retirement during which she embraced the role and became an active mobilizer at North Baptist.

Educational Background

Similar to related work experience, the educational background of the congregants or clergy members can be beneficial to congregational activism but churches are perfectly capable of mobilizing for progressive issues without someone who has been educated by an outside

source. One example of educational experience being helpful is seen at North Baptist, where Bill described how they had a member who was a professor:

As I remember the church [had a] sexuality professor at UPenn who began the human sexuality degrees at UPenn. And he was overseeing a whole transgender community within Philadelphia. In fact, it was a national group. He wasn't himself transgender. He was the resource person for that group nationally. And therefore we used his resourcing and his expertise. That's an unusual example ... but we've had some really talented, gifted well-educated people in areas of these social issues.

Aside from this professor who advanced transgender issues to a great degree in the community around North Baptist, the church has frequently had a number of members with PhDs that have provided educational experiences for the rest of the congregation and opened up those experiences to residents of the neighborhood as well, providing for an even greater impact.

However, while these highly qualified individuals are certainly helpful, many churches and their respective committees are operating on their own without much academic expertise in a given field. With information being widely available and people becoming Internet savvy, many churches are facilitating this learning on their own. A key component of this is having a member, or several, who are interested in engaging deeply on a given topic and then guiding the congregation as well. As Evelyn from West Episcopal described it:

We have a group that has been meeting monthly for over a decade. Recently, this group has been reading, for example, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. But it wasn't on purpose, we were responding to the situation and our concerns ... Every time we gather they manage to pull together a resource for us to explore on our own. Whether it is a video, book, an action item ... that's a resource.

Another member of West Episcopal, Jim, described the kind of work he is doing alongside members of the Immigration Action Group to facilitate learning among their church community about what they see as one of the biggest issues in American society:

What happens is sometimes we discover, uncover, or learn of webinars and various events that are being hosted by other organizations. This sounds like a

rich educational experience to have, please listen in. Encourage others to listen in at 2 PM in the afternoon. We have created our own panel discussions and had speakers come in and talk to the issues. So we've done a little bit of driving the content.

Using the resources already available, from literature to events hosted by outside organizations, Jim and Evelyn are doing a great deal of educating at West Episcopal, both learning themselves and guiding others along a learning journey. However, congregants are frequently not alone in their efforts to learn, with many clergy members taking an active role in facilitating educational experiences. Reverend Eliza of East Presbyterian is the best example of this, if not for her title of Associate Pastor of Adult Education and Mission alone. The only committee she chairs at East Presbyterian is the Anti-Racism Task Force, because of what she describes as the delicate nature of the subject matter being discussed by an almost entirely white group and their lack of education. A large part of her job, she describes, is staying current on issues so that she can adequately discuss them with congregants:

But for me, it's also about staying up on whatever's being written, as far as what's in the news and different ways of paying attention to issues. Or, how the subtleties of these conversations kind of shift, right? So like how do you, it's not necessarily that I shift with them, but just sort of [stay up to date].

Through this section, we have seen how educational experiences can be very helpful in assisting a congregation. The background someone with a PhD brings to church is amazing, if they are willing to give their time, in providing a resource for the congregation to engage deeply on a given set of issues. However, a deeply-rooted educational background is not necessary for churches to start learning on their own, with the wide availability of information allowing people to do a lot of educating on their own and with others who are in a similar place as them.

Summary

Each of the five resources described in this section (time, age, money, work experience, and education) are all helpful to have in a congregation that is interested in supporting progressive causes. If one congregation were to have high levels of all of these resources, it is possible to say that they have a higher chance of mobilizing than a congregation that had none of them. However, in this study as demonstrated above, I have found that these five resources, while helpful, are not necessarily needed by a congregation interested in becoming advocates for progressive causes. In the next section, I will go through each of the four cases one by one to examine the four remaining resources of personal identity, the tenure of the clergy, outside connections, and collective identity. The claim I seek to make is that the resources of personal and collective identity are critical resources a congregation can have while increased levels of outside connections and a long a clergy tenure will help to mitigate a lack of personal and collective identity.

Case Studies

East Presbyterian

Sometimes, when driving or walking by a church, you might not look twice or think much of it. Or, you might not even register that it was there at all. This is not the case with East Presbyterian. The edifice itself is a Gothic-style cathedral, while the campus is sprawling enough to warrant a map on their website that shows where you can find parking. When driving by, it always takes several seconds to pass even though there are no intersections to slow you down. A noteworthy presence in the community, East Presbyterian has unmatched financial resources, bringing with it one Head Pastor and five Associate Pastors who preside over a membership of

around 2,300. They are an incredibly unique church in comparison with others in their area, so I was hopeful upon reaching out to Associate Pastor Eliza that they would be willing to be a part of this study.

Reverend Eliza was the perfect person to have my first conversation with, bringing energy, expertise, and patience to a discussion with me as I was just getting a feel for interviewing and refining my project. She quickly connected me with other local clergy members and congregants of East Presbyterian, allowing for this project to take shape. When she would talk about East Presbyterian's level of mobilization, it would frequently come down to an idea that people believed themselves to be social justice advocates by virtue of attending a church that pursues some progressive issues. However, this belief was not always rooted in reality because the congregation was not following through on promises made, such as the idea that half of their budget would go towards outreach, something that was never true. My view of East Presbyterian is one of a church that has moderate levels of personal mobilization, engaging in reading groups and donating significant amounts of money to local efforts, but lower levels of political mobilization due to the lack of a progressive collective identity in the church. Their political mobilization has come recently in the form of participating in vigils/protests for racial justice and some minor participation in environmental and immigration advocacy for legislative change. They represent an interesting case study where everyone I spoke to is very eager to bring social justice issues to the forefront of the church but frequently struggle to, providing us insights into how resources can sometimes be leveraged to mobilize the congregation and sometimes cannot.

First, in thinking about the personal identities that members of East Presbyterian hold, it is an overwhelmingly white congregation. Over the summer of 2020, East Presbyterian has become engaged in racial justice work that has been both personal and somewhat political. Their

education-focused personal work has been largely through the Anti-Racism Taskforce, chaired by Reverend Eliza. I spoke with Jane, an Asian-American woman working on the committee, who described some of the difficulties of pursuing these efforts in an almost all-white space. When I asked her about the role BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) individuals play in educating their white peers and how the taskforce uses existing resources to lighten that emotional burden, she responded:

I agree with you that we don't need to pull people in to do that work. However, many people from the book group or other members believe that's how one experiences growth and, at least during the book group, we did have many conversations about that and even in the book she discusses that. And so if they had, if they did read the book, then they read that and either disregarded it or, you know, just put it aside.

This is a common theme in all these white churches and frequently brought out in my conversations with congregants of East Presbyterian. White people struggle to engage in racial justice work without other BIPOC people to engage with, specifically Black people. Reverend Eliza humorously describes the dynamic when reflecting on a meeting she had with local clergy, including Reverend Austin from West Episcopal:

We had a great call, actually, that Austin was on and everybody just was going around and just sharing, because we hadn't met for a few months, what are you all doing? And so, people are like, "Oh, we have this group and we have this and this..." you know? So, I of course participate in that. "Well, we have this webinar coming up in this and..." And then it was Austin and Austin goes, "My people just want me to find them Black friends." And I was like, "Oh, I changed my answer."

How, then, do these pastors engage their congregants on issues of racial justice when they have few, if any, BIPOC individuals willing to speak to their experience specifically? This is the site where establishing outside connections becomes a critical component of a congregation's activism, for these connections can act as a bridge between identities that the congregants may not fully understand. I will turn to Reverend Eliza, again:

For a lot of our folks, they are like, on this issue with racism, well I just really want, and this speaks to the suburban context, Black friends. “Rebecca, can you get me some Black friends.” How can we as a white congregation find a Black congregation and form a relationship with them? We need to learn from them.

For Reverend Eliza and others, finding Black congregations that are willing to engage with them as a whole has, as of now, proved difficult. However, Reverend Eliza has found a friend and working partner in Reverend Tiffany of Central AME, a historically Black congregation in the area. In our second conversation, when talking about congregants wanting Black friends, I brought up Reverend Eliza’s relationship with Reverend Tiffany:

Right, she is my Black friend. I think in some ways that is the case. But, it's much more nuanced than that. It's about what are the Black churches and the Black clergy that actually want to be kind of engaged in that way. And so I think this is one of the other things that I'm trying to figure out how to navigate because, and this is something we talk about a lot, it's not a Black pastor's responsibility to teach me how to do this work. And that can be sort of said in a very judgmental way, in a very shaming way. But, the truth is there are Black clergy who want to be helpful, want to be engaged in this work. And so I think you see that in our community, there are certainly a lot of historically black churches and a lot of Black clergy. Tiffany is the one that wants to be engaged on these issues.

