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Placing faith: community commitment among millennial Catholics

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GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Dissertation

**PLACING FAITH: COMMUNITY COMMITMENT
AMONG MILLENNIAL CATHOLICS**

by

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DEDICATION

For Alex

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation attempts to fill the gap in the sociological literature at the intersection of religion and community by examining how local, urban Catholic churches shape and nurture multiple models of community commitment based on differing public-private dimensions of ritual practice and moral calls to action. For this study, I conducted 41 interviews with young adults ages 22-36 actively involved in one of three organizationally distinct Roman Catholic churches in downtown Boston: a parish church, operated by the Archdiocese of Boston; a service church, operated by a religious order of evangelical missionaries; and a Eucharistic shrine, operated by a liturgical order of devout priests and brothers. My empirical findings show that young adult Catholics gravitate towards churches that align with their conceptions of how Catholicism should be practiced based largely on patterns of parental socialization. Young adults who grew up in dual-Catholic-parent households are more likely to attend St. Cecilia's diocesan parish or St. Clement's Eucharistic

Shrine. Young adults from families with only one active Catholic parent were more likely to attend The Paulist Center.

The collective identity of young adult Catholics emerges from patterns of Catholic identity which are *activated* in church settings and *defined* through meaningful role identities established by the organizational framing accomplished by local clergy leadership. Young adult commitment to local churches may be explained through the interaction between their socialization into Catholic faith and its expression in organizational practices that resonate cognitively and emotionally. Ritual memory is tapped through the interaction of collective identities and institutional offerings that guide decision-making around church choice and commitment. Each institutional setting and respective community adapts its own modes of interaction to communicate the resonant message via social practices that result in active religious belonging. In addition, as previous research has shown, participation in church activities and strong social connections within congregations contribute to greater voluntarism and commitment in the larger community. The example of local Catholic churches highlights the importance of multidimensional social networks that can align collective identities with bespoke calls to action amid the evolving needs and aspirations of multiple groups and constituencies.

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PREFACE

During the War of 1812, in the small coastal town of Scituate, Massachusetts, two young women fended off a British naval incursion by playing an impresario's version of "Yankee Doodle Dandy" with a fife and drum.¹ As the story goes, the lighthouse keeper's daughters noticed a British Royal Navy warship anchored in Scituate harbor and redcoats disembarking onto barges. With their father away and the town's militia disbanded, Rebecca Bates, age 21, and her sister, Abigail, age 17, sent their brother to get help, grabbed a fife and drum, took cover in a cedar grove, and began playing music more and more loudly to make it seem as if the town militia were advancing towards the harbor. The ruse worked: the British withdrew, Scituate was saved from sacking, and the girls became local heroes.

This legendary event occurred in September 1814, nearly two decades before Alexis de Tocqueville would set foot in America and tell his story of what a burgeoning democracy looked like. To Tocqueville, there was tremendous energy and vitality in the villages and towns that began in New England with a Puritan ideal of self-governance and voluntarism notable for making neighbors into trusted community partners. Contemporary American thinkers often imagine or reimagine this shared common trust emblematic in small towns and the collective cheers and salutes of parades and fireworks on the Fourth of July. But the contribution of the girls'

¹ The impresario in this case is the older sister, Rebecca, who is reported to have said: "I was fond of military music and could play four tune on the fife. 'Yankee Doodle' was my masterpiece." *Scituate Mariner*, September 18, 2014.

“American Army of Two” suggests something more prescient: community commitment emerges from both vestigial forms and practices and the spirit and immediacy of renewed calls to action. It is from this perspective my dissertation begins.

INTRODUCTION

Among the most pressing concerns at the intersection of community and religion in sociology is whether Americans are losing their sense of commitment to community and whether this is tied to declines in religious commitment. A hundred years ago, Max Weber ([1922] 1993) lamented the potential loss of fellowship and an ideal of Christian brotherhood in the face of advancing industrialization. Forty years ago, Philip Slater (1976) believed American society was moving towards greater technological change, mobility, and individualistic ways of thinking that would destroy the social bonds of family, community, and authentic self-identity. Thirty years ago, Ray Oldenburg (1989) blamed automobile suburbs for the gradual shift in community life from friendly taverns and cafes to increased private modes of interaction like home entertainment. Robert Bellah and colleagues ([1985]/1996) argued that the shared moral and civil discourse that supplied Americans with a sense of belonging have receded as Americans move towards more private expressions of religious faith and community attachment based on personal interests. Robert Putnam (2000) made a lasting impression in the sociological and mainstream literature when he argued that the development of the social capital necessary for building mutual trust and obligation has been increasingly diminished. His analysis showed that Americans now participate with less depth and frequency in social clubs, volunteer activities, church groups, and civic organizations than in previous generations.

In response to Putnam's *community lost* thesis,² sociologists of religion have taken up the gauntlet, defending religious organizations, faith-based groups, and other voluntary associations as important sites for building the social capital that flows from community commitment. As they claim, more Americans are involved in a religious congregation than any other type of association, group, or club. In response to Putnam's specific claim that Americans spend increasingly more leisure time participating in solo activities, Nancy Ammerman (1997a) notes that a decline in one form of associational participation does not indicate decline in other forms.

Putnam is right to be concerned for the continued vitality of face-to-face voluntary organizations where civic skills can be learned. Our evidence would simply suggest that he should look more closely for the new spaces of sociability that may be replacing old ones. (Ammerman 1997a: 365)

Ammerman also suggests that congregations are a unique form of voluntary organization in that they represent and replicate the moral order of a community; parents return or begin new faith attachments at churches in order to provide their children with moral foundation (Ammerman 1997a: 368). In her national study of American congregations, Ammerman shows how congregations provide substantive training in organizational skills and leadership, material resources such as meeting spaces and transportation, which in turn foster the kind of mutual trust and goodwill Putnam finds absent (Ammerman 1997a). Further, Ram Cnaan and colleagues (2006) find that in some congregations, especially those with liberal orientations, members

² Barry Wellman and Barry Leighton categorize community in three now-standard conceptions: Community Lost, Community Saved, and Community Liberated (Wellman and Leighton 1979).

who are not “very religious at all” still attend services regularly and assume leadership positions in the congregation. These “belonging without believing” members find social support through shared commitment (Cnaan, Boddie, McGrew, and Jennifer Kang 2006: 277), which demonstrates the range of community-building options available to active church participants with or without established religious belief systems.

The community question that has dominated scholarship in the sociology of community and religion in the United States centers firmly on the congregational model of faith and community. Congregationalism emphasizes independent lay self-governance through an extension of the Protestant idea of a *priesthood of believers*, the principle that all individuals have direct access to God without need for priest intermediaries. For Puritans and later American iterations of congregationalism, this principle extends to the right of church members to elect their own clergy to represent them absent outside authority or organizational interference.

In Congregationalism all power inheres in the congregation. Each church is a separate and independent body, conducting its own business without reference to any higher body, without ultimate appeal beyond itself; calling Councils, but only for decorum; combining with other churches in a Conference, but only for conference; organizing itself with others in a National Council, but only for counsel. In none of these bodies does a church relinquish a particle of its self-government to any other body, either in respect of belief or action (Hamilton 1887: 330).

The self-governance of village and town governments and voluntarist associations that emerged from the congregational church model speaks to the essential character

of American democracy. But it also limits our understanding of *community* to the particulars of the independent, self-governing institutional structure and requisite forms of its primarily public expression.

