

LIVING FAITH BY SEEKING JUSTICE: PRACTICING FAITH THROUGH
ACTIVISM IN A FAITH AND LABOR COALITION

A Dissertation Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
at the University of Missouri-Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

By
AMY M. LANE

Dr. Mary Jo Neitz and Dr. Clarence Lo, Dissertation Supervisors

JULY 2010

The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled:

LIVING FAITH BY SEEKING JUSTICE: PRACTICING FAITH THROUGH
ACTIVISM IN A FAITH AND LABOR COALITION

presented by Amy M. Lane, a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

Professor Clarence Y. H. Lo

Professor Mary Jo Neitz

Professor J. Kenneth Benson

Professor Victoria Johnson

Professor Richard Callahan

My dissertation is dedicated to the members of Interfaith Worker Justice of Greater Kansas City whose quest for authenticity continues to be a source of inspiration. It is also dedicated to the centers of my universe: Maksim and Alek. Finally, to my dad who will always be in my heart.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a great honor for me to thank professors and colleagues at the University of Missouri for making this dissertation possible. I was fortunate to have two advisors whose different areas of research came together to help me produce a project that is able to speak both to the sociology of religion and to social movements.

Dr. Mary Jo Neitz nurtured my interests in studying religion and broadened my perspective on the literature. I am indebted to her for teaching one of the most solid and inspiring qualitative methods courses a graduate student could encounter. Her work and her presence inspired me to do an ethnography and produced a rewarding research experience. Dr. Clarence Lo introduced me to the study of social movements very early in my graduate studies and through his enthusiasm for theory, movements, and politics, a lifelong fascination with social change was developed. My appreciation for both advisors is boundless.

My committee members each contributed significantly to my growth as a scholar and to components of this project. From Dr. Ken Benson I learned about the contours of organizations. He also gave me a deep and rich understanding of sociological theory. Dr. Victoria Johnson worked independently with me to build my knowledge of the labor movement. And Dr. Richard Callahan connected me to the study of lived religion where it all began to make sense. Through coursework and conversations, his insights into how religion is more than the institution brought me to this project.

Members of IWJ-GKC were not simply research subjects. They each offered important insights that helped sharpen my thinking along the way. I especially thank all of the interviewees who allowed me to explore their lives. I further want to acknowledge

Judy Ancel for refocusing my attention to the shape of the organization during a time when difficult changes were occurring. Josef Walker was an incredible resource for understanding justice from a religious perspective. Dan Johnson and Mike Lewis welcomed me to the project with great enthusiasm and embodied the labor-religion connection. Ron Faust was my expert on authenticity and became a friend throughout my field work. Much thanks goes to Daniel Romero who, though always exceedingly kind to me, serves as the antagonist in this project. I appreciate his willingness to play that role.

I also want to thank my colleagues and friends Jennifer Correa, Kuo-Yang Tang, and Veronica Medina for acting as intellectual soundboards throughout the course of this project and my graduate career. Additional gratitude goes to the Department of Sociology staff, Mary Oakes and Debbie Friedrich, who were not only there for administrative support, but for friendship and stress relief. My partner Maksim Kokushkin was a great source of emotional, intellectual, and technological support throughout this project. He listened to all of my stories from the field, providing feedback and inspiration along the way.

The Graduate School at the University of Missouri funded a portion of the travel costs through the Dissertation Research Travel Fellowship. I was grateful to receive this funding and thank the Dean of the Graduate School, Dr. George Justice for seeing value in my work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
LIST OF IMAGES.....	viii
LIST OF TABLES	ix
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
“This is What Justice Looks Like”: IWJ-GKC Engaged	7
<i>Justice for Janitors: An Ethnographic Account</i>	7
<i>Defining Work and Workers</i>	10
<i>What Justice Is and What It Isn’t</i>	13
<i>Religious Texts and Languages</i>	15
Practices	18
<i>Rally for the New Sanctuary Movement: An Ethnographic Account</i>	18
Overview of the Chapters	29
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Methods	30
Understanding Religious Experience.....	30
<i>Deposing Dualisms</i>	31
<i>Deposing Typologies</i>	33
<i>Seating Lived Experience: Lived Religion and Intersubjectivity</i>	35
Agency, Organizations, and Institutions in Process.....	38
Summary of the Framework	49
Research Questions.....	51
Methods	52
<i>Pre-Field Work</i>	53
<i>Gaining Access</i>	56
<i>In the Field</i>	57
<i>The Interviews</i>	59
<i>Supplementary Resources</i>	60
<i>Working with the Data</i>	61
Chapter 3: Individual Spiritual Journeys	64
Locating the Members	66
Religious Humanists	72

<i>Ilyse</i>	72
<i>Judy</i>	76
<i>Denny</i>	79
Around the Edges.....	83
<i>Susan</i>	83
<i>Josef</i>	88
The Perfect Marriage	95
<i>Mike</i>	95
This is Church to Me.....	101
<i>Dan</i>	101
<i>Ron</i>	106
<i>Reverend Voss</i>	110
Discussion	116
Chapter 4: The Story of the Organization.....	121
The Origin Story	123
Organizing Campaigns.....	126
Pathways into IWJ-GKC.....	130
Solidifying the Organization	132
The Meaning of IWJ-GKC	141
Discussion	143
Chapter 5: Organizational Structure in Process	145
Structural Changes Over Time.....	145
<i>National's Agenda Seeps In</i>	145
<i>IWJ-GKC Gets an Organizer</i>	150
<i>Personal Relationships?</i>	154
<i>Moving Onward</i>	155
<i>Decision-Making: From Consensus, to Committees, to the Executive Board</i>	157
Breaking the Camel's Back	165
<i>The New Sanctuary Movement</i>	165
<i>Confronting the Minutemen: Francis Semler</i>	173
Closure	186
Messages From The Future.....	190

Discussion	191
Chapter 6: Conclusion.....	198
Interinstitutional Relationships: Religion and Labor Together.....	198
Limitations and Extensions.....	206
Appendix A: Interview Schedule.....	209
Appendix B: Media Sources	211
Appendix C: Group Affiliations	212
Appendix D: List of Names and Brief Descriptions.....	214
BIBLIOGRAPHY	216
VITA.....	224

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Respondents' Relationships to IWJ-GKC.....	72
2. Model of Consensus Decision-Making.....	142
3. Model of Committee-Based Decision-Making.....	148
4. Model of Decision-Making with an Emphasis on the Board, the National Office, and the Lead Organizer.....	163

LIST OF IMAGES

Image	Page
1. Billboard placed along the highway for the unveiling of the New Sanctuary Coalition.....	21
2. Children at the rally for the New Sanctuary Coalition hold candles and wear shirts asking “Who Would Jesus Deport?”	22
3. Holding candles and signs high, with bowed heads, the rally for the New Sanctuary Coalition concludes with prayer.....	23

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Recommendations for Religious Partners.....	208
2. Recommendations for Local and National Labor Politics.....	213
3. Recommendations for Labor Tactics.....	214

Chapter 1: Introduction

The combination of a critique of organized faith, along with an interest in pursuing faith expressions by living a particular sense of justice, leads some religious practitioners to discover new contexts to live out their faith experiences. These new contexts may exist outside of traditional religious institutions, but in this process, not all boundary work is put aside. In this dissertation, I explore how a group of social justice activists seeks to unite issues of worker justice and faith by redefining work and the worker as belonging to the realm of the sacred. In so doing, they challenge the boundaries that delineate the sacred and the profane, the public and the private. Based on particular family and faith histories, they have cultivated an understanding that all religions believe in justice, requiring that practitioners move from acts of charity to acts of justice in order to experience a deeper, more “authentic”¹ faith. In journeying with them, I discovered that organizational form and structure are important even in the new setting. Rigid hierarchies and agendas insensitive to local contexts can stand in the way of justice work based on a framework of relationship-building and consensus decision-making. Organizational form can transgress and become something that no longer reflects the ways practitioners want to live out their faiths.

Interfaith Worker Justice of Greater Kansas City (IWJ-GKC) is a diverse coalition of religious practitioners and labor union members that mobilized to promote worker justice. At the time of my study, they worked to fight economic, racial, and gender

¹ This is a naturally-occurring term. I did not look to identify “authentic” faith expressions. Participants in my project used this word to define their faith experiences as different from those faith practitioners who do not engage in justice work.

inequalities through the support of unionization, fair wages, keeping immigrant families united, and equal access to healthcare and jobs. Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) – the national organization located in Chicago of which IWJ-GKC became an affiliate – is currently focused on mobilizing congregation-based and interfaith coalitions for the fight against economic inequality. At the local level, activists are challenged by the effort to push the cultures of their faith communities from mercy and service work to cultures focused on activism based on a moral responsibility to principles of human rights and social justice.

IWJ-GKC participants claim work and activism as realms of the sacred, imbued with religious meaning and inhabited by forms of religious practice. By organizing low-wage workers, meeting with union and company representatives, passing out fliers, and raising a billboard on I-70 which reads “Love the Immigrant as Yourself,” members of IWJ-GKC engage practices that are at the same time religious as they are political. In so doing, they not only engage forms of religious practice that carry into everyday lived experience, through their struggles and interactions they build new varieties of institutional ties and are uniquely positioned to comment on the American labor scene.

In order to understand how faith is lived by contemporary persons and how the resources of faith communities are brought closer to lived experience, the project must be situated within the corridors of daily life (Ammerman 2007; Bender 2003; Bender & Cadge 2006; Orsi 1997). This dissertation is therefore based on ethnographic field work with IWJ-GKC from 2005 to 2008. During my study, I attended monthly meetings of the general membership and meetings of the governing board and action committees, along with fundraising events, rallies, religious services at members’ congregations, and group

retreats. I conducted nine in-depth, semi-structured interviews and supplemented my research with primary source material gathered in the field (described in greater detail in Chapter Two).

Like Orsi (1996; 1997; 2003; 2005) and others (see Ammerman 1997, 2007; Bender 2003; Gould 1997; Hervieu-L  ger 1997), my approach privileges how religion is practiced and experienced. It is an approach which suggests religiosity becomes meaningful as religious ideas and beliefs are experienced through actions and emotions. By focusing on religious practice and religion as it is lived, the broader agenda of this project contributes to the current conversation in the sociology of religion. The discourse calls for a move beyond the secularization thesis and its critique (see Finke and Stark 1992; Neitz 1987) in order to develop new understandings of the ways religion is present throughout multiple areas of social life (Ammerman 2007; Beckford 2003; McGuire 2008). Central to this move is envisioning the permeability of institutional boundaries and a view of religion as both public and private (Bender 2003; Edgell 2006; Friedland and Alford 1997; McGuire and Maduro 2005). Further, using this perspective resulted in an empirically rich project which therefore makes methodological contributions to the study of lived religion by looking at practices across three levels: the individual, the organizational, and the institutional.

In this dissertation, I propose that moving from *mercy to activism* creates a cultural space in which labor activism becomes a form of religious practice, expanding the realm of the sacred to encompass everyday concerns. This is a significant move because, as Poppendieck (1998) points out, the United States has cultivated a “culture of charity that normalizes destitution and legitimates personal generosity as a response to

major social and economic dislocation” (5). This kind of culture calls for “private” responses to social problems, but moving from mercy to activism inspires faith practitioners to invest in “public” responses to social problems. It is a move that takes more “guts” in a way because activists are often tempted to use the discourse of volunteerism to soften their public image (Eliasoph 1998:165-209).

When taking up justice causes and redefining work as sacred, actors challenge the boundaries between what is public and what is private. As Neitz (1995) points out, “Feminist theorist have written about how the traditional dichotomy between the public and the private has been a powerful source of women’s inequality” (300). In writing about a group of women called “Limina,” she finds that they create new relationships between work, family, and faith by adapting Catholic practices and Celtic/indigenous practices to women’s life cycles. By publically enacting rituals, women break down boundaries and promote equality (ibid.). Moving from mercy to activism likewise allows practitioners to challenge boundaries and promote equality, especially for low-wage workers.

While the characters who appear in this dissertation are primarily “Baby Boomers,” the study’s applications are potentially broader because of its treatment of the interfaith, social justice organization as a cultural space for the engagement of faith practices by using the lens of lived religion. Baby boomers, when young adults, were politically active as a whole and they remained so well into adulthood (Youniss 2010:2). Many were inspired to engage in civic activities in faith settings (ibid.). The religious and political concerns of today’s “emerging adults” are being discussed more and more as scholars recognize that the future of the American religious landscape will no longer be

wholly shaped by the baby boomers (Smith 2009; Wuthnow 2007). Instead, the “millennials” – today’s twenty and thirty-somethings – who look similar in their religious views as did the boomers when they were young adults (Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life 2010:8) – are the future of American religion. The millennials are more “aware of political affairs” than previous generations (Youniss 2010) and they also identify as religiously “unaffiliated” at a higher rate than any other generation in the history of US survey research (Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life 2010:3).

But, identifying as unaffiliated does not mean religious concerns are tossed aside, as I describe in this study. The twenty-five percent of adults under the age of thirty who identify as unaffiliated includes people who say religion is important-to-very important in their lives (ibid.). Because they also engage traditional “religious practices [like prayer, reading scriptures, and meditations] less often than do other Americans,” (Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life 2010:8), the areas open for exploration include what kinds of actions become religious practices for this group and what kinds of cultural spaces are available or created for the engagement of faith practices, if any. Considering their levels of political engagement, aspects of this study will be useful for understanding questions about the current generation of young adults now under investigation by scholars of religion. It is possible that those who identify as unaffiliated and who are politically and religiously concerned may find the cultural space of social justice activism to be a home for religious ideals and practices as well. Youniss (2010) finds that “Insofar as service is coupled with and organized around social justice goals, it has staying power beyond the early years” (8). This means that the issues investigated here – the concerns

and practices raised by the people described in this dissertation – could help think about the long-term impacts of the millennials on the American religious scene.

Further, the story of the organization told here may likely prove of practical value for practitioners engaged in interfaith and social justice activism because the dissertation further explores the ways participants negotiate – within an organizational setting – actions and processes of decisions making, in an attempt to keep organizational form in line with the faith values and practices that are cultivated through justice activism². In this context, moving from mercy to activism puts religious persons in a position to engage interfaith and inter-institutional dialogues.

In this rest of this chapter, I introduce IWJ-GKC in greater depth by discussing the ways members understand work, workers, and justice and by showing what justice as a lived expression of faith looks like. Here, I explore ways people can “enchant their lives by drawing on spiritual language and concepts and experiences” (Ammerman 2007:224). The religious experiences of prayers, choruses and hymns, meditations, and reflections are woven throughout events as seemingly secular as a street rally. While marching through the streets of Kansas City to demand fair wages for janitors, typical religious practices are engaged, but the very act of marching for social justice is itself simultaneously a religious and a political practice (Munson 2007). In this chapter, I explore several contexts I encountered in the field to provide an image of the ways faith is lived through social justice activism by members of IWJ-GKC.

² Like many feminist organizations, IWJ-GKC consciously sought a particular organizational form through which to practice an action-based theology. Arnold (1995) writes, “Like the New Left activists who preceded them (S. Evans 1979; Breines 1989), many feminists have considered organizational form to be more than just a means to an end (see Echols 1989). They have viewed the design of an organization’s structure as an opportunity to practice what Wini Breines (1989) call prefigurative politics: that is, as a way to embody the movement’s vision of the ideal society in its practices” (277).

“This is What Justice Looks Like”: IWJ-GKC Engaged

The campaigns, actions and meetings engaged by IWJ-GKC during the time of my study provide evidence of worker justice activism as lived expressions of faith. The organizational story of IWJ-GKC shows that this kind of work does not flow naturally just because people of faith decide to take up certain causes. Rather, there are conflicts that have the potential to erupt when disparate views of the appropriate kinds of actions, decisions, and tactics come head-to-head. Still, despite tensions that developed in the group over time, they were able to come together, guiding actions on several key campaigns.

In Chapter Three, I detail how my interviewees describe a particular sense of justice. Here, I show how a sense of justice – based on the belief that all people have a right to human dignity – was manifest in the work of the organization. I explore the meaning of work and workers from the perspective of a faith-inspired sense of justice. I also examine the basis of worker justice, looking especially into the religious languages and texts that are used to inspire worker justice activism. Lastly, I look at practices, addressing what makes activism an expression of faith and what makes some typical faith practices, activism. First, however, I provide an account of one of IWJ-GKC’s major campaigns during the course of my study: the Justice for Janitors campaign. The action described below was organized together with members of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) and was described by members as a “model campaign.”

Justice for Janitors: An Ethnographic Account

At one end of an area called the Plaza in Kansas City, surrounding the J.C. Nichols fountain, members of the Service Employees International Union and Interfaith

Worker Justice of Greater Kansas City gathered on a wet and chilly Saturday morning in February to rally for a wage increase, better healthcare, and a union contract for Kansas City janitors. No clouds parted to reveal the sun, but the rain subsided as the prayer service began. Dan leaned over and quietly said, "Someone is watching out for us."

Earlier, as we all shuffled around the fountain, coats and scarves wrapped tightly against the wind and rain, Dan told me he had really "dragged his feet" in getting himself out to the rally because, you know, "Missouri basketball is on today." I didn't know, but I smiled and said, "Uh huh" because every good Missouri student knows about Tiger basketball. Dan said it was half-time when he left his home and that the Tigers were doing great. I expressed an appropriate amount of pleasure at hearing the score, but shared a laugh with Dan over the irony of his comments. Dan has served as the labor co-chair of IWJ-GKC since it came together at the end of 2004. He only misses a meeting or rally when there is a conflict with his job at UPS, so the notion of him "dragging his feet" was a humorous intermingling of a Teamster's repertoire of weekend relaxation and what to Dan is really the central purpose of his life: his commitment to justice for workers.

The women and men we rallied with were earning a mere \$6.50 an hour, with unaffordable healthcare and cleaning supplies inadequate for achieving the results demanded of their work. Some are African American, most are Latinas who speak little to no English. We stood together with them and their families for an interfaith, bi-lingual prayer service and rally. Children of the workers dressed in purple SEIU t-shirts helped to hold the Justice for Janitors banner. Some people honked as they passed by in their cars; one man on the sidewalk raised his fist in the air and supported a hearty yell of

solidarity. But, for the most part, people went about the business of the Plaza, which is shopping and eating.

Across the street from where the rally was held is the Cheesecake Factory where a slice of cheesecake goes for a price nearly equal to – sometimes more than – these workers' hourly wages. The contrast was startling. Just several doors away, shoppers moved in and out of Ann Taylor, Origins, and the Body Shop. Arms were laden with bags from Eddie Bauer, the Walking Company, and Sharper Image.

The women of SEIU wore t-shirts, light jackets, and worn jeans under the cloudy skies. They clean the buildings along the Plaza – a place where their wages can buy at best a cup of coffee from Starbucks. The company they work for pays its Denver and Minneapolis janitors \$10.00 per hour, but maintained the argument that since Kansas's minimum wage is only \$2.65 an hour, their Kansas City janitors were quite well-to-do considering the context.

During the rally, an SEIU organizer, announced the company was close to granting a wage increase but was not bending on healthcare. He said they will continue to build on that foundation and apologized for the turnout, but even at forty people, their support was encouraging. Once the prayer service ended, the crowd quickly dispersed and left the chill, cloudy skies for the shelter of their vehicles. A handful of SEIU and IWJ-GKC members hung around to talk.

I walked down the Plaza to buy something hot to drink. I entered the familiar comfort of a Starbucks; grabbed an espresso and a pastry. Warm smiles. Warm music in an atmosphere full intellectualism and jazz. I looked around and thought that each outfit must be a week's or more pay for the women, some of whom were still gathered down the

road around the fountain. On the counter next to me, the front page of the Kansas City Star displayed a bold headline “Extreme Poverty a Reality for More: Kansas has the fifth largest rate of gain with numbers growing 43 percent.” You might not notice it however, amidst lattes, chai, and Tiffany’s across the street. A minister at the rally said “Let justice roll down like water!” I thought, maybe if we put justice in a grande mochachino it would taste sweeter.

Defining Work and Workers

The way that IWJ-GKC members understand “the worker” and work itself is central to a faith-based sense of justice. The view that all workers are *inherently* deserving of dignity, fairness, and justice is built on the foundational belief that “all religious traditions recognize that people are created in God’s image,” according to Reverend Barrett, IWJ-GKC’s religion co-chair during the time of my study. He further argued in an opinion piece printed in the *Kansas City Star* that “wages reflect our values” as a society and that “Workers are not just another production cost like rent, electricity or raw materials” (Barrett 2007). The right to fair and just treatment covers all forms of work, including manual labor. Likewise, the group compiled a statement for their Justice for Janitors campaign – briefly described above – that outlined the “perspective from the faith community.” In this statement, they argued that “All working people, including the lowest-paid clerks or janitors are contributing to society’s productive efforts and deserve to earn enough for life’s basic necessities.” People are said to honor God through their labor as it contributes to the community as a whole. When workers are not fairly compensated, “the moral fabric of society as a whole suffers.” Workers are so important that their “labor sustains our lives,” as Ron – a key IWJ-GKC member and a Disciples of

Christ minister – wrote in a poem titled “Justice for Janitors” that he delivered at the Janitors rally.

At the June, 2007 monthly meeting, Mike, also a core member and a Catholic deacon and retired construction worker, opened the meeting with a prayer, part of which addressed “the worker.” He said, “Our work and the worker is sacred and holy.” Because the worker is considered sacred, at the Janitors’ rally, Mike said that the entire mission of the Christian community fails if people of faith fail to “stand with the worker.” A Sikh clergyman was also at this rally to pray for and give support to the janitors trying to negotiate a contract. Echoing Mike’s emphasis on the mission of the Christian community, the Sikh clergyman pointed out that his tradition considers work, especially physical labor, to be the highest form of worship.

Work itself can be spiritually liberating, from members’ perspectives, therefore people must be fairly compensated for their labor, as indicated in scriptures from several sacred texts. Judy Voss, a United Methodist minister who became an active, key member of IWJ-GKC throughout the course of my study, led a responsive reading at the Janitors rally that incorporated perspectives from Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The reading was included in the program for the event with references to scriptures from the Quran, the Torah, and the Bible. These scriptures were referred to in several other contexts I observed during my fieldwork including at a conference held by the national IWJ in 2007 in Chicago, along with an IWJ-GKC program called Labor in the Pulpit which is a religious service held on the Sunday preceding Labor Day in honor of workers, and during monthly meetings. These scriptures were also printed in event programs and flyers related to the group’s work.

The expansion of the Wal-Mart “empire” was a major concern for IWJ-GKC members: opposing a proposal for a new Wal-Mart site in the Kansas City area was one of the organizing campaigns that brought group members together. In 2005, IWJ-GKC signed a letter addressed to the CEO of Wal-Mart which pointed out, “The prophet Moses in Deuteronomy 25:13-15 teaches ‘Thou shalt not oppress a hired servant that is poor and needy...lest he cry against thee unto the LORD, and it be sin unto thee.’” In front of the fountain on the Plaza, surrounded by janitors in SEIU t-shirts, Reverend Voss called out, “In the labor community we chant: ‘No Justice! No Peace!’ The Prophet Muhammad said,” and the people present responded, “When you hire, compensate your workers and treat them fairly.” The reading went on,

Leader: The Christian scripture says,

People: Listen! The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out.

Leader: The Jewish Talmud says,

People: He who withholds an employee’s wage is as though he deprived him of his life.

Leader: As leaders in the labor and religious communities,

People: We recognize our shared values and pledge to find new ways to forge partnerships seeking for justice for workers.

Work is sacred and workers should be fairly compensated, but what about unions? During a Building Bridges class – IWJ-GKC’s pre-apprenticeship program for women and people of color – in June, 2007 Judy Ancel, Director of the Institute for Labor Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, talked about the history and importance of unions with the students. She asked the students, “What is a fair day’s work?” One student responded, “It’s when you get paid what you’re worth” and Judy followed up by asking, “Well, how do you decide what you’re worth?” The students were a little stumped by this question, giving answers like, “By how hard you work,” and “The

more you know, the more you get paid.” But, Judy replied, “How much you’re worth can only be determined by a group of people getting together to bargain. You have *innate* sense of fairness.” This sense of fairness echoes others’ assertions that all people inherently deserve dignity, fairness, and justice and, for Judy, it is enacted in a collective context.

While Judy would not go so far as to say she “believes in labor,” she describes another member as believing in labor. Her assessment was not far-fetched. At the 2007 IWJ national conference in Chicago, during a small group discussion, one IWJ-GKC member talked about how “the Union saved her.” Tears were rolling down her cheeks as she talked about her faith. What was interesting in interacting with this woman, I was never sure whether she was talking about God or talking about the Union: she used the words interchangeably, as well as invoking them both in the context of talking about “faith,” “spirituality,” and “emotional” connections.

What Justice Is and What It Isn’t

By relocating work to the sacred sphere, IWJ-GKC members gave new definition to the lines between sacred and profane, as well as public and private. But their sense of justice was also defined by the broader assertion that: all religions believe in justice. Hearing this phrase and reading it so often throughout my study, I was interested in finding out what exactly “justice” is and identifying the faith-based justifications for engaging in social justice activism. Not all social justice activists come from a faith perspective, so the kinds of language and texts used situates IWJ-GKC members in a position of “moral authority” on the issues.

First, justice is something different from engaging in acts of charity, from the perspective of group members. Musick and Wilson (2008) describe the distinction between justice and charity as part of the “vernacular language of politics” (18). People tend to feel there is something qualitatively different between charity and justice (ibid.) Significantly, IWJ-GKC members did not look negatively on charity, but it was often considered the first step to living a fuller, deeper religious life. At the December, 2007 monthly meeting, Mike pointed out that “Justice begins with service, but justice is for long-distance runners, not sprinters.” Likewise, in November, 2007 Susan, an active, Presbyterian lay-leader, had argued that “Doing good works and service is important, but justice is doing the right thing to correct the wrongs in society. The role of IWJ-GKC is to help people see beyond doing service.” Both of these arguments indicate that justice is no “quick fix,” which in some ways, distinguishes acts of charity from members’ point of view. Reverend Voss said that justice work, “is a slow, laborious process,” it is not about only meeting immediate needs without tackling systemic issues. As Reverend Barrett suggested, “From the faith perspective, mercy leads to service work, but justice means looking at the core issues” and understanding the systemic causes of those issues. Reflecting on the disproportionate experience of poverty by people of color, he argued that there is a psychological sense of imperfection that is a part of Black culture, especially in a country where God is perceived as white. Further,

Faiths based on Calvinism allowed capitalism to flourish, representing an extreme form of Protestantism and arrogance that allowed for people to go to Africa and get slaves. Slavery mars the soil of a culture and it doesn’t go away with the elimination of rules, but God made us equal. I understood that by the time I was thirteen. We now find that Black and Hispanic churches are partnered all over the nation because they have the same interests: good schools and better working conditions.

Reverend Barrett argued that it is important to developing one's sense of justice to understand these root-causes and to partner together to try to change issues faced by struggling communities. But who decides what which systemic issues are social justice issues? Another, semi-active IWJ-GKC member and a clergyman argued at the December, 2006 planning retreat that "the definition of social justice can't be accurate unless it's defined by people on the fringes. The majority can't define social justice: if they do, it's not justice."

Religious Texts and Languages

Members drew on a variety of religious texts to inspire a sense of justice and used religious language to bolster justice claims with moral authority. At the March, 2008 monthly meeting, Reverend Barrett asked members to share with the group what they thought best described worker justice. One member said the story of the Good Samaritan had been an important source of inspiring his sense of worker justice because it speaks about actions that transcend our socially-defined discriminatory attitudes: "the story suggests that we should act in solidarity even with the social outcast." The story of Zacchaeus was also described as motivation to – through faith-based love – sit down and negotiate in good faith with business owners when working for union contracts. As the story goes, Zacchaeus, a hated tax collector, is so moved that Jesus – in an act of compassion – wanted to visit his home that he renounced his sinful ways and made a pledge of restitution to the community. Another member agreed, saying "Jesus reflected an openness, an awakening, a consciousness, and a spontaneity to life that we should embrace in our social justice work" because doing so might just cause business owners to repent and treat their workers fairly.

During a session on interfaith organizing at the national IWJ conference held in Chicago, some argued that referring to Jesus can be exclusionary: “Jesus is controversial” as one speaker put it. However, invoking Jesus also gives moral authority to justice claims from IWJ-GKC members’ perspectives. The letter sent in 2005 to the CEO of Wal-Mart asked,

Would Jesus support the exploitation of so many for the profit of so few? Would Jesus tolerate systematic discrimination against women? Would Jesus stand by idly while thousands of children go without health care? Would Jesus accept violations of child labor laws? The answer is simple. Jesus would not embrace Wal-Mart's values of greed and profits at any cost, particularly when children suffer as a result of those misguided values.

Likewise, Jesus was invoked at the New Sanctuary Movement rally in 2007, a campaign that focuses on providing safe havens for immigrant families under the threat of separation through deportation. The group came to take on this controversial cause under the direction of the national IWJ. At this rally, a woman whose husband had been deported wore a t-shirt with the slogan, “Who Would Jesus Deport?”

The argument that “all religions believe in justice” was not only used to support claims for worker justice. When the group took up concerns over immigration, the fact that the “fundamental human right to be treated with respect and dignity” was used to demand fair treatment of immigrants as well. The U.S. immigration system itself was described as “broken” (Edgell 2006:109-111 discusses the idea of “brokenness”). The very “soul” of the nation was being lost because of the failures of immigration law. As Reverend Rick, from the coalition People of Faith for Hospitality and Justice – a group that partnered with IWJ-GKC on immigration issues – put it during the rally for the New Sanctuary Movement, “We are losing our soul as we separate parents from their children; as we treat brothers and sisters and neighbors as if they are criminals.” In an inspiration

that opened the October, 2007 monthly meeting, Mike shared a statement by Pope John XXIII in which he argues,

Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own state. When there are just reasons in favor of it, he must be permitted to emigrate to other countries and to take up residence there. The fact that he is a citizen of a particular state does not deprive him of membership in the human family, nor the citizenship in that universal society, the common, world-wide fellowship of women and men.

The stories and texts above are heavily weighted with the Christian viewpoint, which comprised the largest representation in the group, but other texts were used to support justice claims. Across the top of the IWJ-GKC brochure, letters in all caps read, “ALL RELIGIONS BELIEVE IN JUSTICE.” One section of the tri-fold brochure refers to “The Teachings” that inspire the movement. Printed there are four references to holy texts:

Torah: Follow justice and justice alone, so that you may live and possess the land the LORD your God is giving you. Deuteronomy 1:20

...you take usury and excessive interest and make unjust gain from your neighbors by extortion. And you have forgotten Me, declares the Sovereign LORD... Ezekiel 22:12

Gospel: Then they also will answer, ‘Lord when did we see thee hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ Then He will answer them, ‘truly, I say to you, as you did it not to one of the least of these, you did it not to Me.’ Matthew 24:44-45

Koran: O you who believe! Be maintainers of justice, bearers of witness of Allah’s sake, though it may be against your own selves or (your) parents or near relatives; if he be rich or poor, Allah is nearer to them both in compassion; therefore do not follow (your) low desires, lest you deviate; and if you swerve or turn aside, then surely Allah is aware of what you do. Women 4:135

The holy texts and religious language described here suggest that religious practitioners *should* be tuned in to a sense of justice, but as I discuss in Chapter Three, my interviewees’ key problem with organized faith is the lack of action geared toward justice

concerns. Because, as Reverend Barrett put it, “people of faith are given a stewardship over the world, they need to manage it in the way God would have managed it and this includes treating all people with dignity.” Next, I discuss practices observed throughout my study. Members emphasized the importance of action – and particular kinds of action – as indicators of an authentic faith expression, inspired by the texts and language described above. I first provide an ethnographic account of the rally for the New Sanctuary Movement that highlights several key forms of religious practice observed throughout my study.

Practices

Rally for the New Sanctuary Movement: An Ethnographic Account

I walk into the park area where the first part of the rally is held and am greeted by Ron. There are kids playing in the grass nearby and I ask him who the reporter is covering the event. He points out she’s from Washington DC and has been covering the national New Sanctuary Movement. The sky is overcast and dark clouds threaten rain. I talk with Reverend Voss about the weather when I notice the summer intern Ilyse across the lawn. She flew in for the event because a lot of her time had been spent working on Sanctuary over the summer. Everyone mills around, greeting one another, looking up to the sky. Despite the threat of rain, people are smiling and laughing and it feels a little like a family reunion without the barbeque. Candles are being passed around and there’s some discussion of how the candles will be lit, especially with the winds blowing through the park, where there is little shelter from the elements.

As the event begins, directions are given for everyone to form “one big circle.” Father Pat and Daniel – IWJ-GKC’s lead organizer – start arranging people, instructing

them to move in and to move out, allowing enough space for supporters, signs, posters and candles. Daniel asks me to get a head count of the people moving around and I try to count, observe, hold a sign, and interact at the same time. The wind blows my poster around and I finally set it aside.

Once in a circle, we begin to sing "Sanctuary," a song that had become the theme of the movement. The words are printed in English and in Spanish in the event program. Singing starts off tentatively, then builds as everyone finds their location and realizes the event is beginning. I hear in song, "Lord prepare me to be a sanctuary, pure and holy, tried and true. With thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for you." Alternating between English and Spanish, Father Pat welcomes the crowd to the event saying, "Welcome to our celebration of faith, fidelity, and justice. Lord Bless those who are blind that they may see and those who are deaf that they may hear. Amen!" We move through the bulletin to a responsive reading called, "Remember the Immigrant," with phrases in English and Spanish. I struggle to make my words match those around me, then finally give up for the sake of listening.

We move next to Reverend Voss, who stands in the center of the circle wearing her black suit and white collar, marking her as a member of the clergy. She says,

As people of many faiths we gather here in this circle today. From the Hebrew scriptures: Though strangers live within your lands, do not mistreat them. The stranger living with you must be treated as one of your native born. Love him as yourself. From the Buddhist text: serve no others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. From the Muslim text: No one of you is a believer until you desire for another that which you desire for yourself. And the Christian text: Love your neighbor as yourself. Show hospitality to strangers for by doing that, some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Father Pat introduces himself and the unveiling of the New Sanctuary Coalition, pointing to key, organizing members of the coalition. A member of the Unitarian Church – also an immigration lawyer – says,

What is the New Sanctuary Movement and why are we here holding these candles? We know that there are families all over this nation being separated by the immigration laws. As an act of public witness, the New Sanctuary Movement will, without confrontation, provide support and protection and will advocate for families that are being separated.

Another leader from the coalition representing the Mennonites joins in to say, “We are not hiding the families. They are courageously telling their stories.... We are not violating laws. All the sanctuary congregations are signing the same promise: to provide spiritual and material support.”

Laurie, a member of the Presbyterian church who fully embodied the passion of this coalition, moves to the center of the circle to introduce the lighting of the candles. She calls out,

People of Faith for Hospitality and Justice have been meeting frequently for almost a year, partnering with Interfaith Worker Justice to form the New Sanctuary Coalition. We are going to gather to put our faith values into action. We cannot stand by while people are oppressed just because they do not have papers. We are all human beings deserving respect and dignity. At this time we give you the invitation to journey with us.

As we begin to light our candles, moving around the circle, one candle lighting the next, Laurie says,

Let your light shine before men. We are the light of the world. Our light will be seen and it will shine for miles and miles. We are called to no longer hide our light but to be a beacon of truth. We will speak out and no longer be silent. No longer shall we go along with the crowd. We will explain our light to others and seek justice on behalf of our immigrant neighbors and brothers and sisters. We will put forth our light so all may experience its illumination – light your lamps!

With candles in hand, we move in procession from the park to a parking lot near the I-70 billboard, singing “Sanctuary” and holding signs that read, “All Faiths Believe in Justice;” “Love the Immigrant as Yourself;” and “Stop Unjust Deportations;” Once in the parking lot, everyone gathers closely to look up at the billboard. The sun breaks through the thick clouds, illuminating the sign overhead.



Image 1: Billboard placed along the highway for the unveiling of the New Sanctuary Coalition.

Revered Rick draws everyone closer together saying, “If everyone moves closer we can begin. Can you hear me? All you kids, do you have dreams for your future? Do you? I can’t hear you!” There are several small children around me who yell louder and more excitedly as Revered Rick speaks. They wear hand-painted shirts with the words on the front, “Who Would Jesus Deport?” and on the back “The USA Deported My Daddy” and “Stop Deporting Dads.” One little girl sees that my candle had gone out and walks over on tiptoes to help me relight it.



Image 2: Children at the rally for the New Sanctuary Coalition hold candles and wear shirts asking “Who Would Jesus Deport?”

Reverend Rick continued,

Excellent, because you’re looking at a dream come true. It was eleven months ago that a few pastors and a few lay people came together to dream. We were tired of hearing nightmare words of hatred and intimidation. We were tired of the nightmares called the Minutemen and the Klan. We were tired of people we loved being targeted by nightmares like Bill O’Reilly and Lou Dobbs. People of faith were sleeping. But we decided to wake up [Amens erupt across the crowd]. So we came together and we called ourselves People of Faith for Hospitality and Justice. We wanted people to hear about dreams, not nightmares. We wanted to hear about dreams that come from our faith traditions. Dreams of hospitality and justice – the most basic and essential dreams of our scriptures. And we dreamed of a billboard that would carry our message to thousands of people. And we settled on a scripture passage: Leviticus 19:33-34, ‘Love the immigrant as yourself.’ We are enforcing a broken system that is a nightmare. We want people to remember who we’re supposed to be as a nation. It is the very soul of our nation that is at stake. Right now we are losing our soul as we separate parents from their children; as we treat brothers and sisters and neighbors as if they are criminals. The nightmare is too real right now. We need to convert our national nightmare – from nightmare to dream and then to reality. And so today we celebrate this one dream come true for people of faith. This billboard is a dream come true, isn’t it? We know that dreams don’t come true in isolation. It is in community as we partner with one another that we make dreams come true. Along the way, People of Faith for Hospitality and Justice has partnered with Interfaith Worker Justice to create New Sanctuary Movement of Greater Kansas City. From here the billboard looks very big doesn’t it [Yeah!] but it is only a very small part of our dreams. It is a huge dream of hospitality and justice...Let’s get together and turn our dreams into reality – Amen? [Yeah! Amen!]

Ron offers the closing words before the press conference. People bow their heads, assuming prayerful, reverent postures and he asks us to hold our candles high as a declaration of support for immigrant families, saying, “The journey has been long and there are many steps to go. We have carried our light to this spot and now as you extinguish your candle, begin to carry it into your heart. As we leave, I would like you to go in peace. Shalom is another way to say Sanctuary.”



Image 3: Holding candles and signs high, with bowed heads, the rally for the New Sanctuary Coalition concludes with prayer.

I include this selection from my field notes because it addresses one of my central concerns in this project, when religious practice comes to encompass social justice activism, what does it look, sound, and feel like? Several themes related to practice became evident throughout my study: activism as religious practice is embodied, invoking the power of symbols and it is performative, especially through the use of song, prayer, and language. These things – together with the assertion that these are religious practices because practitioners themselves describe them that way – show how social justice activism can be a form of religious practice.

Rallies, vigils, and actions are nothing without bodies. At the most basic level, showing up at an event and taking part in the coordinated movements marks one as a body for the cause. Numbers show support and increase the likelihood of an event having a successful result. Because of this, members welcomed me with enthusiasm at public events. After the Justice for Janitors rally, I received several notes of thanks from one of the organizers connected with SEIU. As I point out in Chapter Two, showing up for the Building Bridges fundraiser was taken as a sign of real commitment to the issues, even knowing that I was there in my capacity as a researcher. So, physically being present at events is a signifier of support.

What bodies do there is also significant. Through physical actions and the use of symbols, an event is marked as faith-based. The importance of wearing clergy vestments was emphasized throughout my study. Because I most often saw members of the group who were also members of the clergy in “street clothes,” it was always fascinating to see them at public events in their religious attire: it defined events as religious occasions. Instead of leading a congregation through a typical religious service, these members of the clergy led social justice activists through actions of protest. At a meeting held in April, 2008, the group was getting ready for an upcoming May Day event which was a prayer vigil held in front of the office of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Daniel said that the faith leaders need to be out there dressed “in their most serious religious garb.” He also commended Reverend Voss’s performance at a City Council meeting held at the end of 2007, during which group members demanded that the Kansas City mayor take accountability for his actions in appointing a member of the Minutemen to the Parks Board. Daniel said, “Reverend Voss was there wearing her collar: she was a

powerful moral force!” Though wearing the vestments can sometimes mark one as a member of the mob, as Dan laughed about during our interview (described in Chapter Three), these garments signify a certain moral authority on the issues at hand. For those members who are not clergy, marching in procession, lighting and holding candles, and gathering together in a circle all signify a unity of purpose that is marked as a religious occasion because these motions are surrounded by faith-based language, prayer, and song. People carry signs inscribed with words from holy texts and assume the postures of solemnity at the right moments.