The relationship between Reverend Eliza and Reverend Tiffany goes beyond just personally supporting Reverend Eliza in the racial justice work she is doing at East Presbyterian; it helps the whole congregation engage more deeply on these issues. Not only is their relationship visible to congregants at East Presbyterian, but Reverend Tiffany has been a presence at East Presbyterian at times, bringing the voice of a Black woman to a white audience:

My parishioners know that she and I are friends, and I think that serves as a proxy for them. They'll say, “Well, I know my pastor is close with Black pastor, so that counts for me.” Right. Even Tiffany and I did like a conversation for Martin Luther King Sunday. Instead of a sermon, it was Tiffany and I having a conversation, in a way to communicate to the church, like this is what it means to have a conversation partner on these issues. Like this is sort of modeling for people. This is what it can look like.

Uplifting Black voices during/instead of sermons is a concept that will be discussed further when talking about North Baptist, but it is a technique that allows for white people to hear directly from someone with whom they do not encounter in their day-to-day life and be essentially required to listen to their experiences. Reverend Tiffany than does not simply act as a legitimizing force for East Presbyterian's anti-racist efforts as the Black pastor who supports them from afar, but also as a mobilizing agent herself through sharing her experiences, coming to the congregation and engaging with Reverend Eliza for the benefit of the congregants. We will come back to Reverend Tiffany's relationships with the local white clergy she works with as well when discussing West Episcopal and the Black Lives Matter vigils that all the local faith communities participated in (including East Presbyterian), but it seems reasonable to say that without Reverend Tiffany's support, the racial justice work being done at East Presbyterian would look entirely different.

East Presbyterian is engaged in progressive activism, such as their racial justice work, despite not wanting to use the label of "progressive" in their identity. So quickly into our conversation that I had yet to ask her permission to record, Reverend Eliza responded to my description of the project highlighting that, at East Presbyterian, they do not call their work "progressive" but rather as advancing "social justice." Reverend Eliza described how many within the church would claim a social justice identity that stems from the pastoral leadership in the 1960s:

In the 1960s, as the national church and collectively Presbyterians were kind of making that shift towards social justice, we also had a pastor here that was very much sort of oriented in that way, right? So, he kind of drug the church along in that way. And so a lot of people who are here who would be older, long-time members in their seventies and above would still have that memory of [that pastor] coming in and saying race as an issue and war as an issue.

The 1960s was an activating decade on progressive issues for many institutions and individuals who were alive at the time; think back to the section on age and the experience Bill brings into North Baptist as someone who was involved in the anti-war movement. In that orientation towards social justice, East Presbyterian would appear to have a cohesive collective identity. Issues that can be considered “social justice” can then be adopted, such as the Black Lives Matter movement, with the help of connections with people like Reverend Tiffany.

However, this still raises questions regarding their identity as a church, for other churches like North Baptist and West Episcopal describe themselves as specifically “progressive” on their websites. What does that mean about their ability to engage with progressive causes as a church? Frequently, it means it is difficult to pursue work that is or can be construed to be political. I want to give East Presbyterian full credit for some of the political work that they do, such as their participation in the Black Lives Matter vigils/protests that attracted local attention, but they are oftentimes unable to get congregational unity to pursue political projects and are therefore only able to work on them at a small, committee-by-committee level. The Environmental Justice Committee contributes financially to PA Interfaith Power and Light, a group focused on renewable energy and the state legislature, but the “primary goal” of their committee is education, according to Carla, the chair of the committee. The issue of climate change has become so politicized, and East Presbyterian lacks a specifically progressive identity, that it is difficult to engage with the issue as a whole and instead they dedicate their time to trying to convince others that climate change is real. As Reverend Eliza explains:

The reason that our environmental group is exhausting is that there are people in our church, I don't understand it, who don't think climate change is real! So instead of just saying “How can we advocate with lower merion township or use our influence to bring in a big speaker that people in the community will come and hear.” For [the committee], it is “How can I change the view of the person in the pew next to me.”

Another example could be found in their Refugee Support Committee, whose name alone signals a sort-of political neutral ground. I spoke with Victoria, the leader of the committee, who talked about how the group has gotten politically involved at times through protesting at the Berks County Detention Center:

We thought that it was wrong- these people should be allowed to go into the community, they shouldn't be isolated. It looked to me to be a political decision... the local commissioners, or whatever their title were, it was somewhat of a money making proposition for them.

However, when we talked about any sort of advocacy the group did for immigrants with regard to policy change, Victoria light-heartedly described it as being "pretty minor, really. Now I feel guilty that you mention it!" While this may be something she wishes to do in the future, her past work, or lack thereof, is quite understandable given that there were members of the committee who were supporters of the Trump campaign and presidency. In that way, the work she could do was inherently limited.

The collective identity of East Presbyterian is one that is oriented towards social justice but not progressivism, a semantic but important distinction. Issues that become too political, like climate change or immigration, become harder to pursue within their congregation. As every pastor characterized in our interviews, the development of a church's collective identity is largely due to the efforts of its leadership. In the case of East Presbyterian, there is an Associate Pastor, Eliza, who is passionate about this work, well-versed in contemporary social discourse, and eager to push her congregation forward on social justice causes. However, Reverend Eliza is only approaching her seventh year in the congregation now, while Carla has been there her whole life and Jane has been there over 25 years. The development of a collective identity is something that takes time, as will be discussed in more depth during the section on South

Methodist, and Reverend Eliza has not had the time to see East Presbyterian transformed. If she and the other pastors of East Presbyterian stay with the church for a long time, it is not hard to imagine the church adopting a more progressive collective identity that would allow them to pursue goals that are now out of reach.

What do the prospects for future progressive activism look like at East Presbyterian? After meeting with so many passionate and committed members of the church and Reverend Eliza, I think there is a strong chance East Presbyterian will continue to grow into being activists on these issues. While they do not have many people with personal identities at stake in progressive causes, the connections they have made help bolster their ability to understand and communicate the importance of issues to members of the congregation who may not initially be interested in the church pursuing progressively-oriented causes, the prime example being their recent anti-racism work. Reverend Eliza has not been at the church for a very long time, but she is actively working towards establishing new understandings of progressive issues that could change the collective identity of the institution. If they continue to craft an identity that does not shy away from the “progressive” label and emphasizes putting their faith into action, I believe the church can maintain its current level of mobilization that was spurred by the Black Lives Matter vigils in the local area and grow into embracing new issues yet unseen.

West Episcopal

West Episcopal might be the church most visible in my daily life as I find myself walking past it regularly on my commute to and from work. The building itself sits on a lot lined by sweeping trees, making it possible to walk by on the main road without noticing the intricate stained glass that sits in its walls. West Episcopal is on the smaller side, with about 95 people attending services on a given Sunday.

My point of contact at West Episcopal was Reverend Austin, someone whom I had heard a good deal about from Reverend Eliza just a week before. Reverend Austin was fairly new to his role when we spoke, having been chosen to be the new Rector of West Episcopal by their lay-led Discernment Committee in December of 2019. I will leave it to him to describe West Episcopal's relationship to progressive activism:

I guess what I would say about a lot of churches is that most churches [in the area] are "liberal." But, the number that are actually progressive is much, much smaller. But, the number that aspire to be progressive is high ... I would say, if I'm being honest, now that I know this is anonymized, we are pretty aspirational.

However, while my goal in this project is to let individuals describe themselves, I do think Reverend Austin might be downplaying the work West Episcopal does on a regular basis. My interactions with them, and all churches in this project, are dramatically influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic which can cause the present moment to feel lackluster in terms of commitments to social justice causes. But, through my conversations with parishioners Jim and Evelyn, it became clear to me that West Episcopal is doing a great deal of personal work in their neighborhood and engaging in some political activism as well. In my view, it is probably this sense the church has towards political activism that Reverend Austin views as aspirational, while he is proud of the work West Episcopal has done on a personal level.

On the personal level, I get the sense that the entire community at West Episcopal is incredibly proud of the food pantry they have created from scratch for people struggling to gain access to quality meals in their neighborhood. The food pantry was brought up in every one of my conversations at West Episcopal, but the most memorable point was mentioned by Carl, a member of the vestry of the church. While interviewing Evelyn, her husband Carl was outside of view of the computer's camera but came to sit down from time-to-time to elaborate on some of Evelyn's points. As he self-describes, "I just like to blurt things out." He told me about how

West Episcopal's deacon was moving on from her role and the vestry was probably going to support employing a part-time manager for the food pantry rather than a full-time deacon. This one example just goes to show how committed West Episcopal is to maintaining the type of personal work at their congregation.