The starting point for studying church communities in America is a similar “de facto” congregationalist model (Warner 1993). Sociologists of religion tend to embed Roman Catholic parishes in congregational church narratives that exclude or discount their unique organizational properties (Adler et al. 2019). One possible exception is Mary Jo Bane’s (2005) examination of the “Catholic puzzle,” i.e., why Catholicism’s rich tradition of social and moral discourse fails to translate into social action at the parish level. Bane finds that Catholics are less likely to volunteer, contribute to secular charities, belong to formal groups, or participate in electoral politics or activism. Thus, while Catholic teachings encourage community participation and service, Bane argues that Catholic parishes are not providing the right opportunities or social settings to do so (Bane 2005: 75). In a survey of religious and community practices, Ammerman (2005) similarly finds that, unlike the formal and informal networks of service of Protestant congregations, Catholic parish culture lacks the necessary mechanisms that would build or tap social networks. However, when Catholics volunteer in the Church, or otherwise spend more time participating, they are equally as likely as Protestants to be drawn into the community (Ammerman 2005: 170).

Less examined in the parish literature is the question of how institutional practices specific to Catholicism are responsive to broader sociological questions of community, moral belonging, and mutual trust. Mary Ellen Konieczny (2013) examines how progressive and conservative Catholics create boundaries that strengthen commitments to parishes, thereby shaping community belonging and identity based around the cultural dynamics of church and family. In this sense, community commitment is understood within the context of larger cultural forces that shape dedicated forms of church engagement. Jerome Baggett's *Sense of the Faithful* (2009) explores West Coast Catholics who actively construct individualized conceptions of Catholic faith and authority. Baggett shows how parishioners' directed efforts towards personal growth and focused causes is exacerbated by the "civic silencing" of parish messaging that limits the potential for church members to engage with Catholic social teachings in ethically challenging and deeply reflective ways (Baggett 2009: 187-89; 176). For these Catholics, discipleship is framed more in terms of an ongoing process of individual discovery than the potential for shared communion through participation in Catholic ritual. As Tricia Bruce (2019) notes, parish case studies like these are valuable for their insights into the lived cultural practices of Catholics but tell us little about the organizational features of churches that shape congregational commitment (Bruce 2019: 37).

This dissertation attempts to fill the gap in the sociological literature at the intersection of religion and community by examining how local, urban Catholic

churches shape and nurture multiple models of community commitment based on differing public-private dimensions of ritual practice and moral calls to action. To explore these processes, I focus on young adult Catholics, a demographic particularly important to the Catholic Church.³ In her study of young adult Catholics in the Washington DC/Maryland/Virginia metro area, Kathleen Garces-Foley (2019) shows how young adult urban Catholics move through “parish hubs,” socializing, attending services, and volunteering across multiple sites of engagement (Garces-Foley 2019). The young adults she interviewed are highly committed to their faith but also vary in their adherence to Church teaching and in their religious journeys as “converts, reverts, and persistent Catholics” (Garces-Foley 2019: 180). The regional urban center is dominated by the neo-traditional Catholic diocese of Arlington, Virginia and archdiocese of Washington DC who collectively operate multiple young adult groups that supersede local parish young adult ministry programs (Garces-Foley 2019: 176). Thus, although this ethnographic research provides new perspectives on our understanding of how young adults engage with local Catholic churches apart from traditional commitment to a single parish, it focuses less on parish-level practices that cultivate and nurture this religious belonging.

Insight into how young adults find a sense of community within local churches and across multiple and varying institutional settings helps us understand how

³ In April 2019, Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Exhortation calling on young people to bring their “momentum, intuitions, and faith” into the Catholic Church, adding: “And when you arrive where we have not yet reached, have the patience to wait for us.” *Vatican News* (2019)

differences in organizational practices and religious messaging inform and shape various kinds of religious commitment: what makes these young adults engage with their Catholic faith and commit their time and energy to these local churches? How do differences in institutional schema (e.g. religious messaging, emphasis on traditional ritual practices, strength of young adult programming, etc.) shape these community attachments? And what do these commitments teach us about community attachment in other kinds of voluntary organizational settings? These are the basic questions my dissertation addresses.

Methodology

This dissertation will examine the question of community and religious commitment through the eyes of young adult Catholics, a population many imagine to be increasingly disconnected from both Church and community. Survey research tells us that large majorities of millennial Catholics express a high level of personal attachment to Catholicism (“being Catholic is an important part of who I am”) but are “loosely tethered” in their commitment to the Catholic Church (D’Antonio, Dillon, and Gautier 2013:143-44; Smith, Longest, Hill, and Christoffersen 2014: 3; D’Antonio, Davidson, Hoge, and Gautier 2007). Young adults enjoy the sacramental and liturgical aspects of the Catholic Mass and consider devotions such as praying the rosary and adoration of the Eucharist important aspects of their religious identity, but only 20 percent attend Mass regularly (D’Antonio, Dillon and Gautier 2013:143-46). This

loose tethering may result from changes in how Catholic families raise their children. In their study of socialization patterns among emerging young adult Catholics (ages 18-23), Christian Smith and colleagues argue that parents who instill religious practices like sacramental obligations and devotional prayer are more likely to provide the continued “stability” young adults need for sustained Catholic identity and commitment (Smith et al. 2014: 268).

My dissertation thus explores a phenomenon that runs counter to national trends. It expands our understanding of religious identity and commitment at the local level by asking how young adult Catholics commit themselves to a “parish home” (Garces-Foley 2019) in one of three popular urban Catholic churches. Contrary to current trends toward millennial disaffiliation, in downtown Boston on any given Sunday, enthusiastic young adult Catholics are at Mass, serving Eucharist, singing in the choir, recruiting new young adult ministry members, and gathering for brunch or dinner. Not only do these young adults attend Mass regularly, they often travel from surrounding towns and neighborhoods to do so. Some are also committed to serving food at a church soup kitchen, bringing necessities to the homeless on the street, and organizing talks and small group meetings about deepening faith and finding connection with God.

For this study, I conducted 41 interviews with young adults ages 22-36⁴ actively involved in one of three organizationally distinct Roman Catholic churches in downtown Boston: a parish church, operated by the Archdiocese of Boston; a service church, operated by a religious order of evangelical missionaries; and a Eucharistic shrine, operated by a liturgical order of devout priests and brothers.⁵ Given that these churches are easily identifiable in Boston, their real names as well as the names of clergy and staff are openly referenced, although the names of the young adults I interviewed are pseudonyms. St. Cecilia's parish combines progressive religious messaging and traditional engagement with Catholic ritual practices; The Paulist Center combines progressive religious messaging with a liberal interpretation of Catholic ritual practices; and St. Clement's shrine adheres to the traditional religious messaging and ritual practices of the institutional Catholic Church. These three churches in the downtown corridor of Beacon Hill and the Back Bay are "magnet" churches that bring young adults into the bustle of the city for activity and engagement. These churches actively recruit young members and in fact boast the largest Catholic young adult memberships in Boston. All three churches remain

⁴ Age ranges for millennials differ but I rely on the range of those born between 1981 and 1996 (Pew Research Center 2015, Pew Research Center 2019a).