The rally for the New Sanctuary Movement and the prayer vigil held in front of the ICE office were both unambiguously faith-based actions. The Sanctuary rally was the rollout event for a movement generated by the support of congregations, while the action in front of ICE was specifically a prayer vigil held purposefully on the National Day of Prayer. The Justice for Janitors rally was somewhat different. It could have easily successfully proceeded as a secular-based event. The primary sponsor was SEIU and IWJ-GKC was there to provide support, however, they were there to lend support by appealing to moral authority. The organizers from SEIU spoke about the terms of the contract under negotiation, while workers told their stories of trying to survive on low wages, bad hours, and no health care insurance. The event was, overall, infused with faith-based practice. As I described above, several Christian clergy were in attendance, along with a rabbi and a Sikh. The event opened and closed with prayer and standing around the fountain, we voiced a responsive reading including verses from three faiths and sang, “We are marching in the light of God, we are marching in the light of God. We are singing in the light of God, we are singing in the light of God.” Ron shared two

poems he had written for the event, honoring the work of low-wage workers and their contributions to the community. The rabbi prayed in Hebrew and then in English, saying,

You can have the right to vote, oh Lord, but if you don't have the right to be, what good is it? You can have the right to work, but if you cannot live on the salary that you make with basic decency, what good is that right to work? So, the right to be is what we speak about today, Lord. And dignity. Let justice roll down as waters and righteousness as a might stream! Perhaps few people will see us and hear us, but we know that You will hear us and we know that our cause is just. We have a covenant with you. A covenant that says we are responsible for each other.

Throughout my study, I came to understand that the way language is used, from the perspective of IWJ-GKC members, can have a powerful impact on the community. When taking up the immigration debate, Reverend Voss, at an immigration summit held in 2008 for which several IWJ-GKC members played central roles, said, "La Raza has been emphasizing the need to get rid of hate speech. If there's anything people of faith can do, it's to be careful about how we talk. Using words like 'alien' and 'illegals' devalues the human being." Likewise, Reverend Barrett was interviewed for the *Kansas City Hispanic News*. He said, "'I think we have to re-think what we're talking about when we use terms like 'illegal' and 'aliens.' It was illegal to be black in America at one time. Just to be black. You were illegal; you weren't legally a man. Laws that are unjust have to be fought,' Barrett concluded" (Bruner 2008:A6).

The use of language also mattered in the context of prayer, as Reverend Voss discussed with me during her interview. During meetings and at events, she often opened and closed prayer with no specific address, or used a more general address like "Creator," or "Spirit." Similarly, Josef, a Catholic lay-leader, would pray addressing the "Gracious Creator" or the "Creator of All." Both intended – though coming from Christian perspectives – praying in this way to be inclusive. Perhaps more significantly, however,

is that the very act of prayer was used in action much in the same way that getting petitions signed or picketing in front of a Wal-Mart store might be. Because prayer is seen as an effective and legitimate form of action, it centered the monthly meetings, as well as the special events and actions. At the ICE prayer vigil, Reverend Rick gave a prayer for the immigrants detained by the Department of Homeland Security. Standing in front of a low-built, non-descript building whose only sign reads, “U.S. Department of Homeland Security,” we stood in a circle near the flag pole with ICE security looking on. Other police officers waited in their cars around the corner and a low-chatter from their radios was just barely audible through the breeze. Reverend Rick prayed,

We come together to pray for the 28,000 individuals, families, and children that are being held in detention across our country every day. 280,000 total for the year is what is being held in detention centers. The number of 28,000 a day is up from only 6,000 ten years ago. We are praying for their release. We are praying for improvement of conditions. We are praying for better access to family, lawyers and to clergy. We come together today also to offer pastoral support. It is our prayer today that religious workers of all kinds would have access to detainees to offer spiritual support. This kind of support is routinely available to those incarcerated in our criminal facilities. But it has been difficult to arrange visits to immigrants. We pray that we might have reasonable access to pray, to counsel, and read scripture with our immigrant brothers and sisters in detention. And finally we pray for our brothers and sisters who work in immigration and customs enforcement and in Homeland Security. We pray for a partnership that would make their job easier and make life better for everyone involved. Without a doubt, being involved in law enforcement brings with it spiritual struggles. Immigration enforcement is no exception. We believe that a partnership to offer support to detainees would improve detention conditions for all involved in the process. We are here to pray. We are here to offer pastoral support. We are here for a partnership. Amen? [Everyone says “Amen!”]

The vigil was concluded as we sang, “Praying, let us work for peace. Singing, share our joy with all. Working, for a world that’s new. Faithful, when we hear Christ’s call.”

While typical religious practices like prayer signify an event as faith-based, how practitioner speak about their actions can make it a faith practice. After the ICE prayer

vigil, we all piled back into our vehicles and met back at the host church for a debriefing session. One participant said, “I really felt like we were the hands and feet of Christ out there today,” while another said, “I felt the Holy Spirit as we were walking out. I was a little bit nervous at first, but then I felt a real sense of peace develop.” These remarks are not surprising given the prayerful orientation of the action. But even mundane actions come to take on a religious hue.

When describing the act of hand-delivering a letter requesting the resignation of the mayor’s Minutemen appointee, Reverend Voss pointed out there is a scriptural basis for doing so. She quoted Matthew 18:15, which says, in her words, “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” The act of signing a petition can also become a faith practice, as Susan described in an opinion piece in the *Kansas City Star*. She wrote in reference to a petition in support of reinstating Medicaid in the state of Missouri, “Taking action by signing a petition and circulating it in your place of worship helps fulfill mandates in the Bible and other sacred writings to care for the most vulnerable in society” (Robinson and Letizia 2006).

In this chapter, I have explored how a particular sense of justice, based on the perspective that all religions believe in justice, was manifest in the work of the organization in order to set the stage for the chapters that follow. Members of IWJ-GKC redefined work as potentially spiritually liberating when workers are fairly compensated. Workers are inherently deserving of dignity because they are made in the image of God and even unions can take on a sacred hue when colored with the language of salvation. Further, I discussed how moral authority is used to bolster worker justice activism as

practitioners draw on sacred languages and texts. Lastly, through embodied practices and performances, actions can be both religious and political at the same time when actors invoke the power of religious symbols, use religious language, and describe actions as faith practices.

Overview of the Chapters

In Chapter Two of the dissertation, I present the theoretical and methodological foundations of the project. I analyze the individual spiritual journeys of nine core members of IWJ-GKC in Chapter Three, showing how family and faith histories cultivated current faith perspectives that are critical of organized religion and are concerned with engaging authentic faith expressions through lived justice activism. Chapters Four and Five unveil IWJ-GKC's organizational story to show how the group moved from one excited about growth and impacting the community, to one fraught with conflict and plagued by the loss of core members when the local agenda was co-opted and decision-making was no longer by consensus. Finally, I conclude the dissertation by discussing members' views of organized labor. Traversing institutional boundaries, members are uniquely positioned to comment on the kinds of actions and tactics that are effective in local contexts.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Methods

Understanding Religious Experience

For this project, I first found it important to move beyond dichotomous thinking because the religious practitioners themselves were thinking of the mundane world as imbued with sacred elements. McGuire (2008) points out,

Rather than take the notion of a clear sacred-profane dichotomy for granted as a defining feature of religion, what would we understand about individuals' religious lives...if we considered the possibility that some, perhaps many, religious persons experience the sacred as arising *within* the profane world. (32)

Pointing out that social and historical processes locate sacred/profane and public/private dichotomies, McGuire further cautions against viewing religion as a “thing” with “features objectively ‘given’” (43).

Next, while religious practitioners are pushing and contesting boundaries between the sacred and profane, they are also engaging a challenge to religious typologies through an open critique of religious institutions and by actively incorporating new forms of religious practice into daily living. Consequently, the ideas that frame this dissertation are based on an understanding that religiosity becomes meaningful as ideas and beliefs are experienced through actions and emotions. This assertion places the concepts of “lived religion” and “intersubjectivity” at the forefront of the analysis. The lived religion approach, “regards religion as an activity rather than as a reified institutional structure or intellectual enterprise...what the scholar seeks to describe and understand are the interpretive tactics and strategies by which situated human beings have improvised and acted within their dynamic and changing circumstances” (Callahan 2009:4-5).

Intersubjectivity is understood here as the notion that what is significant about social life is that it is only made meaningful through the mutual, embodied experiences of the world.³ Everyday living is arguably experienced intersubjectively, therefore actions/practices are made meaningful within the context of intersubjective experience. Because we construct realities together, pre-figured typologies that limit people to the selected characteristics of “the type” do not provide us with a full view of human life. While theory does not claim people are perfect matches with the ideal type, oftentimes the categories do suffer from reification when the characteristics associated with the type are used to suggest determinate actions. Further, when actors do not act according to the type, those aberrant actions may be dismissed as not fitting the norm and therefore may be deemed unimportant. As McGuire (2008) argues, by uncritically accepting sociology’s definitional boundaries that establish religious groups’ practices as mutually exclusive,

We also assume that religious affiliation or membership is somehow a master category that determines an entire set of norms for an individual member’s entire faith and practice... We have assumed that individuals have a unitary religion-as-practiced” (186). She ultimately proposes that religious blending may be “the norm, rather than the exception. (ibid.)

Deposing Dualisms

All human action begs explanation and understanding: the explanatory power of studying from the perspective of lived experience means that all human action can be viewed without the risk of dismissal through the use of categories rooted in the biases of classical Western philosophy and social science. Much of this dismissal is due to dualistic thinking which placed “reason” in the realm of the “mind” and therefore it transcended

³ The notion of embodied experiences as central to intersubjectivity comes from the work of Merleau-Ponty (1962), who unlike Husserl (e.g., Crossley 1996) and Schutz (e.g., Ostrow 1990) did not separate reason/mind (consciousness) from body/subject (perception); consciousness and perception form a “gestalt structure” which means “that all meanings and ideas must be embodied (e.g. in words, gestures, artefacts, rituals, etc.)” (Crossley 1996:29).

lived experiences (Alcoff 2000). Much of classical sociology was based on this dualism and therefore pitted the “subjective” against the “objective.” Because lived experience was viewed as a matter of the body – and not reason – “experiential qualities [were submerged] in the psyche [and] sociology has tended to argue that explorations of experience cannot be based on empirical evidence, only ‘on nondemonstrable intuitions about the ‘inner’ content of mental states’” (Ostrow 1990:5).

Alcoff (2000) points out that the “mind-body dualism” which permeates Western thinking can be traced “as far back as Plato;” this dualism assumed that lived experience rested in the body – primarily experienced by women – whereas reason – primarily belonging to men – inhabited the mind (41). Alcoff argues simply moving women into the realm of the mind while maintaining the mind-body dualism is not the solution because this move effectively disregards the lived experiences that are central to human life and maintains the masculinist notion that mind and body are always separate. She writes, “We cannot simply remove women from the sphere of the ‘body’ and place ourselves in the sphere of the ‘mind’ and ‘reason’ when these latter concepts have been constructed on the basis of our exclusion” (Alcoff 2000:42). What we need, instead, is to bring theory and experience closer together, understanding that theory – also discourse – and experience are “imperfectly aligned, with locations of disjuncture” (Alcoff 2000:47). Weber understood this, as Ostrow (1990) argues. Even whilst proposing ideal types, Weber emphasized the importance of understanding lived experience through his concept *Verstehen*. Ostrow points out,

Before aspects of human existence can be explained in terms of their social conditions they must be understood at the level of their ‘subjective meaning’ – in terms of their interpretation by subjects who live within them. Weber argues that in the absence of such understanding, sociology fails to achieve ‘adequacy at the

level of meaning'; it fails to grasp human reality as it exists for the individuals who inhabit it. (6)

From Weber's perspective, this understanding of lived experience was "an absolute prerequisite for the articulation of social structure" (Ostrow 1990:6).

Deposing Typologies

By emphasizing the intersubjective nature of social life and the importance of investigating lived experience, typologies – rigidly applied – become problematic. While, as Jackson (1998) asserts, any individual "universalizes and objectifies his or her epoch...the singular *I* cannot be reduced to this otherness"; through lived experience, an individual subjects "objective" forms – such class, gender, race, and history – to her "will" (8). Further, "though individuals speak, act, and work toward belonging in a world of others, they simultaneously strive to experience themselves as world makers" (Jackson 1998:8). This kind of explanation of the experience of "existence" raises the question of how, as social scientists, we employ typologies. Applying this logic to our understandings of religion, Beckford (2003) asserts

...it is necessary to descend from the generic level in order to examine precisely what each religion actually means in terms of social interaction and social significance at particular times and places. It may turn out, on closer inspection, that the differences between religions in terms of their expression in social life outweigh their supposedly shared characteristics. (19)

Similarly, McGuire and Maduro (2005) remind us that our scientific concepts and definitions are also social constructions (412).

In *Tricks of the Trade* (1998), one of Becker's "tricks" is to turn "types" of people into "activities" (44). Becker writes,

A classic example is the division sociologists habitually make between deviants and nondeviants, between people who conform to existing social rules and those who break them. What's wrong with that? And what's the alternative? What's

wrong is that such an analysis makes the basic unit of the analysis a kind of person, treated analytically as though that's what he or she is, that's all he or she is, and as though what such people do or are likely to do makes sense, has been 'explained' causally, by the kind of person they are. Analysts do this with psychological types, but also with types based on social characteristics: class types, ethnic types, gender types, or occupational types as well as introverts and extroverts, deviants as well as psychopaths. This is a mistake, to start with, because it's easily observed that no one ever acts completely in character, just like their types. Everyone's activity is always more various and unexpected than that. (Becker 1998:44)

My central focus in this project is on the ways in which religious practice comes to encompass social justice activism, especially worker justice activism. This is a processual focus on the *how's* not the *why's* (another Becker trick – amongst other processual thinkers. See pp. 60-63; also Emirbayer 1997; Emirbayer and Mische 1998; and Hall 1987). Jackson (1998) argues that in many ways, reducing individuals to objective categories devalues them as human beings. By imposing rigid typologies on persons we observe and study, we run the risk of devaluing them and rendering their lived experiences insignificant. Jackson (1998) writes,

Even an inert material object acquires value when one commits energy and time to working on it. But in the absence of direct contact or dialogue, human beings are reduced, vis-à-vis one another, to the status of things... The result is an ever-increasing dissonance between conceptual representations and lived realities that inhibits intersubjective recognition. (131)

Orsi (2005) applies this kind of thinking to his understanding of religion in his call to pay attention to “religious messiness, to multiplicities, to seeing religious spaces as always, inevitably, and profoundly intersected by things brought into them from outside, things that bear their own histories, complexities, meanings different from those offered within the religious space” (167). By focusing in on lived religion in this way, it becomes necessary to look beyond assumptions about religious “types.” Orsi argues, “There is no such thing as a ‘Methodist’ or a ‘Southern Baptist’ who can be neatly summarized by an

account of the denomination's history or theology" (167). The argument Orsi raises is useful to my study because I examine the religious lives of practitioners who have more in common with each other because of their justice focus than they do with congregations with which they may identify.

In my field work I found that religious and political symbols and practices intermingled in the forms of song, prayer, speeches, chants, banners, and movements along with the desires of daily living on the periphery such that it is difficult to tell where religion begins and where politics ends. Ziad Munson (2007) writes, "Understanding religion today thus requires that we take account of this polysemy and the complicated ways in which religious beliefs, rituals, experiences, and expectations overlap other domains of life. But why is this important?" (127). He argues that "The polysemy of social situations...is a key concept in understanding social change" (128). Viewing social action in this way challenges religious typologies and allows us to reveal the myriad ways people construct religious beliefs and practices.

Seating Lived Experience: Lived Religion and Intersubjectivity

Emphasizing lived experience as analytically important means that we gain a better understanding of how religious practitioners live their faiths and consequently, a fuller knowledge of religion in society. First, what constitutes "religious experience"? In this, I draw on Nelson's (1997) assertion that "Religion is more than a set of beliefs and rules of behavior. It is more than an institution and a moral community. It is a way of experiencing the world. Those who believe in the reality of the spiritual realm experience life differently than those who do not" (5). This means that religious experiences are,

firstly, those experiences *described as* religious by people who live them (Nelson 1997:7).

Deriving from the first “attribution” aspect of religious experience, Nelson argues that all experiences, “no matter how ordinary or mundane” can be considered religious experiences if the practitioner describes them as such (Nelson 1997:8). Callahan (2008) points out that the significance of everyday life is frequently dismissed in studying religion for the very fact that it is “mundane;” this dismissal is based on dualistic thinking which places lived experience in the realm of the “profane” while that which is considered extraordinary – or religious – is purely “sacred” (9). But, religion is lived through daily experiences and as such, “it is messy, ambivalent, and sometimes inconsistent, at odds with the often highly structured ideals presented by doctrines, theologies, and the portraits of traditions painted by scholars” (Callahan 2008:9). Studying lived religion, then, necessarily deposes rigid dualities and typologies, challenging researchers to come up with new ways of exploring religious realities.

Because individuals construct faith through interactions with religious histories and with religious others (Bender and Cadge 2006), intersubjectivity becomes a significant component to understanding lived religion. Alcoff (2000) points out that for Merleau-Ponty, lived experience and intersubjectivity go hand-in-hand. Lived experience “is located at the between point of world and consciousness. In this space what exists is a developing synthesis which is forever unfinished precisely because it is instantiated in our concrete, fleshy embodiment, rather than an abstraction or transcendental perspective” (Alcoff 2000:48). Further, because we always exist *in the world rather than separate from the world*,

...we can understand both our ability to know the world and that our knowledge of it is forever incomplete, caught as it is inside, carried out within the temporal flux, and incapable of achieving a final or complete reduction...Lived experience is open-ended, plural, fragmented, and shifting not because of the limitations of language, but because of the nature of embodied, temporal existence. (49)

This assertion does not mean that history and culture are ignored; rather, they are a part of the inhabited world which is lived through embodiment and the inseparability of reason and experience. Further, structure is revealed, “neither in the hidden recesses of the psyche nor in the transpersonal field of history and culture, but in the forms of encounter, interaction, exchange, and dialogue of everyday life” (Jackson 1998:207).

It is in this way that Alcoff (2000) – drawing on Merleau-Ponty’s work – brings theory and discourse closer to lived experience. Experience can therefore be treated as worthy of analysis because by erasing the mind-body dualism (separability), we also accept that understanding *subjective* realities and experiences is as analytically significant as “objective” categorization.⁴ Intersubjectivity is central to the study of lived experience, and therefore lived religion because, to go back to Nelson (1997), religion is more than a set of doctrines and institutions; it is a way of experiencing the world.

Orsi (2003) points out that intersubjectivity is central to the study of lived religion on two levels, “First, it recognizes the intersubjective nature of individual, social, cultural, and religious identities and indeed of reality itself” (174). This first level of intersubjectivity points to the importance of investigating lived experience whether studying religion, labor activism, or some combination of the two. A second way intersubjectivity is central to studies of lived religion, is by recognizing “the

⁴ I use “objective” – emphasizing the quotation marks – to indicate that objective categories are *intersubjectively constituted*. Ostrow (1990) suggests this intersubjective constitution means that we can “escape from the division between ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ orders of existence that has dominated Western philosophy” (3). Similarly, Jackson (1998) emphasizes that the two are always dialectically related (7).

intersubjective nature of research and religion” (Orsi 2003:174). Likewise, Jackson (1998) argues “Some part of the ethnographer’s own life experience always forms the basis for approaching the other, just as the other must see something of himself or herself in the ethnographer’s actions, reactions, and comportment” (109); there’s never “complete overlap” but there has to “be *some* recognition of common identity if any kind of interaction – self-interested *or* otherwise – is to proceed” (109). In lived reality – that which treats the researcher as a part of the lived experiences of others – the lives of the researcher and the researched become intricately intertwined, especially in ethnographic projects (Neitz 2002:35). While it is possible to use aspects of one’s own lived experience to understand and engage others, the lived experiences of the researcher can also serve as the media through which people of faith daily negotiate their own forms of religious practice. Orsi’s first level of intersubjectivity locates the project as a study of *faith in process*, while the second level of intersubjectivity points to reflections on methodology described in more detail below. First, because the organizational story plays a significant role in this dissertation, I turn to a discussion of “social organization.”

Agency, Organizations, and Institutions in Process

A large portion of this dissertation considers the story of IWJ-GKC as an organization from its founding to its eventual decline and attempt to rebuild. This narrative is told in the context of looking to understand the kind of organization that becomes the focus of faith practitioners who are critical of organized religion and who, having cultivated a particular sense of justice, decide to practice faith in an alternative setting. I did not intend the dissertation to be an organizational study, however, as the study progressed, IWJ-GKC began to undergo significant changes in organizational form

and processes such that the kind of organization members were confronting came to be a challenge to the ways they believed religious practices should manifest in everyday life. Therefore, it is important to consider perspectives on agency, organizations, and institutions that frame this discussion.

This project privileges lived experience and intersubjectivity as described above, so I wanted to begin with a dynamic conception of social life in framing individual spiritual journeys and in thinking about the organizational story. First, Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue for moving away from using the static noun “agent.” They propose, instead, that we think of actors as having various capacities to act agentially based on a multi-dimensional (“chordal”) conception of agency situated within the flow of time. This chordal understanding of agency reflects on the triad of pasts (iteration), imagined futures (projectivity), and presents (practical evaluation) of actors. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) further argue for a dynamic perspective on structure and the importance of a dynamic conception of agency for research purposes. They write,

More radically, we also argue that the structural contexts of action are themselves temporal as well as relational fields-multiple, overlapping *ways of ordering time* toward which social actors can assume different simultaneous agentic orientations. Since social actors are embedded within many such temporalities at once, they can be said to be oriented toward the past, the future, and the present at any given moment, although they may be primarily oriented toward one or another of these within any one emergent situation. As actors move within and among these different unfolding contexts, they switch between (or ‘recompose’) their temporal orientations-as constructed within and by means of those contexts-and thus are capable of changing their relationship to structure. We claim that, in examining changes in agentic orientation, we can gain crucial analytical leverage for charting varying degrees of maneuverability, inventiveness, and reflective choice shown by social actors in relation to the constraining and enabling contexts of action. (963-64)

This perspective on agency is useful for understanding individual faith experiences, as well as the story of the organization. The interview context allowed for

respondents to reflect on past, present and future agentic orientations to show how a particular sense of justice influences religious practice. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) point out the “By *subjecting their own agentic orientations to imaginative recomposition and critical judgment, actors can loosen themselves from past patterns of interaction and reframe their relationships to existing constraints*” (1010). Emirbayer and Mische (1998) also posit that their conception of agency is useful for understanding the kind of agentic focus of actors in their “relational” environments which reflect “the embeddedness of actors in multiple cultural, social-structural, and social-psychological contexts” (1006-07). This assertion is useful for understanding changes in IWJ-GKC’s structure over time, as well as actors’ perspectives on the interaction between faith and labor. As Emirbayer and Mische point out, thinking of agency this way may give us hints as to how McAdams’ (1999) “cognitive liberation” occurs (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:1010).

Thinking of agency and structure as temporally situated and non-fixed allows for a dynamic conception of organizations and institutions. Writing from an interactionist perspective on “social organization,” Hall (1987) argues for a process-perspective of social organization. Seeing life as “a continuous stream of activity, broken up into events,” he writes that social organization is best thought of as “in the gerund form-doing, accomplishing” (15). One way to emphasize the dynamic nature of organizations is by focusing in on the stories told about an organization. Czarniawska (1997) argues that “The main front of organizational knowledge is the narrative” (21). In my fieldwork, I was attentive to the multiple narratives of IWJ-GKC told from the perspectives of members in interviews and meetings, as discovered in organizational documents, as seen in media representations, and as viewed from the national office.

Rather than thinking of organizations as static, bounded entities, she argues they are ever changing, processual nets of action (3). More recently, Czarniawska (2008) has written that “organizations are not so much landscapes, as assemblies of organizing processes” (32). Because “official” stories put out by organizations are often very different from the stories told by various departments throughout an organization (Thomas 1994), Czarniawska (1997) argues it is important to focus on stories of the organization told from multiple vantage points. Her work is very much focused on processes of change and transition, but her “basic focus of analysis” – she is critical of writing in terms of “‘units’ existing in ‘reality’” – is “action nets” and she gets at the processes taking place in action nets⁵ by listening to the narratives produced there (179). That is, she conceptualizes “organizational life as story making and organization theory as story reading” (26). Czarniawska writes,

I found it misleading to speak of ‘organizations’ as if they were clear-cut entities with obvious borders. I find it more profitable to study *action nets*, situated in *organizational fields*, distinguishable from one another by the kind of meanings and products socially attributed to them (‘banking,’ ‘city management,’ ‘health insurance’), where various types of units are formed and dissolved, resulting in organizations rather than originating from them. (66)

Action becomes meaningful through the stories people tell and thereby allows for the creation and performance of individual and organizational identities within specific temporal locations.

Locating agency and structure within the flow of time provokes a processual understanding of social life, just as focusing on the stories people tell about an organization shows that we are not dealing with fixed entities. Likewise, Czarniawska (2008) points out that as well, the “word *institution* is a gerund, as *-tion* in Latin has the

⁵ “Action nets” are simply “interconnected actions” (Czarniawska 2002:164).

same function as *-ing* in English. Institution means an act of instituting something, but this meaning has been long forgotten...” (15). Because I also look at the way individual practitioners relate to the institutional settings and how the cultures of faith and labor interact, new institutional scholars are useful in that they argue institutional logics are not bound by institutional borders; that because people move throughout multiple institutions in their daily lives, the cultural practices and ways of thinking are transferred from context to context (e.g., Friedland and Alford 1997). Sociologists of religion have recently taken up this framework in order to understand everyday religion (Ammerman 2007; McGuire 2008) and more recently, social movement scholars Elizabeth Armstrong and Mary Bernstein (2008) have proposed a multi-institutional approach to social movements that challenges the bounded thinking of previous social movement theorizing.

An institution, for Stout and Cormode (1998) is both a structure and a culture; it is “an embedded social structure of rules and hierarchies created to embody and perpetuate a set of cultural norms and values among its members” (64). Thinking of religion at the level of the institutional allows for an understanding of not only changes that occur “*within* religious movements and traditions,” but also, the narrative can be more broadly situated “by tracing changes *between* religious institutions and other, secular institutions undergoing the same transformations” (Stout and Cormode 1998:63). Further elaborating and applying to concept of institutions to religion, Stout and Cormode (1998) assert that

...religious institutions are not merely the cultures of prayer, confession, festas, and so on. They are also structures – buildings, budgets, and tax exemptions. These buildings, in turn, generate other buildings and bureaucracies such as colleges, seminaries, publications houses, hospitals, and denominational ‘headquarters.’ Just as religion functions within cultural limitations, so also does it demarcate structural boundaries that define its relationship to the larger society” (65).

This perspective is useful particularly in conjunction with Friedland and Alford's (1991) conceptualization "of society as an interinstitutional system" (232). They define institutions "as both supraorganizational patterns of activity through which humans conduct their material life in time and space, and symbolic systems through which they categorize that activity and infuse it with meaning" (ibid.). Friedland and Alford take institutionalism's understanding of culture out of the purely cognitive realm of internal interpretive processes (see Scott 2008:186) and give culture expression in the substance of institutions, i.e. symbols and practices. Each institution has a central logic – an "institutional logic" – that is combined of "material practices and symbolic constructions" (Friedland and Alford 1991:248) that are observable, but also contested and fluid (Friedland and Alford 1991:262, n20).

Given their understanding of society, Friedland and Alford (1991) assert that there are multiple institutional logics available to individuals and organizations that are drawn upon as the bases of actions (253). Institutional change can be explained utilizing their framework because their conceptualization of culture allows for the manipulation and reinterpretation of the symbols and practices that comprise an institution in a given historical context (Friedland and Alford 1991:254). Friedland and Alford (1991) write,

The meaning and relevance of symbols may be contested, even as they are shared. Individuals, groups, and organizations struggle to change social relations both within and between institutions. As they do so, they produce new truths, new models by which to understand themselves and their societies, as well as new forms of behavior and material practices. (254)

The interlocking, interdependent institutions that make up society often exist in a contradictory relationship. These contradiction are the bases of political conflicts in society (Friedland and Alford 1991:256). Friedland and Alford (1991) argue that "Some

of the most important struggles between groups, organizations, and classes are over the appropriate relationships between institutions, and by which institutional logic different activities should be regulated and to which categories of persons they apply” (256). Acted out by groups and organizations, these kinds of conflicts alter the interinstitutional relationships that comprise society. Attempts by workers to redefine their relationship to production in terms of the principles of democratic citizenship instead of in terms of property rights, is an example of the effort to extend the logic of one institution to another. Similarly, granting corporations the legal status of personhood is an extension of the logic of democracy to capitalism (Friedland and Alford 1991:257). Friedland and Alford (1991) point out that working-class consciousness could develop out of the importation of a logic external to capitalism (257).

Remember that institutions and their logics are composed of both symbols and practices from this perspective. Friedland and Alford’s (1991) work is compatible with a practice oriented conceptualization of class consciousness. Because they have extracted culture from the minds of individuals and located it within symbols and practices, their work coincides with certain aspects of Fantasia’s (1988) *Cultures of Solidarity*. Fantasia (1988) argues that “class consciousness” has been largely kept within the realm of “thinking.” The centrality of action and process has been ignored, extracting class consciousness from the contexts in which it arises (Fantasia 1988:8). Fantasia (1988) is critical of sociological examinations of class consciousness. He argues that many have drawn upon Marx’s class “in-itself/for-itself” and have extracted it from the active context; “in itself” has been reduced to “objective matters” like labor force size, while “for itself” has been reduced to attitudes (8-9). As Marx intended, the two are meant to be

conjoined, not abstracted from one another – consciousness was grounded “in life activity, in social being” (Fantasia 1988:9). Fantasia’s work, however, concludes that although the workers he examines acted independently of the collective bargaining system, the “extrainstitutional elements” of the wildcat strikes, were a part of the logic of the overall system (72). Friedland and Alford’s (1991) suggestion that class consciousness could be influenced by the importation of the logic of another institution offers an alternative to Fantasia’s cultures of solidarity that arise in process but still operate within the institutional logic of capitalism.

As mentioned above, Stout and Cormode (1998) argue for the importance of viewing institutions as both structure and culture. Attention to the structural side of institutions – and religion as an institution with structural elements – is useful to understanding institutions in their broader contexts. Stout and Cormode (1998) argue, like Friedland and Alford (1991), “Institutions, including religious institutions, do not emerge in a void. They overlap with, interact with, and collide with other surrounding institutions that may incorporate the very same individuals” (66). DiMaggio and Powell’s (1991) concept of “organizational field” is useful here (also used by Czarniawska 1997; 2002; 2008). By organizational field, they mean groups of organizations that collectively comprise an institutional area of society (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). At this level of analysis, attention can be given to competing firms, networks of organizations, and importantly, to the “totality of actors” (DiMaggio and Powell 1991:65). Two institutional concepts are implicated in the organizational field: “connectedness” and “structural equivalence” (ibid.). Stout and Cormode (1998) extend these concepts to their understanding of religion as institutional. They write that connectedness “refers to the

ways that organizations that share many of the same resources are subject to many of the same environmental exigencies...An individual member – that most precious resource – often belonged to many organizations within the religious field” (68). Structural equivalence “refers to the relationship between two or more organizations that occupy spatially similar places in a network, but are not themselves connected or bridged by overlapping resources” (68). Both structural and cultural isomorphism can result as a part of this interconnectedness (Stout and Cormode 1998). This means that because people occupy multiple institutions, there are overlapping cultural and structural patterns that result from this diverse membership. These areas of “overlap” constitute “secondary logics,” which are the defining symbols and practices of another institution. Stout and Cormode (1998) tie these concepts together in the following,

When we look at religious institutions historically in relation to surrounding secular institutions of state, economy, and family, it is clear that in any given organizational field, each institution has its own primary institutional logic that renders it culturally distinct, but it also has secondary logics borrowed from surrounding primary logics in the overlapping organizational field. Thus in addition to supplying transcendent meaning and truth, religion as an institution in the (modern) United States has capitalist-like logics for honoring the accumulation of capital resources, state-like logics for legitimating bureaucratic reporting systems and nonprofit corporate status, democratic-like rules that discourage the quest for state religions, and family-like logics of love and mutual commitment to satisfy the institutional reproduction and perpetuation of the congregational “family of God.” As an institution then, coexisting within a larger organizational field, religion is both more and less than the symbolic universe and sacred canopy that its primary logic specializes in. It has *both* a defining ‘truth’ logic and secondary logics. Why is this so? While we break institutions down to individual levels for purposes of definition and differentiation, we live in a more coherent, interconnected world, and as individuals we share membership in multiple, overlapping institutions that together make up our ‘society.’ (73)

When looking at the relationship between organized labor and religion, considering the context within which the religious communities and union locals are embedded is essential to understanding the nature of that relationship, placing it within

the flow of time. Recent works on labor history explore the complex relationship between labor and religion, suggesting in some cases religious communities facilitated local mobilization and provided symbols and practices that allowed labor causes to resonate with the rank and file (some examples include: Fannin 2003; Fones-Wolf 1989; Gribble 1993). Stromberg (2003) argues, “The American labor movement was never – and could never be – atheistic like the secular unions of Europe. If there was any hostility on the part of labor, that hostility was directed toward *organized* religion and not religious faith *per se*” (8). The early labor movement in the United States, represented by the Knights of Labor for example, incorporated a kind of “fire and brimstone” rhetoric. Stromberg (2003) suggests that “The solution for the labor movement was not a militant denunciation of religion as ‘false consciousness’ but rather to articulate an ideology based on prophetic Christianity, one critical of the status quo while not offending the religious sensibilities of the rank-and-file” (6).

In his dissertation, Stromberg (2003) analyzes political coalitions that develop between community groups, religious communities, and labor unions at the local level. Institutionalism is important to his analytical framework and in assessing the capacity of bridge-building coalitions to tie together religious communities and labor unions. In making reference to Fantasia’s “cultures of solidarity,” Stromberg points out that when these cultures are established they are relatively ephemeral. He writes,

Such shortlivedness is also characteristic of the latent bonds of solidarity between the worlds of religion and labor. When these bridges do materialize – as enacted, for example, when clergy picket with striking workers – they tend to do so only in so far as they are ritually enacted. To be made durable, these cultures of solidarity need to be built up into counter-institutions. (20)

Because cultures of solidarity are transient in nature, it is essential to have “bridge-builders” that are able to articulate institutions one to another, i.e. to bring their ideologies together (27).

Stromberg (2003) discusses institutions of labor, religion, and their bonding through the bridge-builder. Stromberg ultimately ends up asserting that there are different actors within each institution: those occupying the institutions of organized labor, religion, and then, different actors who comprise the bridge-building coalition. Conflict ensues between the two because the actors only have partial understandings of each others’ institutional contexts and institutional logics. For example, unions only have a rudimentary understanding of Catholic teachings and these teachings on the other hand are primarily geared toward unskilled labor so the Church is not very likely to support highly skilled workers. There is also a misunderstanding of organizational structures and how these function between these two institutions (Stromberg 2003:28).

His analysis of potential conflicts between institutions is important and consistent with Friedland and Alford’s (1991) conceptualization of institutions in an interinstitutional society holding conflicting and contradictory logics. Stromberg (2003) proposes,

If religious knowledge were better articulated within the institutional memory of labor and the churches’ own social teachings about labor better instituted within the memory of the churches the costs of these transactions to movements seeking periodic cooperation would be greatly lessened... These same lessons apply not just to labor unions and the churches but to each of the various movements on the left as well. (29)

These points are foundational to Stromberg’s overall claims and are relatively unproblematic. However, throughout my study, I found that the *same* actors are often engaged in processes in different institutions at the local level so that institutional

boundaries need be considered less rigid than Stromberg's vision. Boundaries are more permeable because actors carry the institutional logics with them. They do not remove one hat and put on another so to speak, as role theory might suggest. Rather, as mentioned above, Stout and Cormode (1998) point toward the areas of overlapping institutions as important to conceptualizing social change. People occupy multiple institutions, the logics of which come to be incorporated into one another. The bridge-builder, in Stromberg's terms – is less of a “bridge” between disparate groups of people, in the case of IWJ-GKC, and more of a new kind of cultural space comprised of actors that often occupy both the institution of organized labor and the institution of religion in which religious practices – and symbols – are transformed and come to incorporate labor activism. This space does not develop without conflict. However, as the story of the organization told in this dissertation reveals, the conflicts were less about problems in translating logics between religion and labor, and more about the imposition of a non-local agenda from the national office.

Summary of the Framework

This project works across three levels, each of which contributes to our understandings of religious experience and practices (or lived religion) through relational and processual conceptions of agency, organizations, and institutions. First, I look at individual religious experience as describe by practitioners in in-depth interviews. It is necessary to move beyond thinking of religious experience in terms of rigid dichotomies that delineate pre-given spheres of the sacred/profane and the public/private which end up comprising religious types that suffer from reification. Disposing of dichotomies and types allows for the potential to see how areas of life typically thought of as mundane can

become imbued with religious symbols and practices. By privileging lived religion, one point of investigation is the ways in which actors combine the chordal elements of agency described by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) in varying ways such that institutional boundaries vary in significance. Bender and Cadge (2006) put this another way: we need to investigate the way contents and forms combine in multiple ways to produce varied experiences of lived religion.

Second, I investigate the organizational story as it is told from multiple vantage points and as observed in the field. Working from the perspective that organizations are not bounded and static entities, action becomes meaningful through the stories people tell and thereby allows for the creation and performance of individual and organizational identities within specific temporal locations. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) point out that their perspective on agency is also useful at the level of organizations because by examining different temporal configurations of agency, we show how actors relate to environments that are both constraining and enabling. Actors' relationships to structure can change as they re-orient to different temporal constructions. The changes are arguably also reflected in organizational forms and processes.

Lastly, I explore the implications of worker justice activism by religious practitioners for the institution of labor. In their work on religion and institutions, Friedland and Alford (1991) argue the substance of culture is symbols and practices. In this assertion, culture is removed from the purely cognitive realm to the world of observable actions. Every institution is comprised of a set of institutional logics manifest in symbols and lived out in daily practices. It is asserted that institutional logics are transferable. For example, a working-class consciousness could be developed out of the

importation of a logic external to capitalism. Similarly, a religious consciousness could be developed out of the importation of a logic external to a particular religious institution. In the case of my current project, class consciousness, political consciousness, and religious consciousness influence one another. In many ways, an act is not reducible to religion *or* politics; it is both at the same time. Friedland and Alford, being neo-institutionalists, maintain fairly standard institutional boundaries, but their idea of the transferability of institutional logics is a good starting point for understanding agency in daily life. This notion can be expanded upon by the incorporation of Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) conceptualization of agency. In the following sections, I discuss the research questions that frame the overall project and detail the methodological considerations that went into its construction.

Research Questions

The project began with the observation: Sometimes religious practices transcend institutional boundaries to encompass areas of social life usually thought of as mundane. This observation raised my initial research questions: (1) Who is likely to engage extra-institutional religious practices; What is the family and faith history? (2) If religious practitioners direct their religious aspirations beyond traditional religious institutions, what becomes the focus? How are religious practices engaged? and Where are they engaged?

I found that these questions needed focusing and a research location was needed, so I began to explore. Reading labor history (see discussion above), I came across discussions of the ways religious institutions interacted with the labor movement in the United States. Learning that some practitioners worked with unions in positive ways, I

became curious as to whether there was a present-day focus on connecting religion and labor. Work so centrally connects to the ways religious institutions in the US have developed, so it seemed likely there would be connecting organizations⁶. I came across the national IWJ doing a simple Internet search for “religion and labor.” Looking over their mission and vision statement, I was able to refine my research questions beginning with the observation: Sometimes religious practices transcend institutional boundaries to encompass social justice activism, specifically worker justice issues. From this observation, I developed more focused research questions including: (1) Who is likely to incorporate worker justice activism into religious practice? What is the family and religious history?; (2) If religious practitioners direct their religious aspirations extra-institutionally, specifically to include worker justice activism, what does religious practice look like? How do people talk about the interaction between faith, justice, and activism? And, how do they make sense of their religious path?; (3) When a specific organization – one that stands outside of traditional religious institutions – becomes the vehicle through which extra-institutional religion is practiced, what characterizes that organization?; and (4) Finally, what are the implications for the broader context of labor and religion?

Methods

Smiles, nods, handshakes, and hugs are exchanged, but it is still as if I'm a foreigner in a new land. I'm there as a body, lending support and even a voice as

⁶ Ammerman and Roof (1995) point out that the “old patterns” through the 1950s of work, family, and religion “divided life fairly neatly (at least for the middle class) into public and private spheres” thereby mutually shaping the institutions of work, family and religion (6). Most US congregations supported a conception of separate spheres for men and women through family-oriented programming that supported the male breadwinner model of the family (see Edgell 2006). But, as women began to enter the workforce in massive numbers, these divides were reconfigured, though many congregations did not pay attention to them (Ammerman and Roof 1995:7). Consequently, some religious practitioners experimented with new forms of religious practices (see Part II of Ammerman and Roof 1995).

I join in chants, songs, and Amens. The kinds of thoughts that occupy my mind all relate to the question of what can I do to be of use? How can I be more than a body and more than a voice? I am an observer – participant – researcher, but the words so stir me that I wish to be ‘in’ and to know how to talk about more than the weather and more than Missouri basketball.

Between the fall of 2005 and the spring of 2008, I attended monthly meetings of the general membership of IWJ-GKC and meetings of the governing board and action committees, along with fundraising events, rallies, religious services at members’ congregations, and group retreats. I also conducted nine in-depth, semi-structured interviews with active members, had numerous conversations while in the field, and had several telephone and email discussions. To supplement my fieldwork and interviews, I use local and national news media resources, along with primary source material – including local meeting minutes, agendas, flyers, pamphlets, etc. – and national IWJ resources available electronically, including newsletters, annual reports, and special, topical reports related to specific campaigns.