On the political level, West Episcopal is not the most active congregation, however they have become activated for certain issues in recent history. One example is the Black Lives Matter vigils/protests they started, pulling in other members of the community like East Presbyterian and North Methodist. While Reverend Austin initiated the vigils, talking about that mobilization with Evelyn highlighted the dynamic between a clergy and laity that allow for either to shape their congregation:

As a group, parishioners are pretty socially active. Before Austin came, people would go to rallies and take buses to Harrisburg to protest gun lobby issues. People have gone to DC. I was part of a small group that went to the Parkland rally that happened back then. People don't necessarily wait for the clergyperson to say, "This is important and we should do something." They are already doing things. His response got a lot of support because these are things we want to be doing.

As with each case, I see the resources of personal and collective identity, connections, and the clergy tenure as key to understanding this level of mobilization at West Episcopal, one that can be characterized as high levels of the personal work and moderate levels of the political. First, let us examine the personal identities of members of West Episcopal and how that relates to the work they pursue. In the case of West Episcopal, based on my conversations with parishioners and Reverend Austin, they are a group who pursues much of their progressively-oriented work as allies, holding few identities that are personally at stake in this activism. However, as argued previously, where personal identities are lacking connections to outside people and groups can facilitate new understandings of the experiences of others and engender progressive activism.

I was told the story several times by numerous different people, but in brief summation: Reverend Austin put up a Black Lives Matter sign after George Floyd was murdered in the summer of 2020. Subsequently, the sign was vandalized roughly half a dozen times, causing quite a stir in the community. This was the extent of West Episcopal's progressivism without outside encouragement, however, that is not the end of the story. This is, as described in the case on East Presbyterian, where the interfaith clergy community of the geographic area acted as a connecting force and helped spur the group to action. Reverend Tiffany of Central AME played a key role that I will let her elaborate on:

It was like, here's an institution that's putting themselves out there. How do we not do so? I'm not sure if Reverend Austin shared this, but I called like, "We need to do something like right now." And it was the summertime and he's like, "Oh, but Tiffany..." And then it happened the next weekend. I was like, "No, there needs to be a statement made."

This connection and friendship with Reverend Tiffany, once again, is an amazing resource for white churches like West Episcopal in organizing for racial justice. To be clear, I am using the term "resource" here because it follows with my argument, but Reverend Tiffany and other Black clergy (or people with other identities) are not to be exploited for gain like the typical usage of the term "resource" would denote. This is a partnership, as Reverend Tiffany describes:

I don't know if I would call it teaching. If anything I would call it sharing. And I think, also, I am strategic in that as much as we may be working together, I also take time to meet with folks one-on-one, just to touch base. And I think that's critical too. Or like before there's a need like, "Yo, can I pick your brain on this?" Or like, "Am I reading this wrong? What am I missing? Or what direction is this going in?" And I think those are, but here again, it's about building relationships ... And it's okay for people to say, "You know what, I really need more black people to be a part of this because my people are really upset that we come to these things and there's no black people."

Reverend Tiffany is, like she was for East Presbyterian, a partner in doing a lot of this racial justice work in the area, such as educating white people on issues of systemic racism in the

United States and supporting vigils/protests that took place in the summer of 2020. For East Presbyterian we saw her as a partner in a sermon in front of the whole congregation, doing the kind of sharing she described, while at West Episcopal she helped mobilize Reverend Austin to act on this issue.

In both of my conversations with Evelyn and Jim, parishioners of West Episcopal, you can see connections being a big part of their activities. When I spoke with Evelyn, she described how an organization called Heeding God's Call facilitated a lot of their work around gun violence. They organized buses that West Episcopal then rode to Harrisburg to advocate for state legislation around gun control, something that the parishioners have since done multiple times as they stayed on top of matters of the state legislature. Jim, who is a leader of the Immigration Action Group, explains the group's work with HIAS, an organization that supports low-income immigrants:

Our role in the community is a little bit different. Let's say HIAS is more of a driver in the community, we are more of a hand in hand partner. We will support them. In other words HIAS will say "we need a clothing drive in June." ... And we will make it happen ... It's where we are. We may aspire to be what HIAS is but we are not there quite yet.

As far as I can tell based on my conversations, there are not any members of West Episcopal who are passionate about gun violence and immigration because it has personally affected them, rather it was the news of school shootings and refugee crises that made them interested in doing something. However, like the racial justice vigils, it would likely have ended there had they not been connected with others. Groups like Heeding God's Call and HIAS helped build out parishioners' understanding of these issues by having them hear from people with those experiences and provided avenues for action.

Thus far, we have seen how the lack of personal identities related to social justice causes has not stopped West Episcopal from being engaged in progressive issues because they are connected to individuals and groups that can leverage their identity to build new understandings and encourage them to act. The collective identity of West Episcopal also helps them do much of the work they are interested in, but it is not yet oriented towards action in a way that might open up more avenues to engage in advocacy work. Evelyn articulated that desire:

For myself, I'd like to be more involved in advocacy. I think we do a pretty good job addressing needs, I think there are underlying situations that put people in these situations of need and doing that work is really hard and not fun. Calling your senators, writing letters, getting voters, and all that stuff. If I had any kind of hole I wanted to fill it would be around advocacy.

In my view, this gets at what Reverend Austin was describing earlier as the “aspirational” values of West Episcopal. They are outwardly progressive, using that word and similar language on their website, and my conversations with parishioners and Reverend Austin echoed this. Part of their collective identity goes back to the church’s creation, Reverend Austin said, being founded as a mission church for the poor in the area. The type of collective identity that will lead to the highest mobilization is one that does two things: establishes a progressive orientation and emphasizes putting faith into action. West Episcopal succeeds at being a progressive place, but they do not seem to strongly identify themselves as bringing their faith into their activism. Thus, their mobilization for progressive causes frequently focuses on the personal work, providing educational opportunities and alleviating needs in the community.

Where do they go from here? In my conversations at West Episcopal, I have no reason to believe that they could not turn that corner to becoming forceful advocates on political issues. Like almost all of the other churches in this project, the congregants at West Episcopal I talked with have been active members of their church for longer than the clergy. Reverend Austin has

only worked at West Episcopal for around a year and a half, but it is not hard to imagine him working to build out that collective identity towards faith in action in the coming years at West Episcopal, if that is something he wants to do. As he said, his work in the first year was preoccupied otherwise:

It's been very clear what I've spent all of my energy the first year. It's just administration, trying to figure out the systems and structures, money stuff and all of that. It's been interesting because I have spent so much more energy than I ever could have imagined on systems and structures and committees.

Given time, Reverend Austin will have mastered his role as the rector of West Episcopal and be able to work with congregants in developing an orientation towards putting their faith into action.

In the case of West Episcopal, we can see a church moderately mobilized for progressive causes, spending tremendous amounts of time on the personal work (like the food pantry, refugee resettlement, or educating themselves on issues of racism) and engaging in the political work to a modest degree through protests for racial justice or advocating for gun control legislation. The largest factor facilitating West Episcopal's activism is their connections to individuals, other local religious institutions, and outside organizations. These connections help deepen understandings of critical issues where West Episcopal does not have members with the personal identities needed to speak to those experiences. In addition, those connections help push West Episcopal to act where they might not know where to channel their frustration. The collective identity of West Episcopal is one oriented towards progressivism, but has room to grow in crafting an identity that focuses on turning faith into action. In the coming years, it is very possible that Reverend Austin works to do this and helps bring West Episcopal to more regularly engage in the kind of political work that people like Evelyn are interested in.

North Baptist

This project began by talking to a close friend who is a member of North Baptist. We spoke several times and I learned that they were the “progressive bastion” of the area that I knew would greet me with open arms and make this research possible. Funnily enough, I grew up not far from the church itself, driving by it regularly throughout my childhood. It stands out among the number of churches within a few blocks of each other not for its size but because of its impressive stone structure with bright purple trim around the windows. A bright purple on an otherwise classically-styled structure represents, for me, the kind of radical nature that North Baptist attempts to embody on a regular basis.

Among the churches that make up this study, North Baptist is ahead of the curve on many traditionally progressive issues. I will discuss this more at length shortly, but the briefest example is simply that they put up their Black Lives Matter sign five years before any of the other institutions. However, the more time I spent with the wonderful people at North Baptist, the more I started to close in on the feeling that mobilization for progressive causes at the church seems to be on the decline. Bill, a member of North Baptist who used to be the pastor of his own church, called my attention to it:

In fact, in years past, more than so in the last few years, we've been far more active politically. Writing congresspeople, advocating for particular kinds of legislation, both at the state and national level, both within our denomination somewhat, but also within the political realm. In fact, North Baptist has gotten the reputation of being a really liberal, “radical” kind of congregation.