⁵ In terms of nomenclature, St. Cecilia is a traditional diocesan parish and St. Clement is a diocesan parish dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament. Both churches refer to their congregants as parishioners. The Paulist Center operates under the formal auspices of the Boston Archdiocese but outside the formal diocesan structure of the Catholic Church. Their congregants are referred to as members.

under the formal auspices of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, which ministers to one of the largest Catholic populations in the U.S.⁶

Interview subjects were recruited in three ways: a) direct outreach at young adult gatherings and retreats (all three churches); b) announcements in young adult group email newsletters (St. Cecilia and The Paulist Center); and c) snowball sampling through referrals from interview subjects (all three churches). Over an 18-month period (2016-2018), I attended young adult events and gatherings, such as monthly potlucks, liturgy meetings, and day and overnight retreats. I also gathered background information from representatives⁷ at each church, who kindly made themselves available for ongoing queries. I also attended both regular and young adult Masses over the research period. Before their interviews, study participants completed a brief survey covering demographic and other general background information. Interviews typically lasted between one and a half and two hours and centered on family background, interpretations of religious belief and practice, and the process through which young adults decided to commit to their respective churches. Interviews were transcribed and the qualitative data analyzed using *NVivo*. To protect the identity of participants, I do not make note of individuals' age,

⁶ Boston, New York, and Philadelphia tie for top rank with the highest numbers of Catholics in the U.S. with at 36% of total population. Public Religion Research Institute, 2015.

⁷ These representatives were: Fr. Michael McGarry, CSP, Director of the Paulist Center; Br. Nathan Marzonie, Seminarian, Oblates of the Virgin Mary at St. Clement's; and Mary Kaye, Pastoral Director of Operations at St. Cecilia's.

occupation, hometown, ethnic and racial background, or the specifics of non-Catholic parental religious tradition.

Young adult Catholics who attended church at least once per month were eligible to participate in this study; nearly all involved attended Mass weekly. Study participants are distributed as follows: 14 each at The Paulist Center and St. Clement’s and 13 at St. Cecilia’s. The median age of all study participants at the time of interview was 27. The majority were single at the time of interview. Table 1 summarizes the ethnic, educational, and gender breakdowns of study participants at each church.

Table 1. KEY DEMOGRAPHICS OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS BY CHURCH

Key Demographics of Study Participants by Church						
	St. Cecilia Diocesan Parish n=13		St. Clement Eucharistic Shrine n=14		The Paulist Center n=14	
Ethnicity	African American	1	African American	0	African American	1
	Asian	0	Asian	1	Asian	2
	Euro-American	8	Euro-American	11	Euro-American	8
	Latin American	1	Latin American	0	Latin American	2
	Mixed Heritage	3	Mixed Heritage	2	Mixed Heritage	1
Education	High School	0	High School	0	High School	1
	Some College	0	Some College	1	Some College	1
	Bachelor’s	6	Bachelor’s	8	Bachelor’s	4
	Master’s	7	Master’s	4	Master’s	8
	Doctorate	0	Doctorate	1	Doctorate	0
Gender	Female identified	10	Female identified	8	Female identified	9
	Male identified	3	Male identified	6	Male identified	5

Generally speaking, the young adults interviewed for this study articulated strong commitments to religious faith and community belonging, both through church activities and the fellowship of strong primary-group social ties both inside and outside the church. This study of young adults provides valuable information about how this sub-group of active Catholics finds connection to their local churches through the organizational practices of each church setting. This study necessarily excludes in-depth analysis of family dynamics and the influences of school, work, and peers that have also shaped these church commitments.

Findings

My empirical findings show that young adult Catholics gravitate towards local churches that comport with their conceptions of how Catholicism should be practiced based largely on patterns of parental socialization and the alignment of these with the collective identity of particular church communities. Specifically, young adults who grew up in dual-Catholic-parent households are more likely to attend St. Cecilia's Diocesan Parish or St. Clement's Eucharistic Shrine. Young adults from families with one active (non-lapsed) Catholic were more likely to attend The Paulist Center. Collective identities shaped by shared religious habitus guide young adults to the specific institutional practices of local churches and motivate sustained engagement and commitment to these communities. St. Cecilia's and St. Clement's attract young

adults who share *settled* understandings of their religious identity: they accept the core tenets of Catholic faith and practice, such as the significance and meaning of the Eucharist. The Paulist Center attracts young adults who tend towards *contested* understandings of their religious identity; as such, they are less inclined to accept at face value the significance and meaning of key elements of Catholic faith and practice.

My theoretical findings build on these patterned collective identities and examine how ritual memory, religious habitus, and organizational resonance (Giorgi 2017; Benford and Snow 2000) converge to shape varying interpretations of Catholic roles and commitment. Deep memory of ritual practices is a well-known feature of the Catholic experience, often heightened by the boundaries of sacred space and religious belonging (Orsi 1985, 1999, 2002; McGreevy 1996; Gamm 1999). Robert Orsi (1985) describes this kind of ritual devotion in the annual feast day celebration of the Virgin Mary as it originally occurred on the streets of New York City in the early twentieth century. Brought from Italy to East Harlem in 1881, the statue of Our Lady of Mount Carmel is carried on the back of a flatbed surrounded by flowers and girls in First Communion dresses and paraded through the crowds of celebrants over two summer days. Through rituals like these, religious communities rekindle their collective identity (Durkheim [1922] 1995) and come to know themselves and one another in cultural practices that engender sympathy, fellow-feeling, and shared connection (Thoits 1989).

Nor is this simply a matter of revisiting the traditions of times past. Daniele Hervieu-Léger's conception of ritual memory explains the staying power of religious traditions that continually reinvent the past as these are experienced within the authority of the present and can punctuate the increasingly secular frames of meaning that dominate contemporary life (Hervieu-Léger [1993] 2000). Religious communities engage with their past through chains of memory which, when activated, reinforce the collective identity and shared commitment that can lie dormant in secular life (Hervieu-Léger [1993] 2000).

How this cultural transmission manifests over time is perhaps best formulated in Bourdieu's (1971) early, open-ended conception of *religious habitus*. Drawing from a close reading of Weber's sociology of religion, Bourdieu describes habitus as a multidimensional concept that incorporates the inculcation required for adoption of the religious message (i.e., religious competence), the ethos of a group or class that selectively receives and adapts the message (which resembles Weber's notion of elective affinity), and, in substantive form, the generative process that links religious teachings to interpretive meanings and practices that resonate for believers. Distinct from Bourdieu's later, more strategic formulation (Bourdieu 1990), here religious inculcation and expression are linked to discrete possibilities for social change within fields of action. I would suggest meso level religious habitus is a form of social knowledge whose durability rests on a continued and tenuous harmony between

recipient, the positionality of the recipient and the social-historical context, and on the symbolic forms, or language, used to disseminate the religious message.

In Catholicism the idea of community is shaped by multiple tiers and expressions of belonging and communion (Dulles 2002) which each impose specific moral demands on congregants with resonant meanings that imply different communal boundaries. What members are called to do shapes the community they inhabit, and both are shaped by the particular expression of ritual and institutional practice the parish embodies. For example, while one church may emphasize devotional practices that center on deepening private connection to God, another issues calls to action in the form of private self-understanding and public compassion towards others; still another calls for public action in the world that brings direct service and support to those most in need. The devotional model of institutional practice yields community centeredness around the conception of a merged heaven and earth, within which all God's disciples in this life and the next are present. The compassionate relational model envelops all who share in the message and seek to engage or restore their relationships with God and one another through self-awareness and service to others. The public outreach model focuses on actions that bring God's message of love and strength to those most in need of its message, which implicates the congregation in a shared moral purpose. Each community operates within the construct of larger public-private institutional practices that form the boundaries of community attachment.