Pre-Field Work

I first encountered IWJ-GKC by conducting an Internet search on “interfaith and labor.” The website of the national IWJ is first on Google’s return list. At the time, I was working on a historical project related to labor and religion and did not anticipate so quickly locating an active, present-day organization that brings together issues of faith and labor. I was already familiar with the coalition Jobs with Justice and their local branch in St. Louis, but I was more specifically interested in an organization that put faith values in the forefront, rather than treating faith as one category out of many other issues.

The IWJ website boasted nearly fifty local affiliates and I discovered local groups in Springfield, Missouri and in Kansas City, Missouri. I first called Springfield out of familiarity: I had visited before and was also intrigued by this kind of group existing in

Southern Missouri. I spoke to a kind, if somewhat boisterous sounding man on the phone who was listed as the group's contact. He thanked me for my interest, but explained "We just never could get it off the ground here. None of the religious people *ever* showed any interest in supporting labor issues in Springfield."

I moved on to the next option – Kansas City – wondering if I would get the same kind of response from that group. In August of 2005, I talked to Dan Johnson on the phone. He was the labor co-chair of IWJ-GKC then and our conversation was encouraging. Dan told me that the group was really gaining momentum and he invited me to attend the monthly meetings held at an IBEW union hall on the Missouri side of Kansas City. A labor Sunday service was planned for September, to which I was also invited. From this initial conversation, I learned that IWJ-GKC grew out of one campaign of union organizing meant to raise awareness in the public of a particular company's bad policies toward workers and that IWJ-GKC became active after that. He also mentioned that social justice training is a part of training to be a minister, so clergy are great resources for strengthening the labor movement. This sounded like a great opportunity to study faith and labor organizing in action.

I treated my time during the Fall of 2005 as pre-fieldwork in the sense that I wanted to get a feel for the local terrain. In September, I attended IWJ-GKC's monthly meeting and their Labor in the Pulpit service. I also attended a conference sponsored by a national organization of lawyers who work to serve low-wage workers that have been unfairly treated. I received the invitation to this event from one of the group members. Jobs with Justice held a national conference in St. Louis in September, so I also attended this conference. I went to all of these events to start familiarizing myself with the

language of social justice and to hear what kinds of issues were important to worker justice.

My experience at the September, 2005 monthly meeting solidified my decision to pursue an ethnographic project with IWJ-GKC. While I let members know I was at events as a graduate student interested in pursuing a research project on the interaction between worker justice and faith, I presented my research ideas in greater detail and asked for group consent to take part in their events as a researcher in the fall of 2006. The first meeting I attended occurred just after Hurricane Katrina which was discussed as an issue of great concern to those present. The opening prayer focused on Katrina: grievances were expressed with the government and many voiced their anger over the injustices in the hurricane aftermath. Some members were putting together relief trucks to take down to friends and family in New Orleans and asked attendees for relief items and monetary support.

The national political climate at the time sparked a sense of righteous indignation fueling this meeting with excitement. For me, being at the first meeting felt like “camp meeting.” Durkheim’s effervescence⁷ was evident as discussions of faith intermingled with activism. Members were highly animated, speaking in excited tones with active hand gestures. Some would start up from their seats, stand up, back away from the table, and speak out as though addressing the crowd in a testimonial fashion. The religious co-chair at the time said, “It’s great to hear testimonies from labor people!”

There was some anti-Republican rhetoric at the meeting, but in the midst of this, one member interjected, “Look, the Democrats are involved in this as well. The

⁷ Durkheim (2001) wrote, “What other name can we give to the burst of emotion in which men find themselves when, as the result of collective effervescence, they believe they have been swept up into a world quite different from the one they see?”

government is the problem [in reference to Katrina]. This is not a liberal versus conservative, or democrat versus republican issue. It is a problem of the haves versus the have nots.” Another member emphasized, “That’s right: we have to start singing from the same hymnal, not only here, but at the national level as well.” These comments brought reflections on the state of labor unions that were, in 2005, undergoing their own national crisis with the formation of the coalition Change to Win. One member, speaking from the union perspective emphasized how important it is to not give clergy members the impression that the union members involved in IWJ-GKC are divided along union party lines. He argued that, “IWJ-GKC is able to pull together different strands of union folks and faith-based groups. Our union conflicts are put aside when we enter these meetings.”

Gaining Access

Through the early part of 2006, I stayed in contact with the group through email and reconnected with them in person in June. Prior to the October meeting, I requested time on the agenda to present my research interests in order to ask for group consent to fully pursue my project. I previously had received consent from both the labor co-chair and the religion co-chair, then considered leaders of the organization. At the meeting, I was initially surprised to discover some hesitation about the parameters of participation, especially concerning how I would record the meetings. The majority of members around the table welcomed the project with enthusiasm, however, because the group worked on a consensus model, the fact that two of those present objected to the meetings being digitally recorded meant that I was only allowed to observe and to take notes at the meetings. One of the dissenters also pointed out that the group should have some control over how I represent them in the final writing of the project, but this suggestion was met

with surprise. Those clergy members present argued that in the interest of academic freedom – and freedom of speech in general – I should be allowed to freely interpret my observations. The group consent document was passed around and signed by all members in attendance. I followed-up with an email to the group's listserv, thanking them for allowing me time on the agenda and for welcoming my project. Both co-chairs responded with encouragement. The faith co-chair wrote, "Feel free to share your observations and suggestions for how our organization can better do its job. We will never grow as an organization if we have difficulty with honest criticism." Similarly, the labor co-chair emphasized, "We need to know our true impact and interaction. it can be easy to let ourselves misinterpret or even underestimate our mission of attaining faithful interaction, but our view with rose-colored glasses has to be put into perspective. I think you could do that and provide us with clear direction of where we're at, we are going, and where we should be."

In the Field

After gaining consent at the meeting in early October, 2006, I later in the month attended a fundraiser put on by the organization in support of one of their central programs called Building Bridges, a training program for low-income, minority women and men to gain the necessary skills to be able to pass the initial exams required for entering the building and trades professions. The event was held at the American Jazz Museum and involved dinner, jazz music, and an inspirational talk given by Congressman Emanuel Cleaver.

Attending this event built my rapport with the group. I considered it nothing to travel the two hours to attend, but I was met with a general attitude of thankfulness for

my presence at the fundraiser. I was told that being there represented “real dedication to the group.” It was interesting that even knowing I was there as part of my research project, my simple presence alone was counted as support for the group’s causes. I sat at a table with seven active members and over dinner, they began to ask me about my life: where I grew up, what my parents did, and so on. When I started to talk about growing up in Flint, Michigan and how my dad took early retirement from General Motors, one woman said, “Well, then. You *do* get it! You know what we’re talking about.” I felt a greater connection to the group at that time. She also went on to explain to me some of the tension from the October meeting that occurred regarding my project. She said, “Labor doesn’t always get the importance of academic work. In fact, they’re not always entirely open to ‘free speech.’” She further elaborated that, as an academic, she herself had also experienced some issues with criticism from local unions.

After attending this event, I continued going to monthly meetings, taking field notes as the meetings progressed. I voice recorded reflections after the meetings on my drive home and included these observations in my typed field notes. At each meeting, I proceeded with a discerning ear and eye for what was occurring. There were moments when putting down the pen seemed to relax someone who was speaking. For example, during one meeting, a discussion was raised over the allocation of possible grant money coming in from the local Catholic diocese and some strong words were being said about particular people from the community. I felt it best to recall any relevant details after the meeting so that members might feel more comfortable expressing themselves over a difficult and disputed topic. Likewise, toward the end of my study, there were issues on the table relating to finances during one meeting. A budget report was handed out and it

was noted that there were discrepancies related to the sum of 25,000 dollars and the way those funds were allocated by the national office. There was some dissonance over the management of these funds and those members present asked for clarifications in the moment. However, the religion co-chair was adamant that these matters be discussed later. Non-verbal cues suggested that it was best to excuse myself for a few minutes during this conversation and I took my time viewing the church's sanctuary where the meeting was held. I believed there were some issues that needed immediate discussion and not all members were comfortable doing so with me present. This allowed a few minutes to settle the questions raised about the budget. When I returned, the matter was settled, members were physically and emotionally relaxed and we moved on to other topics. Lastly, At other times, interactions just had to be natural: when going out for lunch, grabbing coffee before the meetings, attending a house party, or talking after the meetings. Important things were shared during these "off-book" moments, so that I wrote reflections later, recalling to the best of my ability what occurred. Finally, because the rallies I attended were considered public events, covered by the news media, I was able to record and transcribe them.

The Interviews

By the end of the study, I was able to interview nine core members in depth. I used a non-rigid set of open interview questions to get at core concepts and ideas I wanted to explore (see Appendix A). During the interviews, I let respondents tell life and faith history narratives in the ways they understood them. I used my interview schedule to prompt interviewees to reflect on specific topics throughout our conversations. I digitally recorded the nine interviews and transcribed them word-for-word, making

memos throughout the text using the comments function of Microsoft Office Word. These comments later helped me code the data (described below).

I had hopes to interview more members, including those who by non-regular attendance did not appear to be core members. The interviews I was able to conduct were met with enthusiasm by the respondents. Two potential interviewees left me stranded for several hours in Kansas City. Once we connected, I was able to talk with them quickly, but was never able to interview them formally. I contacted five other persons through email after talking with them in person at monthly meetings, but three did not respond and two rescheduled for several months until I decided they ultimately were not interested in taking part in the interview process. I also put out a general call for interview participants at meetings. The low response rate was somewhat expected because all members of the group were also employed full time in addition to being involved in several other community projects. Scheduling issues were also partially related to the distance I lived from the study site. Though my “sample” is small, I discovered immense detail about lived faith and labor practices that serve as the foundation of my analysis in Chapter Three.

Supplementary Resources

To supplement my fieldwork and the interviews, I used national and local news media resources available electronically through media databases including: Alternative Press Index, Factiva, LexisNexis Academic, NewsBank, General OneFile, Access World News, MOREnet, and InfoTrac Custom Newspapers. I used a variety of key words and phrases including the name of the organization, names of individuals in the group, names of key people connected to the group and it’s campaigns, and names of specific

campaigns and events organized by the group. I also searched the websites of local radio and television stations, however, not all of them had comprehensive archives. Further, I searched the websites of local print media sources including : *The Pitch*, *Kansas City Hispanic News* and *University News* from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, finding relevant stories on all sites. Unfortunately, *The Labor Beacon*, a paper devoted to Kansas City union news, did not have an online archive. Lastly, I searched the national IWJ's website to find items relevant to the local Kansas City context and additionally drew on information from the personal website of one of the core members. Overall, I found useful source material from media resources from Kansas City, the state of Missouri, and national sources (see Appendix B).

Working with the Data

All field notes were saved on my personal computer by date. I printed these and arranged them in physical folders by date, accompanying primary source material including: agendas, minutes, flyers, pamphlets, and even buttons, candles, and a bag of peanuts labeled, "Kansas Wages." My media sources were all electronic, so I saved them in folders on my personal computer labeled according to the topics addressed. Finally, transcribed interviews were saved according to the respondents name (all interviewees consented to the use of their actual names in the project).

Because I worked with a variety of data, I also used a variety of techniques to make sense of the data. LeCompte and Schensul (1999) were especially helpful in this process. They argue,

We would oversimplify the matter if we argued that these conceptual frameworks can be applied either deductively – by choosing a set of concepts first and then sorting out the data in terms of which of the concepts they fit best – or inductively

– by examining the data first to see into what kinds of chunks they seem to fall naturally and then choosing a set of concepts that helps to explain why the data fell that way. Such a formulation is an oversimplification because, in fact, ethnographers actually use both induction and deduction throughout their analysis. (46)

Following this logic, I used a combination of deductive and inductive coding to organize the data. LeCompte and Schensul point out that deductive coding involves arranging “data into piles according to their congruity with the principal concepts informing” the study (47). My coding was partially deductive in that some codes came from the research questions that were informed by the literature, especially that related to lived religion. However, other codes were formed inductively in that I looked for items, patterns, and structures in the data. As LeCompte and Schensul put it, “Inductive analysis is often talked about as if it is ‘a kind of mystical process’... We believe this process takes place in three stages which can be called the ‘item,’ ‘pattern,’ and ‘constitutive’ or ‘structural’ levels of analysis” (68). First, items are identified by looking for “similarities and differences in behaviors, settings, actors, and other dimension of cultural life;” next, the items are “‘chunked’” together in patterns; and finally, the patterns are linked to the ideas, concepts, and/or theories informing the research (68; 97).

I worked first with the data from my fieldwork, going over materials several times in order to identify categories. I created a Word document for each data category which became a compilation of quotes from field notes and primary sources. In some cases, categories were not entirely mutually exclusive, so I cross-reference all quotes that appeared in more than one category using the comments function in Word. This process resulted in key categories especially related to the life of the organization during the study, including those pieces of data focused on the group’s campaigns, it’s

organizational story, its identity, its relationship to congregations and unions, and its relationship to the national office (this list is not exhaustive).

I next worked with the interview transcripts. I used mostly inductive coding here, creating a compilation of quotes for each interviewee related to codes that emerged from the data. I say “mostly inductive” because the codes largely derived from the interview schedule which was informed by the literature, such that their “emergence” was a result of the overall formulation of the research project. I next created a Word document titled “Interview Patterns” in which I compiled a chart using key words from each interview related to the codes so that I could easily retrieve the interview data when describing each individual’s personal spiritual story. Some of the interview topics related to the organization and to the institutional fields of religion and labor, so those pieces of the data were filtered into the categories discussed in the paragraph above.

Finally, throughout the coding process, following the advice of LeCompte and Schensul, I constantly referred back to the research questions and the working outline of my project to “check” that the coding process was not proceeding circuitously. This resulted in a reduction of the data into workable and useable parts, rather than creating more data out of what I already had. With a workable collection of categories and quotes, I was able to proceed with interpreting the data and writing up the study.

Chapter 3: Individual Spiritual Journeys

I grew up in Colorado along the Rifle River where my social justice education began at the age of fourteen. We lived in a Latino neighborhood that lined the tributary and families built their own homes. Ours was constructed of railroad tracks held together by mud and straw. So, as the story goes, we learned the city planned to build a highway that was meant to bypass the downtown area. Now, this was a town with one stop light and a population of 2500. The neighborhood formed a coalition with my mother as the focal point and we were able to keep the highway from being constructed. This was a significant time for me because I saw my mom in a new light. She was no longer simply a caretaker and a mother; she was an organizer with incredible energy that pulled together a group of otherwise disempowered people to fight for their small, self-built neighborhood. I knew at that time my life would involve social justice work in some way.

I grew up Catholic, but I remember always thinking if I could just make it to communion, mass was almost over. Right now, I really consider myself a seeker. I don't necessarily see God as guiding my life in the sense that my path has been pre-determined; as if I'm riding on railroad tracks to a pre-defined destination. I just know the more good I do for others, the happier and more rewarding my life is. In that sense, I can say God or the Spirit is present in my life. I tend to become more religious – religion pervades my life more – the more I do good things, the more I engage in the kind of work I'm doing now. When I left my last job, my former supervisor (a minister) gave me a sash as a going away present and said to me that she knew that my organizing was a ministry and that it was high time for me to think of it that way. She was 100% right and now I do.

Spending his childhood in a structure made of railroad tracks, mud, and straw materially locates Daniel in a specific set of economic circumstances that set the stage for life processes to follow. It is a poetic parallel that he presently views his spiritual journey as one not predefined like a set of railroad tracks heading toward a specific destination. Like others in the group, in his narrative, Daniel reflects on how certain aspects of his family and faith histories impact his current faith perspective, which is critical of organized religion, and helped him to cultivate a sense of justice based on action.

This chapter focuses on nine semi-structured interviews conducted throughout the course of my study to understand the narratives individuals tell about their religious

experiences. However, I do not simply relay the narratives as told within the context of the interview. Because I wanted the interviews to have the comfortable feel of a conversation, I used a set of interview questions to loosely guide the topical flow (see Appendix A). Once transcribed, I coded the interview material (described in Chapter Two) and found several emergent themes upon which I build the discussion below. With the aid of a dynamic conception of agency, this project contributes to empirical studies in the sociology of religion that look to correct the problematic distinction between “religion” and “spirituality”⁸ and refines understandings of lived religion by showing how actors agentially relate to social contexts rather than conform to rigid religious types.

Throughout this work, I intentionally use faith, religion, and spirituality interchangeably because I want to emphasize that a public, practice-oriented faith, even when its locus is outside of traditional religious institutions, is still shaped by the broader religious context at the same time practitioners work towards changing that context. Wood (2009) argues that the notion of spirituality pitted against religion essentially removes individuals from social context by suggesting that faith becomes a fully self-directed hodgepodge of beliefs and practices divorced from the heavy hand of religious institutions. He writes, “Subjective experiences arise through social practices and interactions” (240). Likewise, McGuire (2008) argues that we should not “uncritically borrow” the distinction between religion and spirituality from respondents’ vocabularies (6). This distinction is instead, a point of investigation for what it says about religion and society. Even when forming alternative religious groups and practices, practitioners still exist within, using Bourdieu’s terms, a “religious field.” Further, discourses and

⁸ Wood 2009 and Wood and Bunn 2009 provide a nice discussion of why this distinction is problematic.

subjective experiences “should not be lifted out of their practical contexts. Rather, they must be seen as emerging from those” (Wood and Bunn 2009:289).

By looking at religious practice through participants’ narratives, my intention is to retrieve “the neglected middle,” as Wuthnow put it (1998:16). Wuthnow (1998) writes that,

Spiritual practices have been largely ignored in recent scholarship, especially in the social sciences, or they have been reduced to simplistic studies of prayer and religious experience. As a result, some scholars have been tempted to think that religious communities are the answer to the problems of the United States; they have focused on congregations and religious membership, on the one hand, or on completely privatized, idiosyncratic, self-serving spirituality, on the other hand. (16)

Rather than measuring how often people pray or by taking congregations as the unit of analysis and membership therein to signify religious commitment, working with Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) chordal conception of agency, the neglected middle is revived by looking at how actions/practices typically thought of as mundane can be differently interpreted on the basis of an actor’s dynamic composition of agency. In the section below, I discuss the major themes that I discovered across these religious narratives. I also “locate” members based on their relationships to IWJ-GKC. While all were key members, I found four different ways of looking at the significance of the organization to religious lives.

Locating the Members

First, for those members interviewed, working as advocates for social justice is the core of their faiths. They describe an action-based theology. As McGuire (2008) points out, peace and justice concerns are often seen as a “byproduct” of religious

commitment. However, social activism can be the “core” of religious practice (McGuire 2008:7). Likewise, in describing a “practice-oriented spirituality,” Wuthnow (1998) points out that activities in which people engage, rather than congregations, can be the core of spirituality (172-173). For the three members who identified as *not religious*, I came to think of them as “religious” throughout the study because the phrase “I am not a religious person,” as I observed, referred to a critique of dogmatic, organized religion, not lived religion as understood in the context of this study. For example, despite identifying as an atheist, Judy said, “I wouldn’t say I’m an unspiritual person, but I’m definitely an unreligious person...I share with religious, *some* religious people, a belief that human beings can be much better than they are.” Like Roof’s (1993) Jewish agnostic of the same generation, Judy makes a distinction between the religious and the spiritual and expresses a reverence for social justice (77-78). As with other group members, her everyday activism for social change is the way she lives out her spirituality.

In making the distinction between being religious and being spiritual, Judy highlights a second important theme that emerged from the interviews: in one way or another, all interviewees are critical of organized religion. As pointed out in Chapter One, all of the interviewees with the exception of the summer intern are from the boomer generation. Their suspicion of organized religion is consistent with research on this generation’s understanding of religion overall (see Roof and Gesch 1995; Wuthnow 1998). Roof (1993) writes that many boomers are troubled by the “complacency” in surrounding congregations (234). However, instead of taking up a seeker-oriented spirituality which bears overtones of a highly privatized kind of faith (see Roof 1993:194-200), IWJ-GKC practitioners engage a practice-oriented faith. This kind of

faith, rather than being overly privatized, takes public concerns to be central to everyday lived spirituality⁹. Judy attended her first demonstration for fair housing in Chicago during the 1960s with her Rabbi who she describes as “very liberal” and “inspiring.” While going through confirmation, Judy was required to write a series of papers on prayer and suffering. These papers were so good that her Rabbi asked her to give a speech on them during the confirmation ceremony. Judy commented, “I told him I couldn’t do it because the one thing I had figured out in doing all these papers was I was an atheist.” Despite being “militarily anti-institutional religion for a long time,” Judy now connects to what is a form of spirituality that manifests in everyday activism and centers on a sense of humanism, rather than being connected to a specific congregation.

I describe the three interviewees who identified as not currently religious as *religious humanists* with social justice activism being at the core¹⁰. In this sense, these three share more in common with their religious colleagues than those identifying as religious feel they share with members of congregations expressly because of their social justice activism and critique of organized religion. The interviewee least critical of organized religion is, interestingly, also the youngest person I interviewed and one who did not “grow up” in a particular faith tradition. I joked with her that she has not had enough time to become frustrated with organized religion. Her experience as a summer

⁹ Wuthnow (1998) writes, “Yet, if a spirituality of seeking is suited to the complexities of American society, it nevertheless results in a transient spiritual existence characterized more often by dabbling than by depth. Identifying another kind of spirituality is thus an important task” (168); and “Broadly conceived, spiritual practice is a cluster of intentional activities concerned with relating to the sacred. Although it may result in extraordinary or miraculous experiences, it generally takes place in ordinary life” (170).

¹⁰ I use this label cautiously, knowing that Judy would likely balk at the use of the word “religious.” From the perspective of lived religion, believing in the supernatural is not a prerequisite for religiosity/spirituality. What is most significant is what people do on a day-to-day basis. Bender (2003) writes, “Once we move, mercifully, away from the notion that ‘switching’ between nonreligious and religious practices is always complete (logically whole), predictable (corresponding to particular institutional contexts), or distinct (nonoverlapping), we can learn more about their ‘unfinished’ and overlapping qualities and their internal variegations” (8).

intern for IWJ was her first real immersion in faith cultures. Though she describes herself as not being a religious person, her summer experiences led her to conclude that she could see herself belonging to a faith community that does not conflict with her political beliefs in the future. Ilyse commented, “I can see myself belonging to a church and being a member...But, I would consider doing justice work my *human responsibility* towards someone else.” Denny was also careful to emphasize the human responsibility to help others regardless of faith identification. He pointed out that although he does not consider himself religious, he is most definitely “not an atheist” and further, he tries “to live a Christian life.” Despite believing that Jesus “was just a man like me,” Denny believes in a “supreme being” and “in an afterlife” while his faith perspective centers on the importance of “helping people that are being downtrodden.” All of these comments point to a commitment to a form of practice oriented toward justice concerns.

Thirdly, like the emphasis on *action* and the *critique of organized religion*, a concern for *authenticity* is a unifying theme throughout the interviews. I did not consciously design the interview schedule to root out what members believed to be expressions of authentic faith; however, in asking about the meaning of IWJ-GKC and activism, what an authentic religious life looks like arose as a key concern. Even in describing himself as not religious, Denny made efforts to explain that he purposely does not participate in communion when attending church on holidays because he does not want to appear “phony” to those who are regular church goers. Likewise, Judy relayed to me her discomfort when another member described her as being “religious enough” for the coalition. In Judy’s words, Mike said, “‘You know, you pass...you know we love you, please stay’ ...I mean, I’ve been an atheist since I was 15 years old. And since I was,

you know like, ‘Why are you going to meetings where they pray?’ You know? It means nothing to me...” Here, Judy refers to her discomfort in being connected to a coalition that “looks” religious and engages in traditional religious practices. She later clarified her involvement by explaining, “To me, IWJ-GKC is a *coalition* between the religious community and the labor community and you don’t need to be a religious person to see the value of it.” Participants’ concerns for authenticity, like the critique of organized faith, also reflect generational concerns. Roof and Gesch (1995) point out, “Contrary to stereotypes, boomers are not opposed to serious commitment, but they do insist that the causes and activities to which they give themselves give expression to their deepest understandings of who they are and of their more cherished relationships...” (78) (also see Roof 1993:234-236).

By highlighting these three themes in the interviews (action, critique of organized religion, and authenticity), my purpose is not to suggest a strong coherence across all religious lives, but to simply look for possible patterns in religion-as-lived by those who focus on social justice activism as the core of their lives. Each interviewee described a specific pathway into social justice activism that eventually connected him or her to IWJ-GKC. There are similarities and differences in these narratives, but the interview was designed to elicit reflection on how *religious pasts* and *family histories* impact *current religious practices and beliefs* based on the understanding that experiences create for us “learned senses” that can impact religious perspectives and practices.

Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu and theologian Sarah Coakley, McGuire (2008) writes that “not just our physical senses but also our social senses – are involved in

remembering practices and embodying practices. Thus, our bodies have embedded in them certain learned senses (such as a sense of justice...)” (99). Further,

Each culture imbues the body with a myriad meanings that serve as both maps and repertoires for individual experience and expression. This meaning, however, is not merely a cognitive or symbolic overlay. Rather, through ritual practice, social meanings become physically embodied...If we accept Bourdieu’s thesis about embodiment and social practices, then we can understand how senses – not only moral senses but also religious ones – can be acquired and embedded in our bodily experience. (McGuire 2008:100).

Each interviewee provided reflections on the interaction between *faith, justice, and labor* that work together to provide an overall “sense of justice” for each practitioner. This sense of justice – combined with past experiences – connected each interviewee to IWJ-GKC through a *specific pathway*. However, involvement in the coalition does not mean that each member describes the organization in the same way. An important part of this study is to understand the ways an organization which exists outside of traditional institutional religion comes to be a locus of lived religion. Therefore, an interesting part of the individual and organizational stories is to explore the meaning of the coalition and its campaigns to the members interviewed. I produce nine stories of religious lives below, highlighting the themes discussed here. While these stories are told in my voice, I generously use quotes from each respondent to better generate a sense of lived religion from members’ perspectives. Concluding this chapter, I discuss these narratives using Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) chordal conception of agency and briefly consider respondents’ generational ties¹¹.

¹¹ Roof (1993) writes, “People’s life stories are never just *their* stories, or even those of their generation; they are also the stories as told by the larger culture...a cultural narrative establishes the broad frame of reference in which a person’s ordinary story makes sense” (28-29).

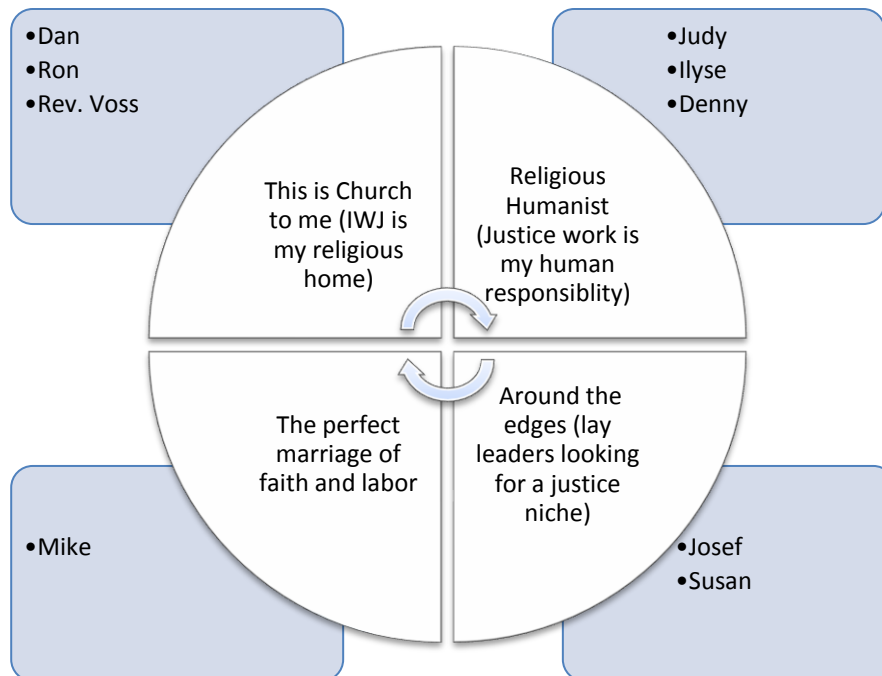


Figure 1: Respondents' Relationships to IWJ-GKC

Religious Humanists

Ilyse

As pointed out above, Ilyse said she was not raised in a religious family.

However, she credits her parents for instilling in her the value of helping others. She told me, "Ever since I can remember, my parents and I have always been involved in volunteer work. So, I'm a person who really wants to do some activism and nonprofit work when I'm older." Ilyse attends a private East Coast college where she first encountered the director of the national IWJ and received information about working as a local summer intern. She said, "One of the things I was kind of nervous about, it is *Interfaith Worker Justice*, and I don't have a background of being affiliated with any faith tradition." Being affiliated is not a requirement for the internship, so Ilyse saw it as a great opportunity to try to create grassroots change and did not anticipate the impact it

would have on her religious thinking. In the process of her internship, she began to explore the idea of belonging to a church. Reflecting on her experience, she said,

So, this summer it was interesting because I was going to church every Sunday and living with a pastor. And I actually found out more about the different Christian denominations... All of the experiences I had were very moving and it's really neat to see people in those kinds of situations. I do see myself in the future as being affiliated with some kind of Christian denomination. So, it's definitely helped me move more towards a background that involves religion.

In our conversations, Ilyse relayed to me that her greatest interests are in the Unitarians and Disciples of Christ because of their reputation for progressivism. She laughed about attending an event at a Unitarian church over the summer because, as she described, "We were around all these people cracking jokes about Republicans, so it was really interesting... I didn't realize there were denominations out there trying to move forward."

Despite enjoying such positive experiences with faith-based groups over the summer, Ilyse did not come to see her possible religious future as wholly intertwining with her drive for activism. Instead, she defines justice work as her human responsibility. She explained, "So, I got involved in IWJ not because of any faith-based, spiritual, or religious calling. So, for me, it may be cool if I can tie those things together with religion – I can see how they connect. But, I would consider doing justice work my human responsibility towards someone else. So, I would kind of keep it separate like that." There is a sense that Ilyse may see the connection between faith and activism as being personally relevant because she emphasized the importance of locating a denomination that places justice work in the forefront of its goals. She expressed the importance of attending a church that is consistent with her political beliefs and one that works to enact political change, rather than focusing primarily on acts of service.

Ilyse describes a desire to focus on a level of action that moves beyond acts of service or compassion to impact change at the points and places where problems begin. She told me that one of her reasons for taking on the IWJ internship was because she saw it as an opportunity to engage in activism. She explained, “The main reason I wanted to do IWJ was because all the other voluntary work I’ve done has kind of been *after the fact*, like pitching in at a homeless shelter. Those are great things, but they’re not going to change why people got there in the first place. So, I want to be on the opposite end to change things at the beginning so people wouldn’t have to end up like that.” She found that desire a little frustrated throughout the summer when hit with the realities of local organizing. “I wasn’t doing what I had expected. I’d expected to be doing a lot of hands on social organizing: organizing people and campaigns and seeing real, concrete change. You either win or you lose this campaign,” she said. Ilyse did much more for the group than it seemed to her at the time. The summer she interned was characterized by much change in the group. It was working to define new campaigns as well as trying to solidify an identity. Ilyse built many relationships that helped make connections especially in those campaigns related to immigration. She pointed out, “I’ve built a lot of relationships and have met a lot of really great people and so, I mean, I definitely have learned a lot because I’ve been put in a lot of awkward situations by having to meet with people and families I’ve never met with before on my own.” In this sense, Ilyse actually did engage a major part of justice work. More seasoned members of the group consistently emphasized the importance of relationship-building for ongoing justice work. A successful rally cannot be put together without ongoing community ties.

Because Ilyse was new to the faith experience, she did not have much to say about faith practices except in the context of observing faith practices in the group. She spoke about opening and closing each monthly meeting with prayer, “It’s very calming at the beginning and the end to just bring you back to reflect...During the discussions and meetings, when things get heated and you close off with prayer, you’re kind of cutting off all the bad stuff and regrouping and just calling on peaceful things.” Ilyse was, however, critical of the impact of prayer. She pointed out, “I feel that maybe people don’t keep that sense with them throughout the meetings.” It was difficult for her to see the faith practices carrying through the nuts and bolts of organizing. Similarly, while pointing out that all faiths believe in “justice and equality,” she was surprised that actually supporting justice work was not a natural connection made by all congregations she visited. She said,

I’ve been trying to go around and meet with clergy. That’s one thing that surprised me because in my idealistic mind, I’m thinking of course someone would go for this. [Labor in the Pulpit] is such a great program, but some people are very hesitant, like, ‘Well, I’m not sure. I’d have to get it passed through a bunch of people.’ Running into that surprised me.

Ilyse was at the same time critical of what happens when money gets involved in churches and in faith-based organizing. She said, “I thought I must’ve been really naïve to think that things should be all happy and that money isn’t involved. It’s too bad that this green stuff is turning people against each other.”

A concern for authenticity rang clearly throughout Ilyse’s description of her search for a faith tradition. She saw researching denominations as integral to her quest. For example she explained, “I would definitely have to be involved with a tradition that went along with how I do certain things, so that’s why I think researching these denominations is important.” Before committing to any particular church, Ilyse

emphasized the need to look into where it stands on “all the major issues” and whether the congregants put their perspectives on justice into action. Her initial anxiety over not being a person of faith when considering an internship with IWJ reflects a concern for not misrepresenting herself in the context of faith-inspired organizing. Likewise, in the early weeks of her internship in Kansas City, Ilyse felt uneasy about what appeared to her to be the lack of action which is so central to her religious identity. She commented, “I was convincing myself that ‘you are here for a good reason’ and so, because I just wanted to make sure I was doing good things with my time and efforts here and I didn’t want it to be in vain. So, it was initially hard for me to grasp.”

Judy

Throughout the study, Judy was the only member who openly identified as an atheist. She began the interview by telling me, “I realized that I didn’t have a spiritual bone in my body.” She was raised Jewish by her parents who made her “do the whole trip,” but stopped going to Hebrew school because she found it “boring” and felt she wasn’t learning anything anyway. Even though the studies she engaged during her confirmation class led her to conclude there was no God, Judy enjoyed this class because of the Rabbi described above who gave her her first experience of social activism. I asked Judy how the Rabbi responded when she told him she had become an atheist. She said,

He was upset. I mean, I continued to talk to him. In fact he married me. It was funny because I asked him to do a civil ceremony and he refused. And I asked him if he ever did a civil ceremony and he said yes, he did it once for an interracial marriage in South Dakota where he was in the army or something and I said, well if you did it for them, why won’ t you do it now? He said, ‘Because I know you as a Jew!’ And boy did he lay it on! There was so much prayer and Hebrew in the wedding ceremony, I just tuned out. It was funny. He later became an Orthodox Jew. Yeah. I guess he got sick of people like me.

Judy moved to Kansas City in 1978 and spent a portion of that time with feelings against institutional religion. But, as things began to move around the idea of building a coalition of faith and labor, she began to reevaluate her stance on religious organizations. She realized that religious organizations, “like labor organizations have their politics.” She further pointed out,

I’ve learned that just because lay people or even your parish priest may subscribe to your values that doesn’t mean the hierarchy does of *any* kind of church. And you know, like currently for instance here in Kansas City, the Bishop is Opus Dei. He’s really right wing. He’s put a damper on a lot of the stuff the church has participated in. You know, I don’t know what he thinks of Jesus, but he stands for different stuff.

Though faith and labor organizing led her to a more open stance on people of faith, Judy feels she would have gotten involved in any coalition that formed around worker justice issues; the faith component was not the driving force. She said,

And you know, if you care about people and you care about justice you find that you have these strange bedfellows and you have a lot more in common with them than you do with people who may share your same religious or non-religious viewpoint, but do nothing, you know?

Still, Judy pointed out that most religions do have a strong sense of justice and fairness. So, what she values in faiths is the ability of some practitioners to put this sense of justice into action despite her perceived in-action by church hierarchies. The institutions themselves are, what she describes, as a “substitute for community” that wraps “everything people can’t understand” into concepts of God and the Devil. Judy heads a university-based labor studies program. Working closely with union members, she found, “Some union folks, for them, it’s almost a religion. You know, it’s certainly a way of looking at the world. It’s a world view, you know, to see the world in terms of

recognizing the value of working people and also the conflict of interest. The *fundamental* dichotomy is not good and evil, it's labor and management. And people who believe that working people have fundamentally something in common with one another and need to get together, practice it in everything they do." She then describes another coalition member who I did not formally interview, but observed in my fieldwork. During the national IWJ conference I attended, I sat in on a small group with this woman who had tears rolling down her face as she described how the union had "saved her."

Like other members of the group, Judy explores more nuanced understandings of religion, seeing the potential for faith to exist around aspects of social life not usually thought of as *religion*. Critical of institutional religion and church hierarchies, overall Judy sees the value of the social justice activism carried out by some religious practitioners. But, to her religion can equally be found in the concept of labor. Judy critiques organized labor in the same way she critiques institutional religion. She believes action and beliefs should transcend institutions. She explained, "I have a vision that we have to build worker power and that absolutely spans the line between union and non-union and it absolutely spans the types of institutions: union versus religion versus citizen organizations and stuff like that. We should be formulating a common vision." What is most significant to her current spirituality is whether a concern for human suffering is put into action. She describes her spirituality as "scientific" and motivated by a drive for social activism. I recognize Judy's concern for authenticity in her questioning of Mike's description of her as religious enough for the coalition, as well as in her critique of organized religion – and labor, for that matter - as not fulfilling social justice teachings.

While she would adamantly argue she is not a religious person, Judy's religiosity does not suffer from her disbelief in God.

Denny

Of the three religious humanists, Denny spoke most extensively about the impact his family and faith history have on his current beliefs and practices. He grew up in a "very large" Catholic family and describes their past status as poor to lower-middle class. They lived in government housing and because his family "didn't have much," his parents developed a sense of justice by being connected to religion and by helping those who lived around them. He said, "Religion was a big thing to us back then. Being poor and having religion had a lot to do with trying to have a feeling of justice." Denny's mom worked at home caring for eight children, while his dad worked odd jobs. In the post-World War II context, Denny explained, there were not a lot of jobs to be had, so the family lived tightly together in a small, two-bedroom home.

Denny said seven out of the eight siblings have at least an undergraduate degree because his parents were always "on us to get our educations. [They said] 'Education is the key to getting out of the barracks.'" After high school, Denny decided to go to a seminary in Wisconsin to study to be a priest. But, as he put it, he "didn't stay long." He said, "I spent one semester there and just sort of realized after about two or three months that I was in love with a girl back here. I was crazy about her. But, I thought I should give that a try and I did and then I realized that it wasn't for me." One of Denny's older brothers had a similar experience. He lasted four years in seminary, dropped out, and became an airline pilot. Denny said that out of the eight children, only one ended up remaining Catholic. An older sister became a nun and now heads the St. Louis Province of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.

Despite leaving the Catholic Church, the sense of lived justice that carried through their daily faith and helping practices had an impact on later practices for Denny and for his siblings, especially his sisters. Denny commented,

My sister [the nun] marched in Atlanta in the Civil Rights Movement, you know, she was at the forefront of that. And all of my sisters are very proactive women's libbers. None of my sisters take a back seat to anybody... They plowed their way to the front... When I was in Vietnam, my sisters were protesting the war. I was in a base camp out in the jungle getting my fanny kicked and at the same time my sisters were back here carrying signs against the war. Well, back then, I had a lot of hard feelings about that. But they were right and I was stupid. I wasn't *stupid*: I got drafted. I had to go to war. I could've said no, I guess, but I wasn't smart enough.

I asked Denny if he later changed his mind about the war, given the activism of his sisters. He replied, "I changed my view on the war *while I was there*. But I mean, my sisters were correct." He went on to explain that their sense of activism and justice must have come from how their parents raised them. He said, "I don't know what else it could be."

Not only did his family inspire an action-oriented faith, Denny describes how the Church's connection between poverty and religion taught him the value of helping others. He relayed an interesting story about "pagan babies." I asked, "Really? The Church called them 'Pagan Babies'?" Denny explained,

Oh, back in the 50s when I was in grade school, we adopted a baby in Korea. It was called 'Pagan Babies' because they weren't baptized and so you would go to class and collect money and adopt a pagan baby and you may only give a nickel this week, you could only afford a nickel because we didn't have much money, but we put money and we were gonna pay to have that child taken to an orphanage where he was gonna get baptized and go to heaven.

Denny told this story in a humorous way, after all the phrase begs a humorous tenor, but he derived a greater, global sense of justice by contributing the small change the family could scrounge up to help a child in another county.

Denny describes his career as a “Cinderella story,” despite being drafted to go to Vietnam after finishing his undergraduate degree. He eventually attended graduate school to earn a Master of Engineering degree, but with the birth of his first child, found he had to make a decision to earn some money and took on an apprenticeship as an electrician. He worked for eleven years as an electrician, then taught at the apprenticeship school for ten years and then served as the financial secretary for his union local. In the midst of such a fulfilling career, Denny had a change of heart about the Church that was triggered by the sexual abuse scandals and the role of women in the hierarchy. He said,

So, I don't feel like organized religion has to be the path you have to follow. That's where I came from and I really got frustrated ten or fifteen years ago when the Catholic Church was going through a turmoil with their priests and they shun women. Women aren't allowed to participate in the Catholic Church and I go and look at the Methodist church and the Episcopalians and I've been to their services and you'll have a wonderful sermon from a woman. Or you'll have a wedding I attended and the minister is a woman. She does a wonderful job. And then the Catholic Church says you can't do that and so it just bothered me. And I think it bothered my brothers and my sisters too. They all left on their own accord. We didn't get together and leave together. We've all strayed on our own.