North Baptist’s reputation precedes itself, for as Rick described, it used to be actively involved in politics in a number of ways. Another congregant I spoke with, Mary, described how her family knew they were going to be members of North Baptist when they moved to the area because her father, an employee of the Baptist Church on the national level, knew of North Baptist’s

reputation as a radically progressive church and wanted to be a part of it. While this reputation is not changing, as Rick noted and I picked up on, it seems as though the activism at North Baptist is decreasing in recent years. This makes North Baptist difficult to label in terms of high/low mobilization, but I see them as a highly mobilized congregation on a recent, modest downward trend as they specifically engage less on the political level, doing less letter-writing and advocacy. Members of North Baptist were always quick to bring up something that happened several years ago, but at times struggled to give more recent examples in comparison to the other churches in this study. I do not wish to be mistaken- North Baptist is quite a progressive congregation. They just present an interesting case study to see what may have changed in recent memory, a question where we find ourselves again examining the resources of personal and collective identity, connections, and the clergy members' tenure.

Racial justice work is an easy place to begin to examine the role of personal identity in activism, as exemplified by our previous two case studies. Unlike East Presbyterian and West Episcopal, North Baptist did not need any of their connections to help push their congregation towards activism, partially because of the role Black congregants played in spurring the church into new understandings of issues of race, as described by Reverend Lydia:

We do have two African-American men here who were being harassed by the [local] police. And it was Advent 4, which is usually a really big Sunday. I chose to use that time by interviewing James about his experiences. To use that really big moment when most people are here to hear about his experiences.

Having members of the North Baptist community who are willing to speak to their personal identities is valuable, as is having members who become specific advocates for those issues. At North Baptist, unlike at all the other churches in this study, it was a Black congregant who put up their Black Lives Matter sign, not a white member of the clergy. Reverend Lydia described what

happened after a young member, Susan, expressed interest in holding a vigil after the shooting at Mother Emmanuel Church in South Carolina in 2015:

Susan was a young adult and, again, not a member. So, I wrote to a couple of members who I thought were really good at taking young adults under their wing. And I said, "I don't see anything happening. Can we help make this happen?" And so Rose, who is a Black woman here and is very good at taking young people under her wing, said, "Sure." ... Rose was running by me what she would put on a banner out front. And I said, "Well, whatever you want to do is fine." ... I show up on Sunday and I come around front and I see a sign that I thought was going to read "equality for all." And instead it said "Black Lives Matter." And I was like, "Hmm." Now, can I tell you in lots of other churches this would have been problematic because Black Lives Matter is political in the broad sense of the term that you're using it. I had three seconds to decide, as a pastor, what I was going to do about this, how I was going to respond to that. And so my response and my internal response was, "Hmm, okay, we're doing this."

That is one of the longest quotes I have from someone in this study, but I think it is worth reading in its entirety because it is such a clear example of how different the outcome of this situation was by having a lay member with personal identity at stake lead an initiative rather than the clergy. Reverend Lydia's reservations about this came across to me during our conversation, and I hope it is apparent in the quote. Without the proactive decision from Rose, it seems somewhat safe to assume that North Baptist would have taken a much longer time to come to a place where they could support the Black Lives Matter movement as a congregation, much like the other churches in this study.

Other aspects of personal identity influence North Baptist's work as well. I turn to Bill, the former pastor and bisexual leader of the Rainbow Alliance:

We used to have good events going on in the church. We used to have a routine about every other year where we would have a weekend in which we would expose the congregation to an aspect of the LGBTQ community. And in other words, we've had transgender weekends. So, we've had them years ago, but long before transgender issues were public and more well-known, in fact, 10, 15 years ago, we would have weekends in which we brought people who are transgendered in, and people in our congregation would meet people who are transgender for the first time in their lives.

Here, we can begin to see that intersection between personal identity and connections, in this instance with the queer identity of many members of North Baptist helping them know people who are transgender and can speak to their experience. As Bill went on to describe, this actually led to many transgender people joining North Baptist as it was one of the few congregations in the area that understood these issues. This is the kind of personal work that many churches are doing around educating their members, something that has a marked positive impact on people in the community as articulated previously.

However, the quote from Bill also exemplifies something North Baptist seems to struggle with: building and articulating intentional connections. For the other case studies in this project, connections serve as a key factor in understanding how they become involved in certain issues. For North Baptist, they have seen themselves at the forefront of many issues, aided by the personal identities of members of their congregation, leading to limits on collaboration. There is always the possibility that I am misinterpreting the situation, but when speaking with members of North Baptist in comparison to other institutions, they were far less likely to mention connections with outside people or groups. While Bill mentioned bringing in transgender individuals to speak to their experiences, that was not a connection that they seem to have maintained. This appears to hold true for other aspects of North Baptist's work, which used to largely be done entirely on their own. Here is another example from Reverend Michael when discussing the interfaith community response to racist comments made by the police superintendent:

What immediately arose first from our own discussions within our Undoing Racism group here, but then other churches like Upper Unitarian, there were some people from Lower Presbyterian, some people from United Methodist began to come to these meetings here. And it wasn't that we called them, but they heard that we were talking about it.

The important phrase there is at the end- they did not call the churches to gather together, it rather happened by those churches hearing about it. However, there is also a clear lack of necessity for North Baptist to be building those connections to bridge between identities when they have the personal identities (racial, gender, sexual orientation, immigrant status) at their church to help kickstart that activism. They were ahead of the curve, so building connections was not always feasible or necessary.

North Baptist's perception that it was at the forefront of many of these issues does not seem misplaced. They have a collective identity strongly tied to progressive causes, with stories that I heard echoed in multiple conversations. Be it in its founding as an anti-slavery church, mortgaging the church to help support the Civil Rights Movement, or being a very early member of the New Sanctuary Movement. Their identity, however, incorporates more than just an orientation towards progressivism and an interest in putting their faith into action. They see themselves as early-adopters of progressive issues, making it so they must adjust to a new norm where many other churches in the area have begun to agree with them on key issues. When I asked Bill why he saw North Baptist pursuing mobilizing less in recent years as he had previously said, he described a shift in their collective identity:

I think the culture has changed. There used to be a time when a church like North Baptist was on the vanguard, the cutting edge of certain kinds of peacemaking movements or peacemaking activities. And so we led the way and we sometimes were the leaders in our denomination and sometimes in our community of these movements, these kinds of activities that have spread out into the community and are not related to necessarily one church's attitude or one church's perspective. We did something like that with Black Lives Matter ... That was a typical thing that North Baptist used to do. Nowadays, though, we're simply allied with a variety of groups like Black Lives Matter as a part of that group, collectively, rather than being on the forefront of doing something. I mean, if you go by half the churches in the area, they have Black Lives Matter signs out front. So, we're no longer unique and we're no longer the cutting edge church or congregation.

North Baptist seems almost demobilized by the increase in mobilization for progressive causes in the area because it has resulted in a sort of crisis of collective identity. No longer situating themselves at the vanguard, they have become less engaged on these issues and instead are stuck recalling the incredible activism they led in the past. The good news is, as North Baptist becomes less unique, it seems like they are initiating, as Bill describes, the work of becoming connected with more outside groups.

To me, this seems like a key step in reinvigorating the church in mobilizing for social justice. Building strong, intentional connections with individuals, religious institutions, and other organizations seeking to advance progressive causes might help to encourage North Baptist to approach its work differently, viewing themselves as a member of the team rather than the leader. A critical piece to this puzzle will be the role co-pastors Lydia and Michael play in shaping the connections between North Baptist and others as it relates to their collective identity. Reverends Lydia and Michael have been at North Baptist for 15 and 10 years, respectively. While members of North Baptist describe the Baptist model as democratic and “bottom-up,” it is also clear that the co-pastors wield agenda-setting power and describe themselves as the creators of the collective identity of the church.

At the moment, it seems as though this connection-building and identity-shaping has been a point of tension in the church, particularly related to their Undoing Racism group’s work with POWER Metro, an interfaith coalition involved in political advocacy. While this seems like a great connection to foster as North Baptist is collectively embracing a more collaborative approach towards progressive activism, Reverend Lydia found the primary goals of POWER to not align with the mission of the congregation. For a variety of reasons, she found herself having

to hold back members of North Baptist from going all-in on working with POWER. Reverend Michael elaborated on this dynamic:

I've seen Lydia do this again and again, and it's taught me to be aware of it. In a church like ours, and I'm sure it's true with other progressive social justice churches, individuals are passionate about the social justice issues they engage with. And so part of the role of us as pastors is to put guardrails so that individuals can't squeeze out the room for other people's passions within the life of the congregation, within the budget of the congregation. So, it's to make sure that that high passion doesn't then play its own role of dominance to deny other people to even articulate their passions. And so sometimes we have to kind of put guardrails or pay very close attention to process.