We may say then that ritual memory and religious habitus are activated through institutional practices that resonate with (and shape) the patterned collective identities of community members. In my analysis, I show how this process occurs through an organizational framing that establishes emotional and cognitive resonance by “striking a responsive chord” that aligns with young adult predispositions toward Catholic faith and identity (Giorgi 2017; Benford and Snow 2000). Ritual memory is tapped through the interaction of varying institutional offerings which guides decision-making around church choice and commitment. Each institutional setting and respective community adapts its own modes of interaction to communicate the resonant message via social practices that conform to dominant organizational frames. Through these mechanisms, ritual memory is transformed into directed actions that result in active religious belonging (Davie 2000).

In response to the community question, I use the example of the local Catholic church to argue that moral belonging occurs primarily through public and private expressions of ritual practice and religious messaging that engender specific calls to action in varied configurations of community attachment. Given the differing dimensions of community in Catholic tradition, it is not enough to ask whether vestigial forms and mechanisms like voluntarism and social capital are sufficient to support civic engagement and a broader sense of community and belonging in contemporary life. Rather, the Catholic experience highlights the more crucial

question of whether institutional calls to action instill the modes of interaction required for directed action and commitment across multiple ideals of community. To resonate, the organizational messaging must match the aspirational ideal of community which is to a large extent dictated by patterns of socialized collective understanding.

At the meso level of analysis, community attachment occurs in the resonance between institutional schema, organizational messaging, and pre-dispositional attitudes toward community and belonging established by socialization patterns. At broader levels, my underlying thesis is that the calls to action that Putnam and Bellah envision in the form of shared moral discourse and mechanisms for public participation resonate more for the academic and social critic than for the target participants. Over the past fifty years, the social and economic landscape in America has radically shifted with the massive transition of women into the workforce, greater income inequality, and more complex roles and identities that constrain motivations and resources available for community commitment, primarily for the lower and middle classes. I believe these societal trends call for more tailored forms of moral discourse that speak to the multivariate needs of broader and more diverse constituencies.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the three churches examined in this study and the organizational practices that comport with models of community in the Catholic Church. The model of *mystical communion* most dominant at the shrine church bonds

Catholics through an intimate relationship with God through the Holy Spirit and leaves open the possibility for spontaneous connection with other church members to occur (Dulles 2002: 51). The model of the *herald or messenger* manifests as the community of disciples who gather and share in the divine message (Dulles 2002: 71), which speaks to the intentionality with which the liturgy is interpreted at all three churches. The *community of disciples* model emerges from the Pentecostal visit of the Holy Spirit forty days after the resurrection in which Jesus tells his disciples he will remain with all who gather in his name (Dulles 2002: 200), and which applies to the diocesan parish and the Paulist church.

In Chapter 2, I examine how community identities are activated and role identities defined through the social settings and specific logics of organizational space. As a structured version of symbolic interaction theory, role identity helps us understand how people make sense of their identity in the relationship between their sense of self and their organizational environment (Grube and Piliavin 2000). Patterns of family socialization lead young adult Catholics to choose and commit to religious communities based on their sense of self *in relation to* the specific organizational practices of each local church. The collective identity of young adult Catholics emerges from patterns of settled or contested understandings of Catholic identity which are activated in church settings that speak to these socialized predispositions and foster deep social attachments that help motivate Catholic commitment. Through intentionality in the presentation of the liturgy and clarity in

the religious messaging, local clergy leadership issue calls to action that establish compelling role identities that guide young adults into motivated action.

In Chapter 3, I explore how explicitly Catholic ideas can take multiple forms. I identify multiple ideal-type models of Catholic identity to show how organizational leaders apply early Christian principles of forgiveness, social justice, and moral guidance in ways that distinctly shape collective identities. Religious belonging occurs when aspirational ideals and collective identities merge with institutional schema, most notably through emotional and cognitive resonance. Clergy guide congregants to institutional resources through modes of interaction that reinforce and support the dominant models of community at each church. These resources consist of shared collective sensibilities around how religious faith should be encountered and engaged through differing institutional emphases on public and private expression.

In Chapter 4, I argue that community as a prerequisite for moral obligation (Durkheim [1922] 1995) depends on how clergy frame calls to action in the public and private expression of ritual. Although Robert Putnam and Robert Bellah draw upon models of the ideal American public citizen that once shaped a shared moral concern for the common good, this study makes clear that socialized collective identities shape feelings of belonging based around particular forms and expressions of organizational practice. Building social capital requires aligning collective identities with aspirational purposes and bespoke calls to action that drive feelings of

shared moral obligation, particularly amid the evolving needs of multiple groups and constituencies. Voluntarism and civic duty therefore cannot be isolated from the dominant cultural ethos of institutions, the socialized collective identities of participants, and moral calls to action which serve as their aspirational, motivating force.

CHAPTER 1 – THREE BOSTON CHURCHES

In the historical ecclesiology of the Catholic Church, the idea of *community* takes multiple forms. Each is an expression of Catholic faith and practice that together incorporate the qualities of community and identity that constitute the Catholic Church as both an institution and a site of experience for forms of religious practice. Jesuit theologian and Catholic cardinal Avery Dulles (2002) draws on both Catholic and Protestant theology to outline six ecclesial community models in the Church: institutional, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, servant, and community of disciples. Although each local church in this study incorporates all aspects of these, *mystical communion*, *herald*, and *community of disciples* provide the most useful starting points from which to make claims about Catholic community and identity (for further discussion, see McDonough 2019: 170-71). While Dulles' purposes were theological, we can also examine these models from a sociological perspective as ideal-types of church leadership and lay participation at the local level.

The model of *mystical communion* bonds Catholics through an intimate relationship with God through the Holy Spirit which “makes room” for the informal, spontaneous, personal, and communal aspects of faith to emerge and which also gives the faithful a sense of meaning and purpose (Dulles 2002: 51). The model of the *herald or messenger* is the congregation as itself the manifestation of the New Testament community: the local church gathering is the source and instrument of the divine message (Dulles 2002: 71). The *community of disciples* model originates with

the first disciples who purposively lived an exceptional style of life to attract attention “like a city set upon a mountaintop or a lantern in a dark place” (Dulles 2002: 200). Following Christ’s resurrection, this early model of discipleship evolves into the universal presence of the Holy Spirit who makes the presence of Jesus known “when two or three are gathered” in his name (Matthew 18:30) (Dulles 2002: 202).

As will be elaborated in Chapters 3 and 4, each church examined in this study adopts dominant organizational schema that align with these models of Christian community. Each effectively uses the model of *herald* as a means of building attachment, claiming that their community manifests through the message of Christ. At St. Cecilia’s, the pastor models *community of discipleship* by showing how to find connection with God through experiences of forgiveness in relationship with others and outreach to those who are marginalized. At The Paulist Center, the Paulist Fathers model *community of discipleship* by showing how to find connection with God as carriers of Jesus’ message of love through acts of service and outreach to those who are suffering. At St. Clement’s, the Oblates of the Virgin Mary model *mystical connection* by showing how to access religious meanings and spiritual paths through devotional prayer and reverence for God and the heavenly body.