Though Denny left the Church, his remaining connection is through his wife and children. He said, “I'm not a Christian. I mean, I left the Catholic church. My whole family's Christian. My wife and all my children, they're all Catholics.” I was curious if Denny experimented with any Protestant denominations and he elaborated, “No. My basic belief is: I don't believe in Jesus Christ. And that's the basis for Christianity. I firmly believe that Jesus Christ was just a man just like me and that he wasn't the son of

God and that's why I can't accept Christianity." He said, however, that he tries to live a Christian life. I asked what that means to him. He answered,

I believe I'm gonna be judged in the end when it's all said and done. I feel like I'm gonna be judged by how I treated other people. And if I treat people with respect and kindness and take care of my fellow man to the best of my ability, no matter who they are, then I'll be rewarded accordingly. I'm a mathematician; math is my strong subject and so is science. So, I sort of feel like it's on a scale. People who live good lives don't have to be Christians; they don't have to believe in Jesus Christ; they don't have to believe in any religion, as long as they are productive and good people while they're here on earth and do well for other people and make this a better world. When we get to an afterlife, then we'll be judged accordingly. Some people are good Methodists and do that all their lives. Some people are good Catholics and do that. Some people are good Muslims and do that all their life. Some people are Catholics and they're some of the most evil people I've ever seen in my life. I don't want to be around them.

Even through his critique of the Church, Denny reflects on the importance of organized religion "for the harmony of people." He explained that the "religious" aspects of IWJ-GKC's meetings – such as opening and closing with prayer – are essential because they "bring people together." He stated that all religions believe in justice in some way. Denny was quick to clarify that while this may seem like a contradiction to his anti-institutional stance, religion was "all my life a form of keeping me together. It was a great influence on me growing up. I just felt when I got older, my intellect changed. I'm real pragmatic. I just can't buy some of the teachings. I'm a Doubting Thomas." He further expressed admiration for members of the group who are active in IWJ-GKC despite that being something their congregations may not support.

Denny's pragmatism penetrates his sense of justice and his expression of authenticity. He matter-of-factly explained that he does not receive the sacraments because he does not want to "put on airs" to make people think he is religious: his authenticity is expressed by abstaining from communion and in helping the downtrodden.

Denny views justice work as being “proactive” but, he did not view IWJ as his faith community. He saw his role in IWJ as contributing proactively to justice for exploited workers, but his faith practices transcend the coalition to encompass embodied practices in the form of “helping others.” He said at one point, his wife even had to ask him to slow down: “I’ve always been a helper. My wife said ‘You’re always helping somebody build this or build that. Or putting up a wall for somebody. Or fixing that person’s air conditioner or fixing that person’s car.’” Denny laughed and explained that he always felt they were “doing it together.”

Around the Edges

Susan

Josef and Susan both have connections to specific faith communities, but their desire to put justice work into action locates them on the “edges” of these communities. Through their experiences, they encountered many congregants content in their faiths and more interested in acts of service than justice. Susan told me, “I was always kind of looking at the edge of things, you know, what does God want me to do now?” Like Denny, Susan grew up in a family that was not “well-to-do” and she describes her parents as helpers. Everyone in the community encountered similar economic circumstances, so there was a great sense of communitarianism and volunteerism. As Susan points out, “we were all in the same boat.” Susan grew up in an Evangelical household in a small town in New York state. When she encountered Biblical verses about poverty, she said, “I translated a lot of the scripture as if we were the poor.” She now recognizes that she may not have been aware as a child of more extensive poverty experienced in “the minority section of town,” but nonetheless, her parents took the scriptures “quite literally” and she spoke extensively about how their community involvement impacted her sense of justice.

She explained, “We always had somebody extra at the table or somebody living with us, or somebody in need.”

Susan’s mom taught piano lessons, but also volunteered at a tuberculosis sanatorium on Long Island and at a local nursing home to pray with the women there. Susan stressed that through this volunteer work, they formed “*relationships* with those women. So, I took from my parents a form of Christianity that was very alive.” Susan described her dad as a lay preacher who opened a “little, tiny church” in their community. She said, “I have really good memories. It was a lively, challenging group...So my faith experience from way back was very real. I sensed God’s presence and love.” Though she describes her early upbringing as Evangelical, she also says she was “brought up a variety” because of her father’s position. She became connected with the Presbyterian Church when she later met her husband at Cornell University, where he attended medical school and she attended nursing school. Both of them had at some point during high school made a commitment “to go on a missions of some kind.” Susan’s husband had actually expressed his commitment in writing in his senior class year book. It was this commitment that led to a significant turning point in Susan’s understanding of action and justice.

Her first application for medical missions was rejected. They said they could not accept her because she has diabetes. She said she was so disappointed and discouraged because she felt this was part of her faith journey: always looking on the edges, Susan was searching for her religious niche. After several months, she finally received a letter of acceptance because this particular hospital had a great need for nurses. She then had to turn them down because, as she explains, she and her husband had already planned to get

married. They eventually wound up in the Kansas City area because both had signed up for the Barry Plan. As Susan explains, “We had signed up for the Barry Plan which said – it was at the time of Vietnam – so rather than being drafted during his education, we wanted to finish, and then we said we’d give two years back to Uncle Sam at the end and so, Uncle Sam brought us here.” During their service, medical missions was still on their minds. Susan was sending out applications and making inquiries, but could find no openings until they “finally connected to the Quakers.” As she describes, “To make a long story short, we went with the Quakers out of Richmond, Indiana” to do medical missions in Kenya for three years. At the time, they had two small children: one five months old and the other two years old. She said, “We were a little bit crazy, but we both sensed God’s calling.”

Susan’s experiences in Kenya opened her eyes to global inequality. Despite having lived through poverty in her childhood, she explains, “I really probably didn’t understand where I stood in the global entity until we went to Kenya and I realized how wealthy I was.” Susan was startled by the stark contrast in living conditions between the United States and Kenya and thus a turning point in her faith expression was born out of this moment of crisis. She said,

Coming back from Kenya I felt like I had a double-vision, you know, I was always confronted by the opulence and the affluence that we all enjoy and I knew at the very same time there were those that didn’t have and they were lacking resources and the people that I met and knew in Kenya were industrious. They were not the image of lazy. And they had been faithful Christians long before I was born. You know the Quakers had gone to Kenya in the 1900s and it wasn’t, again, the evangelistic image of ‘We went to Africa to get people to Christ;’ they were already in Christ and they taught me far more than I ever taught them in terms of trusting Christ and living day-by-day when you don’t know exactly where the next meal was coming from. ...and it just made no sense to me in terms of justice. Why do we as people of faith allow such a dichotomy?

Sensing this dichotomy, Susan joined Bread for the World, an organization that deals with hunger issues, upon returning from Kenya. Through this organization, she actively began writing letters to Congress and meeting with local legislators to try to enact change regarding hunger. As serendipity would have it, a position called “Hunger Action Enabler” opened in a local Presbyterian church and Susan got the job. She attended a conference on hunger in preparation for her work. While her experiences in Kenya “opened her eyes,” this conference triggered for Susan the sense that justice could really happen around issues of hunger. There, she formulated her overall sense of justice and its connection to an action-based faith. Susan said that during the conference, “they talked about our doing something about hunger similar to when Kennedy said ‘We can land on the moon.’ And it was, at the time when he said it, there was no NASA, there was no money, there was no anything else set aside to do that. There was nothing moving, but he kind of pushed the political will and the community. People realized, hey, we could really do this.” Susan explains that she always doubted whether anything could really be done about the issue of hunger, but at this moment, she began to feel things could change. Furthermore, as she describes, enacting justice is “not an option,” instead, it is something that God requires of his followers. She subsequently began speaking at churches about hunger and in the process, came to interpret scriptures in a new light:

Part of my faith perspective [growing up] was kind of that scripture that Jesus said, ‘The poor you’re gonna have with you always.’...And as I got more involved... that scripture reference was not ‘That’s the way it’s gotta be,’ it was ‘I will know how much you care about me and want to be a follower of God by how you treat the poor.’ And that it wasn’t an option. That whole story referred back to Leviticus and at the time I knew very little of this, but it’s part of my accepting that position, I was asked to speak about hunger at churches and stuff, so it pushed me into looking and over and over God says ‘*It’s not an option*. You are here as a people,’ the Israelites in the Old Testament and to the Christian church in the New, ‘to care for those who are hurting: the orphan, the fatherless, the

widow.’ I can still remember being part of a small group that was asking those questions. Who are they [the poor] today and it’s people who don’t have options. It’s people who don’t have a voice in the political structure.

Through her work on hunger, Susan says that she quickly bumped into issues of poverty and began to understand that everything is connected: hunger cannot be separated from poverty. As she worked more for social justice on these issues, she formulated a more solid sense of justice. She describes justice, not only as not an option, but justice should also be something that is a community aspiration, rather than an individual aspiration. Because she believes it is a measure of how much one loves God, Susan – through her position as Hunger Action Enabler – worked diligently to get Presbyterian congregants in the area involved in hunger actions and campaigns. She quickly ran into frustration. Susan describes her faith past as one characterized by searching and by looking on the edges of things; however, once finding her niche in justice work, she began to literally feel on the margins because of her justice-based convictions. With tears, Susan explained that so few people in the congregations actually “get it.” She said,

I don’t know why my heart is so hurting about the justice thing because now I’ve been doing this and having conversations for twenty-something years and I think there’s so many people who don’t understand it: *Jesus didn’t just do charity*. He didn’t just solve individual problems. His message was communal. We *all* have to do something about this and some of what Christ intimated, and granted he didn’t say that we should help with housing, but, he did say that we need to care for one another and...if we go to somebody who’s hungry and we see the housing is terrible, then to me, God is opening our eyes to see we that are responsible for more.

After ten years, Susan’s employers said she worked herself out of a job. She had created food pantries in all of the local Presbyterian churches, yet she felt that despite her efforts, people still did not understand the difference between justice and charity. I asked

Susan to elaborate a little more on how she made the transition from focusing on charity or service to understanding social justice. She reflected on her work and said that one can only alleviate the symptoms of hunger by providing food pantries or “dropping food on people, so to speak.” She began to take her title of “action enabler” seriously to mean working on policies and structures associated with the problem of hunger. Consequently, she left this position disheartened and frustrated with the organized church. As she describes, “I had a very hard time after I left. I left the Presbytery or rather I should say, *the Presbytery left me.*”

Susan said she has “gradually come back to the church,” but her authentic faith expression is present in her ongoing work on hunger and poverty. She has connected to various groups working on hunger and poverty over the years and currently works for a Missouri-based organization that tackles issues of public health and hunger. IWJ-GKC is just one of her connections to social justice. In many ways, Susan also exists on the edges of the coalition. While she does not view IWJ-GKC as her primary faith community, it is one way through which her faith and justice concerns are expressed.

Josef

Josef’s relationship to IWJ-GKC is very similar to Susan’s. During most of the study, he was highly involved – only wavering in participation when he became conflicted over Daniel’s leadership. However, IWJ-GKC is just one of the many outlets he taps into to engage an action-based faith. Josef was raised Catholic in a Bohemian kind of family. His mother was a full-time artist and his stepfather worked “odd jobs.” He credits the kind of upbringing he had for his ability to “connect with people very, very quickly.” As he describes, “...we had a lot of interesting people in and out of the house. Their life was their work and that was their passion and it was all about that. It was very

natural. I just grew up with my gifts being what I do.” They also moved around a lot. As Josef explains, he attended thirteen different schools in twelve years. Through his early experiences, he became a “people person” and developed the “gifts of mediation, teaching, and speaking”.

Because individual “gifts” were so emphasized throughout his childhood, by the age of seventeen, Josef had developed a deep connection to *work as vocation*. He recounts a story when he and his stepfather were working together on odd jobs. He relayed the story to me, “I was working on something with my stepfather when I was seventeen, and I asked, ‘Why are we doing this?’” Josef then explained to me that he did not ask “Why are we *doing* this?” but “Why are we doing *this*?” placing an emphasis on the project itself. His stepfather replied, “Well, we’ve got to do *something*.” Josef reflected on how moments like these helped him feel the spirit of work and that one’s labors were meaningful no matter what the task.

While his family members, through their vocations, inspired a focus on the meaning of work and helped him understand his personal talents, Josef credits Catholic ideals for cultivating his sense of justice. He talked about how he grew up in the “era of the radical priests” who, like Bobby Kennedy, “had a great sense of connecting the political and the real.” He campaigned for George McGovern as one of his early ventures into an active, political life. Josef said, “I stood out in front of what was a little theatre venue in a cow-town with a fried chicken bucket with a sticker, ‘Change for McGovern!’ I know it’s ancient history.” That experience, coupled with inspiring priests and public figures like Bobby Kennedy, led Josef on a search for his niche. As he explains,

That stuff tremendously influenced me and I tried politics. I tried business. I tried to figure out where was the place I could best make a difference. What’s my

niche? For almost twenty years, it was certainly in church work, first as a volunteer. I was an active, volunteer leader. And then, as a staff person. Like I said, I got trained to do adult-ed, and the basic empowerment stuff: round people up, train them, and support them.

Josef's experiences with the Catholic Church taught him that while Catholic values may be about justice, justice is not always enacted in unison and not always by all members. He views the Church, not as a single entity, but as one occupying "both sides."

Josef told a story from his school days that revealed two sides of the Church:

I mean if you look at the Civil Rights, there were a lot of Catholics that sat on the sidelines, but there were a lot of priests who walked in the Civil Rights and Peace Movement protests and stuff. Of course there were some who said, 'Hmmm, I wish this would all go away!' But, there were a lot who were involved and engaged. I must have been in about the 6th grade and for a year we lived down near Springfield and I actually went to the Catholic school in Springfield for a year. We had a radical young priest and I had a radical young teacher and the principal told us that they were Communists because they were against the [Vietnam] war and were for change. She was the 'black-veiled monster' and these guys were 'Communists.' So, I mean we saw both sides of that in church.

Josef currently understands this kind of childhood experience from the perspective of Avery Dulles' (1978; 2002) *Models of the Church*, which as Josef describes argues that the Church can be viewed through multiple lenses and all of them must be kept "in tension." He said,

The church doesn't work if you just have sacraments or if you just have prophecy. You have to have all these different pieces and keep them in tension. When you get too much piety, you stop serving the world. When you serve the world too much, then you lose your connection to the Spirit and you just become another movement.

Keeping these models in tension is important to Josef's sense of justice and living an action-based faith. Josef explained that, "You can never make up in charity what you lack in justice... You need charity for the immediate needs, but you've got to have the

advocacy and the justice piece for the other parts – for the systemic things.” He, however, feels that churches are very much unprepared to tackle issues related to work; that too many have wandered off into a kind of piety that only focuses on individual salvation. He further elaborated,

That piety and conservatism in the Catholic church and in others tends to be very individualized. It’s about me and Jesus and I’ve gotta get my seat in heaven and not care about anybody else. John Paul said a great thing, that we’re experiencing heaven and hell now. By the choices people make for themselves and by the choices that other people make around them, heaven and hell can be experienced. That’s really what revealing the kingdom is about. When Jesus said the kingdom of God is at hand, [he meant] pay attention and believe the good news. If you stop treating other people poorly, you’re going to start a trajectory where people treat other people well. That’s not exclusive to Christianity. It’s any spirituality.

Like Susan, Josef’s religious experience is characterized by looking on the edges of things. He describes his faith experience as one characterized by “niche searching.” As he elaborates, he is “technically still Catholic,” but he finds spiritual sustenance at his wife’s family’s church which is a local Disciples of Christ congregation. He said that, there, because the ministers are focused on “justice, biblical literacy, missions, [and] evangelism,” he can “really go in and enjoy the sermon, which is not always the case in some churches. In fact it’s just the opposite. I go ‘Ugh! It’s making me so angry.’ How do I not get angry about this in church because that’s hard?” I asked Josef what issues make him angry in church and he explained that it is not enough to just “love Jesus.” He said that a lot of religious people think “if you just love Jesus everything else is done and you don’t have to worry about anything else. I go, ‘Ummm, that’s absolutely not right.’ Of course you have to have the *behavior* that Jeeesus has talked about.” Still, he said that if people ask about his religious affiliation, Josef explained that he still says he’s Catholic, “but like Ross and Rachel, we’re kind of on a break!”

Josef's emphasis on behavior taps into his focus on an action-based faith that is inspired by viewing all aspects of the world as sacred. He became frustrated with the fact that those core Catholic values that focus on justice are not always enacted by Church members. He also became increasingly critical of the institution, especially "rigid doctrinal things like birth control." So, while he attends a Disciples of Christ church, he explains that he is "very Catholic" in terms of his "lived sacramental theology." He elaborates that he does not mean the seven sacraments, but viewing the world and all creation as sacred. This is the basis of his perspective on justice. He explains that, "If the world – creation, not just people – was given by God as a gift, then everybody ought to be able to share in that gift." In one of his adult education presentations, Josef emphasizes the fact that throughout history, much of religion has focused on understanding God's "transcendent love;" for Josef, however, God's "immanent love" is important to a deepening of faith and spirituality (Walker nd).

By seeing God's love in the "nuts and bolts" of life, Josef came to understand that the work people do is an expression of God's love in the world and his focus on justice – especially worker justice – is meant to help those workers who are unfairly compensated to take part in the sacredness of the world. In this way, workers are able to experience God's immanent love. In the interview, Josef explained that the Church, meaning all denominations here, is unprepared to deal with work issues. He argued,

For the Church to not be affirming that work is a vital part of our generativity, it's a part of how we feel whole and good about ourselves and contribute to the rest of the world, for the Church to not be willing to be engaged in that, well, I guess I knew that. It's what I'm out trying to talk to lay people about.

He further elaborated that it is a “natural and sinful human tendency to hierarchicalize everything...we’ve seen that with immigration. ‘Well, geez, let’s send these people back!’ Well, now there’s nobody to pick the apples or whatever. Hmm, how did that work out for us?” By creating hierarchies and viewing some workers as less deserving of fair compensation, people get tied up in “distractions” from understanding what faith and God’s love are really about.

Now, for Josef the connection between faith and justice is so natural that when I initially contacted him about setting up an interview, he sent me an email commenting, “I immediately thought, ‘How does [justice] NOT be a part of religious practice?!’ I was trying to recall some formative works or experiences in my life and decided justice and advocacy (distinct from charity) are just woven into the fabric of my spiritual/religious practice.” While the connection feels natural for Josef, throughout this study, he became more and more critical over the tenor of justice-based action as Daniel’s leadership tactics were called into question. This critique bled into his work as an educator, but in a way that allowed him to refine his thoughts on action. He told me this story:

I guess my concern is how do you not become that which you hate? I had the opportunity to teach social justice stuff to the Community of Christ pastoral ministries over the summer. It was a three part, hour-talk each day and one of things I did, you’re old enough to have seen Star Wars? Well, actually, the scene where Luke and Darth are fighting at the end ...and the scene where Darth falls backwards, he just fell back against the rail, and Luke’s got his light saber out...and eventually Darth saves his life. Well, anyway my point to them was, ‘Who is it that the Dark Lord cheers for throughout the whole scene?’ He cheers for Luke, you know, ‘Use your anger!’ And I think one of the things with all organizations [is] you hear that silly thing about ‘speak truth to power’ and people have no idea what that means.

This story raises important points about how the *nature* of justice action can either reflect real, faith-based activism or not from Josef’s perspective. He argues that “all the

traditions [emphasize], don't do things to other people that you don't want them to do to you. That, turn the other cheek, you know, reap what you sew, all that stuff." He explained that in justice work, it is important to build solid, lasting relationships. When you bring in organizers that are unfamiliar with local practices, they can stir up a lot of negative feelings, leaving situations worse off than they were to begin with. In his organizing work, Josef has been inspired by Rolheiser's book, *The Holy Longing* (1999). In December, 2007 he sent me an email with a quote from the book which elaborates on the point that the kind of action engaged in justice work matters. Rolheiser explains,

What we are coming more and more to realized, however, is that one of the reasons why the world is not responding more to our challenge to justice is that our actions for justice themselves often mimic the very violence, injustice, hardness, and egoism they are trying to challenge...As Gil Bailie puts it... '...Righteous indignation is often the first symptom of the metastasis of the cancer of violence. It tends to provide the indignant ones with a license to commit or condone acts structurally indistinguishable from those that aroused the indignation. (Rolheiser 1999:180)

Josef reflected these points in his discussion of actions he had been involved in.

He told me about an action to organize nurses in which a local group brought in an outside organizer. He said,

In the Midwest, you can't get by with that knee-busting East Coast atmosphere. [This local organization] brought in mister greasy, slimy, you know from Chicago, we're gonna unionize, we're gonna push people around, we're going to speak truth to power, that whole thing instead of how are we gonna sit down and you know, when the organizer leaves the neighborhood, a business, whatever, the employees and the employers are still there and they've gotta live together. If you worsen that relationship, you know, in the process, what do you gain? ...We do not need that in the world.

This organizer left such a lasting impression that one of the nurses years later told Josef that "there were relationships that never healed in the hospital between the nurses and between nurses and staff because that was so divisive."

At the time of the interview, Josef was working as a chaplain and a mediator for a group of nurses who were trying to form a union. They were feeling a lot of anger and frustration as their employer kept putting roadblocks in their efforts to unionize. Josef said he had been trying to help them work through that anger and frustration by, “helping them take a step back.” He explained,

Say you have the ability to anti-up, to ratchet-up the violence, the anger, and the hostility, and what will that do, you know? They can always trump your bet. They can always do more to you than you can do to them. So that’s a no-win situation. [In this context] you don’t want to create any martyrs. That’s a bad idea.

From these stories, it is evident that not only is justice work important, the ways that justice work is carried out significantly reflect one’s values. Josef explains that his focus on justice “flows out of” seeing “creation” as God’s gift and that it is important “to be inclusive and always reaching out.” He does not just view “knee-busting tactics” (like “sneaking up” on the bosses by taking in a petition when they already know something is going on anyway) as ineffective, they are disingenuous in the context of faith-based justice work. This work, from Josef’s perspective is about relationship-building, inclusion, and not about dragging people “in the mud.”

The Perfect Marriage

Mike

Mike was described by Judy as representing the “perfect marriage” between faith and labor and arguably, he truly is the kind of person one might conjure up when thinking about the ideal representation of a faith-focused, labor activist. Mike grew up in an Irish Catholic, trade union family in which the language of workers’ rights was intimately tied to everyday conversations around the dinner table. There, they “talked about the rights and wrongs and workers and who to vote for and who not to vote for.” Mike said this was

a very pragmatic environment to be raised in where they had “both feet on the ground” and were very aware of “what the world is like as far as workers are concerned.” He explains that everyone believed that you help one another through struggles. Following in his great grandfather’s footsteps, Mike grew up to be a pipefitter. He recalled going grocery shopping with his great grandfather when he was very little. He explained that they brought all the groceries home and stored them away in the cupboards, but just a few hours later, they were taking things out of the cupboards and loading them in boxes. Mike said, “I asked him what he was doing. And he said, ‘Well, we’re on strike and people need help.’ So I learned about a sense of solidarity and interdependency by living in that environment.” He also remembers a time when his grandfather’s union was on strike for better wages. He explained,

I’ll never forget, I was riding in the car with my grandfather and we were riding right over here [near our interview location] – a little side road before they built the interstate – a little side road that you’d weave your way across and got out onto another road. Why I remember that, I don’t know, but he was talking to one of the older members in the family who was also in construction and he said to him, ‘You know, boy if we could just get that raise up to 3.26 an hour, we’d be set.’ I’ll never forget that. I have a son that’s in the same trade now and the wage and benefit package is over 40 dollars an hour. And that’s in my lifetime!

Mike describes his work with IWJ-GKC as something that he does “out of a sense of who I really am.” For him, there “was no bolt of lightning;” rather, joining IWJ-GKC was a natural continuation of the values and practices with which he was raised. He explained, “My great grandmother was a legendary woman of immigrant parents and was orphaned and taken in by one of the founding bishops to live with his family. So my roots in the Irish Catholic, blue-collar, vote Democrat world here are pretty deep.” His family members were always active in the local Catholic diocese, and while Mike now serves as

a full-time deacon at his local parish, he feels that he would still be engaging in the kind of work IWJ-GKC does whether he was a deacon or not. However, being a deacon, he argues, “just embellishes on the perspective of moral authority. It’s not *me*, but it’s what the *Church* says and believes about justice: Biblical justice and worker justice.”

For the first fifteen years, Mike’s role as a deacon was part time while he continued working as a pipefitter. But, an on-the-job injury in 1991 left him to face some choices. He went through several stages of rehabilitation over the course of twenty months. He was able to return to work for about six months, but with a leg injury, the work was much more difficult. Mike said that many times over the years, parish leaders had asked him to become a full time deacon, if “for no other reason than my people skills. I don’t have any degrees in theology.” Following his accident, he took up their offer. Mike laughed and said, “It was a financially dumb decision, but I thought I might want to do that.” Worker justice activism and working as a full-time deacon proved a “natural fit” for Mike. He explained that deacons were brought into the Church to help “the widows and orphans. They weren’t brought in to be ceremonial...they were seen as someone who represented the widows and orphans – or the poor and disadvantage. So, if you add that to the mix of the background that I’ve come out of in my life, there’s a natural fit together. They just fit together. So, the passion and the energy I have for this [IWJ-GKC] has to do with what looks to me to be normal. It’s what you do.”

While the fit is *normal*, Mike does not view the Church as untouched by problems. Like Josef, Mike argues that the Catholic Church, “literally has the background and the documentation” regarding worker justice. However, he elaborates, “as far as activism, the other faith expressions have much more activism than the Roman Catholics.

We have the roadmap and they walk the talk.” At the time of the interview, Mike was critical of a bishop who was recently sent to the area “to clean up dodge.” He explained that theirs is one of the “most progressive diocese in the world” having had extensive lay ministries and women in high offices. Mike said that “this bishop came in and got rid of them all.” I asked how, if being such a progressive diocese they ended up with this bishop - who was described by Mike and other IWJ-GKC members as “Opus Dei” – and he explained, “I’d say it’s one of the few places in the country – even the world – where Rome has a lot to say about bringing in the bishop. So, they sent us a guy who has been a ‘good soldier’ against homosexual rights.”

From Mike’s point of view, there is a disconnect between the Church hierarchy and local concerns. He talked to me about a current counter-reform movement occurring in the “Roman Church,” something also discussed at the national IWJ summer conference. Despite current efforts to turn back progressive changes made at the Second Vatican Council, Mike did not seem especially worried. He said, “The heartening thing is, counter-reforms never work.” He explained that practically speaking, counter-reforms do not work because people in the local parishes do not buy into them; they will simply stop attending if they do not like the changes. Despite reform efforts, Mike emphasized,

I’m not angry at this bishop. I get along with him. I understand where he’s coming from, I’m just not going there! Plus, the people I serve, they’re not in his world either. It’s not because I told them not to be. It’s because they’re not! I’m talking about a whole group of senior citizens that were twenty years old during the Second Vatican Council, so it’s not like they’re a bunch of young, liberals.

Mike’s critique of the organized church focuses primarily on non-local hierarchy, as indicated above. He pointed out that through this counter-reform, some in the hierarchy will push for change and try to “make life miserable for a lot of people.” But,

as Mike noted, “You can’t change the spirit of the doctrine.” Providing the “perfect example” for the impact of the spirit of the doctrine, Mike relayed to me the story of how Pope Leo XIII came to formulate his encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. While he became known as the “working people’s Pope,” Mike explains that he had plans to ban Catholic involvement in the Knights of Labor at the end of the nineteenth century because “some rich industrialists in the United States got a hold of him.” However, Cardinal James Gibbons of Baltimore told him,

‘Don’t believe the Carnegies and all these people. These people are meeting in parish halls and being led by good priests. They’re dying digging these canals. They’re dying on these railroads and in these coalmines. Women are dying in these sweatshops.’ Well, [the Pope] didn’t ban the Knights of Labor. All that documentation that came out with the *Rerum Novarum*, all that documentation that’s come out since, would’ve gone out the window, credibility-wise. Those Irish Catholic priests were getting people together in their parish halls saying, you don’t have to put up with this. We put up with this with the English for 800 years and you don’t have to put up with it anymore and I’ll be right there with you.

From his perspective, the spirit of the doctrine further calls people to be active in the world beyond the local parish. Mike explains that he has always had a sense of the “bigger picture” outside of his parish. He says that “deacons are supposed to be out in the world making a difference.” He further explained,

There’s a lot of widows and orphans that come to a parish. I mean, I’m using those terms symbolically. There’s a lot of poverty that’s not just material poverty. There’s a lot of poverty to be worked on by being on a parish staff. So, what I’ve tried to do is get myself involved in the bigger world so that when I get up to preach, I will have had some connection and credibility in what I’m talking about; so that I’ll be grounded and rooted in who I am and where I’ve been and what my life journey has been. Would I like to have a BMW? Yeah. But it isn’t about that. It’s about, do I understand how fundamentally important it is for people to have human dignity and to go to the places it doesn’t exist and to try to find ways to work with that system to make it better. You’re not going to change the world significantly. But when you have the opportunity to do the right thing, then you should do it.

Mike also told me about a workshop he was in that was attended by a “room full of priests” and he challenged them all for “*just preaching*” at a time when a group of nurses was trying to organize a union in a local Catholic hospital. He argued that the priests and bishops are preaching about “moral issues” that “ring hollow” in the face of in-action on general social justice issues, and in particular, in-action regarding the sexual abuse scandals. He argued these priests should have simply been taken out of the system, but the problem was “old Irish cronyism.”

In addition to IWJ-GKC, Mike is involved in several other forms of non-profit work focusing on issues from healthcare to housing and neighborhood safety. But, IWJ-GKC, he says, “is closer to my heart because of my life journey. I’m actually there speaking to things I have been talking about my entire life: jobs, union representation, Catholic social issues.” Being involved in these things is, for Mike, a part of what makes his work as a deacon credible, as he points out in the quote above. Like Josef, however, simply being active is not what determines one’s credibility. The kind of action engaged is important. While being in IWJ-GKC allows Mike to “stand up for [what he believes] and to walk the talk, so to speak,” he clarifies, “I’m not cutting a hole in a missile silo. I’m not going to do anything like that. I think that’s done more to hurt the social justice movement, those extreme levels of response.” Mike further explained that “trampling people to get what you want” does not fit “within what the spirit of the faith and moral perspective should be. We oughtn’t to be trying to figure out how to leverage an advantage.” Rather, people engaged in a conflict should be focused on relationship-building and mediation in order to work through tensions and conflicts.

Mike, like Josef, also reflected on *The Holy Longing* (Rolheiser 1999). He talked about how having a sense of justice and acting upon it is essential to being a “well-formed person,” especially for Catholics. He argues that it is simply, “integral to the makeup of that person. It’s what makes up a Christian.” But, action alone is not what makes the Christian. As Mike explains, Rolheiser points out that people in the justice movement have a tendency to be “really angry all the time, but also a part of the makeup of a well-formed Catholic person is a mellow heart.” It is important to recognize that you are not always going to win: you will actually “lose more than you win,” but you know with confidence that “you’re headed in the right direction” if you take up justice concerns with a “mellow heart.”

This is Church to Me

Dan

The last three interviewees discussed here defined IWJ-GKC as their primary religious community at the time of the interview. Interestingly, Ron and Judy Voss are ministers without churches, who through frustration with organized faith came to view their work with IWJ-GKC as a way of expressing their ministerial calling free of church-based confines. Dan, however, is more like Mike in that he brought a strong, union-based perspective to the table. However, unlike Mike, he does not attend a church: he told me his work with IWJ-GKC is his “way of being religious.” Throughout much of my study, Dan served as the labor co-chair of IWJ-GKC, while also working for UPS and serving as his union’s steward. He was my first contact with the group and his story inspired me to pursue this project.

Dan grew up in a Methodist family whose primary occupation was sharecropping. He explains that they went to church every Sunday and attended Sunday school doing

“the whole bit” until he went to college. His disenchantment with organized faith took root when he and his wife began searching for a home church soon after they were married. Dan told me, “In our early years, we kind of went from church to church looking for things. We went to the Methodist; we went to the Presbyterian; we went to the Baptist; we went to several of them.” Dan and his wife were both teachers and they immediately became frustrated with each church because, as he told me, after the services they attended, “They wanted us to teach Sunday school and they wanted to know how much money we were gonna give. I mean, we didn’t talk about anything else.” He elaborated that teaching all week, they did not want to teach in church on the weekends and further did not feel qualified to teach the Bible. The question of money also proved problematic. Dan explained,

But to immediately launch into how much money I was gonna give, you know, I took affront to that too. And so we kinda went from church to church. We kept experiencing that and sometimes we didn’t go at all. Just couldn’t find anything that we really thought we fit into and such and then we went overseas.

Going overseas to Australia represented a major turning point in Dan’s life and faith experience. Early in their teaching careers, Dan and his wife felt they wanted to experience “something different,” so they applied to the Peace Corps and to AmeriCorps VISTA in the mid-1970s. In the process of doing so, they came across a call for teachers put out by the Australian government at the time to fulfill a teacher shortage. They hired one thousand teachers to teach in government schools. Dan’s wife taught in a government school 120 miles outside of Melbourne for two years, while he taught there for one and left because he “didn’t get along on philosophy” with the school. They were experimenting with a low-structure environment, however, Dan felt the children were

missing out of the basics of school, including grammar, spelling and math. So, he left there and took the vice principal position at a Catholic school. During their last year in Australia, Dan's wife was home pregnant. While he was at work, as he explains,

The Jehovah's Witnesses started coming by the door and knocked and I didn't know about it, but um, she started studying with them and so forth, and that was part of the reason why I wanted to come on home and for her to get back around our family and her family. Nobody over here was Jehovah's Witnesses and I never liked it.

Coming home, however, did not end Dan's wife's interaction with the Witnesses; instead, she continued studying with them while Dan went to work for UPS. His wife cared for their children fulltime and he explains that for at least three years, he was unaware that she was involved with the Witnesses. Eventually, she became very committed and subsequently their three children were raised in this church. These experiences led Dan to stop attending church altogether. While his wife and children asked him over the years to go to services with them, he explains that they stopped asking because he always refused to go with the exception of attending to support his son's first forty-five minute talk, for example. Overall, the shape of his family's religiosity is a difficult topic for Dan. He explained that the holidays are especially tough because the Witnesses only celebrate wedding anniversaries. Regarding holidays, he said, "I just kind of do them by myself if I do any at all." He elaborated, "They don't celebrate anything. They don't want to. They don't even vote or pledge allegiance!" Here, I suggested to Dan, "Well, you're quite political, so..." and he responded, "Me being that way has nothing to do with what they are. I mean, I was going to be that way whether they were that way or not. It's not a retaliation against them, but it kind of works out that way."

While Dan's experiences took him outside of the organized church, these same experiences cultivated a sense of tolerance for a broader spectrum of religious practice which he applied to his work as labor co-chair for IWJ-GKC. He explained,

I think I'm more tolerant and more aware of differences and so forth. I think I've learned a lot working around various faiths, you know, sometimes you get misconceptions or, no realization of what people are about or what they're really thinking. By spending so much time with various people of various faiths, I don't know, I just find it very rewarding to sit around and *be with them*. Maybe this is my way of being religious.

I later asked Dan in an email follow-up to the interview what he meant by this and he elaborated,

My comment on IWJ-GKC being my way of being religious was kind of response from something I hear quite often from people when talking to me about IWJ-GKC. For instance, [another IWJ-GKC member] knows that I do not go to church on Sundays and [this individual] made a comment once 'I know you are not religious but...' when asking an opinion on something we were doing. I hear that some from people who know my religious situation at home and the fact that I do not attend church. They assume that makes me non-religious and I take offense to that. I do not believe that attendance assures being religious as well as non-attendance taking that away. I actually see that attitude as a form of discrimination. Can't a person be religious without attending a church?

While this person inaccurately judged Dan's faith perspective and provoked frustration, others in the group were able to comprehend a more nuanced sense of faith. For example, Reverend Voss explained that Dan may occupy the labor co-chair position, "But, that doesn't mean he isn't a spiritual person!" she commented during my interview with her. All in all, at the time of the interview, Dan viewed IWJ-GKC as his faith community. His way of being religious was through the campaigns and actions IWJ-GKC engaged in. In this way, he embodies an action-based sense of faith that centers around relationship-

building and helping the disadvantaged and that is reflected in his critique of organized faith. He explained,

Churches have lost their way...as more time is spent building monuments for houses of worship than helping the poor, down-trodden, in need of support members of society. They are afraid of coming down too hard on business owners that mistreat workers for fear of losing the tithe. Many of the poor feel overlooked by the Churches as they don't feel welcome or don't fit in social structure wise. The many scandals prove that not enough time was spent doing the real work of the Church or the Church workers would not have time to abuse or cook up monetary schemes.

Throughout the interview, Dan spoke most extensively about the development of IWJ-GKC, its campaigns over the years, and the direction he would like to see the group take. He pointed out that he hopes IWJ-GKC can strike a balance in the community by educating faith groups about labor and by educating labor unions about faith perspectives that emphasize social justice. Further, he spoke with passion about hoping to help labor overcome some of its race and gender-based tensions. He argued, “Deep down they really don’t believe that way, but it’s always been that way and maybe we could, you know, *maybe* we could break the mould, I don’t know, but it sure can’t hurt... maybe we can offer some kind of moral soul to the community.” Being a part of IWJ-GKC during its formative years helped to shape Dan’s sense of justice. This sense became increasingly refined through his work with IWJ-GKC. Dan pointed out that both faith and labor speak from a broad-based, communal sense of justice that is a part of their basic training. However, each side may approach the issues differently. From his perspective, justice is about sustaining relationships and taking care of people in need. So, he views his work with IWJ-GKC with a “sense of pride” because they are filling “the void of leadership in the community” that not only brings together faith and labor, but also the labor community itself which is fraught with divisions.

Ron

Like Dan, Ron views IWJ-GKC as his faith community, though he came to this perspective through very different experiences. Ron grew up on the West coast, living with a single mother who was raising five children. Much of his childhood was spent living in poverty. While he had no father in the home, Ron explains that his grandfather provided him with “a male image and was a really significant individual in my life.” Ron describes his grandfather as “gentle and strong” with a “kind of pedestrian sense of God” that contrasted with his grandmother’s more “controlling, legalistic, and disciplinarian” view of religion. Ron said that these contrasting images of faith presented him with a “schizophrenic conflict or crisis” in his own life which he dealt with by trying to excel at school.

He did excel and graduated in the top-ten of a very large school where he also was a success on the wrestling team. When he went to college, Ron explains that he began with a lot of confidence, but quickly found that he “wasn’t dealing with it very well.” In the midst of taking several advanced classes in math and the sciences he had an “epiphany experience” in which he questioned God’s existence. As he explains, “I finally just remember breaking down and saying, ‘I don’t know if you exist, God.’ [God said] ‘Well, act as if you do!’ So, that was the beginning for me.” Ron then went to visit his local pastor for guidance and he was asked to speak during the Christmas service. He describes this as a harrowing experience, being a “very shy person,” but this minister suggested he transfer to a Christian school close to home. After transferring, Ron’s ideas about the church began to expand and he had a sense that he understood what church should be, but at that age he felt, “The last thing I ever wanted to do was go into the

ministry.” Still, after majoring in the social sciences, Ron applied and received a scholarship to attend a Disciples of Christ seminary in Indianapolis.

Again, his ideas about faith and the church were challenged with this new experience at seminary. Ron laughed that he thought he had it all worked out at the undergraduate level back in Oregon, but at seminary, he was exposed to an array of ideas and views of the church, which led him to “reformulate just about everything.” There, he came to understand ecumenism and to incorporate it into his way of viewing the church. At this time, he also became active with the drama team at seminary. These experiences helped him to overcome a debilitating shyness and he realized he “could speak” and “could do a pretty good job at that.”

While going an extra year of seminary in the counseling program, Ron came across an ad for a “leisure minister” at the Lake of the Ozarks in Missouri. So, he left his pursuit of another degree to lead an interdenominational leisure ministry team in the mid-1970s. Ron describes this experience as his “pinnacle of ministry.” In this ministry, he was responsible for running a Christian coffee house and for conducting “vespers cruises.” As he explains, “We went by boat around the camp sites and gave sermons and worship services and had young people come in that would be guitar players... Those were the great days when you could do ecumenical ministry and get support.”

Excited about this experience, Ron next pursued a doctorate in leisure ministries. He emphasized,

I used to always say we worship our work, work at our play, and play down our worship and so, I always saw the church as a leisure experience and always wanted to counter-balance this kind of work ethic [by saying] leisure was the freedom to concentrate on an activity that provided play *and* spiritual enrichment.

This unconventional style of ministry colored Ron's future with organized faith. His subsequent ministries were filled with tension. He explains,

When I look back at all my student churches, generally I was fired from these churches for being a little bit too prophetic and getting cross-wise sometimes with the power entities. Like, when I went to seminary, I went to Washington, DC during the Vietnam war. I knew we were wrong in there and I gave a sermon on it. And the elders said, 'If you ever give sermon like that again, you're out of here.' I just felt there was a need sometimes to say things and still embrace lovingly, your people. And generally, I was pretty good at it, but there was always some conservative that always got worked up.