At its surface, this makes sense to me. The pastors are playing a role in guiding how involved North Baptist can be with outside organizations, deciding that no one group can play too big of a role in congregational life. As co-pastors Lydia and Michael have been at North Baptist for a good period of time, this seems to be becoming an established norm, that the connections North Baptist is fostering are weaker rather than stronger in order to limit issue dominance within the church. However, the congregants that originally brought this issue to light when I spoke with them were not pleased with this decision, viewing it as harmful to the potential positive political impact North Baptist could make. This example, of limiting the collaboration between North Baptist and POWER Metro, goes to show how the clergy of an institution can put the brakes onto something within their congregation, especially if they have been leaders of that institution for as long as co-pastors Lydia and Michael.

While these last few pages have not been overly positive, I am still optimistic about the prospects for future activism at North Baptist. Whenever I left conversations with the co-pastors and members of North Baptist, I always felt energized by the incredible work they were doing on so many different fronts. They have strong personal identities that tie them to issues and are currently working hard to build new connections with others to help bolster their activism. In

recent years, they have struggled with a collective identity that no longer sees itself at the forefront of these issues, but this can be combated with the work of its members and co-pastors to become allies on these issues working in coalitions with others rather than alone. If Reverends Lydia and Michael use their power to support collaboration, I see no reason why North Baptist cannot quickly re-mobilize its members for progressive causes.

South Methodist

Of all the churches I had the pleasure of spending time with, South Methodist is the smallest by a wide margin. With a membership of 100 and attendance on Sundays of an average 55 congregants, the pews of South Methodist may not be overflowing but they are incredibly active. Proud of their status as a Reconciling Congregation, South Methodist displays the cross and flame on their website in rainbow colors. This signals and vocalizes many things, among which is a commitment to end forms of oppression and be accepting of all forms of sexuality in their church. Not only are they a member of POWER Metro, a faith-based coalition that focuses on making change to the state and local legislature, they are one of the most vocal institutions in the coalition. As Reverend Robert put it, “We're really small, but our voice has been strong. We've been one of the strongest voices in this work.”

Reverend Robert was a hard man to reach. I had been trying to get into contact with him ever since I heard Reverend Austin from West Episcopal describe him as the more radical pastor who was always talking about POWER, but it was Reverend Tiffany of Central AME who was able to put me in touch. In our first conversation, it became clear that Reverend Robert's radical commitment to social justice worked alongside a deep and unyielding love for his congregants. He was quick to sing the praises of members of his congregation but spoke the most about the

ways in which Christianity should and could combat some of the most glaring inequalities in the United States. I found Reverend Robert's compassion and emphasis on grace to be contagious, to the point where I left our conversations feeling moved in ways that lack easy description.

In terms of personal mobilization, South Methodist is highly mobilized around progressive causes but in different ways than the other churches in this study. First, much of the education occurring at South Methodist comes directly from the pulpit. All of the churches I have spoken with have some type of group committed to anti-racism, whereas at South Methodist that anti-racist commitment is engaged with collectively, even if not to the liking of all of the congregants all of the time. Reverend Robert describes this dynamic in regard to the personal work of education being done at South Methodist:

I've been talking about it Sunday after Sunday. And I still have people that say, "You know, Pastor, I appreciate you talking about this stuff, but if I want all race all the time I'd listen to NPR." And I say, "Well, sorry, we gotta talk about this." It's just central. Especially after George Floyd was killed, I talked about racism for the whole month and people get tired of it. It's really depressing. It's very difficult to look at. And I think it's just essential to keep talking about and keep looking at it.

With education coming from the pulpit instead of from committees, this creates another dynamic that highlights the second way South Methodist's personal mobilization is different from the other churches: they engage in issues as a collective rather than in smaller groups. When attending South Methodist, engagement in anti-racism, LGBTQ+ issues, or supporting survivors of domestic violence is not as optional as it is in other places. Everyone appears to be a participant in some way or another.

This extends into political mobilization as well, for members of South Methodist frequently mobilize for progressive causes collectively. I would characterize South Methodist as the most politically mobilized congregation around progressive issues out of all the churches

with whom I have spoken. A large majority of their political work takes place through POWER Metro, the coalition that Katherine, a member of South Methodists, worked with extensively:

We really did do a lot. We have absolutely not only gone to Harrisburg and fought for fair funding of public schools, but members of our congregation have educated others on what those proposals are, what the current state of affairs is. We've spoken to local politicians about it to try to persuade them to vote in a different way. We've had meetings with politicians. All of that was congregants and often Robert as well ... We've done voting registration campaigns where we've set up a tent at local fairs and festivals and things to get people to register to vote, to understand the importance that their voice counts. ... We've done healthcare initiatives where we've had doctors at our congregation speak again in front of other congregations to help educate on the issues. We've done actions for raising the minimum wage to a living wage. We've done a lot of work and I bet that people don't even realize how much we've done.

As we can see from Katherine's description, South Methodist is politically involved in a whole host of issues, becoming advocates on many progressive topics. Not only are they actively mobilized, their advocacy has been effective. When speaking with members of South Methodist, especially Reverend Robert, it is evident that they take great pride in the Pennsylvania state government changing policies to make it so all new education funding is distributed equitably and the governor's current budget proposal increases funding for all schools.

What, then, has led to South Methodist being such a highly mobilized congregation on the personal and political fronts? As with the other churches, the intersections of personal and collective identity, connections, and pastoral tenure seem to play a key role. First, let us look at how the personal identities of congregants are leveraged to encourage the rest of the congregation to mobilize. Someone who exemplifies how personal identity can shape issue advocacy is Emma, the congregant mentioned in the previous section on work experience. Emma was an animated and all-around delightful person to have a conversation with, her passion for turning faith into action was palpable in everything she described. A critical piece of her work at

South Methodist has been around creating a local interfaith support network for survivors of domestic violence. This work began with Emma sharing her story with her peers:

I spoke as a survivor at an interfaith symposium that we had and Pastor Robert was there and he later asked me if I would give a sermon that was essentially sharing my story. Which I did, and both were really powerful. I asked if there was any interest in creating a domestic violence initiative within our church. I did get a lot of interest in that.

Similar to some of our other case studies, we can see how Emma's personal identity as a survivor and the understanding she brings to that situation was shared with the rest of the congregation and then spurred everyone into action. Emma is the leader of this new initiative, but she has others who are ready to support her. And, while I cannot positively affirm this, it seems telling that Emma's willingness to share her story and South Methodist's action on the issue of domestic violence stands in contrast with no other church I spoke with taking up a similar cause. Without a survivor to bring up the topic in the congregation, this is not an issue that seems likely to be taken up by a church.

As I have mentioned before, the conception of leveraging personal identities as a resource can be (or just is) problematic. In order to support survivors of domestic violence, a church should not need to have a survivor who is willing to speak with incredibly high levels of vulnerability to the entire church about their experience. However, what I have heard in my interviews is that a church who has people willing to share their identity-based experiences is more likely to mobilize around that issue. I do not put forward ways in this study to do this effectively and with care, but I wanted to note it now as something that needs to be carefully considered.

Similar to Emma, Katherine also became involved in progressive issues, in her case POWER, due to her own personal identity. For Katherine, it was her status as a mother that led

her to pursue avenues of activism through POWER and South Methodist to change Pennsylvania's education funding policies:

We voted on three initiatives that POWER Metro, which was the suburban division, was going to take on. And one was fair funding of the public schools in Philadelphia or in Pennsylvania. So that really spoke to me, greatly. It was one of the main reasons we moved out of the city, my husband and I, because we knew if we were going to raise kids, we needed a good school system.

Katherine and Emma both provide strong examples of people whose personal identity has influenced the issues they become advocates for and help mobilize their congregation around. However, similar to other congregations, South Methodist does not have people speaking to all identities within their church. Connections become an important way for them to bring in other voices, both to bridge across identity to share experiences and advice as well as encourage the community to mobilize.

The work Reverend Robert takes the most pride in is around anti-racism and his connections have facilitated this work in many ways. He put it simply: "We do have a lot of allies and if I didn't have the allies, I couldn't do it." The coalition of religious institutions and organizers that make up POWER are an obvious connection for South Methodist, helping encourage them to engage on a number of issues with pre-planned actions and requirements for participation. However, beyond POWER, the connections Reverend Robert has help not only push the congregation to mobilize but also to make sure their actions are being done well, particularly around issues of race:

We're building connections with AME churches, with Baptist churches, and working together with them, listening to them, taking leadership from Black people and Black churches so that we don't get lost in our own misdirection around what we think is the best thing. Because, if we have our way, it doesn't move. It doesn't move fast. And it doesn't move, always, even in the right direction.