All of these models of community are carried in the way people gather to worship. Liturgy – the patterned practices of worship – is prescribed in the Catholic Church, but, especially since the Second Vatican Council’s approval of the vernacular Mass, local parishes have had greater freedom to shape their own way of celebrating.

In what follows, I describe the interpretation of liturgy at each church and how the organizational leadership frames meanings in Catholic messaging and ritual practice.

St. Cecilia Diocesan Parish

Liturgy of the Mass

The Romanesque twelfth-century Norman architecture of St. Cecilia’s belies the yellow-gold warmth of its bright interior. A reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci’s *Last Supper* adorns the circular backdrop of a massive white altar, carved from Italian marble. The parish sits at the western edge of Back Bay, established in 1888 at the request of Irish maids and coachmen who served the wealthy Protestant neighborhood residents. The church is the fastest growing of the 281 parishes⁸ in the Boston Archdiocese, with some 300 new households registering each year.⁹ The 9:30am and 11:15am Sunday Masses are often filled to capacity (600 seats).

In his homilies, the pastor, Fr. John, focuses on how to build relationship with God through emotional connection, authenticity, and self-awareness; and how to carry out the gospel message amid the often-conflicting demands and realities of daily life. With humor and a notable Boston accent, Fr. John will often make a distinction between his own perspective (“this is me, John Unni talking now”) and that of his role as “Fr. John,” noting how he, like everyone, “misses the mark” (“no one pitches a perfect game”). Fr. John acknowledges the challenges parishioners face as they seek

⁸ Archdiocese of Boston Financial Report for Year Ending June 30, 2019.

⁹ St. Cecilia’s continued growth announced at Mass in 2019 for the 2018-2019 fiscal year.

to carry out the gospel message. He also routinely addresses political and institutional upheavals, including the leadership failings of the Catholic Church in its handling of the child sexual abuse crisis.¹⁰

Among the clergy at the three churches examined in this study, Fr. John was the only priest to speak to the heated national debate that unfolded with Christine Blasey Ford's testimony against Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh in October 2018.¹¹ At Mass on the Sunday following Ford's testimony (October 7, 2018), the gospel reading for the day was Mark 10:2-16, a passage in which the Pharisees test Jesus by asking if his views agree with traditional Hebrew teaching that a husband may divorce his wife:

"It was because your hearts were hard that Moses wrote you this law," Jesus replied. ⁶"But at the beginning of creation God 'made them male and female.'⁷ 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, ⁸ and the two will become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh. ⁹ Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate."

¹⁰ When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. ¹¹ He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. ¹² And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."

¹⁰ Among the largest recent scandals is the August 2018 Pennsylvania Grand Jury report which documented abuse and coverup in six of eight Catholic dioceses by more than 300 priests over a 70+ year period. Fr. John's videotaped homily given the Sunday after the announcement may be found [here](#).

¹¹ On any given day, the readings, daily prayers, and reflections, are the same across all Roman Catholic churches. The U.S. Supreme Court nomination hearings generated heated national debate and serve as a useful proxy for assessing how real-world events are integrated into the religious messaging at each church.

Fr. John put this gospel into historical context: women had no power and men could divorce only if the wife had been unfaithful. By including women, Jesus is in fact equalizing the terms of divorce for both husband and wife. That reframing of the gospel text was then linked to the lives of his parishioners. Fr. John further pointed out that divorce typically involves considerable pain and suffering for both parties; as such, we must have compassion and consider the essence of gospel teaching, that is, not “the letter of the law,” but “the spirit.”¹² He then applied the same principle to Christine Blasey Ford’s testimony: whatever your position on the outcome of the Supreme Court nomination hearings – who is to be believed or not believed – we must think about the courage it takes for the most vulnerable to come forward and testify, and remember how easy it is for the powers that be – whether the Catholic Church or those in government – to apply the letter of the law rather than prioritize its spirit, the suffering of the victims.¹³

In keeping with the inclusivity of St. Cecilia’s, which openly embraces the LGBTQ community, Fr. John added that if there are any at St. Cecilia’s who are divorced and remarried,¹⁴ and worried about coming to “share at the table” (Holy

¹² Quotes from homilies are paraphrased.

¹³ Senate Judiciary Committee members in favor of the nomination formally acknowledged the emotional truthfulness of Ford’s narrative, but disputed Brett Kavanaugh’s role as the perpetrator, saying there was insufficient evidence to substantiate her claims.

¹⁴ Under Catholic Church doctrine, divorced men and women who remarry cannot receive Communion unless they are granted an annulment from their first marriage. Pope Francis has publicly advocated a more pastoral and welcoming approach, appearing to leave the question of taking Communion open to the discretion of local priests and bishops. In his 2016 Letter to the Synod, *Amoris Laetitia* (“The Joy of Love”), the pope emphasizes that divorced men and women in new marriages should be made to feel welcome in the church: “It is important that the divorced who have

Communion), “you are welcome.” Although formal church teaching says, “you are committing adultery...I would say, and this is me, John Unni, talking, listen to your heart, do what your heart says.” He said he does not believe God would turn anyone away from the table; this is not in keeping with the spirit of the gospel. When Fr. John ended his homily, applause erupted. He responded in an emotional voice, saying he only hopes his words “tilled something inside you” and that “you will listen to that voice.”

Young adults who regularly attend St. Cecilia’s typically cite this kind of emotional authenticity as key reason for their sustained commitment.

I’d never seen someone be so humble, so vulnerable, who’s a priest. I’ve never had that sort of rhetoric in my church experience. So, I don’t really know him personally that well, but I feel close to him because he feels like me. I think he’s great. – *Amanda*

I feel like when I’m listening to one of Father John’s sermons, the Holy Spirit is coming through him completely. Everything that comes out, it’s just so much passion and it’s so raw and I love how authentic he is. There’s nothing about him where I feel like he’s ever censoring himself to please others. He’s not afraid to be outspoken about certain things and be real. And that’s a really rare find in a priest. [laughter] – *Laura*

I think that there are a select few priests that I have been blessed to meet who I think are real, true embodiments of the heart of Christ, in the depth of love that they have for each individual person they meet. And Father John is one of those priests. I think that if he could do everything for everyone, he would...There are times when he’ll tell an anecdote during his homilies, and

entered a new union should be made to feel part of the Church. They are not excommunicated, and they should not be treated as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community. The Christian community’s care of such persons is not to be considered a weakening of its faith and testimony to the indissolubility of marriage; rather, such care is a particular expression of its charity.” (*Amoris Laetitia*, #243)

I'm like, "You are doing the most, sir. And you are doing more than you can. [chuckle] And you're going to collapse one day." [chuckle] And, yeah, that is one of the biggest things that gives the parish life, because he doesn't set himself apart from the parish, from the parishioners. – *Meredith*

However, controversies surrounding difficult social issues can make some young adults wish Fr. John would express greater moral outrage when speaking about social injustice:

I love Father John, [laughter] obviously he's a big reason that I'm here. But I don't always agree with things he says...He can sometimes feel very mushy, he's a people pleaser. He is both a people pleaser and has gotten in trouble for being too outspoken in the past...He'll dilute things. If we're talking about immigration, sometimes he'll just be, "Well, you know, like we're all just, I'm no expert, and we're all just people, we should... " Kinda these vague things...that sound good, but I'm just like, Father, just fucking say it. Just say that the way we're deporting children is immoral. I think in some weird way sometimes the institutional church I find can be more direct about these things than some of the things Saint Cecilia's willing to be. - *David*

[Fr. John] pointed out how many world leaders are responding in retaliation and with anger and violence, and just in a more mundane way, like you're stuck in traffic or they're making a lot of noise outside. I think he talked about how that's a struggle for him, not responding with anger or not having anger while responding with a smile. And that's something I've been thinking about a lot is if we're supposed to approach everything with love and not anger, then how do you still stop terrible things from happening? How do you stop young black men from being shot by the police if your reaction to that isn't anger? I think everyone should see that and react with anger. 'Cause how else is it gonna change? That's something I'm here and I'm like, "Yeah, that's lovely. If everyone in the world responded with love, there might not even be anything to get angry about." [laughter] But that's hard for me. – *Erin*

To David and Erin, Fr. John sidesteps an opportunity to speak out against moral ambivalence and societal issues like racial violence.

That very ambiguous messaging may also be part of Fr. John's insistence on inclusion. One of the most notable characteristics of the messaging at St. Cecilia's is Fr. John's unwillingness to exclude community members who may have differing political beliefs. The pastor will often cite the complexity of social and political issues and the deep divisions in America, even within the same families, and emphasize his own neutral (unspoken) position, for example on immigration policy. This discursive maneuvering is likely meant to ensure that political allegiances do not interfere with St. Cecilia's larger message of welcome and inclusion.

One quality that unites both St. Cecilia's and The Paulist Center is what young adults call the intentionality of the service, by which they mean the care and attention with which the liturgy is expressed and encountered. At the beginning of Sunday Mass, Fr. John asks everyone to greet the person next to them so that "we may know with whom we are gathering." Before the lectors begin the readings, Fr. John will introduce a key theme he wants congregants to pay attention to, which is then taken up during the homily. After the homily, a lector will read five or more "Prayers of the Faithful," which traditionally highlight petitions for the sick and needy. At St. Cecilia's, the Prayers of the Faithful incorporate the local church community ("for our catechumens on their journey") and often an event or issue at the organizational or national level ("for the wisdom and guidance of our leaders as they navigate....") and which often thematically links the readings:

[The Prayers of the Faithful] are very thoughtful. It's not just generic prayers for the poor. They really connect to current events. They connect to what's happening in Boston. It's connecting to even just the feelings, or they'll connect it to the readings, specifically that week. I really love how intentional they are." - *Anna*

Following the Prayers of the Faithful, congregants recite the Nicene Creed in unison ("I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible..."). That, too, is intentional. Fr. John leads the recitation but removes single-gender references: "For us ~~men~~ and for our salvation he came down from heaven, and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became hu-man..."¹⁵

The presentation and preparation of the gifts of bread and wine are similarly expressed with a thoughtful execution of the ritual act. Fr. John speaks deliberately as he reads through the Eucharistic Prayer, invoking more than mere recital of the oft-repeated Catholic liturgy. When the time comes for Fr. John to consecrate the bread and wine, he again speaks deliberately, making eye contact with congregants from side to side as he raises the host and then the chalice.

"Take this, all of you, and eat it. For this is my body which will be given up for you." In a similar way, when supper was ended, he took the chalice and, once more giving thanks, he gave it to his disciples, saying: "Take this, all of you, and drink from it, for this is the chalice of my blood, the blood of the new and eternal covenant, which will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in memory of me."

¹⁵ Parishioners can be heard distinctly following Fr. John in removing the "men" from the first part of the sentence. Fr. John began saying "human" instead of "man" in December 2018 / January 2019.

By the time congregants have exchanged handshakes as a sign of peace, six to eight Eucharistic Ministers have gathered at the altar. Eucharistic Ministers appear warm in their interactions; they have been instructed to smile and make eye contact when presenting the host and chalice as a way of expressing the meaning, joy, and connection of the moment.¹⁶

This intentionality and passionate commitment to interpreting the Catholic liturgy in a personal way resonates strongly with young adult parishioners.

I think the thing that sealed the deal for me was Father Unni. I've never, one, seen a priest that is so courageous in speaking out and wants to talk about racism and police shootings and all this other stuff in the homily. But two, I think what it is about him is his charisma. I've run across very few priests outside of orders that are just so genuinely... so happy to be there. Like he is so happy to be a priest it is tangible, and you want to be around that. You just want to be around somebody who's living their life to the fullest... I think, to me at the end of the day, that's the hope that he gives people. Is that you can be a happy disciple of Christ if you do what Christ asks of you. – *Amanda*

Young adult membership

Young adults find affirmation for their Catholic faith through Fr. John's interpretation of the Catholic liturgy and through their relationships with other Catholics who want to engage in similar expressions of religious faith and practice. St. Cecilia's offers Masses aimed at young adults Sundays at 6:00p throughout the academic year; however, many of the young adults interviewed for this study often attend the 11:15a Mass and meet friends for coffee or brunch afterwards. Young

¹⁶ Information gathered through participation in a Eucharistic Ministry training program at the church.

adults actively participate in the liturgy of the Mass, volunteering as Eucharistic minister, lector, choir member, pastoral council member, and young adult ministry leader. A core group of 12-15 young adult ministry organizers¹⁷ plans social, spiritual, and outreach activities which include discussion groups (e.g. Women in the Bible), hikes with time set aside for prayer and reflection, karaoke, bowling, volunteer work (e.g. Healthcare for the Homeless), a spring retreat, and a winter dance co-sponsored with The Paulist Center.

At a two-night spring retreat on the grounds of a Benedictine Abbey near Boston, St. Cecilia young adult leaders asked open-ended questions to elicit small group session discussions for the 35 retreatants: “What is your faith story? How did you get to where you are today, wherever that might be?” The tenor of workshops mirrored themes Fr. John touches upon during homilies, which suggest emotional awareness and a capacity and desire for spiritual connection through openness and intimacy with each other, and, by extension, with God. Young adults had the option of attending evening vespers with the monks at the Benedictine Abbey chapel, and all of them collectively attended Mass at the chapel on Sunday morning.

Many who are actively involved in the young adult ministry cite the primary-group relationships they have developed through close friendships with other St. Cecilia young adults. Alison alludes to how her Catholic faith and practice have “grown exponentially” since joining St. Cecilia’s: “I’m acting on it more and that it’s a

¹⁷ St. Cecilia’s also hired a full-time Director of College and Youth Ministry in August 2018.

bigger part of my life than it's ever been now. And part of that is for the first-time having friends that are Catholic.”

The Paulist Center

Liturgy of the Mass

The Federalist-style Paulist Center building houses the Chapel of the Holy Spirit which seeks to communicate the simplicity of early Christian principles: a sparse altar, a single tree branch shaped like a crucifix, and above this a sculpture of Jesus Christ floating from an invisible wire. Above and in front of the sculpture floats an abstract image of the Holy Spirit symbolized as dove, flame, and breath in a swirl of satin ribbon. A large marble-green baptismal font for adult and child baptisms rests on the floor beneath the sculpture. Since the 1940s, The Paulist Center has operated on the Boston Common as a financially independent religious order under the formal authority of the Archdiocese of Boston. The Paulists reach out to Catholics, such as lesbians and gays, who have felt excluded by their home parishes. They welcome Christians from all denominations who have married into the Catholic faith and/or who may be interested in converting to Catholicism.