I asked Ron what being "too prophetic" means and he explained that the Protestant gift to the church is "speaking out on injustices and contextualizing scripture" so that the church serves more than the priestly function, which is engaging in the sacraments. There is also, he argued, a prophetic function of the church which brings a "sense of justice." As he explained to me at lunch after one of the monthly meetings, having a sense of justice is about,

...having a deeper theology. It's necessary to go through a conversion process: a second conversion, that is. Religious folks must go through a second conversion to understand justice and that happens by seeing Jesus as a human being and as moving amongst the world, rather than floating above the world, disembodied and unengaged.

For Ron, this sense of justice and practicing an authentic faith go hand in hand. Much of his discussion during the interview centered on how to be religiously authentic. His overall faith experience has been characterized by a search for authenticity: for, taking off the "church tuxedo." He said, "If nothing else, I can't say that I've been all that successful in the church if I'm measuring it." Because he found the organized church to be so confining, Ron started exploring new ways to practice his faith. He worked as a chaplain at a psychiatric hospital, worked for Greenpeace, and led an inner-city program

that provided youths with after-school alternatives to being on the street. He explained, “I’ve had numerous, numerous different kinds of jobs just trying to patch it together.” He further elaborated,

I’d say I tried to fit into a church tuxedo, you know, and played the role of ministry in order to meet the requirements and to try to help people in whatever ways I could. But at some point, that presented for me a crisis and so, in other words, it seemed to me that I had to give up the church in order to be the church. What I mean by that is that I felt like I needed to be more liberated and be able to be more casual, and earthy, and real: *more authentic*. That’s what I was reaching for all along, a kind of authenticity.

Ron further elaborated that the opposite of being authentic is being “phony.” He explained that the church as a workplace ultimately ends up making most people a “fraud” because there is “a disconnect between one’s demeanor and what they feel and what they’re thinking...I’ve met more fraudulent ministers than I care to mention.” He reflected that ministers’ silence on the war in Iraq and their silence on the injustices faced by people trying to protect their jobs is an “not authentic” religious practice. By not engaging the prophetic aspect of the church, most ministers ultimately end up practicing hypocrisy, from Ron’s perspective. Having many dissonant experiences with organized religion, connecting with IWJ-GKC became so significant for Ron that he explained, “This is Church to me. I mean universal church, not church with a small ‘c.’ It’s bigger fish for me. It has to do with peace and justice. It’s very progressive.”

Ron explained that most churches do have the “gift of offering some sacraments.” In fact, he attends a couple local churches in order to take communion because he feels communion connects all believers, past and present. However, engaging in social justice work, for Ron, is “a way of reinterpreting prayer” and a way of creating a “sacramental quality to life” by invoking, like Josef emphasized, the notion of sacramental creation. He

said, “Prayer to me is more of just experiencing creation in its wholeness.” Ron pointed out that God is experienced through social justice work and through the sacredness of the surrounding world: this reflects authenticity, Ron argues. So, his work with IWJ-GKC became a way of living an authentic faith by being able to engage in social justice work by seeing the sacred in all aspects of life, including work. Like Josef and Mike, Ron also pointed out that social justice work and religious authenticity are not just about action: the kind of action is additionally important. He argued, “We have all these people *trying* to do social justice and working so hard at it. I stand back and kind of rebel on it actually, because it’s almost a frenzied kind of motion that loses a sense of awe and wonder by just busily doing. I just don’t want that anymore.”

Reverend Voss

Reverend Voss, like Dan and Ron identified IWJ-GKC as her primary faith community during the interview. She was a little hesitant to do so saying, “You’re gonna think this a little crazy, but I see IWJ-GKC right now as my faith community.” I asked her why she felt I might think the response crazy. She responded, “Well, because I think that for a clergy-person to say that a church is not the major part of their spiritual journey at the moment is a little strange.” But, like Ron, through her experiences as a minister, Reverend Voss became frustrated with the congregations she headed for their lack of interest in justice issues. Growing up in South Dakota, Reverend Voss learned through the examples her parents set that “everybody counts.” She explains that she learned early on that people experience injustices because of the color of their skin. In her childhood, she noticed differential treatment of the Native Americans living in her community. She also pointed out that in rural South Dakota, some families had to rent a place to stay “in

town” during the week so their children could attend school. Reverend Voss’s parents owned a motel and there was one Black family living in the community her parents asked to stay at the motel in a context when they were not allowed to live anywhere else. From this example, she learned that “everybody is included.” Reverend Voss additionally pointed to her older brother – also a member of the clergy – as an inspiration in her work for social justice. As she describes, “I belonged to a family who was very spiritually strong in the foundation of what we did and how we lived. And we always were involved with a church, but not necessarily with a specific denomination. In South Dakota, you have to kind of choose the church that’s in the rural area.”

Reverend Voss worked as an administrator in a military hospital for about eighteen years until when, in 1993, she answered a call to ministry that she had received years earlier. She chuckled, saying that her calling was “very specific.” I asked her to elaborate. She explained,

My calling came in the middle of the night. I don’t know whether to explain it as a dream, but it was kind of like [Samuel’s vision]. It was a bright light that came to me and said, *actually, I heard* a voice say to me, ‘Go preach to all the world.’ And I heard that when I was twenty-one years old and so I never told anybody about it. My husband was getting ready to go to seminary and I kind of saw it then as a way to support him in his ministry and in his calling. Believe me, almost no women were in ministry in 1965; not very many still, but anyway, I had a kind of a change of direction in 1993 which helped me remember that call. It was like I had a whole lot of life experiences in between that time and so I was forty-seven at the time and started the seminary. And so, basically, I would say I kind of argued with God because I said, ‘First of all women aren’t pastors and secondly, who in the name of goodness would want to prepare a sermon every week?’ But that didn’t work.

Reverend Voss moved to the Kansas City area with her husband so he could attend seminary. Eventually, their relationship ended in divorce and Reverend Voss raised her son as a single parent. When she finally interpreted the calling as meant for

her, she entered a United Methodist seminary and focused on ministering in rural churches after her graduation. She recalled a story from her time in seminary that has had a significant impact on how she prays today, especially in an interfaith setting.

In seminary, inclusive language was really new. I was in a *lot* different place fifteen years ago than I am now, but I said, you know like for example, some of my friends still do call God, ‘She’ and I don’t see God as a gender. So, I said something dumb in class one day and I said, ‘I don’t get this whole inclusive language thing.’ I said, ‘I was raised in a time when the pronouns he and she were used in a different way and if there was a choice, the pronoun he was always used. It wasn’t about gender, discrimination, or harassment or anything like that. It was just the way I was raised.’ But, the facilitator looked me straight in the eye, very kindly, and said, ‘It may not make a difference to you, but it could make a difference to some one person in your congregation if you’re not aware of someone else’s place in their spiritual journey.’ And from then on, I thought that is true, you have to be aware of who else is around.

Reverend Voss carried this experience with her to each IWJ-GKC meeting and rally. I often heard her pray, “In the name of the Spirit,” not only with no mention of gender, but also with no mention of “God” or “Jesus.” She explained to me that, “If we are praying in the name of Jesus, somebody is automatically cut off if they don’t believe in Christ as Christians do.”

Being raised with a sense of justice that focused on inclusion, Reverend Voss quickly became frustrated with working in rural churches because, as she found, they are “not interested in social justice. In fact, it’s not talked about.” She also ran into widespread racial prejudice and said,

Well, knowing that is totally and completely against my core, I became very frustrated with how to minister in such a prejudice area. So, I made the decision to take a leave and I began to discern what I really was supposed to do and I decided that was to do something with people who are discriminated against or put down, disenfranchised, and so I really searched for the last few years with regard to what that was supposed to be.

Reverend Voss's search led her back to Kansas City. Feeling that she had lost many of her networks while living "out in the rural areas for so long," she "started going to different places to different groups to reestablish a connection to see where and what issues were coming to the forefront and how they were being handled." Reverend Voss explains that in that process, she ran into Josef who invited her to IWJ-GKC in 2005. She said that for almost a year, she just attended to listen and to learn about work and labor. She eventually became more involved with IWJ-GKC to the extent that she came to think of it as her faith community because of its emphasis on social justice activism. Through her studies, Reverend Voss developed a love-based theology that found a solid home in IWJ-GKC's work. She explained,

I think that the Christian religion is based on love. Period. I also believe that all of the religions of the world are based on love. And my experience has been that too many people want the easy way out of living: they come to many congregations – no matter what religion – out of obligation, tradition, or custom. But for me, there's another state and that is action. I feel like that has to be a part of your spiritual journey. If not, you are going to have an unbalanced spiritual journey.

Reverend Voss does attend a church for "spiritual nourishment," but she points out it is not the same as being involved with IWJ-GKC whose focus is on "being in action." She explains that IWJ-GKC is, to her, a "true faith community" because it is "not stagnant: it's something that keeps changing like the universe and like creation."

Reflecting on the IWJ national summer conference, Reverend Voss said,

Those plenary session [in Chicago] were worship. I mean, I just get goose bumps right now thinking about it. I looked around that room and thought that's what it's about. It's not about a little building here and there or having something above the door that says I'm a certain religion or faith. The interfaith thing is so important to me: that's *real* to me right now. The peace and justice movement is important to me too because it's the same kind of thing.

Reverend Voss originally did not plan to attend the conference, but she ended up going because of what she describes as a “divine intervention.” During one of the monthly meetings, a paper was distributed for those who wanted to attend the conference to sign up. Reverend Voss said, “I don’t know whether my glasses were on whopper-jawed or what, but evidently, I marked the column that said I was going.” Several months later, Reverend Voss explained that during another monthly meeting, “It was just like a spiritual prompting to me that I was supposed to go to that conference...nothing’s an accident.”

At that same conference, attendees who stayed on the campus where the events were held were assigned roommates by the conference coordinators. Reverend Voss was assigned a roommate who was there to speak on the current immigration issues under consideration by the national IWJ. She had been struggling for about a year with the “immigration issue” and she felt having the opportunity to room with this woman was also no accident. She said, “It was like that was the person I was *supposed* to room with.” She elaborated on her conference experience,

The things I was thinking were so far away from my moral background, as well as my commitment to people that it was scary to me...So, the conference was a turning point for me to hear the [immigrants’] stories. To hear what’s really happening: not to read something in the newspaper, but to see that wonderful little woman and when she mentioned at breakfast that day, the thing about the back pain and being hurt, I instantly identified with her because I was in a car wreck about nine years ago and I have never been and never will be the same again. And I watched her all the time and every time she stood up, I could see the pain it was taking for her to even be there. When she walked up those steps and she even just stood, I knew how bad it was for her. I just totally identified with that woman. I just said to myself, ‘God, this cannot be okay.’ I don’t care what anybody else is saying. This is one of those things that people have got to step out and risk for. This is not okay and we cannot let the government keep doing these things. Then, somebody said, ‘Love does not stop at the border.’ And since my whole theology is based on love, it was kind of like a brick hitting my head.

Identifying with this woman who was a immigrant worker in a Southern factory led Reverend Voss to immerse herself in IWJ-GKC's work on immigration, but interestingly, she described IWJ-GKC's New Sanctuary Movement as acts of *service*, rather than justice.

Reverend Voss's sense of justice derives from her understanding of love: love is something that must be put into action through acts of goodness towards others. For Reverend Voss, those acts are about trying "to make a difference in people's lives so that everyone has basic needs: food, shelter, healthcare, and a job – a *fair* job – not something that pays 2.65 an hour!" I asked her to elaborate on how she would distinguish between acts of service or charity and justice work. She illustrated this point with a story from the life of Moses. She told me the fact that Pharaoh's daughter lifted Moses from the river was an act of *mercy*. What people of faith are called to do, however, is to go up that river, see what is happening there that made the situation so bad that Moses was put in the river in the first place and stop it from happening. "That is justice," she said. She related this point to IWJ-GKC's Sanctuary Movement, arguing,

The Sanctuary work to me feels like a service act. The justice act is going to be to get legislation passed that is going to keep that from happening. There's no reason somebody should have to go into hiding: something's wrong with the system. And that's my struggle with where the organized church is right now. It's a lot harder to go to a rally or vigil. It's harder to go and take a risk of slander or something worse. It's harder, so not many people are going to do it.

Like others in the group, Reverend Voss contrasts inaction and acting on one's sense of justice to define what an authentic faith looks like, as well as to express her critique of organized religion. As she put it, "I don't see how you can *not* put your faith into practice – your spiritual journey into practice – and consider yourself authentic. You have to act

what you believe. You know, if it's not a group like IWJ-GKC, maybe the place is your workplace. That may be the most spiritual influence that you could possibly have anywhere on the planet."

Discussion

This chapter positions the rich narratives of members' religious lives against the backdrop of a practice-oriented spirituality agentially oriented to the present. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) propose that by analyzing actors' agentic orientations, "we can gain crucial analytical leverage for charting varying degrees of maneuverability, inventiveness, and reflective choice shown by social actors in relation to the constraining and enabling contexts of action" (964). While actors are simultaneously oriented to the past, present, and future, in particular contexts, one tone is often dominant. But, each chordal element also holds traces of the other elements as well, so that if actors are primarily oriented to the practical-evaluative (present) element, the past and the future are also present and available for analysis. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) write that,

The primary locus of agency in its practical-evaluative dimension lies in the *contextualization* of social experience...By increasing their capacity for practical evaluation, actors strengthen their ability to exercise agency in a *mediating* fashion, enabling them (at least potentially) to pursue their projects in ways that may challenge and transform the situational contexts of action themselves. (994)

In describing current beliefs and practices (a practice-oriented presentist spirituality), I found that IWJ-GKC members engaged an action-based theology that invokes a sense of justice. The past is present as particular family and faith histories led to a critique of organized religion and inspired a sense of justice that is forward looking, or focused on

the future. Actors' devotion to everyday activism places their spirituality in the present moment where a concern for authenticity is projected.

The past appears in actors' narratives as a way to characterize "a given situation against the background of past patterns of experience" (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:997). The past for IWJ-GKC members both colors their perspectives on organized religion and provides inspirational experiences, people, and contexts for a forward looking, action-based theology. All of the interviewees, with the exception of the summer intern Ilyse, described experiences connected to the social and cultural changes embedded in the 1960s and the 1970s. Experiences with the Vietnam war, the Second Vatican Council, and the social context that inspired programs like AmeriCorps VISTA and the Peace Corps placed members in a context to encounter inspiring activist figures including family members, religious and political leaders. Several grew up in poverty and lived with families that taught the values of helping others, inclusion, and community. Positive experiences with religious institutions and values are recounted, however, a broader frustration with organized religion developed over time as members came to realize that, while all religions may believe in justice, justice is not always enacted on a day-to-day basis by religious practitioners. In many ways, these religious narratives reflect general concerns of the boomer generation. Roof (1993) argues that "Something more is going on with the boomers, something far more experiential in shaping a new set of sensitivities to religious or spiritual matters. The best explanation, it seems, lies in the sixties' cultural experience" (169). Though I did not chart members' relative exposure to the sixties (see Roof 1993:35), they all, with the exception of the one interviewee from the millennial generation, talked vividly about memories from this period of time. Roof

(1993) argues that even if there are differential experiences of the sixties based on when and where people were born, “What they all share is ‘the sixties,’ even if they didn’t live it the same way... They are bound by a shared sense of time, and an optimism tempered by the disillusionment that came with assassinations, Vietnam, and Watergate” (35).

The future appears in members’ narratives as “projectivity enters into processes of practical evaluation” (Emirbayer and Mische 1998:998). In engaging the nuts and bolts of day-to-day activism, actors consciously orient choices to broader goals. They can also be emotionally engaged with a situation (999). The particular sense of justice enacted by members of IWJ-GKC is necessarily future-oriented because it is, firstly, about envisioning systemic change. As described in Chapter One, mercy or service work focuses on meeting immediate needs, but it does not look to correct the wrongs that caused the problems in the first place. All interviewees expressed some sentiment that people can be better by working to change the arrangements of present institutions. Members’ sense of justice is secondly future-oriented in that they placed an emphasis on forming stable, long-term relationships through specific forms of action. Invoking angry responses, “busily doing,” or engaging in destructive behavior creates only ephemeral relationships. Members therefore describe a kind of justice that is broad-based and communal, rather than individual and unconcerned about local contexts and relationships.

Finally, because members are focused on a concern for everyday activism as a form of religious practice, the practical-evaluative (present) tone is arguably a dominant tone. A present-focused, practice-oriented spirituality involves recognizing problems, making decisions, and carrying out actions (998-999). Working from the perspective of an action-based theology means that actors place particular importance on everyday-

practices. I found IWJ-GKC members' concern for authenticity to be one oriented towards the present because it was a concern for linking everyday actions to a well-defined sense of justice. As pointed out above, an important aspect of the present tone of chordal agency is the ability to contextualize social experience. As Ron put it, justice work is about being able to *contextualize* scripture. Further, viewing work as sacred is a way of extending the sacred to lived concerns so that God's love is understood as immanent, rather than transcendent¹². At a more mundane level, justice work is simply about being able to get things done: it is about being able to take inspiration and lessons from one's past and apply them to practical solutions to present issues with the hope for systemic change.

In this chapter I have explored how aspects of family and faith histories impact current faith perspectives of core members of IWJ-GKC, most of whom grew up as baby boomers. Their current faiths are characterized by a critique of organized religion, an action-based theology, and a concern for authentic practice. Each of these together suggest a present-oriented, practice-based spirituality, the discussion of which broadens our understandings of a certain segment of the boomer generation. Utilizing a dynamic conception of agency, the narratives derived from the interview context showed how actors are agentially oriented in such a way that structural context is influential, but also is used creatively in everyday religious experience. In this way, this project moves beyond the "native" distinction between "religion" and "spirituality" in an effort to think of agency and structure as processual, further refining our use of the framework of lived religion and challenging the application or typologies.

¹² Roof (1999) points out that one of things that characterizes the American religious landscape today is that practitioners look to reconnect "the transcendent and the immanent, reclaiming God in everyday life and experiences" (100).

In some ways, the discussion “freezes” members in time by describing one, overarching chordal construction. This reflects the limitations of using one form of data: the interview. I therefore place IWJ-GKC members within temporal flow in Chapters Four and Five as I describe the processes of organizational growth and change. We can imagine that each moment encountered by actors in the context of living the organization presents new chordal combinations.

Chapter 4: The Story of the Organization

The next two chapters detail the story of IWJ-GKC as an organization. It is a story of growth, change, and decline and as such, it is not an atypical story for social movement organizations (see Ferree and Martin 1995). What is striking is that the organization was originally designed by members as a cultural space to enact a form of lived religion characterized by an action-based theology and a critique of traditional religious institutions. Justice-as-religious practice, emphasizes equality through an understanding that all people are created in God's image (see Chapter One), so IWJ-GKC was established as a consensus-based organization in which all members contributed to the processes of decision-making regarding which campaigns and actions to support. As the organization moved towards closer ties with the national office and hired a full-time organizer, the axis of decision-making became more vertically aligned. IWJ-GKC experienced a loss of core members that was a practical and emotional blow to local coalition-building between faith and labor.

In constructing this narrative, I drew on field notes from meetings and events, along with transcribed material from public events over the course of three years. I also draw on personal conversations while in the field, along with email communications, and interview material. Primary source material proved invaluable for putting the story together. This includes the use of local literature in the form of fliers and pamphlets highlighting community activities and campaigns of interest to the group; monthly minutes, agendas, and meeting reminders; inspirational and research-based material relevant to current campaigns brought to meetings by members. National IWJ literature in the form of annual reports, literature supporting its campaigns and actions, as well as

strategic outlines for the local group also contributed to the narrative construction. Lastly, I utilized local and national news media sources that made reference to specific group campaigns.

The organizational story told here is a reconstruction of events and processes that privileges the local context over the national agenda on the basis of corroboration of material through the rigorous coding methods described in Chapter Two. I take the position that had the national office been more sensitive to the interests of local members, the organization would not have suffered such a demoralizing and disorganizing blow that still impacts the local context years later.

Describing the organization as one “designed by members to...” has important implications for the study of religion. Members of social movement organizations are often consciously concerned about organizational form as a representation of desired views and practices (Arnold 1995:276). Roof (1999) has described the American religious landscape as a “spiritual marketplace” with “suppliers” adapting their “products” to religious seekers. This work importantly shows how religious entrepreneurs are designing new kinds of groups and congregations *for* practitioners in changing cultural and historical circumstances. Roof concludes this work with a discussion of new “centers of value,” suggesting that practitioners who value immanence over transcendence may emerge on the American religious scene and pose challenges to traditional religious institutions. He writes, “Old discussions of transcendence and immanence in a theistic mode are giving way to new ways of conceptualizing sacred reality, but more so outside of organized religion than within it” (304).

The narrative told over the next two chapters expands on Roof's (1999) brief, concluding suggestion that a new center of value may emerge around immanence. I show how some practitioners come to create their own organizations on the basis of a present, practice-oriented sense of spirituality. Wuthnow (1998) asserts that a practice-oriented spirituality is "best nurtured by practice-oriented religious organizations" (17), but, as my analysis shows, the design of those organizations must reflect the ways practitioners want to engage a lived faith in order to be durable. What is problematic about traditional religious congregations for IWJ-GKC members is that they are not active in the community for systemic change. Already skeptical of religious institutions, it is important for this generation of practitioners that the kinds of organizations to which they belong reflect "their deepest feelings and commitments" (Roof 1993:257). However, while most of the members I interviewed do not fully belong to a specific congregation, I do not propose, like Roof (1993) that they can be characterized by "believing" without "belonging," a distinction that represents a privatized sense of faith (200). When faith practitioners treat social justice as the core expression of their spirituality, they necessarily fuse the public and the private, by expanding the realm of the sacred. Members of IWJ-GKC, through deliberate organizational design and through their campaigns, created a cultural space defined by the move from mercy to activism, in an effort to create a new locus of belonging.

The Origin Story

The story of how the organization began is told in slightly different ways from the perspectives of four of my interviewees. It is telling that the other five interviewees did not directly address the founding of the organization: loosely formed and somewhat

messy early on, the origin story is a little unclear. What is certain is that the group grew out of a tragic incident following the shooting of a local activist by an off-duty, security guard. It was given form by organizing campaigns which brought together key community members interested in generating a relationship between faith and labor in Kansas City. The group gained more solidity, but began to change in structure and process, when the national Interfaith Worker Justice took an interest in what was happening in Kansas City.

On August 12, 2003, Jerry Meszaros was shot in the chest by an off-duty security guard who was later charged with second-degree murder and was sentenced to five years in prison. The guard claimed Meszaros was driving the wrong way on a one-way street. The two exchanged words, which escalated into the shooting death of Meszaros (Lambe 2005; Stafford 2003b). Jerry was well-known across the community, having a larger-than-life presence that ultimately served as an inspiration to get faith and labor together following his death.

“He was enthusiastic and dedicated to helping others,” according to a *Kansas City Star* article (McCann 2004). Jerry had worked as a union organizer for several national unions and served as a fundraiser for the Kansas City-based Labor Council. He also was a founding member of a church-based workers’ center in the Kansas City area, amongst many other listed roles and accomplishments (“Obits: Gerald ‘Jerry’ Eugene Meszaros” 2003). Jerry pulled together representatives from local churches, social service agencies, and unions to assist blue-collar and entry-level workers with job search skills (Stafford 2003a).

It was efforts like these that lit the spark uniting issues of faith and worker justice in Kansas City. Following his death, the *Kansas City Star* reported, “The Kansas City area this week lost a tireless advocate for low-skilled and blue-collar workers, but associates vow his work will go on” (Stafford 2003b). Revered Larry Keller, who later became an active member of IWJ-GKC said regarding the work that Jerry did, ““We’re going to go on. But, we don’t know just how yet. You don’t just go out and hire a generic Jerry Meszaros”” (ibid.). Jerry’s legacy was so significant that employer of the year awards were given in his honor at the labor Sunday services (called Labor in the Pulpit) in 2005 and 2006. The awards were meant to recall “his energy, care, and commitment” to “union causes,” pointing out that the formation of IWJ-GKC was an “outcome of his legacy.”

I first heard about Jerry Meszaros at the 2005 Labor in the Pulpit event during which the Employer of the Year award was given to Costco for its good labor practices. His efforts in the Kansas City area were described and he was noted as helping to create the context into which IWJ-GKC was born. Jerry’s name next came up during my first interview when I asked Dan Johnson to explain to me how IWJ-GKC came into being. He said,

There’s been many kinds of attempts over the years by various people to try to kind of integrate faith and labor to work on various issues. Jerry Meszaros is probably the one name that kind of jumps out and that’s who we named our Labor in the Pulpit after. He was murdered back in [2003]. He was a community activist. He wasn’t a preacher: he used to be an activist and I don’t remember what union he belonged to, but he was a Methodist. I think he was in Reverend Keller’s church actually. Anyway, he was just very involved and so forth, but he was never quite able to get it off the ground.

Jerry's ideas may have never taken off for a reason other than the context of Kansas City not being ripe for a faith and labor coalition. According to two other interviewees, Jerry was quite a character. In Chapters Three and Six, I discuss how not just *action*, but specific kinds of action are important to faith and labor organizing. Josef suggested in his interview that, "knee-busting, East Coast" kinds of tactics are not effective in faith and labor organizing. As Mike Lewis explained,

It was all started by a guy by the name of Jerry Meszaros. Jerry didn't connect well with everybody. He was out of the ACORN, start the fire, wait twenty minutes, and call the fire department model. He cut a hole in a missile silo and spent two years in jail. I have this perfect example. One time they were going to make a huge cutback at the TWA – Trans-World Airline base – he called me and asked me to get my pastor to come with me and we were gonna go up and have a rally with 600 employees. So, my pastor's a great, great social justice guy. So, we went up to this base and met with the head of the union and we kept thinking well, we're going to go into this room and meet all these people and encourage them to continue to struggle. There was just the three of us sitting in this big lobby. That was all there was. Jerry would do stuff like that all the time.

Addressing Jerry's vision and the impact of his death, Judy explained,

Jerry had this vision [of faith and labor working together]. And he tirelessly worked for nothing to try to pull it off. He was living out of a shoebox in somebody's church basement basically, you know, (chuckles) it wasn't the basement, but you know. But he was never able to pull it off and I could give you lots of reasons but I'm not going to. And after his death, some people, I don't know whether they felt, do you know, like, moved? Because of the shock of his death and the injustice of it, or whether it was time. I early on had been involved with some of Jerry's stuff, but I couldn't get along with Jerry and so I dropped out.

The combination of a challenging personality and a choice in tactics that was not effective for faith-based, worker justice organizing generated obstacles for the realization of Jerry's vision. His unfortunate death, however, serves as the foundation for the origins story of IWJ-GKC.

Organizing Campaigns

Jerry's vision was one catalyst for the formation of IWJ-GKC, but it does not reflect the full story. Shortly after his death, the national IWJ was conducting a voter registration project called the "Faithful Citizenship Project" that brought together people of faith and those representing labor in Kansas City. This project resulted in the formation of IWJ-GKC. Since there was no official IWJ affiliate in Kansas City at the time, according to Dan, the national office, "just kind of asked anybody to get involved." He went on to explain how this project brought people together with similar interests in the community and as a result, the idea for a local IWJ affiliate was born. Charese Jordan, now the Deputy Director of IWJ, started her work with the organization through this project. Subsequently, throughout my study, she had a particular interest in developing Kansas City for IWJ. On several occasions she explained how people from Kansas City were very "close to her heart" because of her work on the Faithful Citizenship Project. Dan described the project and its impact on forming the local organization:

About eight interns came to town to work on this project. They were here for ten weeks and they went around and got signatures and signed people up and it was quite a successful deal and they all stayed there and worked out of the Teamsters hall. And they went out and did their signing up and all of that, but in the process, we had to meet every month and kind of evaluate what they were doing and kind of set ourselves up as a group to do that and with Charese's help we started talking about formulating an IWJ or a coalition of labor and religion.

Dan goes on to explain that those involved in the Faithful Citizenship Project went on to meet after the project was over. He said, "We originally just called it a coalition of labor and religion without any affiliation to IWJ. But we started meeting with it and we had several meetings and it kind of culminated in the fall of 2004." In November, 2004, the national IWJ conducted a "retreat" for about forty faith and labor leaders and held the meetings at St. Mark's – the church Jerry used to attend. At the

retreat, they were guided through the process of coming up with a vision statement, with committee structures, and with bylaws for the coalition. Dan further explained how he came to be the labor co-chair and how the group established a regular meeting place:

Everyone was kind of excited about putting something together where we'd meet with religion and labor on a regular basis. And it was following that meeting that several of them, particularly on the labor side, asked me to take over as chair on a temporary basis. So I did, and my boss thought it was a good idea; was sort of behind it, thought it was a good idea and so that's what we did and I've been chair ever since. But we started out meeting in various places, kind of moving around a little bit every month and quite often met at the Teamsters hall and so forth and kind of settled on the idea that it would be good if we met at the same place, same time every month. And that way everyone would know where it was at. And, the IBEW offered the retirees hall over there and that's where we've been ever since. And it's worked out great.

The first campaigns taken on by the new coalition revolved around opposition to a new Wal-Mart site being planned in the Kansas City area and the Teamsters' effort to organize drivers from the package delivery company, DHL. These campaigns happened pretty much simultaneously. Early in 2005, the Kansas City Council approved a redevelopment plan for the Blue Ridge Mall, which would house a brand new Wal-Mart just a short drive from what was once one of the largest Wal-Mart stores in the country ("Blue Ridge Mall Plan" 2005). Dan described the project as follows,

The first project that we took on in the fall of '04 and the start of '05 was the Blue Ridge Mall TIF project dealing with the Wal-Mart store. They were going to tear Blue Ridge down, but they wanted 27 million dollars in TIF money to do it. Everyone was upset with Wal-Mart in general anyway. And so it was something – just a project we knew would be short term because it was just a matter of going through the planning and zoning with the city council as to whether or not they'd approve the TIF. So we knew it was going to be short term. We knew it was going to be a hot topic. Everybody was kind of excited about it. It brought everybody together. But that was our first big project and we had several committee meetings leading up to the planning and zoning meeting and then eventually the city council meeting.

He went on to say that the Teamsters sponsored a talk by the former lieutenant governor of Missouri, Joe Maxwell, along with a speaker from the Associated Wholesale Grocers who talked about the impact of Wal-Mart on local grocery stores. At this meeting with the city council, Dan said they “packed the house, upstairs and downstairs.” He joked that the city council even brought in extra security “because they weren’t sure what to expect.” While ultimately IWJ-GKC did not get the desired results, Dan explains, “The city had already decided pretty much what it was going to be. But it kind of put us on the map. Let everybody know. It got kind of an awareness to the community of the problem with Wal-Mart. And to have the ministers involved, that really did get their attention!”

Also on the agenda early 2005, the national Teamsters were working to organize DHL, arguing that drivers are “paid low wages, work long hours, and are offered unaffordable health benefits” (Heaster 2005a). Workers at two facilities had filed claims that they were fired for trying to organize a union (“Delivery Workers to Vote on Union” 2005). It was reported in the *Kansas City Star* that the “Kansas City Coalition for Worker Justice presented a letter...asking that the company abide by federal laws” (Heaster 2005a). Dan told the fascinating story about the impact of the involvement of IWJ-GKC and the role of the clergy in putting pressure on the company.

We sent ministers to St. Jo for the DHL campaign and they went in and they talked to the boss and the boss came out and was a whole lot easier to get along with. So they didn’t know if it was the mob or who it was that showed up! That’s what they asked, ‘Were those people part of the mob?’ But he sure was a lot more receptive that same day after we’d been there. You know, and all we did was just present some demands and the ministers gave some letters, handed them to him. That worked out pretty good.

Just as the mob is famous for making “an offer you can’t refuse,” Dan pointed out that, especially at the local level, it is difficult for bosses to say “no” to members of the clergy

who are seen as offering a moral voice on public issues. Ultimately, the two facilities ended up voting to unionize, so the involvement of the newly formed IWJ-GKC was part of that successful process.

Pathways into IWJ-GKC

In Chapter Three, I describe how particular family and faith histories influenced current faith values and practices, along with a sense of justice for nine core members of IWJ-GKC. I understand these life narratives to be connected to members' pathways into IWJ-GKC. However, during the interviews, I was also interested in finding out how members specifically came to be a part of the coalition: How did they hear about it? Were they invited to participate by a particular person? Did specific organizations connect them to IWJ-GKC? These pathways into the organization are also a part of its organizational story: they reveal the kinds of community ties brought to the table and show how diverse its network became during the course of my study (for a full list of local affiliations including union, faith, and community-based relationships, see Appendix C).

Several of the interviewees came to IWJ-GKC through local social justice networks to which they continued to maintain ties once joining IWJ-GKC. During the announcements segment of monthly meetings, members would pass out flyers and pamphlets, informing the group about a variety of events happening in the community regarding issues of: peace, racial and cultural diversity, hunger, poverty, healthcare, housing, corporate responsibility (including Wal-Mart, sweatshops, and maquiladoras), minimum wage and wage theft, and immigrant workers and immigration reform. It was through these networks that these members came to be connected with specific IWJ-GKC campaigns.

Both Ron and Judy got involved with IWJ-GKC through the national organization Reclaim Democracy, whose focus is on corporate responsibility. One of their campaigns focuses on Wal-Mart and it was the Blue Ridge Mall proposal that brought them to the group. I asked how exactly they got invited to join in the actions, and Judy replied, “I probably got a notice. You know, I’m on all kinds of email lists for labor stuff.” The situation was similar for Ron.

Dan was involved in the Faithful Citizenship Project, as well as the Blue Ridge Mall Wal-Mart campaign and the effort to organize DHL workers. His role with the group was formalized when he was asked to serve as chair. He points out that his boss thought the group was a good idea, so he was also there as a Teamsters representative. Similarly, Denny was asked to attend the IWJ-GKC retreat in the fall of 2004 as a representative from his union local of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. As he explains,

The business manager who is the boss of the union – he’s our CEO – and I’m the second man – I’m the financial secretary. He came to me and said, ‘Denny, there’s gonna be a meeting. A bunch of people are going to meet over at the Teamsters hall and its going to be a bunch of labor and religious people.’ He said, ‘I don’t have anybody to send over there, would you mind going?’ So, he sent me and I went to the first meeting. So, that’s how I got started and I came back here and I reported to my business manager what it was about. I told him it was kind of low-key but they were trying to put something together. And he said, ‘Well, will you continue going to the meetings?’ And I said, ‘Yeah.’ But that’s how basically I got started. And I just sort of stayed with it. Even though the business manager that asked me to go was defeated two years ago in the election.

Others came to the group through various paths. Mike recalls getting connected to the coalition through a campaign to organize nurses that had some involvement from the national IWJ prior to the formation of IWJ-GKC. Just as the origins story of the group is a little fuzzy, at first Josef told me, “And I’ll tell you what, I really have no idea, at this

point how I got into the group.” But then he clarified, “Um...I take that back. I do remember. I was at a Catholic meeting, a Catholic board I sit on and the then-Director of the Peace and Justice office had heard about it or helped start it and knew I’d like the group and said, well you should come to this group. I do remember that now.” Reverend Voss, in her efforts to build her social justice network in Kansas City, discussed in Chapter Three was invited to attend an IWJ-GKC meeting by Josef. Susan heard about the group’s work through her own actions with a Missouri-based organization that focuses on issues of hunger and poverty. And finally, Ilyse, was connected to IWJ-GKC through the national office’s summer intern program. She heard Kim Bobo, the director of IWJ, lecture at her college and she was inspired to join their summer intern program.

Solidifying the Organization

Despite the conflicts that were later to occur between the local IWJ-GKC and the national IWJ office, national’s involvement in local Kansas City processes brought together a group of people who were inspired by the work of their deceased social justice fellow, but who were previously unable to solidify an ongoing organization. Judy, Denny, Mike and Dan all pointed to the role of the national office in pulling together disparate strands of the faith and labor communities interested in worker justice issues. As Judy put in, “You know, frankly, it probably would’ve all just disappeared if it hadn’t have been for the intervention of IWJ from Chicago. I mean, they gave it, oh, continuity. They brought some expertise. They made people more accountable, so that was good.” Dan and Denny both described how the retreat held in the fall of 2004 gave the loose group of activists a written structure to work with in the form of bylaws, a vision statement, and committees descriptions.

Mike also discussed the role of the national office, but he further elaborated that the founding of IWJ-GKC was “issue-driven” and “grassroots.” While the national office helped pull together some sense of an organizing structure, the group early-on remained loose and worked on a consensus model of decision-making. There was very little hierarchy. In fact, as Mike describes, “It didn’t have hardly any organization to it.” For the most part, this kind of structure worked for the group early on: while they raised very little money, there was a consistent membership base and they began to establish themselves as a trustworthy, moral voice for worker justice issues in the community.

However, there was a sense that change and growth should occur. Members expressed interest during monthly meetings in generating more support for their work throughout the community. The “labor side” often talked about wanting to get more clergy involved; while the “faith side” talked about wanting to have a larger and broader labor presence. While I saw a fairly equal representation from both sides at monthly meetings early on (later, labor representation effectively dissipated), during my interviews I heard the same kinds of concerns: more labor and more faith representatives should be engaged. Dan, on the other hand, pointed out that greater representation from the “rank and file” was needed on both sides. He wanted to not only see leaders from the labor community and clergy members take part in IWJ-GKC, but to see everyday workers and those who sit in the pews connect to the issues so that there would be a broader base of support throughout the community.

There was, secondly, an expressed concern over what kinds religious representation were present. Those who represented the “religion side” of things came largely from a Christian background. While clergy from other faiths (Judaism, Islam, and

Buddhism) were available for campaigns and major events, regular IWJ-GKC members talked about the need to reach out to “non-Christian brothers and sisters” in the community. During my interviews, both Ilyse and Denny talked about the need to have a greater variety of faiths regularly present. They both also spoke about how those representing faith were there as *individuals* not as congregational representatives, arguing this is problematic from a growth standpoint.

Thirdly, an issue that somewhat couples together with building a broader support network, is education. At the monthly meetings, there was often a discussion about needing to educate congregations and unions about worker justice issues. Dan argued, “I think we need to do a lot of educating of our members in the labor community, as well as in the congregations. That’s somewhere I’d like to see our organization expand.” He further elaborated that he felt part of the group’s goal should be “to strike the moral chord” of the public concerning worker justice. Regarding supporting – either actively or passively – worker inequality, Dan emphasized that people “Deep down, they really don’t believe that way, but it’s always been that way and maybe we could, you know, maybe we could break the mould, I don’t know, but it sure can’t hurt.” With these three concerns in mind, regular IWJ-GKC members welcomed help from the national office with enthusiasm.

In the summer of 2005, the national IWJ office sent an intern to Kansas City to help the new group begin to get the word out about its presence. This intern helped with developing the faith and labor networks and put together a flyer for the group, based on national office templates. There was a general air of thankfulness for this intern, but in the summer of 2006, the national office was unable to send another one. By the end of

2006, they seemed to recognize that the Kansas City affiliate needed some help if it were to grow as an organization. Part of its planning for 2007, was to place priority on building group capacity in several of its local affiliates. Recognizing the potential in Kansas City for a vibrant, growing group, it was placed on the national's priority list.

A retreat was held in December, 2006 to evaluate where the group had been and where it was going. At the November meeting, Reverend Barrett explained that the upcoming retreat would be "a time to regroup, redirect, and refine the mission of the group by setting up goals for 2007, as well as long-term goals." He said they needed to come up with ways "to recruit clergy with similar goals and directives" and to work on creating "authentic partnerships with other groups without losing our own identity." Before the retreat, Dan sent out an email, requesting suggestions for 2007 campaigns, asking unions specifically if there were any issues out there for consideration. He wrote, "We have lost some steam on Wal-Mart (that may need to be pumped up again) and we do not want the same to happen to the Immigrant Worker issues and we have to continue building our Building Bridges Project."

From the perspective of the national office, in 2006 IWJ-GKC had done a number of things right, including: the organization of a Wal-Mart conference (called "Rollback Wal-Mart") and maintaining ongoing Wal-Mart actions throughout the year; they had generated faith-based support for janitors, DHL workers, bus drivers and teachers; started the Building Bridges Project (a pre-apprenticeship program for women and people of color); raised faith and labor-based support for Missouri's proposal to increase the minimum wage; and organized a Labor in the Pulpit event on the Sunday before Labor Day that brought in 150 participants ("We Are Ready" 2006).

Despite moving in the community, the national office felt that as an affiliate, the local IWJ-GKC should focus on several things for 2007. Prior to the December, 2006 retreat, Charese Jordan and Will Tanzman (an organizer for the national IWJ) discussed by phone 2007 target areas for IWJ-GKC with the co-chairs. The agreed-upon priorities for growth presented at the retreat asked the group to: design a “full strategic outline” to generate religious support for local union organizing; develop a broader religious base by engaging a core group of clergy and lay people; commit to fundraising with the goal of hiring staff. It was noted that hiring staff “makes affiliates more successful in the long-run.”

Some discussion followed each of these issues. The first question raised addressed the issue of how to broaden IWJ-GKC’s religious base. Charese said several things can be done to reach this goal, including the mapping of the religious landscape of Kansas City so that the group could have a true sense of the faith communities present and the kinds of people they represented. She emphasized the importance of relationship-building, especially using one-on-one meetings by board members. She also suggested that IWJ-GKC members brush up on their awareness regarding religious languages and rituals, cultivating a sensitivity for a variety of traditions and an awareness of the issues faced by people of color. Lastly, she talked about the importance of engaging religious communities on *specific* actions and campaigns, rather than just looking for general support. Doing so gets people excited about the work that the group does overall and generates stronger, more durable relationships. There was little disagreement. Reverend Barrett agreed that the group had not been “intentional” about this kind of outreach and he echoed Dan’s concern for education: group members themselves needed to get a

greater understanding of non-Christian faiths. Charese suggested that every organizing campaign was an opportunity to include an educational component, not just for group members, but for the broader community.