Not only are connections to members of historically Black faith institutions an important part of South Methodist's political activism, it also becomes a deep part of the personal work as well. While sharing experiences is a key component of connections that helps facilitate mobilization among adults, South Methodist is mobilizing for progressive causes in their Sunday School as well. Drawing inspiration from the Freedom Schools of the Civil Rights Movement, Reverend Robert has partnered with a friend to do something for the children of the modern day:

I have a Black Baptist friend who's involved in work in the city and we've been allies for 20 years. And so our two churches are working together on this Freedom Sunday School and our kids and their kids are going online and studying about the Civil Rights Movement and the Beatitudes, and trying to figure out how those two things go together. How loving your neighbor as yourself is kind of the same thing as working on civil rights.

With people who are willing to speak to their identity and mobilize the congregation along with strong connections to outside individuals and coalitions, the high level of mobilization South Methodist achieves for progressive causes begins to make sense. However, the largest difference I observed between South Methodist and the other churches I have spent time with is Reverend Robert's tenure and their collective identity. It is these two resources, the former aiding the latter, that I see pushing South Methodist to the highest levels of mobilization among all of these congregations.

Reverend Robert has been the pastor of South Methodist for 25 years, with retirement on the horizon. He had been working in Philadelphia when he received the appointment to go out to the suburbs, a prospect that did not originally excite him. As he described it, South Methodist was a "very conservative" congregation upon his arrival and he waited patiently before "presenting anything controversial" to them. The South Methodist I knew was one deeply involved in progressive causes, both personally and politically, so learning this surprised me.

When I asked Reverend Robert about the time it took him to instill this new ethos into the church, he explained:

It happened gradually over time. Some pastors say it takes 5 years before you really get to know a congregation. I found that it did take 5 years and then it took another 10 or 15 before I had built up the capital to be able to do some of the things that I really wanted to do ... People were really scared when I came here, they knew my reputation. They knew that that was something that I valued. And they said, "Pastor, we know we need to change, but we got to do it slow. We can't do it right away." And I said, "Okay." At that point in my career, I had just had a baby and I was really just wanting to spend time with him. And so things moved very slowly for the first few years, and they still felt it was a little quick for them. But, I looked for opportunities along the way and I looked for people that would be receptive.

The congregants of South Methodist were resistant to change, to mobilizing for progressive causes, when Reverend Robert took up his appointment. Over time, he had enough capital to begin pushing them in new directions, developing a new collective identity away from the conservative into the progressive. Katherine, who has been a member of South Methodist for 18 years, has seen Reverend Robert's patience in action when the church was going to take the vote to becoming a Reconciling Congregation:

He really worked on that for a very long time to slowly get older congregants comfortable with the idea, to the point where I was getting a little frustrated. Because I was like, "You're never going to have total buy-in here" ... and it was quite slow. We became a Reconciling Congregation, but we didn't want to advertise it. And I was like, "So that's not cool." And David was like, "Hmm." He had a plan. He was like, "We'll get there, we'll get there." But he couldn't say it, but it was kind of like a wink and a nod.

What is this collective identity that Reverend Robert was crafting during his tenure? Unlike North Baptist and West Episcopal, who both have a historical identity rooted in social justice and a modern embrace of progressivism, South Methodist has neither. While the church is associated with practically all progressive causes, they still would not use that label. As Reverend Robert

says, “People think that I preach politics when I'm talking about racism and sexism and homophobia. I don't consider that political ... [it's] a Christian stance.”

South Methodist, more than any other institution in this study, embodies the third aspect of collective identity I mentioned in the research design: putting their faith into action. In his 25 years at South Methodist, Reverend Robert has worked tirelessly to promote the idea that his interpretation of Christianity requires putting faith into practice. Here, Reverend Robert describes his disagreement with some of the ways other members of the Methodist Church operate and what he communicates to his congregants:

The primary focus of the Methodist church, our slogan is “Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” The extent that those focuses fit into the focus on racism and LGBT stuff, for us, those are a natural thing! That's the transformation of the world. That's creating disciples of Jesus Christ. But for a lot of people in the Methodist church, that means getting new members and so there's a tension there.

Reverend Robert's focus is on creating disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world, but he is cultivating those people within his church through his orientation towards putting faith into action. I began to pick up on this thread from Katherine, who mentioned it frequently, and I think best describes it here:

I think he's very intentionally trying to change [the church's identity] and he's doing it carefully and in a way that threads it to faith. I really do think that's why he's able to kind of move some people along the continuum that may not have done.

For her, putting her faith into action was what kept her coming back to South Methodist 18 years ago. She says, “He's made a very compelling comparison to putting your faith into action, and that was the hook for me.” I do not think Katherine is alone here, for Reverend Robert's cultivation of a new collective identity focused on putting faith into action is likely one reason that South Methodist mobilizes for progressive causes as a whole. While the small size of South

Methodist is not to be discounted in that claim, it is also fair to say that they have a higher percentage of Republican voters than any other church while still mobilizing around progressive issues. Reverend Robert's cultivation of their collective identity, oriented specifically towards putting faith into action, seems to be a key reason as to why.

Unlike other churches, there are no resources I think South Methodist is lacking that they could further cultivate to increase their likelihood of mobilization, apart from maybe a more explicit orientation towards progressivism. Members of their church use their personal identities as points of entry into topics and to encourage the rest of the congregation to act. They have strong connections, such as with POWER or nearby historically Black churches, that help start, sustain, and perfect their mobilizations. Finally, as Reverend Robert begins to transition away from his leadership role, he leaves behind a collective identity rooted in putting their faith into action for a wide array of progressive causes. The prospects for future mobilization for progressive causes at South Methodist looks hopeful, although they will soon enter a period of uncertainty when Reverend Robert vacates his position. If the new pastor is not resistant to progressive activism, I believe people like Emma and Katherine will pick up the mantle and keep South Methodist as engaged as it is today.

Discussion

Conclusion

In all my conversations with churches in the Philadelphia suburbs, I have been moved by the level of compassion and willingness for introspection that each individual and institution has contributed to this project. Everyone was patient with me as I stumbled and searched for the right questions, shared their life experiences with honesty and vulnerability, and guided my research

towards new understandings of what I initially set out to study. Each person uplifted new aspects of their work for progressive causes, but the themes of personal and collective identity, connections, and the importance of having a clergy capable of making change over time all stood out to me. Those four resources were ones that numerous people spoke to directly or indirectly, leading me to the conclusion, influenced by all the case studies, that having access to those resources leads to heightened mobilization for progressive causes.

As we have seen at North Baptist and South Methodist, the personal identities of congregants played a direct role in mobilizing themselves and the rest of their church for progressive causes. At North Baptist, it was a Black woman, Rose, who put up the Black Lives Matter sign and helped organize the vigils, largely without the direct assistance of either Reverend Lydia or Reverend Michael. While both were undoubtedly supportive, highlighting the way mobilization can occur from the bottom-up with a supportive clergy, neither of them would have been likely to take that step on their own, as Reverend Lydia described. At South Methodist, we have two examples of women whose personal identities were a critical mobilizing factor according to themselves, with Emma working to create an interfaith network to support survivors of domestic violence and Katherine fighting with POWER Metro for fair-funding for education in Pennsylvania. As a survivor of domestic violence and a mother of school-age children, both of these women were guided by the identities they held to pursue the progressive projects that the rest of their church then became involved in.

Strong connections also act as a crucial resource for churches, both serving as a way to expose congregations to new experiences that they may not easily comprehend and becoming an additional push for activism. While every mainstream American church will have a laity and a clergy, not all of them will have outside connections encouraging them to act on progressive

issues. As the literature review demonstrated⁵² and the case studies of this research show, strong connections to other groups help mobilize congregations on an additional level than merely having a clergy or lay member spurring their church into action. We can see connections pushing congregations to act in the instance of Reverend Tiffany telling Reverend Austin that something needed to be done about the vandalization of the Black Lives Matter sign outside West Episcopal or in Jim's description of West Episcopal as the supporter of HIAS rather than the leader itself. In addition, this is visible in South Methodist's relationship with POWER Metro, where they are consistently mobilizing for progressive causes because of POWER's initiatives that they take up as a congregation. Beyond the literature review, the churches I have spoken with also demonstrate how connections can also serve to introduce members of a congregation, including the clergy, to new experiences and ideas that they may not have initially had. At East Presbyterian, we saw how Reverend Eliza's friendship with Reverend Tiffany led to a conversation in front of the entire congregation at East Presbyterian to model interracial friendships and build deeper understandings of race.

With regard to the tenure of the clergy, it is clear from my discussions with all the clergy I spoke to that increasing the amount of time at their institution has allowed for them to have a greater impact on the culture of the church. We saw this best with Reverend Austin of West Episcopal and Reverend Robert of South Methodist, with them being the two newest and oldest, respectively, to their roles. We heard Reverend Austin describe the difficulty of coming into a new position, needing to spend far more time and energy than he anticipated on learning new structures, managing the institution, and working with committees. In Reverend Robert, we see a prime example of someone who has dedicated a large portion of his life to one community, changing it dramatically over the course of his tenure.