The Paulists in Boston are led by Paulist Center Director Fr. Michael McGarry, C.S.P., (“Fr. Mike”) who is supported by an associate director and visiting Paulist priests. In their messaging, the Paulist Fathers express the brothers’ organizational emphasis on evangelizing Americans who are not religiously affiliated, reconciling those who have left the Catholic Church, and working towards unity between

Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions. In his homily in the Paulist chapel on the Sunday following Christine Blasey Ford's emotional testimony, Fr. Broderick Walsh, C.S.P., ("Fr. Rick") explained the importance of compassion by contextualizing the historical period of that day's gospel lesson, making clear that the rules that apply then do not apply now ("there were no civil unions"), and focusing on a message of care for all *because* of their suffering, not despite their shortfalls and missteps. Referencing the first reading, he said, just as the book of Genesis is about the creation of the world, the marriage of one man and one woman baptized in faith and part of a community of God is an ideal interpretation of what marriage and communion should look like, not the kind of relationships and separations we experience in daily life. Fr. Rick makes points like Fr. John's, but he draws more on analytical argument than emotional connection. Like Fr. John, he at times makes clear he is "speaking through the prism of the Catholic Church," thereby acknowledging potential divergences between formal Church teaching and the complex lived experiences of the faithful. However, Fr. Rick never speaks directly to the controversial issue of divorce and the prohibition against remarriage in the Catholic Church, instead guiding listeners towards a compassionate understanding of human frailty and leaving open the possibility of one's own personal experiential interpretation of the religious message.

At The Paulist Center, worship is informal, participatory, and accessible to newcomers. There are no hymnals or readers or kneelers in the pews, which are arranged in a three-sided rectangular configuration that opens towards the altar.

Liturgical music, folk and contemporary style, is projected onto the sanctuary wall on either side of the crucifix. Colorful, embossed two-sided cards in the pews provide a handy guide to Mass prayers and responses. Lay members often give “guest” homilies, generally following a brief introduction by the Paulist priest.¹⁸ It is expected that everyone will hold hands during the prayer of the Our Father. The Eucharistic bread on Sundays takes the form of homemade brown bread broken into rough pieces; a Paulist Center ministry devotes itself to using a special recipe of flour and water to bake the bread at home, after which it is brought to the church to be consecrated during the Eucharist.

At the end of Mass, the presiding priest asks if there is anyone who is visiting for the first time. After the priest asks all newcomers to introduce themselves, the congregation warmly claps in a gesture of hearty welcome. These welcoming gestures and the charism of the Paulists to bring in those who never belonged or who have fallen away from the Catholic church resonates strongly with young adults and often translates into their own feeling of acceptance by the larger community:

I'm always really aware of the people sitting next to me, and when I take their hands for the Our Father, that sense of community or something. So I held hands with two people who I didn't know, and I got to meet both of them afterwards. But just that sense of like, even though I have never met these people, it felt like a sense of kinship or something with them. And I think just a general sense of really belonging. And I really missed that in the number of

¹⁸ Typically, the priest will speak briefly and then introduce the member of the community who will be giving the homily. In the past, guest homilists have included Paulist Center staff members and social justice activists.

months trying to search for a community. And so I really feel like a part of things at the Paulist Center, and I'm known and I matter there. – *Cathy*

Young adult membership

Like St. Cecilia's, the Paulist Center holds Masses geared toward young adults at 6:00p on Sundays throughout the year, and here young adults typically attend that service and then gather for a potluck or a dinner out afterwards. The Paulist Center employs a part-time Pastoral Minister for Young Adults to organize activities in collaboration with the six to eight members of the Young Adult Leadership Team. Young adult events include the monthly potluck, outings like hiking and apple picking, a fall retreat, panel discussions on spirituality and faith, and small group meetings with fellow young adults. Paulist Center young adults volunteer as choir members, lectors, and Eucharistic Ministers, and members of the Pastoral Council, and help distribute food at the Paulist's Wednesday Night Supper Club for the homeless.

At their annual two-night retreat, at the same Benedictine Abbey south of Boston, 23 retreatants heard presentations from three young adult group members around the theme of hearing, responding, and trusting God's call. The first two presentations were made by female converts. One spoke about her painful childhood and family separation in the wake of a deeply personal trauma and the other about addiction to marijuana and feelings of hopelessness. She told how what seemed like mystical signs and clues eventually brought her to the Catholic faith. The last presentation was made by a Catholic male who spoke about his own discernment

process as he continued to weigh the possibility of joining the priesthood. The emotional tenor of the presentations and the response of the retreatants seemed more muted, as the stories focused less on the painful and confusing early periods and more on the rationale for transitioning to a new faith – or towards a vocational calling.

After each presentation, small groups met to discuss their own spiritual journeys and respond to young adult ministry leaders who asked questions like: In your own life story, what does it mean to you to be Catholic? How has God spoken to you in the past? How has God been speaking to you lately? How do you seek to honor God in your life? How are you called to serve God in the way that God intends you to serve? Retreatants spent time drawing life maps that charted their own spiritual paths towards God and away from God, and then they returned to share these with the group.

On Sunday morning, rather than attend the Benedictine Mass in the chapel, Paulist Center young adults held their own Mass in the small living room of the main residential house. A coffee table served as altar and retreatants gathered in a wide circle of chairs, kneeling on the carpet at the designated moments. Fr. Coughlin from the Paulist Center presided, also kneeling at the coffee table for the consecration of the bread and wine. In his homily, he emphasized the differing interpretations of the gospel reading in which Jesus is asked to name the greatest commandment. The books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke provide slightly different responses: love the Lord your

God and love your neighbor like yourself. Fr. Coughlin makes clear that the gospel speaks to the listener in ways that the listener can understand, i.e., God's message adapts itself to the listener. The same is true in everyday life: instead of looking for the perfect answer from God and feeling inadequately equipped to receive the message, we should interpret the message as part of an ongoing conversation with God through which we use our innate talents to make small steps that guide us in the right direction. During the Mass, young adult retreatants played guitar, sang, and assisted in the Eucharist, which made the embodied expression of Catholic faith very much their own.

Like St. Cecilia young adults, Paulist Center young adults feel a strong sense of attachment to the religious messaging of the church and to social connections with their peers:

I came here looking for a church not even really looking for community, just looking more to go to Mass and then I discovered that this was kind of more than what I was looking for. It was a community that actually made sense to me. I felt challenged by the homilies at Mass and then we have a very robust young adult ministry program, so I think that that's what keeps me coming back to this church specifically. - *Lisa*

Peaceful, it's very peaceful to me. I feel like I'm coming with my family. I just feel very... I'm always looking around to see which of the core group is there that night. - *Cathy*

St. Clement Eucharistic Shrine

Liturgy of the Mass

St. Clement Eucharistic Shrine started in 1925 as the Church of the Redeemer, a landmark Gothic-style construction built by the Second Universalist Society of Boston and then sold to the Catholic church 10 years later. Within a few blocks of St. Cecilia's parish, St. Clement served as an auxiliary chapel until 1944, when it was dedicated as a eucharistic shrine and spiritual center led by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. In the 1970s, another religious order, the Oblates of the Virgin Mary, took over management of the church and rectory, which also provides residential housing for Oblate seminarians. Each weekday during the academic year, Oblates and seminarians pray and chant morning and evening prayers. The church shrine is open for visitors 24 hours a day, seven days a week, staffed by Oblates and Perpetual Adoration volunteers who commit one hour per week to keeping the Blessed Sacrament exposed for worship.