In terms of developing a strategy to support union organizing, Judy noted that there is a great need in the community to understand worker issues faced by people from “other communities,” people of Middle Eastern decent, for example. The local UAW had recently held a panel discussion to gather experiences of workers from groups that face exploitation, but who have not traditionally been unionized. This issue was raised in addition to a general emphasis on the need to involve more rank-and-file union members in the group’s activities. It was thirdly argued that not only just rank-and-file members need to be included, but that the group needed to be intentional about diversity given a history of race-based union exclusion in the Kansas City area. One reverend argued that groups can be racist at times without even trying to be just by the act of *not* being intentional about diversity.

The issue of fundraising was discussed with a little uncertainty. This had not been the group’s strong point. Though they had raised about 5,000 dollars at an October, 2006 fundraiser for their Building Bridges Project, most of the funds came through individual and group dues. Even a small organization requires some funds to survive. There were basic expenses to cover, like telephone and Internet access, copying, and postage. The group also often donated funds to other organizations pursuing causes related to worker justice. Consequently, there was concern over where to even begin. It was asked where the group should be in terms of fundraising and Charese said, “In the foundation business. The national office receives about sixty percent of its funding from

foundations.” At this time, they had not submitted the paperwork to gain 501(c)3 status, but Charese suggested that members not get bogged down in these details right away. The most important steps were to first develop a clear program and a strategic overview. The bylaws required updating before the paperwork could be completed and Charese further noted that the IWJ national office was working on developing an “umbrella” 501(c)3 that would operate much like the coalition Jobs with Justice. Members present, however, seemed anxious about this issue, expressing that funds could likely be more easily generated if the group had non-profit status. Reverend Barrett actually asked the Board to set dates so they could make the necessary corrections to the bylaws that were needed to proceed with 501(c)3 status.

The next item up for consideration at the retreat was the national IWJ’s proposal to “lend” organizer Will for one week a month from January to June, 2007 with the purpose of helping IWJ-GKC build capacity by developing a fundraising plan, beefing up networks, locating a summer intern, and helping to develop campaign strategies. The national office agreed to pay Will’s salary and transportation to and from Kansas City and the IWJ-GKC was responsible for providing him with a place to stay and a rental car during his visits. There was no voiced opposition to this proposal at the retreat. It was generally seen as a good deal for the group and the “Memorandum of Understanding between Interfaith Worker Justice and Interfaith Worker Justice of Greater Kansas City for Joint Work in 2007” was approved. The relationship outlined in the memorandum was contingent upon IWJ-GKC’s commitment to six activities for 2007. They must, continue the program Building Bridges; engage in one union campaign focused on low-wage workers; send a delegation of religious leaders to meet with a member of Congress;

expand the Labor in the Pulpits program to include events at several congregations; reactivate the original committee structures that were designed at the 2004 retreat; and fundraise for a hired staff person.

Everyone was excited about Will's upcoming work for the group. Even at the retreat, he demonstrated that the national office had trained him well in its understanding of organizing tactics (based on the national IWJ director's published organizing manual called *Organizing for Social Change*). He led a workshop segment to help the group define some of its goals for 2007. Will discussed the importance of distinguishing between "problems," which are broad-based and "issues" which are winnable campaigns or short-term actions that chip away at the larger problems. By focusing on issues, concrete action is engaged, individuals and groups are empowered, and the relationships of power can be altered. Focusing on issues is a good way to get new people involved, to raise funds, and to receive recognition from community leaders, organizations, and potential funders. He argued that IWJ-GKC's recent minimum wage campaign success in Missouri was an issue rather than a problem. However, while churches that had not been previously involved in campaigns supported the minimum wage campaign, this issue was not necessarily used to build the organization itself, so Will also discussed the need to follow through on sustaining relationships after issues are engaged. These ideas were presented to get the local group to think, using the organizing strategies of the national office. It was also the first time that I heard the group's concern over Wal-Mart discussed as an "unwinnable problem." This monolithic corporation was something pressing on the minds of members. Involvement in anti-Wal-Mart work is one way members connected to one another. However, as a mission, it did not quite fit within what was do-able when

distinguishing between “problems and issues.” As the relationship between IWJ-GKC and the national office grew closer, there was a push to get members to think outside of the Wal-Mart box.

Overall, Will served as an excellent resource for the group: he almost literally hit the ground running. He started meeting with committee members to have one-on-one conversations about the direction of the group at the start of January and by February, 2007 he had submitted IWJ-GKC’s 501(c)3 paperwork. He focused much of his energy on trying to reconnect with people who had already had a connection with IWJ-GKC and to encourage them to express more commitment to the group. By April, he had secured a 25,000 dollar grant from the Kauffmann Foundation to support Building Bridges. This money was to be managed through the national office. Will also contacted Catholic Charities and got the ball rolling to contact unions and congregations using personal letters from group members and encouraged the use of house parties to raise funds for the group. One was later held in the fall of 2007.

This relationship with the national office did great wonders in solidifying IWJ-GKC’s organizational status. Will’s work infused the group with energy and a sense of accomplishment that allowed it to be forward-looking. However, in the midst of this budding relationship, changes began to occur in organizational structure and process, that in part, altered the script of a successful, growing organization, to one in decline. I discuss these changes in Chapter Five. Next, the hiring of a full-time organizer after Will’s agreement with the local affiliate was completed, brought a push for more rigid committees and a hierarchically defined decision-making process, removing the rank-and-file from a number of key decisions over time. These changes effectively

disintegrated the membership base. By the end of my fieldwork, I had seen the group build in momentum, foster an excitement for growth, then decline sharply following the institution of un-democratic decision making processes, and lastly regroup after the dismissal of the lead organizer and a brief, summer hiatus to heal wounded relationships.

The Meaning of IWJ-GKC

The group's identity was, all along, malleable: it manifested in the meanings IWJ-GKC came to have to individual participants. These meanings became complicated and increasingly unclear as the group structure evolved. Early in my study, members described the group in disparate ways, but there was a feeling that this was non-problematic. As Reverend Voss put it, the group needed a little more structure, but not too much structure because most of the people there, were there because they are interested in justice, equality, and democracy. Citing the failure of organized religion to engage in social justice, IWJ-GKC served as an outlet for religious practitioners interested in living their faiths by tackling worker inequality. This failure went hand in hand with a critique of church-based hierarchies and bureaucratic decision-making. Mike emphasized that decision-making should be by "consensus only" and that compromises always have to be made in a group like IWJ-GKC (see Figure 2 below). In a personal communication, he cautioned me against looking for much organization and structure in IWJ-GKC, saying, "A lot of decisions get made here leaning on the hood of a car or sitting in the back of a pick-up truck, so to speak. Missourians get a lot of things done without a lot of structure or organization surrounding them."

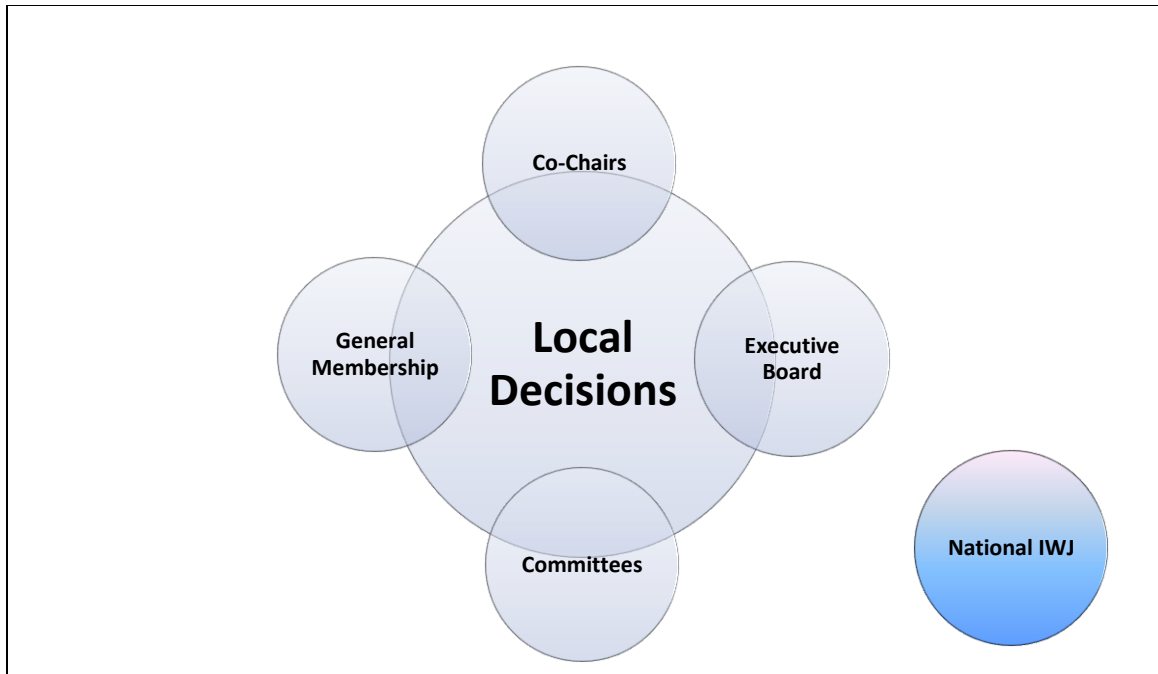


Figure 2: Decisions are made locally and by consensus at the monthly meetings. The national IWJ is present, but exerts little to no influence on local decisions.

IWJ-GKC was described to me as a “coalition of labor and religion;” “faith-based organization;” “relationship-based organization;” “bridge-building organization;” and as a “volunteer organization with a focus on labor and religion teamwork.” It was seen as proactive, creative, liberal, progressive, open and accepting early on. Towards the end of my study, key members were no longer clear about the role of the general membership. I listened to them describe the group as top-heavy, non-transparent, undemocratic and too structured. Below, I tell the story of structural change over time: how the group transitioned from being loosely formed, but tightly-knit, to loosely-knit and highly controlled. Whereas the national office was seen as helping to solidify IWJ-GKC, they later were described by Josef as “imposing an agenda” and as being “insensitive to the local context.”

Discussion

In this chapter, I have constructed a narrative that outlines how IWJ-GKC began and came to be solidified as a voice for moral authority on worker justice issues in the community. Prior to 2004, the ideas for collaboration between faith and labor were floating around, but it did not quite get off the ground. Jerry Meszaros had the vision, but the kinds of actions he engaged were not entirely suitable to the sense of justice that future IWJ-GKC members were developing. His tragic death and the involvement of the national IWJ on a voter registration campaign both served as catalysts to finally organize a loose group of people interested in coordinating faith and labor for worker justice. The national office helped local members create an organization by helping them with the process of writing a vision statement, developing committees and bylaws. Next, two major organizing campaigns gave the group momentum and an energy towards growth and change. With a vision for involving more rank-and-file union and religious members, building up a greater diversity of religious representation, and expanding IWJ-GKC's educational component, the group accepted the national office's local collaboration through the help of an intern and a part time organizer.

From the start, the identity of the group was malleable. Group members described IWJ-GKC in different ways, but what united them was a particular sense of justice so that it did not matter whether some members saw the group as "Church" or as one of their social justice organizations in a list of many others. Significantly, the national office, in its efforts to build local capacity, came from the perspective that the group was a *religious organization* and as such, the prescribed goals for the year 2007 were largely focused on orienting the group towards building more religious and a greater diversity of

religious support *for* union campaigns. This necessarily redirected the identity of the group whose amorphous character was perhaps one of its strengths in its ability to unite people from disparate walks of life. The national's vision maintained separate spheres of influence: the local's vision was one more unified. They walked in the area of institutional "overlap" and created a cultural space where acts of service had given way to social justice activism. In the next chapter, I detail the major changes in organizational form and processes to show how changes in decision-making processes which emphasized a more hierarchically-aligned structure brought about a commitment to campaigns that likely would not have happened had decision-making remained consensual and had the local agenda remained in the hands of the local constituents.

Chapter 5: Organizational Structure in Process

Part of the argument of this dissertation is that members' understandings of faith and justice are lived through the structure of the organization. As Wuthnow (1998) argues, the organizations on which a practice-oriented spirituality is based must reflect its members greatest desires. The very structure and nature of the organization early on reflected the way many members felt religious practice should be carried out. This is significant in that religious practice is reflected in democratic decision making processes; justice and equality are connected to everyone having a voice. Later, as described below, the national office's increased involvement in the group led to a more rigidly-defined structure, removing rank-and-file members from decision-making process. Once that component was removed from the group, several members began to remove themselves.

Structural Changes Over Time

National's Agenda Seeps In

As IWJ-GKC began to more closely engage the structural and organizing philosophy of the national office, change was evident at the monthly meetings, in the group email communications, and in group documents. Dan echoed the enthusiasm of the group for new directions at the beginning of 2007 in an email communication about reorganizing and consolidating the committees to three primary committees. He wrote that "With the help of Will Tanzman, we see some exciting months ahead as we focus on the challenges." My intention is not to misrepresent this process of change or to create villains: group members favored growth, they favored a stronger organization, and

welcomed the help of the national office. However, the changes that had resulted by the end of the study were not those anticipated by the group.

Will's extensive work through January, 2007 brought a new tone to the February meeting. The theme of the day was organizational transition. This was in many ways the foreshadowing of changes to come. Structure and procedure were emphasized throughout the meeting so much so that it was evident the local affiliate was working to bring its form and processes into alignment with those of the national organization. This point was evidenced by the co-occurrence of Will's direction of the meetings and changes in the way the agenda was set up and an emphasis on building committee decision-making power. At this meeting, it was also announced that Board members had interviewed Daniel Romero the evening prior to the meeting for the full-time position of Lead Organizer of IWJ-GKC. Daniel was asked by Kim Bobo, the director of the national office whose church he attended in Chicago, to interview for the position. His salary and benefits were to be covered by the national office until the end of 2007, after which time, he and IWJ-GKC would work to raise funds for his position.

Starting this meeting off, the first thing I noticed was a change in the agenda. Even something as simple as this indicated a shift in the organizational story. The agenda took on a new look with time allotments for each segment. This served the purpose of emphasizing organizational process. While time allotments are meant to keep things on task and moving forward so that the meeting could be completed on time, they also indicate a new emphasis on "tightening the ship" suggesting a commitment to organizational "seriousness" or intent, as was pointed out at the meeting. During prior meetings, there was an agenda, but the meeting progress was less orderly and it often ran

past noon, the proposed ending time. As Zerubavel (1987) points out, the firmness and rigidity with which we allot time to certain events is indicative of their relative importance and formality (346-347). Similarly, the development of group literature was discussed, including a website, newsletter, and letterhead, to – as one member put it – “make the organization look more official.”

Opening the meeting, Reverend Barrett discussed the organizational change in process. He stated, “For an organization to function we have to function as an organization. We are not passive recipients at these meetings. We need to be active participants.” He spoke about the purpose of the committees and the purpose of the meetings of the general membership. Meetings, he pointed out, are meant to inform the members and make *some* decisions, while the committees are designed to pull together statements and actions that the group will engage in. Already, with the emphasis on committee-based decision making, a slight shift had occurred, moving the group away from a consensus model (see Figure 3 below). Mike gave the report of the Actions and Outreach committee and he pointed out that IWJ-GKC had become invested in the Justice for Janitors Campaign (organized by SEIU) as a way to learn not just how to support particular campaigns, but to study how the group functions and should function together. He noted a rally would be held on February 17, 2007. Mike pointed out that IWJ-GKC’s commitment to this rally, “is a symbolic representation in coming together on issues with a particular focus. The group will be shepherded through the process by Will and by Justin [an SEIU organizer for Justice for Janitors]. Further, this is an immersion in an action and a process that the group can evaluate later and assess where we are and where we are going.” Another member of the Actions and Outreach

committee interjected that the committee had not forgotten about Wal-Mart, but that they decided the group should focus on issues needing immediate attention, like the Justice for Janitor's Campaign described in Chapter One.

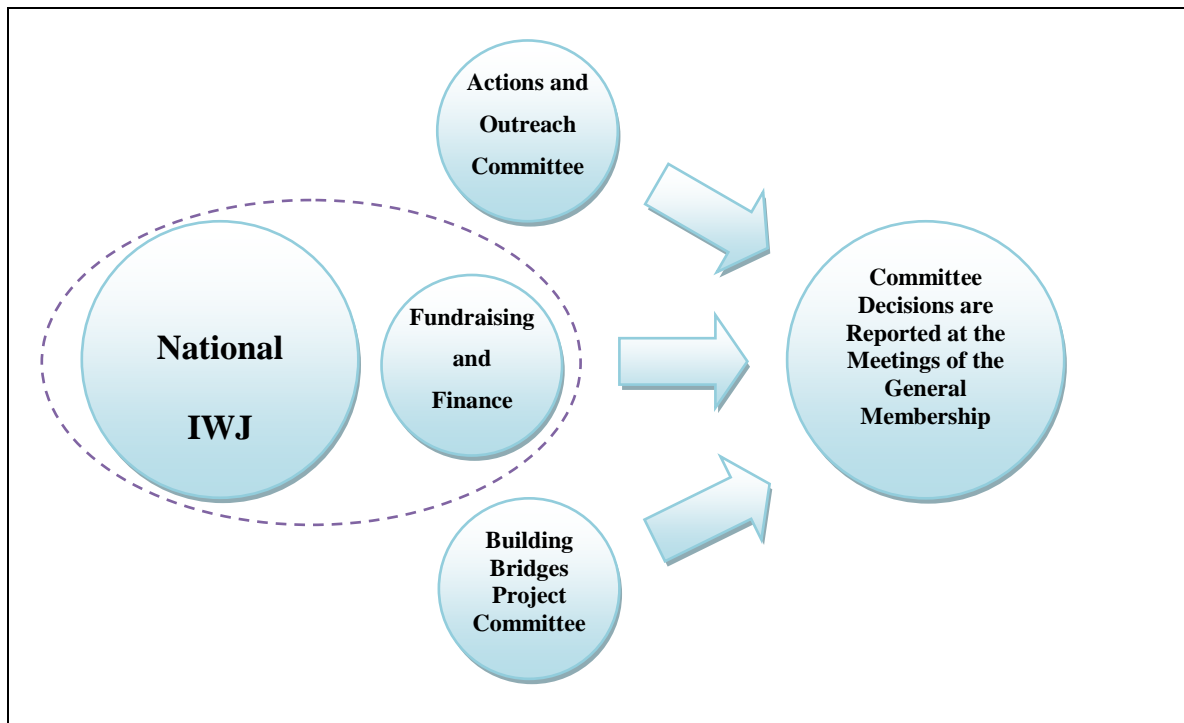


Figure 3: Decisions are made locally, but they are made by the committees which then report decisions at the meeting of the general membership for feedback. There is now a formal relationship with the national office, primarily in terms of a fiscal agreement.

At least two key members were visibly and audibly frustrated at this meeting's honoring of organizational procedure. At prior meetings, members freely announced issues that were of concern in the community. While possibly not the most efficient way to run a meeting, these meetings were more open, and as I described in Chapter Two almost testimonial in style. During the meeting, Judy moved that IWJ-GKC join Missouri Immigrant & Refugee Advocates (MIRA) a new "coalition of labor, religious, human rights, and immigrant and service organizations." Will suggested that the group first pull together its stance on immigration: to create a *written* statement about its stance on

immigration before committing to any other organization's agenda. Judy pointed out that whether or not there is a written stance on immigration, IWJ-GKC is focused on a "moral consideration" of immigration issues. This exchange represented an interesting tension between the desire to act in a timely way on something that appears to be the morally responsible thing to do, and the current stress on organizational development. The national office emphasizes first, the need for clearly defined, written goals and position statements, followed by actions. The motion was eventually passed to join MIRA, however, it was noted that if present at next month's meeting Judy should do a presentation on immigration, which is one of her specialty areas. Before this exchange, early into the meeting, Judy mentioned she would like to do a presentation, if she was able to come to the meeting, on immigration for the group to help people understand the current issues. Her tone was hopeful and willing. Amidst Will's efforts to table her concern for joining MIRA, Judy's tone had changed considerably to the point that when he suggested she do a presentation at the next month's meeting, she responded that she *could not because she would not be at the meeting*. Her frustration was written all over her body language and was evident in the sound of her voice. It was suggested the motion be passed to join MIRA but that Judy along with the Actions and Outreach committee come up with a statement on immigration. At the end of this exchange, Mike pointed out, "We're only trying to honor process. I don't want to get into bureaucracy here."

Also at this meeting, Ron brought a list of possible vision statements he had written. He was allowed a minute to talk about them, but given that this meeting was agenda-driven, a discussion on these statements was tabled for March. Eventually, the discussion of the vision statement was tabled once again at the March meeting and was

never returned to for serious consideration. Ron later told me that he felt silenced over this issue. It was important to him that the group have a simple statement about its vision to unify everyone and to make sure members were on the same page in terms of the group's identity. Like Judy, Ron was visibly and audibly dejected. Attending the meetings since the fall 2006, this was the first time I saw members' concerns dismissed in the name of following the agenda. Knowing the central roles both members played in the organization, these exchanges were very difficult for me to witness. Dissonance was created in a context that was previously effervescent.

IWJ-GKC Gets an Organizer

At the March, 2007 meeting, it was announced that Daniel was offered and had accepted the lead-organizer position and would start his work at the beginning of April. For the first time, the New Sanctuary Movement was also talked about at this meeting under the direction of Will. Sanctuary was the prime focus of the national office at the time and they were making efforts to encourage the affiliates to get involved. Unfortunately, it also became one of the campaigns that plunged the group into controversy. Will brought a handout that described IWJ's strategy as "Prophetic Hospitality" which they defined as,

...an act of public witness, we will publicly provide hospitality and protection to a limited number of immigrant families whose cases clearly reveal the contradictions and moral injustice of our current immigration system while working to support legislation that would change their situation.

No group commitment was made during the meeting: this was purely meant to be an informational session. As indicated above, Judy was not at this meeting to discuss immigration issues, though she did give a presentation on the problems caused by the US

immigration system at the April meeting. The timing of these discussions became important: on the one hand, the group was being asked to formulate its stance on immigration and Judy should have been a great resource in this process. On the other hand, by all appearances, the national office had already decided Kansas City should be a Sanctuary city as indicated by the attempted inculcation of members through documents produced by the national office about Sanctuary and the organizer-centered drive to discuss the topic. As time passed, Judy and others came to feel that an agenda had been imposed on the group and that their efforts to learn about and educate others about issues facing immigrant workers was for nothing.

The agenda took on a new look as Daniel took over as lead organizer for IWJ-GKC in April, 2007. Prior to the meeting, Dan sent out an email that highlighted the exciting things to happen at the meeting, including starting and ending “promptly.” Now, rather than allotting time for each segment on the agenda, items were numbered and a *specific* time was assigned to each agenda item, like 10:30, 10:33, etc. The meeting proceeded with a somewhat frenzied pace in order to run according to the outlined schedule. Daniel was introduced to the group and his role was defined as, “organizing on the front of raising funds and new forces.” He took over leadership of the meetings at this point, whereas previously, the meetings had been led by the labor and religion co-chairs.

Daniel talked about how he viewed his role and the group at this meeting. He noted that as an organization, IWJ-GKC should offer something back to the people in the room. In his role he could offer the kind of leadership development that they could take back to their churches, in addition to development for advocacy, outreach, and fundraising. He emphasized being able to develop a special set of skills for IWJ-GKC

members based on his years of experience as a labor and community organizer. He pointed out that the “IWJ mindset” should be that when everyone steps into the room for a meeting, they should notice “who is with us and who needs to be here.” He closed his introduction by saying, “I’m looking forward to celebrating a lot of victories with you.”

Daniel also added a new segment to the meeting agenda called “Evaluation.” This was a good opportunity to hear how members felt about the changes that were occurring. Daniel went around the room asking for a one-word response from those present regarding how they were “feeling” about the meeting. Response words included: challenged, informed, educated, excited, ambivalent, motivated, and stressed. He next asked, “What did we do well today?” People listed: became informed about immigration, stayed on schedule, and had concise committee reports. These responses point to an excitement about change, growth, and education, but there is also an indication that there was a little unease about the new environment under construction. Lastly, Daniel asked, “What can we improve on?” and the responses were: more faith-based organizations at the table AND more labor people involved. Daniel challenged everyone to think about a new person to bring to next month’s meeting and closed with the following remarks: “A compelling vision of the work you want to do has to be inspiring and exciting. It needs to be presented in a way that compels people to follow and needs to come from a place that appeals to all of us personally.” The meeting was closed with a toast of sparkling juice to the future success of IWJ-GKC.

Daniel scheduled a “one-on-one” with me in May, 2007. He drove the two hours from Kansas City to speak with me in Columbia, saying, “You’ve made this trip so many times, let me come out to meet you.” From our conversation, I learned about Daniel’s

upbringing and his motivations as an organizer, some of which I describe in Chapter Three. He talked with me about what he wanted for IWJ-GKC and identified some tensions that he felt were present in the group at that time. What did he want for the group? Daniel told me he wanted it go grow, to strengthen relationships, to develop its immigration stance, to strengthen the healthcare piece, and to establish more formal relationships with the workers' center Kansas City. During this conversation, Daniel also pointed out that there are members of AFL-CIO and Change to Win at the table, which produces some political tensions between members. I found this interesting, because as I point out in Chapter Two, one member said these tensions were set aside during IWJ-GKC meetings. He further pointed out tensions around "UM-KC's presence" at the table, which was an unusual choice of wording given that the only UM-KC presence at the table was Judy. He said this presence represents a strong personality and that there are "issues" especially with how to deal with immigration. He also mentioned that for him personally, Wal-Mart is a tension because "it is not a winnable issue."

Though tensions were identified early-on between Daniel and some key IWJ-GKC members, he was, like organizational growth, welcomed with excitement. Reverend Voss consistently expressed thankfulness for Daniel's work and commitment to the group. Mike pointed out at the end of the May, 2007 meeting that "Daniel is a stabilizing influence" on the group. Others echoed these sentiments during monthly meeting. He may have seemed like a stabilizing influence at the time: meetings came together in more structured ways, funds were being pursued, new relationships were being sought, and new campaigns were being defined. It seemed like the group was heading upwards and expanding. A telling comment arose in Daniel's closing evaluation of the May meeting.

He said, “Agitation is an act of love.” He argued that it prepares one to be a stronger and better leader. He further asked, “How much personal investment do you have in the success or failure of IWJ-GKC? That is how successful we will be.” Daniel’s self-description in the “Strengths” section of his resume has key words that illuminate his motivations and intentions in handling the group: “My organizing strengths include maintenance and base-building one-on-ones, leadership development, **agitation**...I am highly motivated and I understand all the elements of organizing work.” I highlighted the word “agitation” in bold because it represents the breaking point between members and Daniel’s tactics and methods, as elaborated in Chapter Three and Six. Daniel was an excellent organizer, as he points out in the resume, but sustaining long-term relationships in a democratic structure proved to not be one of his strengths. He does emphasize developing relationships in his resume, but for IWJ-GKC members, these were described as touch-and-go relationships. His “maintenance and base-building one-on-ones” were in many ways meant to get people on his page and to make sure they were still there.

Personal Relationships?

More changes ensued at the May, 2007 meeting. Though they are listed on the agenda, Denny was asked to point out at the beginning of the meeting the intention to eliminate the “Announcements” for the sake of time at meetings. He suggested that people bring fliers and handouts to talk about announcements either before or after the meeting, not during the scheduled agenda. Another seemingly insignificant change, I argue this kind of thing actually mattered. The announcements segments had been a significant point in the meetings during which members would share what their other organizational connections were doing and would request support or attendance of

specific events at that time. These segments allowed everyone to get a sense of the variety of things each member was involved in and the justice work occurring in the community at large. It additionally allowed for a portion of the meeting to be “in the hands of” the general membership, rather than in the hands of the organizer or committee chairs. It was in keeping with members’ critique of hierarchical religion discussed in Chapter Two, for one thing. But it also signified another step in changes to the way decisions were made and the impact was such that key members began to wonder what was the role of the general membership. This uncertainty was expressed in the interviews I conducted in the summer of 2007.

Despite this change, the rhetoric at the meeting was about building “personal relationships” amongst the people in the group. Daniel said that “Bringing voices of faith together requires open dialogue and knowing each other more deeply. Surface relationships do not facilitate working with the movement.” A kind of ice-breaker was conducted at this meeting, asking members to reflect on three questions: Who are your heroes?; What is something the group doesn’t know about you?; and What important experience in your life impacted you in a significant way? Another addition added to the meetings was a “spotlight” on a particular organization to which a member had significant ties. While these segments were designed as education segments and were meant to connect members to one another, their structured nature took away the free-flowing sense of information sharing that was previously occurring at meetings.

Moving Onward

IWJ-GKC really began to move onward in May, 2007. They took part in a May Day event that attracted over 1000 participants. They requested signs from the national

office with the IWJ logo and these were sent in overnight. The media presence at the event captured the signs, publicly establishing IWJ-GKC's connection to immigrant issues. The message at the event was that workers' rights can no longer be talked about without addressing the issue of immigration; the purpose of the event was to educate through action. At the May meeting, Ron pointed out the event was a significant statement about IWJ-GKC's stance on immigration. Daniel then emphasized, "We rest on a foundation of commonality: we are all brothers and sisters, sons and daughters of immigrants." The group began to incorporate issues facing immigrant workers more and more into meeting discussions.

They also took part in other significant events, including the organization of a "Clergy Breakfast" in June, 2007 in an effort to increase clergy representation and diversity. At the June, 2007 meeting, Josef reported that the breakfast was a success, bringing together forty-one attendees including clergy, union representatives, community leaders, attorneys, and legislators. There were religious leaders representing Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Sheik faiths. He pointed out that the Sheiks have "a great worker justice tradition" and that it is important to seek out these smaller religious communities in Kansas City and to build some new networks there. At the May meeting, sign-up sheets were also posted on the wall for people to express a public commitment to some particular action or committee, including inviting a clergy member to the breakfast. People were also asked to sign up for the upcoming summer conference held by the national IWJ in Chicago. Funds had been approved to help members with travel expenses should they be interested in attending the conference.

The official IWJ-GKC letter sent out to clergy members asking them to attend the breakfast, identified IWJ-GKC as a “network of people of faith” and as a “progressive, faith-based organization.” This letter poses as an official representation of IWJ-GKC as a faith-based organization, described this way by one member as mention above, but more often it was seen as a coalition of faith and labor. While early on, a diversity of descriptions was unproblematic, as the group transformed in structure and in its relationship with the national office, a diversity of descriptions showed that members were not entirely in tune with the changes that were occurring. This became very evident at the June, 2007 meeting.

Decision-Making: From Consensus, to Committees, to the Executive Board

One of the handouts for this month were the bylaws, considered then a work in progress. The bylaws, modeled after the national IWJ bylaws, had been previously approved, however, as they were only used as a model, they did not fully represent the processes of the group in practice. This set of bylaws even still contained the name of the national IWJ, rather than being amended to reflect the local IWJ-GKC. In these bylaws, there was a strong position for the Board of Directors, a momentous point at the June, 2007 meeting. This is when it became evident that the organizational structure and processes superseded the membership base. Members came to feel isolated, disregarded, and angered over a perceived lack of democratic process. The meeting was tense and left many talking quietly on the sidelines at the end, wondering what direction the organization was taking.

In giving the Board Report, Mike made a significant point in terms of organizational structure. It was emphasized that because IWJ-GKC was moving towards

a more “professional organization” the group would be moving towards a more board, committee, and membership dues structure. Included in this change, the Executive Board would meet once a month and committees would hold their own meetings as well. This is different from the way IWJ-GKC had developed: everything happened at the monthly meeting where issues were raised and decisions were made by the full membership body. Mike further discussed signing a fiscal agreement with the national IWJ which would act as the 501(c)3 umbrella organization and emphasized the membership fee structure so that IWJ-GKC could enact some stability and be able to move forward on budgeting.

Additionally, the New Sanctuary Movement became the fulcrum of change: an opportunity arose to receive a \$10,000 grant (administered by the national office) for IWJ-GKC to create a local Sanctuary coalition. The grant was time sensitive, so the Executive Board met to approve the group’s acceptance of the grant, committing to the movement but noting that they understood this to be “a complicated issue.” It was emphasized that “IWJ-GKC needs to be at the table on this issue” by developing a national immigration policy strategy and that involvement in the New Sanctuary Movement is critical for IWJ-GKC “to be a part of a peaceful and constructive dialogue.”

This decision understandably raised many concerns: those issues raised were not over immigration or providing sanctuary itself, rather the concerns were about *process*. Those who raised opposition were very careful to point this out. Megan, an active member of the Actions and Outreach committee argued that the decision to accept the funds and to move forward on an immigration issue was made without consulting the Actions & Outreach committee, who were given the express purpose of making decisions about what campaigns the group would engage. Immigration was recently revealed as

one of the cornerstone issues of the group and the committee had been meeting regularly to design a group strategy. In April, an email was sent to the group outlining a proposed group statement on immigration given that they would be taking part in the May Day event to honor immigrant workers. There were also two anti-immigrant bills under consideration in Missouri at the time. Both were opposed by the group, and the committee, in their message, emphasized that the group needs much more dialogue and education to further develop its official position on immigration, but that they wanted to produce a statement in light of the current local and state-level activities. They said they wanted the statement “to be simultaneously substantive yet non-specific on national policy because we understand that our members are not of one mind on those issues.” Further, the goal they “wanted to achieve was to reflect IWJ-GKC’s core values rooted in our faith-labor partnership.” This email was sent by Daniel for the Actions and Outreach committee and he noted, “The Committee strongly recommends consensus membership approval of the statement.” The statement was approved, but in it, there was no mention of the New Sanctuary Movement. Instead, the statement was centered on recognizing the dignity of all human beings. It pointed out that IWJ-GKC members

... begin this work with the belief and understanding that all people have a fundamental human right to be treated with respect and dignity. All religions believe in justice and we stand together because our faith teaches us that we are all God’s people. From the earliest settlers to present day residents, those foreign-born who fled monarchy, war, fascism, famine, disease and social and economic despair in search of a better life in America have always had more in common with native-born than not... Our faith compels us not only to speak out against policies and practices that dehumanize but also to organize and advocate changing them. Our immigration laws and policies are broken and should not pit migrants against native-born workers driving down wages and working conditions for both. Missouri House Joint Resolution 7, the ‘English Only’ bill, House Bill 269, which denies college entrance to undocumented students even if they’ve grown up here, and Senate Bill 348, is fraught with widespread human rights violations. We oppose these bills because they fail to provide any real solutions to immigration

and instead increase scapegoating and fear. At the national level, we are optimistic that a real debate is finally taking place which is the important first step towards developing a comprehensive and human, rational and fair national immigration policy.

Megan raised concerns at the June meeting that their strategy work, including the statement discussed above, was being rendered meaningless. She stated that she had received a letter from Jerry Young of the Kansas City-St. Joseph Catholic Diocese Human Rights Office which raised concerns about the national IWJ's involvement in the New Sanctuary Movement. She explained that the letter suggested that if IWJ-GKC moved in this direction, they would lose the support of his diocese. Scott Burnett, a local legislator who often attended the meetings, said that he had talked to Jerry Young just before the meeting. Young said he would no longer be attending any IWJ-GKC meetings and that he was pulling his support for the group. This was not only moral support, but it would potentially mean a loss of earmarked funds in the sum of \$25,000 that were meant for IWJ-GKC from the Diocese. Megan clearly felt uncomfortable about raising her concerns: this group had rarely seen such open conflict and it was clear it was difficult for her to raise the argument. She spoke cautiously, though confidently. Incidentally, she had her dog with her in her lap because it had recently been picked up from the veterinarian and another member said, "Maybe your dog is just making you emotional." Megan was offended by this off-handed remark and responded that her points were valid and that her perspective should not be disregarded.

After Megan spoke, another concern was raised that IWJ-GKC was moving too fast on this issue, though Mike pointed out that the group had been discussing immigration for months. At this time, Daniel took over the conversation and led it in the

direction of attempting to clarify the New Sanctuary Movement, ignoring the concerns that were raised about decision-making processes. From Daniel's perspective, it seemed this conflict and those that subsequently arose were all about Sanctuary and immigration itself. He reiterated this point to me several months later when some members began to leave the group, stating, "They have problems with the immigration issue." The attempts to emphasize concerns over process fell on deaf ears.

Daniel pointed out that the national IWJ was very invested in the movement, referring to a handout from the national office's newsletter *Faith Works* on Sanctuary. The handout points out that the New Sanctuary Movement was started by Cardinal Mahoney in California as a response to a law requiring social service agencies to collect legal papers to provide services. They next began to seek comprehensive immigration reform. IWJ nationally took up the issue in 2006 to try to keep families together because of deportation concerns. The \$10,000 approved by IWJ-GKC's Board was meant for the hiring of a local organizer to create a New Sanctuary Movement coalition in Kansas City. That organizer was Daniel. Interestingly, a New Sanctuary Movement event that was held in the fall of 2007 in Kansas City was covered by a reporter from the *Washington Times*. The author wrote,

Daniel Romero, 45, noticeable by the silver earring in his left ear, worked his way in and out of the crowd. A one-time paralegal for Legal Aid and a past regional vice president for United Auto Workers, he had put in his time with the homeless and in soup kitchens. Early last year, Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ), a Chicago labor rights group coordinating the new sanctuary movement nationwide, asked whether he would move from Chicago *to set up a branch office in Kansas City* (emphasis added). (Duin 2008)

In June, 2007 a plan for a media campaign was already in the works along with a scheduled June 12 meeting for congregations and individuals interested in learning about

Sanctuary and forming a coalition. Daniel pointed out IWJ-GKC and another local organization called People of Faith for Hospitality and Justice were taking the lead on Sanctuary in Kansas City.

Following Daniel, Mike responded regarding the Board's action, pointing out that it was a time sensitive issue, so they met on an emergency basis to make a decision. He argued that members had been discussing the New Sanctuary Movement for about three months, so the decision should not have completely been a surprise. There was further discussion about structure with an emphasis on the Board needing to be able to make decisions between general meetings. Again, the concern raised over the threat from the local Catholic Diocese to remove its support was brought up and dismissed by the argument that nationally Catholics are very involved in the movement. If there was a broader problem, and a concern from Catholics theologically, the issue would have surface nationally. Those members who earlier raised objections to the decision to accept New Sanctuary Movement funds responded emphatically that their concerns were not raised over immigration or even Sanctuary, rather, the concerns were about structure and process. They argued the Board needs to better communicate with the Actions and Outreach committee and that policy decisions need to be made by that committee. This discussion was closed when Dan referred to the new structure in that the Board *consults* with committees and the general membership, but *policy decisions are made by the Board* (see Figure 4 below).

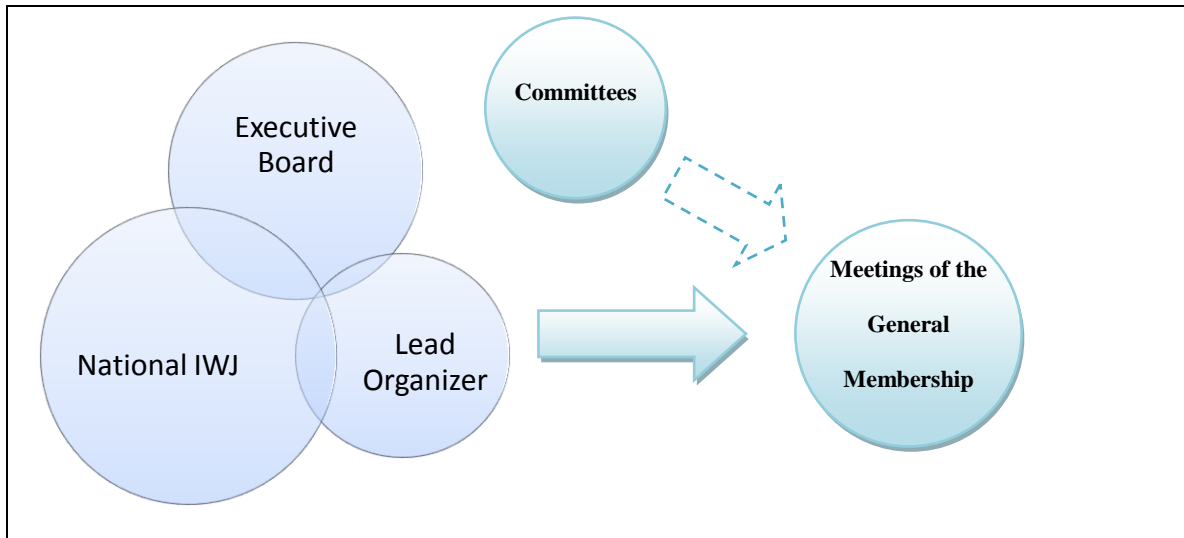


Figure 4: Decisions are made by the Executive Board in conjunction with the Lead Organizer. There is a significant influence from the national office over the decision-making process, which is then reported at the meetings of the general membership. The committees are still making decisions, but as the colorless arrow indicates, those decisions become hollow in the light of group changes.