Finally, we have seen at each institution how a collective identity rooted in history, oriented towards “progressivism,” and dedicated to putting faith in action will lead to higher levels of mobilization. At East Presbyterian, they struggle to embrace the label of “progressive,” leading to difficulties in pursuing work that could be perceived as political by their lay members. At West Episcopal, we saw how while the church and its members proudly espouse a progressive identity, they do not always stress putting their faith into action, leading to an interest among members to get more deeply involved in the political work rather than just the personal. At North Baptist, we heard from multiple congregants about how important the church’s founding as an anti-slavery institution is to their current perception of why they mobilize for progressive causes. And, at South Methodist, we saw a highly mobilized congregation built intentionally around putting their faith into action, leading to them pursuing issues as a collective rather than in small committees.

Limitations

As I look back on my research, there is much I would have liked to do for which I simply did not have time. My description and analysis of the building of collective identity is not as thorough as other scholars,⁵³ particularly as my conceptualization of it as a resource came midway into my project. Given more time, I would have liked to examine this concept more critically and with the depth and attention it deserves, for many clergy members had things to say about it that I would have liked to further discuss. A limitation of this work (an unavoidable one, due to the Covid-19 pandemic) is that all of my data is from interviews and not participant observation of services or smaller committee work being conducted by the churches with which I spend my time. A thorough examination of collective identity would, in my mind, require that

type of observation and participation in communal life to best understand the identity of a collective and its change over time.

In particular, the Alinsky-styled conception of self-interest (that scholars like Jeffrey Stout, Heidi Swarts, and Mark Warren have described) is a key framework of collective identity at South Methodist that deserves further attention. This was not something I could fully explore with the small number of people I was able to interview at South Methodist, but it was clear through my conversation with Katherine that Reverend Robert was focusing on individual's self-interest in a way that helped them tap into personal identities that may not have originally mobilized them. There could be a variety of different reasons for this, but I see Katherine's identification as a mother in relation to her activism as a probable result of Reverend Robert's explicit focus on tapping into the self-interest of each of his congregants to mobilize them. Trained by the Industrial Areas Foundation to focus on self-interest, Reverend Robert has been bringing that language to South Methodist for decades:

What I was taught in community organizing is that people work around their self-interest. And the problem with working on some of these social issues is people don't see it in their self-interest. So, a lot of times when I preach about racism, I'm trying to tell white people, "This is your self-interest. Please do not do this to try and help black people do this, to help yourself do this because you are isolated. You are in denial, you are blind, you are scared to death to go downtown into Philadelphia. You're scared to go out and live in your neighborhood. You are scared to be with Muslim people. You are scared. This is in your self-interest to tear down these walls."

After he finished speaking, Reverend Robert joked that he had started preaching again during this conversation, but I think his words beautifully illustrate how important this concept is to him and how it has activated members of South Methodist. This idea of mobilizing around self-interest is not something I was fully able to explore, and thus, my conclusions around both collective and personal identity are limited.

In addition, when thinking about the idea of a clergy member's tenure as a resource, I am not claiming that time alone will cause a congregation to shift in its values to mirror its leading clergy. My argument is that a change in values towards progressivism and putting faith into action takes time, so, without it, a clergy member will struggle to make that transition. However, my research is also limited in its lack of specific focus on the way clergy attempt to make this transition over time. Reverend Robert is an example of someone who has successfully done this via his patience, emphasis on loving all his congregants, and pushing the church to put its faith into action. As I have just mentioned, however, there are likely other dynamics of pastoral leadership that I have failed to adequately describe, such as emphasizing the self-interest of congregants as it relates to progressive causes. Studying and describing the learned and inherent skills a pastor might use in mobilizing their congregants is likely a thesis on its own. I have attempted to account for such skills through the description of the resources of tenure and crafting of a collective identity, but more work could be done to further elaborate what those specific skills are in relation to creating a culture of mobilization.

Due to time constraints and the simple infeasibility of studying such a complex phenomenon, I narrowed my focus in this project to be specifically about resources. Not everything, however, is a resource. I have situated this study through the lens of resource mobilization within the field of social movement theory, but I believe the greatest descriptions of mobilization on the congregational level will take an even more holistic approach than I have done here. This study contributes to a broader field of scholarship in social movement theory that describes other reasons why congregations might mobilize, such as Rebecca Sager's descriptions of political opportunity structures, Richard Wood's or Jack Jenkins' understanding of grievances, or Alfred Morris' uplifting of charismatic leadership. Taken together with resource mobilization,

I believe these frameworks all provide insights into mobilization for progressive causes, helping paint a picture that is more complete than any one study can likely accomplish.

Beyond social movement theory, the theological tools and resources that a religious group has at their disposal are also worth examining from a resource mobilization perspective. As I began my project, my goal was to study the resources a church might have at their disposal that would be similar to any secular institution or group due to the high number of studies on the religious left focusing on religiosity specifically. However, as my research progressed, and the conception of collective identity became more and more visible, I began to realize that excluding the possible religious reasons for mobilization further limits this study. Similar to incorporating other aspects of social movement theory, a more thorough accounting of theological resources that could elaborate on previous scholarship would help complete the account of congregational mobilization,

Future Directions

The area that I am most interested in seeing studied in the future is the use of connections with individuals or groups to help bridge the gap between different identity-based experiences. In speaking with the clergy of majority-white congregations, particularly East Presbyterian and West Episcopal, it became apparent that members of their churches were very focused on hearing from Black people about their experiences to the point where it limits their ability to mobilize for race-oriented activism consistently. White people become so focused on making Black friends that they do not take steps towards ending systemic racism on their own. I think this dynamic of connections would extend to any number of different issues, because simply having close ties with others who are personally invested in specific causes would likely lead to an investment of one's own in that same cause. While my analysis on connections was frequently

race-based, aspects of immigrant status, gender identity, and sexual preference also came up, making me think this could be a more widely studied phenomenon that could lead to interesting conclusions.

In addition, many of the limitations of this study are also worthy of further analysis. The explicit study of the theological tools that predict the highest likelihood of success in mobilizing a congregation could generate conclusions beyond the current scholarship, much of which describes which kind of tools are used but fails to make further predictive conclusions. In the context of the white American suburbs, a more thorough analysis of the effects on emphasizing self-interest in organizing would likely contribute to a deeper understanding of mobilizing efforts. Contrasting a church or pastor's emphasis on self-interest with a separate emphasis on altruism could lead to conclusions that move beyond the current scholarship, which frequently describes these two aspects within coalition organizing but fails to examine whether they are most successful in combination or independently.⁵⁴

If all my directions for future research have a common theme, it is that of embracing a more holistic approach towards studying congregational mobilization. My study has aimed to shine new light on the role of resources that a suburban church might have at its disposal, but it should not be viewed in isolation with the innumerable other descriptions of the religious left in America. I hope future scholars will continue to take up these questions at the level of the congregation to create a robust understanding of what a single church is capable of rather than solely focusing on the coalition-level as is largely done in the most recognized scholarly works.

For organizers, pastors, and lay members of churches, my hope is that this study can provide an engaging entry into self-reflection and a deeper understanding of the multitude of resources a congregation can have to mobilize for progressive action. Activating a large group,

such as a church, for progressive causes can be difficult, as evidenced by my conversations. However, I believe this approach towards conceptualizing the resources a suburban church might have can be beneficial in establishing practices that will aid in heightening the mobilization one congregation can achieve. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of a congregation as it relates to resources can provide tangible steps for action, such as making new connections or reframing collective identity. While I cannot provide all the answers, I have hopefully lent a hand in describing some of the resources that will help a white suburban church mobilize for progressive causes

In conclusion, I would like to once again recognize the amazing work that every congregation who participated in this study is pursuing. I left each conversation feeling inspired by the dedication to and passion for each individual issue people were mobilizing around. At a time when gun violence is rampant, hate crimes against queer people continue on a regular basis, Black individuals are regularly murdered by the police, immigrants cannot find sanctuary in our country, and countless other problems arise on a daily basis, I draw hope from each person with whom I spoke as they are fighting to make a difference. Hopefully, these congregations can continue to mobilize for progressive causes and do so on an increasing level, finding some helpful insights in my conversations with them and the paper I have produced.

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From the beginning, Steve McGovern has been my patient and unwavering advisor in the Political Science department, pushing me in new directions and encouraging me to think critically about every aspect of this project. It was his class that originally piqued my interest in social movement theory and this thesis is heavily inspired by what I have learned from him.

To Terrance Wiley, in the Religion department, I extend my most sincere thanks for his willingness to take me on as an advisee in the spring of my senior year with a half-written thesis. Without him, this final project would look very different than it does now, and I am grateful for every conversation we had that not only generated new insights but included much laughter and many smiles.