The closing evaluation of this meeting was called by Daniel a “Moment of Agitation.” He said that IWJ-GKC has to be genuinely democratic, but at the same time there is a movement and direction that the group must take and immigration is a part of that. He said that there is often pressure and fear in deciding whether or not to get involved on an issue and immigration is no different. He also pointed out that there is oftentimes fear of growth in an organization and fear from members in getting involved in controversial issues. He closed by saying, “The challenge is to feel that fear and to move past it courageously.” When Daniel went around the room asking members to provide a “feeling word” to evaluate the meeting, Josef responded “conflicted” and Daniel asked why he felt that way. Josef said, “We are at an impasse where process is leaving us nonresponsive to the rank and file, not just at the table, but beyond.”

After the meeting, there was a roll of quiet chatter in various parts of the room. Always amicable and caring, this was the most frustrated and irritated I had seen Josef. In our conversation after the meeting he said, “I don’t buy this notion of just taking up the cross and bearing it. What Chere said was wrong: you don’t just do something because you may think its morally right. Real change comes from the intellect: from thinking, from planning, and from devising strategies *together* in meetings.” Chere had responded in support of the Board’s quick action, saying “Sometimes you just gotta do something.” She was also the member who dismissed Megan’s concerns as “emotional.” Joining in on our conversation, Judy said, “Daniel is taking the group in a direction people are not ready to go and may not want to go.” She was not talking about immigration, but about structure and process. She stepped away and left the meeting after this comment. Josef followed up by saying, “Instead of utilizing energy to change or get rid of people like Megan and Judy, they need to try to figure out how to incorporate broader perspectives and not isolate members over such a controversial issue.”

Daniel followed up the meeting with an email to the group’s list stating, “I thought today's meeting was just great. We all want IWJ to be transparent, democratic, diverse, progressive and inclusive but we will need each other's help to make that happen. I welcomed the spirited, constructive dialog today and will continue to work hard for and with each of you. I am honored to work with you and greatly value your leadership and guidance. Have a good weekend.” This message was, however, too little too late as key members of the group were already feeling detached and isolated from group processes. Over the next months, several group members would make their exit.

Breaking the Camel's Back

The New Sanctuary Movement

Following on the heels of the tensions that occurred at the June, 2007 meeting, the Board of Directors met in July to talk about the process of decision-making as described in the current bylaws (which gave them ownership over decisions for the group). They recognized the importance of incorporating – officially – the committees and the general membership in the decision-making process following long-standing practices. An amendment was proposed and later approved at the July meeting of the general membership, to include the phrase “In consultation with sub committees and the general membership,” before the phrase “The IWJ Board’s areas of authority include...” This was a positive move in the direction of re-centering the group’s structure *in writing* with the group’s structure *as lived* through most of its history.

However, the decision that was made in June to circumvent the committees and the general membership to accept money connected to the New Sanctuary Movement was still in motion. IWJ-GKC was now a part of this movement, whether or not all members wanted it to be. Just as those members who raised the critique of structure and process at the June meeting, I also want to be clear that members who continued to oppose IWJ-GKC’s involvement in the New Sanctuary Movement did not do so because they had “issues” with immigrants. Though Daniel maintained this argument until the end of his time with IWJ-GKC, I learned through personal communications that this was not a factor (some of these conversations and emails were marked as confidential).

My argument is also consistent with the way conversations had been proceeding at monthly meetings. There was a long-expressed concern for the exploitation of

immigrant workers. Since beginning my study, the group maintained connections to the local workers' center, supporting it monetarily, and got involved in opposing anti-immigrant Missouri-based legislation. An integral part of their justice work was opposing racism and it was often emphasized that racism was no longer just about conflicts between blacks and whites. In our interview, Denny – one of the union members that eventually left the group – said the way to rejuvenate the labor movement in the United States is by generating a concern for immigrant workers and by getting them organized. He was one of the members that was said to have left because of “the immigration issue.” Certainly the group still needed to work out its stance on immigration, recognizing that there were a variety of views on how to handle things. There was also a feeling that local Kansas City unions were struggling with how to understand immigrant workers. But to boil the exodus of key members down to “the immigration issue” is an oversimplification of problems that arose around two campaigns in particular, and a style of organizing that was not suited for the Kansas City context.

To be fair, the rhetoric from the national office conflated immigration reform and rights for immigrant workers with the New Sanctuary Movement at the time. According to an article in their newsletter, “The New Sanctuary Movement has also drawn much needed public attention to the U.S.’s broken immigration system” (“Kansas City Congregations Offer Sanctuary” 2007:4). If Daniel actually went to Kansas City to establish it as a Sanctuary city as the *Washington Times* article stated, he also likely saw all the issues as intertwined. At the June meeting, in addition to providing the group with an article titled, “An Invitation to Join the New Sanctuary Movement” from the national IWJ’s newsletter, he passed around copies of a letter from John Sweeney, then President

of the AFL-CIO, in which he opposed the Secure Borders, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Reform Act of 2007 (S. 1348). Daniel said this letter showed that the New Sanctuary Movement was in line with Sweeney's position on immigration. In this letter Sweeney argued,

Comprehensive immigration reform should provide an opportunity for the current undocumented population to earn a path towards legal status, and it should uphold long-standing U.S. policy favoring the reunification of families. In addition, it should limit the size and scope of guest worker programs so that the presence of hundreds of thousands of temporary workers in permanent jobs does not drive down wages, benefits, and health and safety protections.

The article from the national IWJ's newsletter, *Faith Works*, however, did not include unions in its call to action. For example, it states, "We welcome religious leaders, congregations and faith-based organizations of all denominations to join us in this effort" ("An Invitation to Join the New Sanctuary Movement" 2007:5). Further, the article points out, "The New Sanctuary Movement is fundamentally an interfaith movement. Secular immigrant and allied organizations will be invited to partner with the New Sanctuary Movement as needed, but the movement will be independent and faith-based" ("An Invitation to Join the New Sanctuary Movement" 2007:6). The wording of this article is interesting because it strikes directly at the balance and the identity of IWJ-GKC. Though loosely-defined, the involvement of unions and union members – not always of faith – was an unquestioned aspect of the group. As pointed out above, the Actions and Outreach committee was working to formulate an immigration strategy that reflected IWJ-GKC's "core values rooted in our faith-labor partnership." The national office's description of the New Sanctuary Movement largely excluded labor union partners, but the letter from Sweeney was included at this meeting – stapled together with the *Faith Works* article – likely to soften the rhetoric of the national office.

By committing to this movement, however, the group shifted its membership focus in a way that ended up excluding labor-based participation. Locally, not all members conflated providing sanctuary to immigrant families with workers' rights. Some considered aspects of providing sanctuary to be illegal, preferring instead to focus on the issues they could impact on the ground like confronting a long list of employers in the Kansas City area notorious for not paying their immigrant workers for their labor. When Judy gave her presentation on legal and illegal immigration in April, 2007, her talk was received with excitement. Members present expressed how they were impressed and moved by the data presented. Her talk largely focused on how the deregulations resulting from NAFTA became a significant factor in pushing immigrant workers to the United States by destroying farm-related labor and causing food prices to skyrocket. I believe Judy was well-positioned to spearhead an educational campaign about immigration supported by the group, however, the national agenda took over and pushed the group towards the New Sanctuary Movement with no regard for the concerns of the local community. Given the receptivity of Judy's presentation, and acceptance by the general membership of the non-sanctuary based focus of the statement submitted in April by the Actions and Outreach committee, the immigration path could have gone in a different direction had the decision-making process been more localized.

Still, the group moved onward with the New Sanctuary Movement. This engagement, coupled with a concern over Daniel's leadership style marked IWJ-GKC as a volatile group to others in the social justice community. At the national IWJ conference held in June, 2007, I had a confidential conversation with a representative of an organization that was considering whether to officially affiliate with IWJ-GKC. After the

happenings at the June meeting, the Board of this organization was concerned about whether an official affiliation with the group would mean the loss of autonomy and self-determination. They were cautiously interested in supporting IWJ-GKC, but were concerned about being co-opted by the group and its current agenda. This one decision made in June, based on what was seen as an undemocratic process, had unintended ripple effects throughout the social justice community.

At the July meeting, a discussion of the New Sanctuary Movement was front and center. A member of People of Faith for Hospitality and Justice, the organization helping IWJ-GKC lead Sanctuary, was there to talk about IWJ-GKC's role in the movement. He began to recount the history of the New Sanctuary Movement, noting that People of Faith for Hospitality and Justice was formed in November 2006 as a response to the Minutemen presence in the Kansas City area. In researching immigration issues, they came across the New Sanctuary Movement. John Sweeney's letter regarding immigration from June, 2007 was referred to again at this meeting as being consistent with the things the New Sanctuary Movement wants to accomplish even though there is no indication in the letter that churches – or any organization – should provide sanctuary for immigrant families. Reverend Rick pointed out that twelve congregations had come together and identified a family in need of sanctuary. The roll out event was planned for August 14th to announce the movement in Kansas City and to announce that there is a family in sanctuary. He said the effort was not about trying to impact legislation, but to make a “statement” addressing the broken immigration system. Further, having a family in sanctuary “puts a face on this issue,” but for the hosting congregations, “It’s about helping people in the way the Bible mandates.” The question was raised, “What is IWJ-

GKC's role?" Reverend Rick answered, "To act in leadership by developing the coalition and to serve a spiritual role like Joshua at the wall of Jericho." He pointed out that "This is not just a political issue, but a real moral issue. People are people, not aliens."

Following this discussion, there were still some concerns raised regarding the implications for the entire general membership about IWJ-GKC's involvement in the movement, but Daniel again emphasized moving past fear in his closing evaluation.

The August 14th, 2007 unveiling of the New Sanctuary Movement Coalition of Greater Kansas City had to be put off because one of the family members of the original family the coalition was going to focus on decided to go back to Mexico. It was announced at the September meeting that the coalition made the decision to "come out" as supporters of the New Sanctuary Movement so that if anyone felt they needed sanctuary, they would know who to turn to. Ron said the coalition decided to "show Kansas City to be a place of sanctuary should it be needed." The plan was to place a billboard stating "Love the Immigrant as Yourself" and "Keep Families Together" along a Kansas City highway, with the Biblical reference Leviticus 19:33-34, "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God." Judy, who was still with the group at the time, offered to help formulate answers for the press and counter-demonstrators. There was an anticipated backlash against the group's immigrant-related activities because of its recent involvement in a controversy involving the appointed Board Commissioner of the Parks Department, who was a member of the Minutemen (described in detail below).

The rollout event was held on September 25, 2007 and was attended by about 125 people from twenty different congregations (Franey 2007; “Kansas City Congregations Offer Sanctuary” 2007). There were a lot of new faces I had never seen before, tied to the New Sanctuary Movement Coalition of Greater Kansas City and just a few faces I knew as regular, core members of IWJ-GKC. The coverage in the *Kansas City Star* raised the issue of legality that several group members had also raised, and the low attendance by actual IWJ-GKC members was an indication of where people stood on this issue.

According to the *Star*,

The churches say providing shelter isn't against the law, because church members wouldn't resist agents coming on church property. But Kris Kobach, a University of Missouri-Kansas City law professor, said federal law prohibits harboring an illegal immigrant with knowledge the person is in the U.S. illegally. ‘There are many points of view about the role of churches in our society and how much civic engagement there should be,’ said Kobach. ‘But I think one area that until very recently has been pretty clear is, churches shouldn't themselves violate federal law.’

Not only was the question whether churches should violate the law, there was also voiced concern over whether the group’s recently obtained non-profit status could be revoked if they actually came to offer sanctuary to an illegal immigrant. The issue never arose: during the course of my study, the Sanctuary Coalition did not connect with a family in need of sanctuary, so arguably IWJ-GKC’s support of the New Sanctuary Movement needlessly marginalized key members of the group. By October, 2007 Dan Johnson, the labor co-chair resigned from the group (discussed below).

After unveiling the New Sanctuary Movement in Kansas City, the meetings of the membership of IWJ-GKC proceeded with general discussions regarding immigration. In October, the conversation turned to the issue of unions and immigration. Daniel pointed out that “Immigration is a bit of a stretch for many union members.” The discussion

proceeded with the understanding that unions are struggling with how to deal with immigration because of a history of racism. One reverend pointed out that today's immigrants "are just the wrong color" and Deacon Lewis followed up by saying, "Speaking from a spiritual health perspective, we should never become comfortable with our prejudice." Members were encouraged to think about the immigration issue because it had essentially been dropped by Congress. Reverend Rick argued that it is now up to IWJ-GKC to take up the issue.

At the November meeting, the immigration educational packet, "For You Were Once a Stranger" produced by the national IWJ was passed out by Daniel. He said this was meant to be an educational moment in response to calls for more education on immigration issues. Daniel noted as far as position and policies of the group goes, the national office already has worked it out and he encouraged members to read the provided packet. Daniel then emphasized, "We need to be prepared to have a rational conversation or we will be left behind." It was also noted during this segment that a bishop in Oklahoma called a service with 1500 people in attendance and said the current Oklahoma legislation which essentially banished immigrants from that state is "immoral." Mike Lewis pointed out that the churches are coming into this issue. He supported Daniel's segment by saying the issue is timely for IWJ-GKC, again, because of legislation that will be coming soon.

The two paragraphs above read as an almost afterthought. This is intentional because these discussions began to occur almost as an afterthought. Clearly the group needed more education and more "rational conversation" about the issues all along, but early on, they were not allowed to do so as the group was plunged into the New

Sanctuary Movement before it could even formulate a stance. However, from the perspective of the national office, “Twenty-two congregations in Greater Kansas City joined the New Sanctuary Movement after a *long process of education and deliberation* [emphasis added] in 2007” (“Interfaith Worker Justice 2007 Annual Report” 2007:1). Also in the Annual Report, under a section titled “Grassroots Mobilization,” the engagement of hundreds of people to participate in the New Sanctuary Movement is listed as one of IWJ-GKC’s 2007 accomplishments, along with supporting the Justice for Janitors and the nurses campaigns (“Interfaith Worker Justice 2007 Annual Report” 2007:13).. The latter two, from the local perspective, can certainly be described as grassroots, however, I argue it is disingenuous to describe engagement in the New Sanctuary Movement this way based on the narrative told above.

Confronting the Minutemen: Francis Semler

Concern for a Minutemen presence in Kansas City was raised initially in October, 2006. Judy Ancel pointed out there were two chapters in Kansas City and they had attempted to shut down a day laborers’ center. Dan sent out an email after the meeting addressing the discussion with an attached petition “to protect the civil rights of immigrants in hopes of ending racism and discrimination towards them...More discussion will be held at the next IWJ-GKC meeting about the group endorsing [the petition].” He also attached a document put together by the Center for New Community, a national justice-based organization, describing the Minutemen so that the group could have an “informed discussion at the next meeting.”

At the November meeting, the issue of the group endorsing the petition was raised. This document was specifically in opposition to the Minutemen in Kansas City

who were planning a “Support American Workers” rally in the area. A motion was made to sign the petition in opposition to the Minutemen presence and discussion was opened. All ended up voting in favor to sign the petition for several reasons including the argument that “immigration is a worker justice issue” and agreements that hate groups and racism need to be exposed in their efforts to promote worker justice; all of these issues are related. Reverend Barrett argued,

Racism is a part of everyday relations. Hispanics have become the new scapegoat. Border pressure and economic issues become disguises to cover up the underlying issue of racism. This issue should be a concern for any Christian. These groups are an attack on the idea that America is a community for everyone. Signing the petition helps us define who we are. Okay, I’m not going to preach anymore!

When in June, 2007, the mayor of Kansas City appointed a member of the local Minutemen Civil Defense Corps, members of IWJ-GKC were understandably concerned. At the July monthly meeting, the issue of Frances Semler’s appointment was raised and it was proposed that the Actions and Outreach committee work on a group stance, together with local Latino community groups. The question was raised whether the issue was still important because one month had passed since Semler’s appointment. There was uncertainty: some said yes, it was a concern, others said no, but there was agreement that more thought needs to be given to the issue. It was pointed out that not only was Semler a member of the Minutemen, she also belonged to the Federation for American Immigration Reform, a somewhat benign title, but the group had a reputation for being anti-immigrant and anti-Catholic.

Local Latino activists were the first to voice public opposition to the mayor’s decision and the issue received considerable press coverage. According to the *Kansas City Star*, the president of the Coalition of Hispanic Organizations in Kansas City said,

“‘It's like a member of the Ku Klux Klan’ being appointed to the board” (Helling 2007).

Mayor Funkhouser claimed he was not aware of her connections to the Minutemen before the appointment, but that regardless of the group’s views, he planned to “‘work with lots of people whose views are totally different from mine’” (ibid.). Further,

Semler said she was ‘not active’ in the group, but Ed Hayes, the president of the Heart of America chapter of the Minuteman Civil Defense Corps, said Semler was helping to organize a march in Topeka to oppose immigration reform. ‘She's a member who helps us,’ Hayes said of Semler. Asked whether she considered the Minuteman group racist, Semler said, ‘Heavens, no.’ ‘They're a little strident, but not racist,’ she said. ‘I wish you wouldn't make a big deal out of this.’ (Helling 2007).

Semler was also interviewed on CNN in 2003 to talk about her views on immigration, during which she suggested the US government halt all *legal* immigration until it was able to impose the law (Smith and Horsley 2007).

A rally was held on June 14, 2007 attended by representatives of the Coalition of Hispanic Organizations, the Jewish Community Relations Bureau/American Jewish Community, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the NAACP (Campbell 2007; Smith and Horsley 2007). The protesters, along with six members of the City Council called for Semler’s removal. That day, Semler offered her resignation, but Mayor Funkhouser rejected it, “saying he has talked with her and is convinced she has the best interests of Kansas City parks as her priority” (Campbell 2007). The City Council voted to get rid of Semler, and while their vote was not legally binding, they meant it as a reprimand to the mayor who, “scolded council members for opposing Semler without knowing her or speaking to her” (Smith 2007a). Mayor Funkhouser described Semler as a, “74-year-old grandmother who has been found guilty by association” (Campbell and Horsely 2007). This characterization of Semler later became important when IWJ-GKC

decided to take action on the issue: she became the “victim” of hate and intimidation. This controversy went on for several months leading the NAACP and La Raza to threaten to pull upcoming national conventions from Kansas City unless Semler was removed. La Raza eventually moved their 2009 convention to Chicago over the upset, while the NAACP held their 2010 convention in Kansas City.

At the Actions and Outreach committee meeting in July, Deacon Lewis mentioned Semler’s appointment and the committee tabled the issue for further discussion in order to determine if there were any worker justice issues related to her appointment. Daniel decided to set up a subcommittee to work on the Semler controversy, but involved no other IWJ-GKC leadership¹³. A letter was written asking for Semler to resign and it was printed using IWJ-GKC letterhead. Instead of mailing the letter to Semler’s home, they decided to hand-deliver it, a tactic that Daniel would later describe as having a more significant impact because “it is symbolic.” Similarly, Reverend Voss pointed out there was a scriptural basis for delivering a letter to Semler. It was not meant to harass her, but meant as an effort to show her IWJ-GKC’s position in private, rather than coming out with a public statement. It was not until after inaccurate reporting in the *Star* that they decided to hold the press conference. She referred to Matthew 18:15 – “If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.” Reverend Voss closed by noting, “We are making a difference and anyone working to make a difference will receive criticism.”

¹³ I was told in a confidential correspondence that only one other key member, who later questioned why being the only one involved, was asked to help put together a plan. This detail has important implications for the repercussions the action had in the community and on the group, but I do not elaborate further because of confidentiality.

This action, done in the name of IWJ-GKC, did not receive favorable press, neither from the print media, nor broadcast media. As one member (confidentially) put it, it allowed the press to “have a hay day and it has been a recruitment tool for the Minutemen. Many of the calls to the talk shows wanted the phone number of the Minutemen so they could join.” According to one *Kansas City Star* article, “Wednesday, Semler called the police after a group saying it represented churches, labor and Hispanic groups knocked on her door and left a letter asking her to resign. Police said they would step up patrols of her neighborhood” (Smith 2007b). The article further described the incident,

On Wednesday, Semler said she was at home when she got a phone call wanting to confirm her identity, and then the caller immediately hung up. A short time later, about 10 a.m., eight or nine individuals were at her doorstep, and she heard pounding on the door. She said she thought they were spoiling for a confrontation with her, so she did not go to the door but looked out from a side window. She said they eventually departed, leaving behind a letter from 11 churches, union groups and Hispanic organizations calling for her resignation, citing her membership in the Minutemen. The hand-delivered letter was on the stationery of the Interfaith Worker Justice of Greater Kansas City. Daniel Romero of the organization expressed surprise Wednesday afternoon that The Star had received the letter from Semler. He declined to comment on what occurred at Semler's home. (Smith 2007b)

The mayor condemned the action, saying “It is taking the discussion to a new low” (ibid.).

Semler claimed the incident “left her shaken,” and Reverend Barrett was quoted in the *Star* saying, “We don’t regret delivering her the letter... We do apologize to her. Our only regret would be that she was frightened in any way, shape or form” (Smith, Helling, and Horsely 2007). The article additionally pointed out that Semler did not feel the group had really apologized “because members said they would do nothing differently” (ibid.). The action also generated letters to the *Star*. One reader wrote, “So it

took six people from the Interfaith Worker Justice of Greater Kansas City to deliver a letter to Frances Semler. What's the matter? Haven't they heard of the U.S. Postal Service? Six people was six too many." ("Letters to the Star" 2007). Others wondered why the group was trying to intimidate a harmless old lady by showing up on her doorstep. Not everyone voiced opposition, however. Some letters were written to chastise Mayor Funkhouser for being "stubborn" in the face of such community outrage.

The letter to Semler was hand-delivered without the knowledge of key leaders of the group who ended up calling an emergency meeting prior to the September, 2007 meeting of the general membership. I was told confidentially that the labor community was "livid" over the incident and that one of IWJ-GKC's key organizing campaigns would be affected as a result. It was decided at this emergency meeting to not bring the issue up at the meeting of the general membership for two reasons: those who met felt that the issue was potentially explosive and that Daniel would be the target; secondly, there were several international guests scheduled to come talk at the meeting to share about their experiences of uniting faith and labor communities in their own countries. IWJ-GKC leadership did not want this issue to detract from their presence. Disregarding this decision, Daniel compiled a report outlining the step-by-step timeline leading up to the Semler incident and this was presented at the meeting of the general membership, "in an act of defiance."

The timeline was written in a way that emphasized that the action was designed by committee, the Actions and Outreach committee in particular, but I was told this was not the case. At the September meeting, Reverend Voss conveyed the series of events leading up to the delivery of the letter to Semler. She emphasized how the decision-

making process was not carried out by one person, but was a process engaged in by several people over a series of many meetings. She pointed out that a lot of “love, the gift of presence, and prayer” went into this action and all other actions engaged in by the Actions and Outreach committee. I was told, confidentially, that Reverend Voss was not present at all of the dates reported on and she had, as one member put it, “difficulty getting through the report.” Another key member told me confidentially after the September meeting that the report was a “complete fabrication.”

The reported timeline included the following (in summary): A first attempt was made to deliver a letter to a home listed under Semler’s name, but it was found out this was not her residence. The *committee* after that decided they needed more education about hate groups before making another attempt, so they had an educational meeting and decided to deliver a second letter to Semler’s home on September 5. She was not home so they left the letter there. In response to misrepresentations of the intent of the letter in the *Kansas City Star*, the Actions and Outreach committee met and decided to hold a press-conference to state what their intentions were. The timeline made a special note of the fact that Actions and Outreach, along with Board members were working together with a Latino-based group in this effort. It was emphasized as a collaborative effort.

Big Losses

The delivery of the call-for-resignation letter to Semler’s home, along with the processes by which IWJ-GKC came to be involved in the New Sanctuary Movement, had lasting impacts on the group membership. At the October, 2007 meeting the resignation of Dan Johnson as Labor Co-Chair of IWJ-GKC was announced, as well as the resignation of John Boyd (a Board member and lawyer specializing in workers’

compensation issues). Reverend Barrett was careful not to elaborate the details of their departures, but he said their service and dedication has been greatly appreciated and he moved that IWJ-GKC send them letters of thanks for their service. A member of the Teachers Union agreed to fill in as the interim labor co-chair. Daniel pointed out at the meeting that IWJ-GKC's bylaws give the Board authority to elect co-chairs, but members present asked to ratify the interim co-chair's position anyway. When Daniel reminded the group of the procedures, one member pointed out that the procedures did not matter and she felt the general membership should show support for the new labor co-chair and she subsequently moved to support the chair's role. The motion was seconded and Reverend Barrett, asked, "Well, all in favor?"

The loss of Dan was quite a blow to the group. He was, for me, the face of the organization because it was through IWJ-GKC that he lived out his faith expression. Rather than attending a congregation, Dan said, "This is my way of being religious." The shock of the announcement of his resignation was audible in the voices and visible on faces at the October meeting. I had been notified by Daniel of Dan's resignation prior to meeting in an email communication, but was still saddened by the announcement. There are several details and a number of incidents that led up to Dan's departure. These were shared with me confidentially and I was asked not to relay them in writing, but I can point out that he left because decision-making processes had become undemocratic and the national office had become unresponsive to the culture, the context, and the concerns of the general membership in Kansas City. Dan said that he decided to leave because "The group is more important than me."

Another retreat was held with representatives from the national office in November, 2007, but this was a retreat for the “key leadership” of IWJ-GKC. The purposes of the retreat were to orient new board members; to talk about getting new IWJ-GKC members; to redefine the structure; and to develop methods for communicating. A significant portion of the retreat was devoted to discussing the expectations of Board members. Charese and Will were there to talk about IWJ national’s history and campaigns. Charese said, “Our emphasis is on organizing *religious communities* to stand together with unions and workers.” So, the direction of the organization, based on the tenor of this meeting, was seemingly leaning towards one with a strong role for the Executive Board, and one defined as being led by religious communities.

An impressive list of goals was generated during a brainstorming session for IWJ-GKC’s three-year plan, which included for 2008, a membership increase (75 individuals, 10 churches, 5 unions); holding a fundraising event; impact the ’08 elections through voter registration in partnership with other groups; elect a Latino to the IWJ-GKC board; increase public relations; hold a house party; create a website and a yearly newsletter; hire support staff; expand Building Bridges, amongst other goals. The list could have potentially generated an excitement for growth, but it was at this meeting that Denny spoke to me about the possibility of taking a break from the group. He was troubled by a full-day’s discussion of programs, campaigns, and expansion with no funds to support any of them. As IWJ-GKC’s treasurer he was aware of its history of fundraising and the kinds of expenses that could be incurred through what looked like lavish programming for a group that was all but floundering at the time.

Things fell apart over the holidays. By February, 2008, Denny had resigned and as a result the February meeting was postponed one week and was held at Reverend Barrett's church, rather than at Denny's union local. Another member from the Plumbers Union who had recently been elected to serve on the Executive Board, but never even got started, also resigned. At the February meeting, Daniel said their reasons were concern over the immigration issues being dealt with by the group. By this time, Judy had also left the group and in March, I was told, once again that she left for "immigration reasons." Again, I felt this statement was odd, especially given Judy's extensive research and activism on immigration issues and her push for the group to consider how it could incorporate immigrant workers into its justice work all along. At a community "Summit on Immigration" – a program which Judy was key in organizing – she told me her leaving the group had absolutely nothing to do with immigration. Her reasons for leaving were similar to Dan's reasons including a lack of accountability in the decisions being made by the lead organizer and a national office that was not connecting to the concerns and context of their local affiliate.

At the February meeting, there were only a handful of people at Bethel AME. Concerns were raised over the "exodus of members," especially the trade union partners: those around the table were all representatives of faith. Reverend Barrett commented that that "confronting racial injustice is a systemic problem and is fraught with conflict. The problem may not be with individuals but with systems. The trade unions were built on a slavery mentality. We need to keep an open dialogue and we haven't always been good at that." Mike, however, pointed out, "Immigration is a touch-point, yes, but we can't simplify the problems we've had to this point only. There are a number of reasons why

people left that we don't need to get into today. No matter how many people sit at this table, the issues still exist and the mission is still the same." Despite the loss of members and disagreement over the reasons, there was still a sense of hope at the meeting. Ron said that he is used to working in small groups and that "they can still make an impact." Daniel went on to discuss the three kinds of models for IWJ affiliates in which the leadership is: entirely comprised of clergy and lay leaders; entirely comprised of labor leaders; or some combination of these, usually a fifty-fifty representation. He said he believed IWJ-GKC was moving towards the first model, comprised entirely of clergy and lay leaders. A move towards this model, however, meant not just a shift in group composition, but a shift in the group's identity.

Even with a loss of significant members and a changing group identity, the meeting moved forward with a discussion of plans for the future. Much of the talk centered on the group's responsibilities for fundraising to support Daniel's salary. They had failed to meet the requirements established by the national office for 2007, during which Daniel's salary was covered. The national IWJ compromised, proposing to provide him with a stipend through the first quarter of 2008 on the basis that IWJ-GKC would: raise \$10,000 dollars in the first quarter; engage the Executive Board in fundraising through personal contributions, house parties, and union/congregation contributions; and lastly, Daniel was required to communicate regularly with the national office.

At the March, 2008 meeting the major focus again was the group's financial circumstances. Ron had held a house party, but it had failed to raise the desired funds. It was announced that Daniel was searching for another job at the time. He said he felt the national office would not send another organizer until the group demonstrated the ability

to pay a staff salary. A Board meeting was called for March 25 during which they would discuss the status of IWJ-GKC's organizer and at the April meeting, it was announced that that day was Daniel's last as full-time organizer for the group.

The April meeting was attended by six members and usually held on the second Friday of each month, this one was held on the first. Reverend Barrett noted it was just an oversight on his part. He had begun sending out the minutes and the agenda for the meetings given the current transitions in the group. This meeting was quite informal: small numbers, a lot of humor and jostling around. There were Krispy Kreme donuts on the table, but no one seemed to know where they came from. Someone said that they were "manna from heaven." Reverend Barrett conducted the meeting, taking the reins from Daniel. Usually opening and closing reflections are scheduled and more formal, this day, they were given as almost an afterthought. There were no opening prayers as usual and no opening reflections: just a call to begin and a launching into a presentation on the minimum wage campaign in Kansas. After announcing Daniel's last day, Reverend Barrett pointed out he had offered to stay on as a volunteer organizer for the group, but the reverend felt uncomfortable about holding him to a volunteer position, suggesting that Daniel needs to be paid for his work. Daniel reiterated he was happy to do some work for the group on a volunteer basis, but Reverend Barrett said this is something to be decided in a Board meeting.

There were other issues on the table relating to finances, yet again. Daniel passed out a budget report and it was noted first by Reverend Voss that there were discrepancies in the sum of 25,000 dollars (the grant received to support the Building Bridges program) and the way those funds were allocated to support Daniel's salary through the national

office rather than supporting explicitly Building Bridges. There seemed to be some dissonance over the management of these funds, but Reverend Barrett said this matter should be discussed at the Board meeting. As explained in Chapter Two, I excused myself from the meeting so the group could work through those pressing issues rather than having to postpone them because of my presence.

At the end of the meeting, Reverend Barrett remarked, “What you’re writing about must’ve changed quite a bit!” I hung around for a few minutes to sign a gift for Daniel: a framed poster with the IWJ logo. There were messages and signatures in various Sharpie colors surrounding the image that would later be placed in a black frame and given to Daniel at his farewell dinner. In Reverend Barrett’s office, Reverend Voss and Ron were fishing around for verses to put on the poster for Reverend Barrett’s signature. Eventually after joking about a few, he decided to just sign the poster in red ink. I commented that I was in the presence of great minister minds at work and Reverend Voss pointed out memorizing scripture was not her thing: that she knew her favorite verses and that was about it.

Later in the evening, there was a dinner celebrating Daniel’s work as IWJ-GKC organizer for one year. When thanking Daniel for his service to the group, Reverend Voss thanked him for being “a man of God” and for letting that shine through his activism. She thanked him for being able to move the group into a place where they could “take risks.” During her moment, she looked Daniel straight in the eye – as is her style of affirmation – and asserted his man-of-god status. It is interesting the way she professes truth-claims with this demeanor. Later, after I had thanked Daniel for always making me feel welcome and a member of the group, Reverend Voss hugged me and told me it was very important

to Daniel that I was there and to hear me thank him. “It meant a lot to Daniel” she said. The meal was blessed in Spanish, everyone holding hands around the table. When saying goodbye, Daniel hugged me and said he would send me his new email address and also said he would see me at the May 1st prayer vigil in front of ICE.

Closure

The next meeting I attended was held in October, 2008. The purpose of this meeting was to regroup after the IWJ-GKC decided not to keep Daniel on earlier in the year. Because the numbers had so dwindled down and conflicts and distress were felt throughout the group, Ron had suggested they take a break for the summer in order to get some perspective. This was the first meeting in several months. I got out of the car and was greeted by Josef. Feeling like I had taken a hiatus myself, I was warmly met and he immediately asked me about my dissertation work: “Where are you? What’s going on?” We walked through the doors of Reverend Barrett’s church and started to turn upstairs, but a man who was washing the windows asked us if we were there for the meeting and directed us to the basement.

The room was fabulously clean and orderly. On the bright orange floor, four tables were pushed together to form a square, around which were arranged desk chairs on wheels. There was a blackboard and a dry erase board – both filled with prayers and lessons. There was coffee and “excellent donuts” available which Reverend Barrett said came from a donut shop “down the road where the donuts are handmade, not factory made. So have one because I’m not going to!” When I walked into the meeting area, Greg, from the Sheet Metal Workers was there – previously active in IWJ-GKC, he had not attended for quite a while. Mike greeted me with his customary “Hi kiddo!” and gave

his strong, warm handshake. Representatives from SEIU, the UAW, the Teachers' Union, and a representative from the nurses campaign were all present. Overall, thirteen people attended, with a strong labor presence and the climactic arrival of Dan Johnson and Roy Nixon.

The meeting started on time and was led by Reverend Barrett as the "Chair" or "Co-Chairs" as he said, and then jokingly commented "I am IWJ." Before the opening prayer, Dan and Roy came in. Everyone's attention was focused on Reverend Barrett starting the meeting, so that when Dan and Roy came in it was a surprise and an electricity went through the room. This was a pivotal moment and a signal of change. They were greeted with much excitement, hugs, handshakes, and welcomes. The way this meeting proceeded, was in many ways, a reflection of how things had proceeded in the past. The conversation centered on the status of the group. Someone mentioned something that sounded like "committee work" and Reverend Barrett said "Don't even mention that word around me!" In calling the meeting to order and talking about the focus of the meeting and the future, he emphasized that "We've come through a tough time, but now it's time to focus on the relationships we do have, on building new relationships, on deciding by *consensus*, and on *talking around the table*." "Consensus" was said several times throughout the meeting and was followed by statements like, "We don't want a bureaucracy;" "We don't want structure;" "The meetings will be less formal and more focused on talking through the issues on the agenda;" and "We don't want multiple committees."

They decided to keep affiliation with the national office, but to take their finances back: through the structural changes and closer ties to the national office, their funds

were relocated to Chicago because they have an accounting office. Reverend Barrett and Mike emphasized the importance of being able to control their own finances because they felt that some money during Daniel's tenure had been misspent and by keeping it in-house they could keep better track of their cash flow. There was a discussion over whether the 501(c)3 status would be kept and the issue was tabled because they wanted to ask the national office about this. The conversation quickly moved on, and it was emphasized that the group should have a "self-directed agenda, rather than one dominated by the national office." During the meeting, they accomplished the support – in the form of letter writing – to three different organizing campaigns for nurses, teachers, and home healthcare workers.

Reverend Barrett asked, "Well, where have we been and where are we going?" Jobs with Justice had recently come together in Kansas City and there were questions as to whether IWJ-GKC still had a place in this context. Reverend Barrett said, "Where we have been is through a difficult time. I'm not regretting having had Daniel around, but the non-consensus based decision making that happened during his tenure was not healthy for the group. Our structure became too rigid." Reverend Barrett happily introduced the Wal-Mart Report, which had effectively been removed from the program. Dan delivered the report and Reverend Barrett told a story about how in one of his daughter's classes, they had done a study on Wal-Mart and she came home "all fired up" and told him she understood why he felt the way he did. He said he was "ready to talk about Wal-Mart!" He conveyed the sentiment that IWJ-GKC has a unique perspective on the issues affecting the community and that there is no reason to not work in coalition with other groups like Jobs with Justice (JWJ), while maintaining their own purpose and autonomy.

He explained, “What’s unique about IWJ-GKC is that religion is strained through all our actions and is a part of our moral conscience,” whereas with JWJ, they have a religion chair, but they only draw on the religious community for support; it’s not the guiding principle.

Ron emphasized that there has been a lot of pain that the group has gone through. He asked several times, “What is distinct about IWJ as opposed to JWJ?” He suggested “maybe they all should go check it out.” He seemed cautious and hesitant and not sure what direction he wanted to go with the group. Mike pointed out that he felt, like Reverend Barrett that “There’s no reason to not have more than one group around. If we see union busting in our communities and groups not negotiating in good faith, then we should be there. These are guiding principles of the group.” Others seemed to agree that more than one organization could exist in the field.

After these discussions, they quite literally went back to the beginning: the original bylaws and vision statement dated December, 2004 were passed around for consideration. These things signify the clean slate approach: one member said, “Let’s go back to the beginning and pull together what excited us in the first place.” Everyone agreed that the vision statement reflected what they are about: “The Greater Kansas City Coalition for Worker Justice is a broad-based, diverse coalition, which will provide a support structure for workers in need of organizing resources, education opportunities, religious and community support of their efforts to gain dignity in the workplace.” They decided that the key elements to be addressed by the group include: supporting workers’ rights centers; advocacy efforts to craft public policy that is “progressive” and “moral”; confronting corporate power; educating legislative bodies, community groups, and young

people about workers' issues, utilizing the media to do so; and create urban-rural connections. Throughout these goals, there was a very specific focus on social and economic justice with the unions playing a major role in creating and continuing to support these issues.

Messages From The Future

Flyer for a May 24, 2009 Faust House Party

This fundraiser will plant seeds of growth for Interfaith Worker Justice in Kansas City. We will be sharing among friends about our work in IWJ and ways to partnership with other organizations. We are learning about and strategizing to pass the Employee Free Choice Act. Enjoy the evening near the Gazebo and Water Garden where weddings are performed and see the new bathroom and new quilt displayed in the living room. This will be a chance to win three prizes like a book and enjoy the Memorial Day Weekend (Stay as long as you want).

A July 3, 2009 email from Ron

IWJ? A few of us are keeping it going, trying to partner with Jobs With Justice and their new executive director, Darnell Johnson(?). I did learn a few tidbits, that I haven't even shared with the rest of the group. Charese married and moved to Baltimore...Daniel Romero dropped out of sight but wound up in Denver with an anti hunger program (no details?)...we'll probably morph into a religious emphasis group with JWJ although I have yet to propose what our identity will be. No doubt, KCIWJ was crippled and needing to find our way...

An October 29, 2009 email from Ron

Fellow Colleagues concerned about worker justice,
Our next Interfaith Worker Justice meeting is scheduled for Friday, Nov. 13, 2009 at 1pm in the Sheet Metal Workers Local No 2 hall, 2902 Blue Ridge Blvd. This notice is to project ahead with the new time. We are undergoing transition and changing times. We want to work with Jobs With Justice and IJAM [Immigrant Justice Advocacy Movement]. We need suggestions on how to make the organizations work together and more effectively. Some of our discussion will focus on IWJ goals and moving into the new year with limited resources.

A January 25, 2010 email from Ron

Interfaith Worker Justice of Kansas City announces the co-chair of Greg Davidson and Mike Lewis to begin leadership on Feb. 9, 2010 at 1pm at the Sheet

Metal Workers Hall, 2902 Blue Ridge, Kansas City MO. Greg and Mike have long time union experience and historic IWJ commitment, which has provided faith-worker cooperation since 2004 and fulfilled the dream of Jerry Meszaros. We are trying to find our way again with a new dream, alongside JWJ and other partnerships within the labor movement. Mark your calendar for new time, new day, on Tues, Feb. 9 at 1pm.

Discussion

In this chapter, I have provided a narrative of changes in organizational form and processes over time based on IWJ-GKC's story. This narrative shows how a local agenda comes to be influenced by a national agenda and organizational decision-making moves from consensus-driven to board-centered. First, the national IWJ's agenda and form began to seep in as evidenced by changes in the way meetings proceeded, in the ways agendas came to be constructed, and by whom these changes were made. Further, discussions began to center on committee-based decision-making. Once IWJ-GKC got a full-time organizer who was paid by the national office, the group was maneuvered to focus on the New Sanctuary Movement through the inundation of national literature, even at a time when the local Actions and Outreach committee was working on formulating the group's *locally driven* immigration stance.

As the lead organizer took over direction of the meetings, they became more structured and agenda-drive, while those communal aspects (like the announcements segment) were removed from meetings all together. The new organizer was initially greeted with excitement and was seen as a stabilizing influence as the group focused on gaining funds and defining campaigns. However, while the group seemed to be working on local commitments, like having a presence at the May Day 2007 event to signify IWJ-GKC's commitment to immigrant workers, the group was later committed to the New

Sanctuary Movement with the acceptance of funds, managed by the national office, to form a Sanctuary Coalition in Kansas City. This decision was not made by the membership body and therefore, many key members felt isolated from group processes. This decision also isolated IWJ-GKC from some local supporters because of Sanctuary and because the questionable decision-making process led to questions about the group's stability.

Once fully committed to the New Sanctuary Movement, IWJ-GKC found that its labor supporters began to exit en masse. The reasons given were not because labor had issues with immigration, but they did have problems with the legality of the New Sanctuary Movement. Many felt that IWJ-GKC's immigration stance had shifted its focus away from worker justice. Finally, members were concerned about the presence of the Minutemen in Kansas City, but were exceedingly troubled by the decision to hand-deliver a letter to Francis Semler, the Minutemen member of the city's Parks Board. The action was framed as a group decision, when instead, several key members relayed that the decision was made by the organizer alone. This action, combined with the group's commitment to Sanctuary, led to big losses as key members exited the group.

Like Reinelt (1995), I am critical of the supposition that if a movement organization works with mainstream institutions, develops some hierarchy or bureaucratic structures, it has become fully co-opted. She argues this assumption is faulty because organizations can exist using a "modified collective form" without having been co-opted. This means that groups can have a board, meetings can be run by a chair, and that decision-making can be made by consensus (91-92). In fact, her argument, based on understanding women's shelters, is that for shelters to exist, they must garner community

support by building relationships with formal institutions (93). Reinelt's suggestion is helpful in understanding the changes that happened in IWJ-GKC over time as they came to take on a modified collective form. The group may not have been co-opted, but its focus did change in terms of agenda and decision-making.

I walk cautiously along the line of co-optation and influence because the former implies a release of agency. Working from the perspective developed by Emirbayer and Mische (1998) that people are always agentially oriented in some way, I argue IWJ-GKC very consciously built closer ties with the national office for the sake of building local capacity. Put simply, members wanted to have a greater impact on local issues based on worker justice and saw the opportunity to do so through its relationship with IWJ. Because all group members were actively involved in other organizations and/or holding full time jobs, they moved with excitement towards committee work, thus relieving some pressures on their time. They did so, however, in such a way that the general membership remained a part of the overall processes of decision-making. Discussions at meetings and conversations revealed an understanding that in order to widen the sphere of influence, the group needed to gain a little more solidity. As Acker (1995) points out, "completely egalitarian, collective decision-making and action are impossible to achieve over any substantial period of time, given the existing organizational structure of our society..." (140).

So, the problems that arose were not necessarily over the move towards a more structured environment. They instead arose because circumstances provoked non-consensus decision-making processes, reflecting a too-rigid structural form, along with

the adoption of an agenda that did not fully reflect members original goal: to enact worker justice. Arnold (1995) argues,

If an organization's structure is to embody the normative ideals of a social movement, then those who design that structure must agree on what those ideals are. This is not to say that ideological consensus on the meaning and goals of the movement will preclude disagreement about specific rules and procedures, but rather that the debate will be carried on within a context of shared assumptions and ties of solidarity that may sustain its members' commitment to the group during such conflicts. (287-288)

The national office's decision to make Kansas City a Sanctuary city by using the local IWJ-GKC as a means to achieve that purpose was a process that reflected an insensitivity to local concerns and ideological commitments. Several members who left the group did not see the New Sanctuary Movement as a workers' rights issue, even whilst they were working to formulate a stance on helping immigrant workers that the group could support by consensus. When the lead organizer entered the picture, he brought with him a different set of commitments, developing a Sanctuary coalition for the national IWJ being one of those. Pushing the group to move beyond its concern for Wal-Mart was also a portion of the national agenda that did not mesh with local concerns. Representatives from the national office actually spoke about the Wal-Mart campaign as a problem and emphasized a desire to move beyond this campaign, which was a foundational, organizing campaign for the group. While perhaps not a "winnable issue," the Wal-Mart campaign embodied the group's concern for corporate dominance of culture and exploitation of low-wage workers and was therefore an important focal point.

The analysis still begs the question of how all this came to be if members were focused on building their group and widening the sphere of influence in the community. One member told me confidentially that some group members did not deal well with

open confrontation and suggested that members who continued to go along with changes in the group, despite the fact that key members were leaving, chose to do so because they wanted to avoid confrontation. This is not an empty argument. In her work, Arnold (1995) found that activists in the battered women's movement in St. Louis, when new ideals were introduced, chose to avoid discussion and conflicts for the sake of keeping their group together (288). Arnold writes that this is not a neutral strategy, but one that ends up pushing the group towards a new set of commitments. In her study, the organization became more service-oriented, rather than committed to structural change (ibid.).

While the point of avoidance accounts for some of the changes that occurred, members did not wholly avoid talking about the problems with Sanctuary and decision-making processes that came to be attributed to the tactics of the lead organizer. A handful did discuss the unfolding problems with the director of the national office, who appeared troubled, but unresponsive (a point derived from confidential, personal communications). In the end, as one member put it, they were never sure what was the national office's "game." Based on my analysis, the national office simply had a vested interest in, and used their resources to do so, expanding the New Sanctuary Movement with the hope of pressuring Congress to enact sweeping immigration reform. Developing a Mid-Western city as a Sanctuary city would show that the movement was not limited to more liberal, coastal cities, and would thus further legitimate their concerns.

The problem of changes in decision-making processes still remains. Part of the problem resulted from the personality of the lead organizer who cultivated an antagonistic environment and troubled relationships more than he sustained, as I was told

by members who left the group. However, leading IWJ-GKC was his full time appointment and he saw his role as one meant for making decisions for the group between meetings of the committees and the general membership. His orientation to the group did not take into account its history of consensus decision-making, and it is likely that he saw this as a hindrance to moving the group forward. Further, his tactical orientation was the kind members were most critical of as I discussed in Chapter Three. He was more open to “agitation” than dialogue as the problematic decision to hand-deliver the letter to Francis Semler shows. An energetic and caring person, I do not wish to villainize him, but once Daniel left the group and once IWJ-GKC distanced itself from the national office, there was a sense of relief and the hope for the possibility of building the group once again.

Despite changes that happened in the group, its outcome should not be viewed as “failure” simply because the organization floundered. Staggenborg (1995) points out that the success of a social movement does not always end when movement organizations are terminated. She writes that one measure of success is the “activation of a pool of people who can be drawn into subsequent movements” which she calls “mobilization outcomes” (341). Since IWJ-GKC – the manifestation of the group I studied – disbanded, there have been repeated calls to reorganize and people gather together to tackle specific issues. Individuals still work through their various networks on worker justice issues, locally-based. A successful chapter of Jobs with Justice has also been established and several IWJ-GKC members are active there. Writing to me across the years, IWJ-GKC members are proud of what they accomplished and many feel, despite the tensions caused by group changes and conflict, that they also had an impact on the local culture, activating, more

broadly, network connections between religious groups and labor unions¹⁴. I turn to this point in the concluding chapter because the work IWJ-GKC engaged generated important lessons for the collaboration between religion and labor, and for the future success of the labor movement in the US.

¹⁴ Staggenborg (1995) writes that another measure of movement success is reflected in “cultural outcomes,” which relate to “broader change in public and private values and meanings created by movements as new vocabularies and new ideas are introduced and disseminated...” (341). I did not measure this outcome, but members feel they impacted the local culture through their work, and certainly this should be counted as a successful move for worker justice and for collaboration between religion and labor.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Interinstitutional Relationships: Religion and Labor Together

This project raises questions about the processes involved in faith-based worker justice activism, especially ones that focus on how faith and labor communities can interact in a way that they positively impact the lives of workers. Based on a sense of justice that redefines work and the worker as sacred, as contributing to the overall workings of society, and as the way faith practitioners take part in “sacramental creation,” these activists position themselves as allies to the labor movement. A well-funded study, broader in scope, could investigate these relationships in depth. However, even given the limitations of this project, my field observations and the interviews produced important results regarding the way people of faith who are interested in impacting worker justice issues – especially for low-wage workers – think about the labor movement, including relationship, local and national union politics, and tactics. They come from a perspective that is both critical and appreciative.

First, fully aware of the complicated history of the labor movement, locally and nationally, those people of faith I observed in action hold labor unions and the work they can do in high regard. This is important in a national context where labor unions are losing favorable opinions across most demographic categories (Pew Research Center for the People & the Press: 2010). Positive attitudes towards unions are at an all-time low since 1936 (*ibid.*). At the planning retreat held by IWJ-GKC in December, 2006, national IWJ organizer Will asked the question, “Why get involved with IWJ in the first place?” Several responses marked the importance of establishing ongoing relationships between

faith and labor. One member said, “Organized religion and labor are a perfect match, if done properly. From the union perspective, there’s a need for new and potential members, so any resource that provides guidance and stability is essential and a church member is an excellent source of support.”

Members additionally view labor as a present movement, not one only historically important. At the July, 2007 monthly meeting, a United Methodist minister said, “Labor isn’t a historic movement: it’s a present movement,” and he spoke about this to his congregation, marking Labor Day in September, 2007. Another member belonging to the Plumbers Union also pointed out at the May, 2007 monthly meeting that one of his personal goals is “clarifying labor’s present and separating it from its colored past.” He said that he does this at job fairs and even in his church. He further argued that “Individual politics should not matter in terms of how people support the union. That’s only an individual variation and it shouldn’t matter in life.”

Finally, one of the ways the group itself tried to impact views of labor unions was through its program Building Bridges. The program was focused on preparing women and people of color to take the apprenticeship exams for the trades. While they largely focused on developing math skills, a portion of the program was devoted to educating the students about the importance of unions. During one of the classes I attended, Judy outlined the history of the US labor movement and emphasized why it is still important. She pointed out that, “The biggest wage cuts often go to the lowest paid workers.” Students replied, “That’s just dirty!” and “I don’t know how they get away with it!” Speaking to people who had long been disenfranchised there was little need for much

convincing about exploitation. However, during this class, I witnessed a transformation as students came to understand that collective power is possible.

Taken together, these stories reflect contributions religious groups could make to the labor movement through partnership (see Table 1). Even being fully aware of labor's historical prejudices, members of IWJ-GKC held unions in high regard, going against the national trend of local union favorability. IWJ-GKC members were located at the intersection of religion and labor, understanding the logics of both. Through a practice-oriented faith with an emphasis on immanence and enacting a sense of justice, they provided a certain moral authority to worker justice issues. Next, because members, by defining work and workers as sacred, saw the labor movement as a present movement, not one historically located, religious partners arguably could help the labor movement frame its concerns as relevant to today's context, especially through its politics and tactics (see Tables 2 and 3). Lastly, religious communities are often specially located to work with disenfranchised communities. Therefore, labor's influence could be expanded by committing to local programs for minority and women workers, whether they be pre-apprenticeship programs or seminars that teach low-wage workers about the benefits of organizing.

Table 1:

Religious Partners

- Boost favorable opinions about labor by drawing on moral authority.
 - Help frame labor concerns in terms relevant to today.
 - Through specific programs that target minority and women workers, expand labor's influence.
-

With the group comprised of some labor union members and through their interactions on organizing campaigns for nurses, janitors, teachers, and delivery drivers,

they also had a lot to say about the politics of local and national unions (see Table 2 below). Seeing churches and unions as “natural partners” did not exempt them from critique. Just as members were critical of organized religion for its lack of action on social justice issues, they were also critical of unions’ loss of focus. Dan pointed out to me in an email in November, 2007,

The Unions and Congregations have much in common from their roots, but have both let affluence water down the drive. Unions, historically, try to protect their turf and the leaders try to insulate themselves from election loss by controlling the membership content (family, close friends and referrals of friends). This is particularly true of Building Trades Unions, but even the Teamsters have had their bouts with nepotism ... which in turn controls the work force, work rules and elections. Leaders begin to forget what they are protecting and who they are there to help and spend more time trying to extend their position in power. Unions began, to band together to help everyone where if one prospers they all share. Over the years, the Unions have abandoned real organizing and sat back enjoying their wealth until now the work force is dominated by non-union companies. Leaders now have the ‘woe is me’ attitude and blame the low paid immigrant, non-union worker instead of the companies that take advantage of these same workers. Government and the general population has turned the blind eye but relished in the cheap labor driving down cost. Everyone is worried about overpaying everyone but themselves. They don't want to pay police, fire, teachers or any worker top wages, except themselves.

A Teamster himself, Dan talked extensively with me about the history of the Teamsters. He proudly served as his union’s steward, despite understanding the reality of union politics. He explained that UPS started out as a union company. He said that UPS “management can be brutal,” but because UPS workers have always had representation, they are a little “spoiled” and many are unaware of their union history. Still, both Denny and Dan talked with excitement about their local unions being great examples for working to achieve better standards of living for their workers. Denny said about his local union,

And basically we are the pinnacle of achieving that [the forty-hour work week, public education, worker safety, health insurance, and pensions]: this local union.

You can go anywhere in the country, but you take a look at our local union and you can't find a better example of achieving that for the working man in this country.

Dan experienced some disappointments because meetings of local unions do not always get good turnouts, so it was not always easy to try to educate local union members about the work IWJ-GKC was engaging in the community. When IWJ-GKC started their campaign against the new Wal-Mart site at the Blue Ridge Mall, Ron said they “couldn’t get local unions to commit to supporting an ongoing anti-Wal-Mart campaign.” He felt that more “energy” was needed from the local unions in IWJ-GKC’s efforts to work with unorganized and low-wage workers. Still, he said in interacting with local union members who did get involved in their actions and campaigns, he found “people with great integrity who are concerned for people at the bottom.” Judy echoed that they just could not get labor to take leadership on the Wal-Mart issue, so it died out.

Mike similarly expressed mixed feelings about the local labor context. While he talked about the importance of labor union history, he said that the local labor community “is one large, dysfunctional family.” He felt that while the national labor movement understands global inequality, the local context is too parochial: “they’re into their own selfishness.” He did feel, however, that by getting into coalitions with religion, local unions could get “an image makeover.” Judy voiced these concerns a little differently, but they still point to local unions needing a broader outlook. Because Judy serves as the Director for the Institute of Labor Studies at UM-KC, I wanted to get her view on some of the recent literature. I asked her if she thought Clawson’s (2003) and Tait’s (2005) suggestions that the revitalization of labor will come through coalition building with non-labor based groups was applicable to the Kansas City context. While she believes these

coalitions will be the way to build labor up again nationally, the local context is a little complicated. She explained,

Part of the problem is [these works] sort of make an assumption that labor shares the vision that they have of a much more energized class-conscious labor movement and I don't think that's true in Kansas City of the labor unions here. I think that labor consciousness in Kansas City is very pragmatic. It's still really dominated by a vision of business unions. They understand the pain and they understand what they're up against to some extent and they know they're losing. But, they've never done the analysis to try to figure out why and so I think that's possibly why the participation by labor in the coalition is pretty limited. Most unions are still very, very inward looking and don't see themselves as part of a much bigger movement, even part of the labor movement, let alone a broader movement... They've been very successful in building alliances with community groups in order to win their goals, but it's not to transform society. Clawson and Vanessa Tait, you know, are really transformational in their vision and the people here in Kansas City are just looking at survival.

Still, regardless of their critiques, members believed in the significance of IWJ-GKC. It was seen as filling the gap in the community to bring together local labor groups, religion, and politicians. If anything could help this dysfunctional family function, members felt IWJ-GKC was positioned to help. Their critiques of the local labor context did not mean the national labor movement was glorified. Members equally took a critical stance on the national labor context, especially in the ways its politics affected the local level. Judy said that as the group was coming together in 2004 and 2005, the union side “put up with a lot of scolding from the religion side” because the national labor movement has a history of getting into coalition only when it suits their interests.

While members talked about a disconnect between the local and the national labor contexts, they still noted how national union politics significantly impacted the local level. When the AFL-CIO lost some of its members in 2005 with the formation of Change to Win, problems developed locally, despite that local unions tried to let the national level politics play out. Dan explained,

So that created a little problem when trying to work together and so forth. Take the building and trades for instance. Most of them stayed with the AFL-CIO, but they were told at one time to kick out anybody that wasn't part of the AFL-CIO, which we [his Teamsters local] belonged to the local [Greater Kansas City Building and Trades Council] here and so did 541 and so did the Laborers. Well, when that all happened it hurt Gary [Director of the Building and Trades Council] something fierce because we had planned to go ahead and let them do whatever they want on the national level, but we need to work together here locally. But he was forced to kick us out or he was going to lose his affiliation with the national. It was a blackmail type thing. So we've had to kind of work around that and that's where IWJ-GKC and the roundtable and things like that have kind of bridged that gap because it brings all the other labor people together without being under the umbrella of either building trades or AFL-CIO, or a Coalition to Win or under any of that.

Frustrated by local and national labor politics, members talked about labor's decline, but not without evaluating ways that it could be built up again. Dan, Judy and Mike all talked about labor's sordid history of racism and sexism, locally and nationally. They felt that unions need to face up to this history and intentionally work to move past it. One way this can happen is by building strong coalitions and by having regular dialogue with religious organizations: especially at the local level. Both Mike and Denny said that labor has worked to the point that its workers are fully middle class and well-off. They are impregnated with a sense of elitism. Mike argued that labor's focus now should be on workers facing "gross injustices and on immigration reform." Denny similarly commented that the only way labor will resurge in the US is by getting immigrant and poor workers organized: "They are going to be the rejuvenators of labor," he said. Coalitions like IWJ-GKC, members understandably felt, are central to rebuilding labor, giving it an "image makeover" by refocusing its efforts on those workers who are most greatly exploited. In this way, labor could reposition itself as inclusive and diverse, rather than racist and sexist.

Table 2:

Labor Politics

- At the national level, be responsive and sensitive to local concerns and relationships without imposing national politics.
- At the local level, focus more broadly on global inequality.
- At both levels, own labor's history of racism and sexism and move forward by forming coalitions with justice partners.

But, just meeting together in coalition is not enough. IWJ-GKC members talked about how some labor tactics are not always the most effective ways to tackle issues (see Table 3 below). Therefore, labor needs to be open to exploring new and different ways of trying to impact change. Importantly, tactics should be context-specific, sensitive to local cultures. On several occasions, as pointed out in Chapter Three, Josef talked about how the “aggressive” kinds of tactics that work on the Coasts may not be effective in the Mid-West where people respond better to dialogue and open negotiations. This is especially important when working together with clergy and lay leaders. Dan explained that union organizers tend to be aggressive, impatient and the “bristle up quickly,” whereas Denny said they are “reactive, constantly trying to defend their turf. Not proactive, like IWJ-GKC.” While the religion side, as Dan pointed out, may not always understand the pressure that labor leaders are under – “Their actions are sometimes misinterpreted” – labor has a history of waiting until they get into trouble to ask clergy to help. He argued that labor should look to form relationships with clergy and lay leaders early on in a campaign to help out negotiations, rather than waiting until they are at the point of striking to ask for support. He felt that a lot of churches are hesitant to get involved at that point because of “labor’s history of violence.” He said,

Most of that violence has been brought on by management, but it has nothing to do with religion and it makes it difficult... You know the religious community is

pretty much trying to do things on faith, to do things on diplomacy, and trying to appeal to people and so forth. Labor leaders get impatient.

Table 3:

Labor Tactics

- Be context-specific and sensitive to local cultures.
- Work towards dialogue rather than confrontation.
- Be proactive, rather than reactive.

Limitations and Extensions

Certainly more research is needed to draw general conclusions, but the discussion above draws on the knowledge and experiences of a group of people who have experienced on-the-ground organizing in coalition with faith and labor groups. Their arguments point to important avenues of research that I was not able to fully cover during the course of my study. The story of the organization suggests that a singular, national IWJ agenda is not applicable in all local contexts. A comparative study needs to be conducted to gain a richer understanding of the interplay between the national organization and its local affiliates. The national IWJ’s annual reports – a couple of which were used in the writing of this project – show that there is incomplete knowledge at the national level about the processes of decision-making and the kinds of relationships that are sustained at the local level. This argument may also be applicable to the national labor context: to better understand ways that labor can rebuild itself across the nation, it needs to be more sensitive to the politics and the relationships formed at the local level by being open to context-specific, locally generated tactics. Finally, one of my primary interests was in looking at religious practice in a context outside of established, organized congregations. While I was able to observe religious practices in the field and talk about

them a great deal with my interviewees, the scope of my project limited my ability to draw conclusions about the impact these forms of practice have on local religious bodies, as well as on the US religious landscape. Overall, the study, despite limitations on time and funding, significantly contributes to our understandings of lived religion, organizational forms and processes based on the drive to cultivate a new cultural space for practicing and action-based theology, and provides suggestions for the interinstitutional relationship between faith and labor groups that could prove fruitful for the US labor movement.

As the project unfolded, I drew on data collected over a period of three years to describe how through the combination of a critique of organized faith, along with an interest in pursuing faith expressions by living a particular sense of justice, IWJ-GKC members created a new context – a cultural space defined by the move from mercy to activism – to live out their faith experiences. I explored how members of IWJ-GKC sought to unite issues of worker justice and faith by redefining work and the worker as belonging to the realm of the sacred. In so doing, they challenge the boundaries that delineate the sacred and the profane, the public and the private. Based on particular family and faith histories, they have cultivated an understanding that all religions believe in justice, requiring that practitioners move from acts of charity to acts of justice in order to experience a deeper, more authentic faith. Further, through a narrative of the organizations, I showed how organizational form and structure are important even in the new cultural space. Rigid hierarchies and agendas insensitive to local contexts can stand in the way of justice work based on a framework of relationship-building and consensus decision-making. Organizational form became something that no longer coincided with

members desire to practice an action-oriented spirituality. Finally, I made recommendations for labor activists to consider, based on IWJ-GKC members' experiences in bringing together the communities of faith and labor.

Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Opening Dialogue (Life Narrative)

For this interview, I am interested in something like a life narrative, told in whatever way you would like to tell it, that brings us around to the point of how you got involved with IWJ-GKC and why you are involved with IWJ-GKC. I would like to learn about where you grew up, what your family was like, and your religious background. I am also interested in the work experiences you have had. Next, I would like you to reflect on what your work with IWJ-GKC means to you. How does it relate to or what does it do for your spiritual life? I will let you get started and will ask follow-up questions and ask you to explore a few other topics throughout our conversation.

The Organization

1. In your view, where has IWJ-GKC been, where is it now, where is it headed?
2. How would you define the organization? Is it a faith-based organization? A coalition between labor and religion? A bridge between labor and religion, etc.?
3. What would you say are the most significant goals and actions of IWJ-GKC in Kansas City?

Values and Practices (Individual and Institutional Logics)

4. What kinds of tensions and unifying concepts and/or practices have you observed in the relationship between labor and faith communities?
5. What is the significance of faith in the context of activism? That is, what would be the difference in working for worker justice in the absence of faith based organizing; What does faith “do” for the movement?

6. What kinds of faith practices/languages are acceptable in an interfaith setting and in what ways (if any) might you use different languages/practices in an interfaith setting? For example, one woman at the national conference said in interfaith settings, “Jesus is controversial” after which a conversation developed around in whose name do we pray in such a setting without excluding groups of people and/or isolating some people from their traditions.

Appendix B: Media Sources

Internet Sources

1. <http://josefwalker.com/>
2. <http://iwj.org/template/index.cfm>

Kansas City Local News

3. *The Kansas City Star*
4. *The Northeast News*
5. *Kansas City Hispanic News*
6. *University News* (from University of Missouri-Kansas City)
7. *The Pitch*

Missouri News

8. *Jefferson City News-Tribune*
9. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*
10. *Columbia Daily Tribune*

National News

11. *Washington Times*
12. *Wall Street Journal*
13. *New York Times*

Appendix C: Group Affiliations

Local Union Representation

Missouri State AFL-CIO
Tri-County Labor Council
Building and Trades Labor Council
United Auto Workers
Transportation Workers Union
Sheet Metal Workers Union
Pipefitters Union
Steelworkers Union
Plumbers Union
Roofers Union
American Federation of Teachers
Service Employees International Union
Laborers Union
Bricklayers Union
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
Communications Workers of America
Machinists Union
Teamsters
Asbestos Workers Union
Painters Union
Cement Masons Union

Affiliations of Board Members and Key Leaders

Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church
Tri-County Labor Council and Secretary-Treasurer, UAW Local 31
Communications Workers of America
Southern Heights United Methodist Church
Disciples of Christ
Heartland Presbytery
St. Patrick Catholic Church
American Federation of Teachers Local 691
Hispanic Ministries, Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas
Teamster's National Black Caucus, Teamsters Local 41
Grandview United Methodist Church
Presbyterian Church of Stanley
St. Mary's Catholic Church
Sons and Daughters of Immigrants
El Centro
Argentine Presbyterian Church
Community of Christ

Trinity United Methodist Church
Catholic Archdiocese of Kansas City, Kansas

Community Relationships

Communities Creating Opportunity: A faith-based community organization that developed in the 1970s in response to racial tensions and financial disinvestment in certain communities.

Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council: GKCIC focuses on building interfaith dialogue in the community.

Harmony: Harmony's focus is on building racial tolerance and dialogue, along with increasing interest in cultural diversity.

Westside Community Action Network: A day-laborer, workers center in Kansas City.

Kansas City Worker Justice Project: A project specializing in advocacy for low-income workers.

Metro Organization for Racial and Economic Equity (MORE2): A faith-based community organization comprised of sixteen congregations & faith communities.

Appendix D: List of Names and Brief Descriptions

IWJ-GKC Core Members: These are the members who appear in the dissertation. It is not an exhaustive list of the membership (alphabetical listing).

- **Dan:** served as IWJ-GKC's Labor Co-Chair during the first part of my study. Dan is a member of the Teamsters. He describes himself as a Methodist, though he does not attend a church. At the time of the interviews, he considered IWJ-GKC his faith community.
- **Denny:** was the Financial Secretary for his International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers local and he also served as IWJ-GKC's Secretary and Treasurer. Though Denny no longer thinks of himself as Catholic, he said he tries to live a Christian life through his justice work.
- **Josef:** a Catholic lay-leader, Josef was connected to a number of local justice organizations, seeing justice activism as central to his faith expression.
- **Judy:** the Director of the Institute for Labor Studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City. Judy describes herself as an atheist, but one who is "spiritual." In her work, she specializes in the problems facing immigrant workers.
- **Megan:** an organizer for an organization focused on health care concerns, Megan was active in the group until the processes of decision-making began to significantly change. She was not an interviewee, but is included here because she was the first to vocalize opposition to changing decision-making processes at a monthly meeting.
- **Mike:** a Catholic deacon and retired construction worker, Mike was described as the perfect marriage between faith and labor. Raised in a Catholic, union family, Mike said his work with IWJ-GKC was a natural part of who he is. He stayed active with the group through its transitions.
- **Rev. Barrett:** a minister of an African Methodist Episcopal church, Rev. Barrett also served as the Faith Co-Chair of IWJ-GKC throughout the study.
- **Rev. Voss:** a United Methodist minister, Rev. Judy Voss called IWJ-GKC her faith community.
- **Ron:** a Disciples of Christ minister, Ron said IWJ-GKC is "Church" with a "big C."
- **Susan:** an active IWJ-GKC member and Presbyterian lay-leader, Susan saw her connection to IWJ-GKC as one of her justice-based outlets. She worked extensively on issues relating to hunger and healthcare.

IWJ-GKC Summer Intern

- **Ilyse:** IWJ-GKC's summer intern. Ilyse's work especially focused on helping Daniel build the New Sanctuary Coalition. Her summer work with IWJ-GKC sparked an interest in religion.

IWJ-GKC Lead Organizer

- **Daniel:** IWJ-GKC's full time, lead organizer. Daniel became the focal point of conflicts that developed in the group over time.

Representatives from the National IWJ

- **Charese:** the Deputy Director of Interfaith Worker Justice who took an active interest in building and strengthening the local coalition.
- **Will:** the part time organizer, on "loan" to the local affiliate from the national Interfaith Worker Justice. Will laid the groundwork for IWJ-GKC's non-profit status and was instrumental in securing a major grant for the group.

Organizer from Service Employees International Union

- **Justin:** an organizer for SEIU, Justin significantly helped IWJ-GKC develop its Justice for Janitors campaign, which was described as a "model campaign."

Members of the New Sanctuary Movement Coalition: These members were all active in IWJ-GKC as well, but from the location of the New Sanctuary Movement Coalition. They were representatives at the center of this movement.

- **Father Pat:** head of Hispanic Ministries for the Archdiocese of Kansas City.
- **Laurie:** a Presbyterian lay-leader who took up the cause of the New Sanctuary Movement with a passion. She became a central organizer of the Coalition.
- **Rev. Rick:** a Presbyterian minister of a largely Hispanic congregation, primarily comprised of recent immigrants (legal and non-legal).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acker, Joan. 1995. "Feminist Goals and Organizing Processes." Pp. 137-144 in *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, edited by Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Alcoff, Linda Martin. 2000. "Phenomenology, Post-Structuralism, and Feminist Theory on the Concept of Experience." Pp. 39-56 in *Feminist Phenomenology*, edited by Linda Fisher and Lester Embree. Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- Ammerman, Nancy. 1997. "Golden Rule Christianity: Lived Religion in the American Mainstream." Pp. 196-216 in *Lived Religion in America*, edited by D. Hall. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- , 2007. "Studying Everyday Religion: Challenges for the Future." Pp. 219-238 in *Everyday Religion*, edited by N. Ammerman. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ammerman, Nancy Tatom, and Wade Clark Roof (Eds.). 1995. *Work, Family, and Religion in Contemporary Society*. New York: Routledge.
- Ammerman, Nancy Tatom, and Wade Clark Roof. 1995. "Old Patterns, New Trends, Fragile Experiments." Pp. 1-20 in *Work, Family, and Religion in Contemporary Society*, edited by Nancy Tatom Ammerman and Wade Clark Roof. New York: Routledge.
2007. "An Invitation to Join the New Sanctuary Movement." *Faith Works*, May, pp. 5-6.
- Armstrong, Elizabeth A., and Mary Bernstein. 2008. "Culture, Power, and Institutions: A Multi-Institutional Politics Approach to Social Movements." *Sociological Theory* 26:74-99.
- Arnold, Gretchen. 1995. "Dilemmas of Feminist Coalitions: Collective Identity and Strategic Effectiveness in the Battered Women's Movement." Pp. 276-290 in *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, edited by Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Barrett, Spencer. 2007. "As I See It." *Kansas City Star*, August 2, p. B10.
- Becker, Howard S. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Beckford, James. 2003. *Social Theory and Religion*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bender, Courtney. 2003. *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Bender, Courtney and Wendy Cadge. 2006. "Constructing Buddhism(s): Interreligious Dialogue and Religious Hybridity." *Sociology of Religion* 67:229-247.
2005. "Blue Ridge Mall Plan: Opponents of Wal-Mart Gather Signatures for Petition." *Kansas City Star*, March 8, p. 4.
- Bruner, L. Yvonne. 2008. "Demonstrators Voice Opposition to Minutemen Conference." *Kansas City Hispanic News*, February 7 & 13, pp. A1 & A6.
- Campbell, Matt. 2007. "Funkhouser Rejects Semler's Resignation Offer: Councilman to Call for Her Removal." *Kansas City Star*, June 14, np.
- Campbell, Matt and Lynn Horsely. 2007. "Mayor, Council at Odds on Board Appointee." *Kansas City Star*, p. A1.
- Clawson, Dan. 2003. *The Next Upsurge: Labor and the New Social Movements*. Ithaca: ILR Press.
- Crossley, Nick. 1996. *Intersubjectivity: the Fabric of Social Becoming*. London: Sage Publications.
- Czarniawska, Barbara. 1997. *Narrating the Organization: Dramas of Institutional Identity*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- , 2002. "Remembering While Forgetting: The Role of Automorphism in City Management in Warsaw." *Public Administration Review* 62:163-173.
- , 2008. *A Theory of Organizing*. Cheltenham, UK ; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar.
2005. "Delivery Workers to Vote on Unions." *Kansas City Star*, April 26, p. 19.
- DiMaggio, Paul J. and Walter W. Powell. 1991. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields." Pp. 63-82 in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Duin, Julia. 2008. "Because the Bible Tells Them So: Churches Offer Immigrant Families Decreed Kindness of Strangers." *Washington Times*, May 28, p. A01.
- Dulles, Avery. 2002. *Models of the Church*. New York: Doubleday.
- Durkheim, Emile. 2001. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. Translated by Carol Cosman. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Edgell, Penny. 2006. *Religion and Family in a Changing Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Eliasoph, Nina. 1998. *Avoiding Politics: How Americans Produce Apathy in Everyday Life*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Emirbayer, Mustafa. 1996. "Useful Durkheim." *Sociological Theory* 14:109-130.

-----, 1997. "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology." *The American Journal of Sociology* 103:281-317.

Emirbayer, Mustafa, and Ann Mische. 1998. "What Is Agency?" *The American Journal of Sociology* 103:962-1023.

Fannin, Mark. 2003. *Labor's Promised Land: Radical Visions of Gender, Race, and Religion in the South*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.

Fantasia, Rick. 1988. *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ferree, Myra Marx, and Patricia Yancey Martin (Eds.). 1995. *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Finke, Roger and Rodney Stark. 1992. *The Churching of America 1776-1990*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

Fones-Wolf, Ken. 1989. *Trade Union Gospel: Christianity and Labor in Industrial Philadelphia, 1865-1915*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Franey, Lynn. 2007. "Some KC area church leaders pledge to offer sanctuary to illegal immigrants." *Kansas City Star*, September 26, p. B5.

Friedland, Roger and Roger R. Alford. 1991. "Bringing Society Back In: Symbols, Practices and Institutional Contradictions." Pp. 232-262 in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, edited by W.W. Powell and P.J. DiMaggio. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gould, Rebecca Kneale. 1997. "Getting (Not Too) Close to Nature: Modern Homesteading as Lived Religion in America." Pp. 217-242 in *Lived Religion in America*, edited by D.D. Hall. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Gribble, Richard. 1993. *Catholicism and the San Francisco Labor Movement, 1896-1921*. San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press.

Hall, Peter M. 1987. "Interactionism and the Study of Social Organization." *The Sociological Quarterly* 28:1-22.

Heaster, Randolph. 2005a. "Union Plea Made for Workers." *Kansas City Star*, April 5, p. D19.

-----, 2005b. "Workplace Experts Will Push for Justice." *Kansas City Star*, September 20, p. D14.

Helling, Dave. 2007. "Appointee Part of Minuteman Group: Amid Fierce Criticism, Funkhouser Defends Naming Frances Semler to the KC Park Board." *Kansas City Star*, June 12, p. B11.

Hervieu-Leger, Daniele. 1997. "'What Scripture Tells Me': Spontaneity and Regulation within the Catholic Charismatic Renewal." Pp. 22-40 in *Lived Religion in America*, edited by D.D. Hall. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

-----, 2000. *Religion as a Chain of Memory*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

2007. "Interfaith Worker Justice 2007 Annual Report."
<http://www.iwj.org/doc/AnnualReport07.pdf>

Jackson, Michael. 1998. *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2009. "Jobs With Justice Says Its Time Has Come." *Kansas City Star*, January 27, p. D10.

2007. "Kansas City Congregations Offer Sanctuary." *Faith Works*, October, p. 4.

Lambe, Joe. 2005. "Shooting Sends Ex-Guard to Prison." *Kansas City Star*, April 22, p. B1.

LeCompte, Margaret D., and Jean J. Schensul. 1999. *Analyzing & Interpreting Ethnographic Data*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press.

2007. "Letters to the Star." *Kansas City Star*, September 10, p. B10.

McAdam, Doug. 1999. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

McCann, Sarah. 2004. "'Potato Drop' Will Benefit the Needy." *Kansas City Star*, June 4, p. B4.

McGuire, Meredith B. 2008. *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

- McGuire, Meredith B. and Otto Maduro. 2005. "Introduction." *Social Compass* 52:411-415.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. 1962. *Phenomenology of Perception*. New Jersey: The Humanities Press.
- Munson, Ziad. 2007. "When a Funeral Isn't Just a Funeral: The Layered Meaning of Everyday Action." Pp. 121-135 in *Everyday Religion*, edited by N. Ammerman. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Musick, Marc, and John Wilson. 2008. *Volunteers: A Social Profile*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Neitz, Mary Jo. 1987. *Charisma and Community: A Study of Religious Commitment within the Charismatic Renewal*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.
- , 1995. "Constructing Women's Rituals." Pp. 283-304 in *Work, Family, and Religion in Contemporary Society*, edited by Nancy Tatom Ammerman and Wade Clark Roof. New York: Routledge.
- , 2002. "Walking between the Worlds: Permeable Boundaries, Ambiguous Identities." Pp. 33-46 in *Personal Knowledge and Beyond: Reshaping the Ethnography of Religion*, edited by James V. Spickard, J. Shawn Landres, and Meredith B. McGuire. New York: New York University Press.
- Nelson, Timothy. 1997. "He Made A Way Out Of No Way: Religious Experience in an African-American Congregation." *Review of Religious Research* 39:5-26.
2003. "Obits: Gerald 'Jerry' Eugene Meszaros." *Kansas City Star*, August 13, p. B4.
- Orsi, R.A. 1996. *Thank You, St. Jude: Women's Devotion to the Patron Saint of Hopeless Causes*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- , 1997. "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion." Pp. 3-21 in *Lived Religion in America*, edited by D. D. Hall. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- , 2003. "Is the Study of Lived Religion Irrelevant to the World We Live in?" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 42:169-174.
- , 2005. *Between Heaven and Earth*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ostrow, James M. 1990. *Social Sensitivity: A Study of Habit and Experience*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Patel, Eboo, and Patrice Brodeur (Eds.). 2006. *Building the Interfaith Youth Movement: Beyond Dialogue to Action*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. 2010. "Favorable Ratings of Labor Unions Fall Sharply." Washington DC: Pew Research Center for the People & the Press. <http://people-press.org/reports/pdf/591.pdf>

Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life. 2010. "Religion Among the Millennials: Less Religiously Active Than Older Americans, But Fairly Traditional in Other Ways." Washington DC: Pew Research Center. <http://pewforum.org/Age/Religion-Among-the-Millennials.aspx>

Poppendieck, Janet. 1998. *Sweet Charity: Emergency Food and the End of Entitlement*. New York: Penguin Compass.

Reinelt, Claire. 1995. "Moving onto the Terrain of the State: The Battered Women's Movement and the Politics of Engagement." Pp. 84-104 in *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, edited by Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Robinson, Kathy and Susan Letizia. 2006. "As I See It: Churches Striving to Rescue Medicaid." *Kansas City Star*, April 29, p. 6.

Rolheiser, Ronald. 1999. *The Holy Longing*. New York: Doubleday Press.

Roof, Wade Clark. 1993. *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*. San Francisco: Harper Collins Publishers.

-----, 1999. *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Roof, Wade Clark, and Ann Gesch. 1995. "Boomers and the Culture of Choice: Changing Patterns of Work, Family, and Religion." Pp. 61-79 in *Work, Family, and Religion in Contemporary Society*, edited by Nancy Tatom Ammerman and Wade Clark Roof. New York: Routledge.

Scott, W. Richard. 2008. *Institutions and Organizations*. 3d ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Smith, Deann. 2007a. "KC Council Seeks Park Board Member's Resignation." *Kansas City Star*, June 14, np.

Smith, Deann. 2007b. "NAACP Official Says Funkhouser Should Accept Semler's Resignation." *Kansas City Star*, p. A1.

Smith, Deann and Lynn Horsley. 2007. "Park Board Commissioner: Coalition Plans a Protest Gather Today." *Kansas City Star*, June 14, p. B1.

Smith, Deann, Dave Helling, and Lynn Horsely. 2007. "Semler Vows to Stay on Park Board." *Kansas City Star*, September 7, np.

Stafford, Diane. 2003a. "To Blue Collars, He's True Blue." *Kansas City Star*, July 20, p. K1.

----- . 2003b. "Friends Mourn Workers' Advocate: Gerald Meszaros Aided Job Programs." *Kansas City Star*, August 15, p. C1.

Staggenborg, Suzanne. 1995. "Can Feminist Organizations Be Effective?" Pp. 339-355 in *Feminist Organizations: Harvest of the New Women's Movement*, edited by Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Stout, Harry S. and D. Scott Cormode. 1998. "Institutions and the Story of American Religion." Pp. 62-78 in *Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, edited by Demerath III, N. J. et. al. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stromberg, Eric Stephen. 2003. "Bridging the Social Worlds of Religion and Labor." Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Sociology, University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN.

Tait, Vanessa. 2005. *Poor Workers' Unions: Rebuilding Labor from Below*. Cambridge, Mass.: South End Press.

Thomas, Robert J. 1994. *What Machines Can't Do: Politics and Technology in the Industrial Enterprise*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Walker, Josef. nd. "Stabilizing and Treating the American Family."
<http://josefwalker.com>

2006. "We Are Ready: Interfaith Worker Justice 2006 Annual Report."
<http://www.iwj.org/doc/AnnualReport06.pdf>

Wood, Matthew. 2009. "The Nonformative Elements of Religious Life: Questioning the 'Sociology of Spirituality' Paradigm." *Social Compass* 56:237-248.

Wood, Matthew, and Christopher Bunn. 2009. "Strategy in a Religious Network: A Bourdieuan Critique of the Sociology of Spirituality." *Sociology* 43:286-303.

Wuthnow, Robert. 2007. *After the Baby Boomers: How Twenty- and Thirty-Somethings are Shaping the Future of American Religion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Youniss, James. 2010. "Trends in Political and Civic Behavior in Emerging Adults." The Changing Spirituality of Emerging Adults Project.
<http://www.changingsea.net/essays/Youniss.pdf>

Zerubavel, Eviatar. 1987. "The Language of Time: Toward a Semiotics of Temporality."
The Sociological Quarterly 28:343-356.

VITA

Amy Lane was born in Flint, Michigan on December 8, 1974. She received a B.A. in Anthropology from the University of Michigan, Flint in 1997 and her M.A. in sociology in 2002 from the University of Missouri, Columbia. Her research interests include the study of religion as lived and practiced, along with understanding the history of the labor movement and the potential for labor's revitalization in the United States.