Finally, I am so grateful to have friends and family that have supported me, not just in writing this thesis but in my entire college career. Thank you to my roommates for bearing with me as I was either stressed, excited, or requesting some quiet in which to work. And thank you to my family, Mom, Dad, and Ria, for helping me along with every step of the way. I love you all.

Notes

¹ Stout, Jeffrey. 2010. *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 239.

² Ibid., 247.

³ Ibid., 14.

⁴ Djupe, Paul A. and Ryan P. Burge. 2020. "The Religious Left is Small But Loud." *Religion in Public*. January 8. <https://religioninpublic.blog/2020/01/08/the-religious-left-is-small-but-loud/>.

⁵ West, Cornel. 2004. *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism*. New York: The Penguin Press.

⁶ Ibid., 166.

⁷ Ibid., 152.

⁸ Ibid., 158.

⁹ Other scholars who characterize faith-based organizing for progressive causes also frequently depict secular organizations as well. Stout is one such scholar, other influential scholars include Heidi Swarts and Mark Warren who will both be explicitly discussed during the review of the literature.

¹⁰ Cep, Casey. 2020. "Is There a Religious Left?" *The New Yorker*. June 11; Goodstein, Laurie. 2017. "Religious Liberals Sat Out of Politics for 40 Years. Now They Want in the Game" *The New York Times*. June 10; Jenkins, Jack. 2020. *American Prophets: The Religious Roots of Progressive Politics and the Ongoing Fight for the Soul of the Country*. HarperCollins Publishers; Slessarev-Jamir, Helene. 2011. *Prophetic Activism: Progressive Religious Justice Movements in Contemporary America*. New York: New York University Press; Yukich, Grace. 2013. *One Family Under God: Immigration Politics and Progressive Religion in America*. New York: Oxford University Press. All of these scholarly and journalistic works point towards a reinvigoration of the religious left and an assertion of power on the political scene.

¹¹ Smith, Gregory A., Alan Cooperman, Besheer Mohamed, Elizabeth Podrebarac Sciupac, Becka A. Alper, Kiana Cox, Claire Gecewicz, and Michael Lipka. 2019. *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*. Pew Research Center.

¹² Parker, Kim, Juliana Menasce Horowitz, Anna Brown, Richard Fry, D'Vera Cohn, and Ruth Igielnik. 2018. *What Unites and Divides Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities*. Pew Research Center. The authors highlight the suburban political divide in Chapter 2, finding that suburban counties regularly flip from majority-Democrat to majority-Republican since 1998.

¹³ Beyerlein, Kraig, and A. Joseph West. 2017. "Why Congregations Mobilize for Progressive Causes." In *Religion and Progressive Activism: New Stories about Faith and Politics*, edited by Ruth Braunstein, Todd Nicholas Fuist, and Rhys H. Williams, 76-96. New York University Press.

¹⁴ Morris, Aldon D. 1984. *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change*. New York: The Free Press.

¹⁵ Ibid., 279.

¹⁶ Nepstad, Sharon Erickson. 2004. "Leadership and the Formation of Solidarity." In *Convictions of the Soul: Religion Culture and Agency in the Central America Solidarity Movement*, by Sharon Erickson Nepstad. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁷ Delehanty, John D. "Prophets of resistance: Social justice activists contesting comfortable church culture." *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 1, (Spring 2016): 37-58.

¹⁸ Delehanty, John D. "Religious Activism and the Cultural Complexities of Progressive Politics." (PhD diss., University of Minnesota, 2018).

¹⁹ Brown, R. K., and Ronald E. Brown. "Race, religion, and immigration policy attitudes." *Race and Social Problems* 9, no. 1 (2017): 4-18.

²⁰ Cavendish, James C. "African-American Religion and the Mobilization of Community Activism: Congregations as Recruiting Agents." (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1997); Cavendish, James C. 2001. "To March or Not to March: Clergy Mobilization Strategies and Grassroots Antidrug Activism." In *Christian Clergy in American Politics*, by Sue E. S. Crawford and Laura R. Olson, 203-227. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

²¹ Cavendish, "African-American Religion and the Mobilization of Community Activism," 1997.

²² Cavendish, "To March or Not to March," 2001.

²³ Fetzer, Joel S. 2001. "Shaping Pacifism: The Role of the Local Anabaptist Pastor." In *Christian Clergy in American Politics*, by Sue E. S. Crawford and Laura R. Olson. 177-188. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

²⁴ Nteta, Tatishe M., and Kevin J. Wallsten. "Preaching to the Choir? Religious Leaders and American Opinion on Immigration Reform." *Social Science Quarterly* 93, no. 4 (2012): 891-910.

²⁵ Margolis, Michele F. "How Far Does Social Group Influence Reach? Identities, Elites, and Immigration Attitudes." *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 3, (2018).

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- ²⁶ Jelen, Ted G. 2001. "Notes for a Theory of Clergy as Political Leaders." In *Christian Clergy in American Politics*, by Sue E. S. Crawford and Laura R. Olson. 15-30. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- ²⁷ Beyerlein and West, "Why Congregations Mobilize for Progressive Causes," 2017.
- ²⁸ Braunstein, Ruth. 2017. *Prophets and Patriots: Faith in Democracy across the Political Divide*. Oakland, California: University of California Press; Geraty, Kristin. 2017. "Challenges and Opportunities of Community Organizing in Suburban Congregations." In *Religion and Progressive Activism: New Stories about Faith and Politics*, by Ruth Braunstein, Todd Nicholas Fuist, and Rhys H. Williams, 161-183. New York: New York University Press.
- ²⁹ Warren, Mark R. 2010. *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- ³⁰ Swarts, Heidi J. 2008. *Organizing Urban America: Secular and Faith-Based Progressive Movements*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- ³¹ Braunstein, *Prophets and Patriots*, 2017.
- ³² Wood, Richard L., and Brad R. Fulton. 2015. *A Shared Future: Faith-Based Organizing for Racial Equity and Ethical Democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ³³ Wood, Richard L. 2002. *Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- ³⁴ Geraty, "Challenges and Opportunities of Community Organizing in Suburban Congregations," 2017.
- ³⁵ Sager, Rebecca. 2017. "Progressive Religious Activists and Democratic Party Politics." In *Religion and Progressive Activism: New Stories about Faith and Politics*, by Ruth Braunstein, Todd Nicholas Fuist, and Rhys H. Williams, 56-75. New York: New York University Press.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.
- ³⁷ Beyerlein, Kraig, and Peter Ryan. "Religious Resistance to Trump: Progressive Faith and the Women's March on Chicago." *Sociology of Religion*, 79, no. 2 (Summer 2018): 196-219.
- ³⁸ Ammerman, Nancy T. 2002. "Connecting Mainline Protestant Churches with Public Life." In *The Quiet Hand of God: Faith-Based Activism and the Public Role of Mainline Protestantism*, by John H. Evans and Robert Wuthnow. 129-158. University of California Press.
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- ⁴¹ Delehanty, "Prophets of Resistance," 2016.
- ⁴² Ammerman, "Connecting Mainline Protestant Churches with Public Life."
- ⁴³ Braunstein, Ruth, Todd Nicholas Fuist, and Rhys H. Williams. 2017. *Religion and Progressive Activism: New Stories about Faith and Politics*, New York: New York University Press, 1-29.
- ⁴⁴ Wood and Fulton, *A Shared Future*, 2015.
- ⁴⁵ Wood, *Faith in Action*, 2002.
- ⁴⁶ Jenkins, *American Prophets*, 2020.
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- ⁴⁹ Pew Research Center. 2018. *The Generation Gap in American Politics*. March 1, 2018.
- ⁵⁰ Braunstein, Ruth, Todd Nicholas Fuist and Rhys H. Williams, "Introduction," 2017, 9.
- ⁵¹ Pew Research Center. 2018. *The Generation Gap in American Politics*. March 1, 2018.
- ⁵² Braunstein, *Prophets and Patriots*, 2017; Swarts, *Organizing Urban America*, 2008; Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 2010; Wood, *Faith in Action*, 2002. These scholars contribute extensively to a deeper understanding of coalition-based connections. My contributions focus not only on the coalition or outside organization but also on the individual connections that can bridge between identity-based experiences.
- ⁵³ Cavendish, "To March or Not to March," 2001; Swarts, *Organizing Urban America*, 2008; Jelen, "Notes for a Theory of Clergy of Political Leaders," 2001. Cavendish's analysis of St. Sabina and Fr.

Mike come to mind here, along with Swarts' conception of collective identity at the coalition level. Jelen's theory of clergy as political leaders highlights the creation of a cultural identity, but it does not provide specific examples/research.

⁵⁴ Swarts, *Organizing Urban American*, 2008.

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