Catholic tradition is lived in deep and reverential ways at St. Clement's. The Oblate community profess a "loving obedience" to the Pope and the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, which is the ultimate authority on the interpretation of sacred scripture and tradition. Young adults who regularly attend St. Clement's often cite this reverence for ritual meaning and tradition as a key component of their commitment to the church:

This is gonna sound weird but watching when the brothers and the seminarians serve Mass, because their reverence is just awe-inspiring and encourages me to think more about everything including my faith. And then also having Adoration, which is not part of the Mass, but the exposition at the

end and just the reverence with which they treat the Eucharist has just been really transformative. – *Miriam*

Young adults also mention Fr. Peter Grover, the Director of St. Clement's. They like his fly-fishing stories, low-key humor, and the openness with which he makes the vicissitudes of ordinary life into teachable moments. In one homily, Fr. Peter explained how he teaches New Testament Greek at St. John's Seminary by making it easy for students to change their thinking, and their hearts. Rather than expect them to memorize the alphabet on their own, he uses rhymes and mnemonic devices during class to guide them. Fr. Peter asks, why would hardened sinners and tax collectors suddenly change their hearts? What did John the Baptist do to convert masses of people to trust in God? John the Baptist invited them from the hot desert into the cool Jordan river, from which they emerged renewed by the Holy Spirit: he made it easy for them to regain the grace of God.

On the Sunday following the Christine Blasey Ford testimony, Fr. Tom Carzon, Oblate director of vocational training for seminarians, presided at Mass in the absence of Fr. Peter. He began his homily by repeating the question the Pharisees ask Jesus: "Is it lawful for a husband to divorce his wife?" Fr. Tom noted how everyone has been touched by divorce, which he said is "part of our brokenness and fallenness." Divorce is always a tragedy and particularly devastating for the children involved. Fr. Tom referred parishioners to a book of testimonials of adult children of divorce about their painful experiences with family rupture and loss. He argued that even with the

brokenness of our lives, God has an ideal version of man and woman and everyone carries this longing for communion, even if it has been frustrated or hurt or taken advantage of. But, because God made this ideal known to us from the beginning, it can never be undone, not by human weakness or frailty or sin. God's original plan, Fr. Tom said, is a full and perfect happiness that comes from a desire for communion with God, "to be known as we truly are," and welcomed, received, and loved. By taking the Eucharist, we take this desire for communion beyond ourselves, towards others, and ultimately towards God; and, by becoming filled with God's acceptance and love, we can be filled with love for others. In closing, Fr. Tom asks parishioners to pray for those who are struggling with marriage, or seeking someone to share life with, for those who are about to be married, and for one another as members of the body of Christ. As members of the body of Christ, we should pray for those in pain. The experience of ritual communion (the Eucharist), then, is tied to a practice of loving one another. The testimony of Christine Blasey Ford was not mentioned.

At St. Clement's the invitation of the liturgy is to enter the mystery, where God's ideal can be glimpsed, and strength for overcoming pain can be found. The Oblates emphasize the essential gospel teaching of God's abiding love. Fr. Tom makes no distinction between his own views and those of the Church. He acknowledges the suffering and pain that result from marital separation and divorce and encourages parishioners to take responsibility for maintaining relationship with God as the spiritual source of this truer self. Community belonging thus refers to a universal

ideal of communion with God, understood as a spiritual journey towards sustained belief and trust. It is that belief and trust that leads to a greater capacity for communion with others.

This stands in contrast to the messages at St. Cecilia and the Paulist Center. There the ideal of perfect communion between man and woman and by extension God serves primarily as a reminder of God's unconditional love and acceptance. The more important question is how we bring this reminder of God's love to fruition into our daily lives. Parishioners are invited to seek healing of emotional wounds and embark on a spiritual journey that brings them into greater alignment with God's wishes and greater commitment to alleviating the pain and suffering of others. For Fr. John, perfect communion with God may well come at the end of life, when living the example of the gospel merits entry to the kingdom of heaven and the promise of God's community. In this life, Fr. John says, we are "just passing through" ("As my father used to say, 'Have you ever seen a U-Haul being towed behind a hearse?"). The Paulists sidestep larger theological discussions and instead ground their religious messaging in words and actions that keep interpretive frames open and unbounded, ensuring that religious participants from all ecumenical backgrounds are fully welcomed into the Catholic community.

The Oblate message of human vulnerability, divine love, and spiritual mystery resonates with the young adults who regularly attend Mass at St. Clement's:

[Fr. Peter] is an amazing, intelligent man. It's staggering how much he knows about the Bible. But he grew up from sort of a blue-collar lifestyle, and it shows in the way he talks, and the things he talks about. He worked with his hands his whole life. He's a roofer, his family was a group of roofers. And he conveys that simplicity while also tying an immense intelligence that he had to work hard to get. But he talked about a meaning that I'd never heard of in the gospel readings. He talked about this concept of finishing the job, which was such a powerful notion to me. How you don't rest until you've finished your work. And he talked about the concept of finishing your job as a Christian, attaining things and accomplishing what Christ wants you to do. – *Adam*

Father Peter, even last week he talked about how you can just say all of these reasons why you're not good enough, "I'm divorced, I'm a sinner, I'm a lawyer," you can put any label and say they're bad things that have a connotation with this label and why you're not good enough to go to heaven and why you're not good enough for the gifts of the church and the faith... Things that scare people to think about, the end, he'll talk about the loss of his parents sometimes. He'll talk about, yeah, anything. It doesn't matter if it has a stigma attached to it the way that divorce does in the Catholic church, or if it's something that people don't like. People don't like thinking about death. That's why everyone hates insurance. That's why people don't save enough for retirement. He'll go on in on those types of subjects...I never feel like he has a fear in what he speaks about. There are things that he won't speak about to protect you. I never feel like he's going to shelter me. – *Marie*

Young adult membership

St. Clement's offers an 8:00p Mass on Sundays throughout the year but most St. Clement's young adults interviewed for this study attend Mass irregularly at the church. Apart from adoration at the Shrine, they choose their local parishes, St. Cecilia's, or the traditional St. Paul's parish in Harvard Square. Like the young adults Garces-Foley studied, they access multiple sites for the traditional Mass liturgy (Garces-Foley 2019). When asked about her impressions of the homily at St. Cecilia's, one woman said: "I feel like the homily is never a draw for me. [chuckle] It's good if

there's a good homily, but it's just kinda, I don't know, I don't really care that much.”

Young adult ministry groups are supported by an Oblate brother who also organizes the annual retreat. A young adult ministry group meets weekly at St. Clement’s church to discuss the readings for the upcoming Sunday Mass, enthusiastically debating the meanings and nuances of the liturgical texts and then gathering for dinner afterwards; this group is led by a volunteer young adult. There is also an active weekly Pure in Heart® group that focuses on discussions of chastity and the theology of the body in Catholic faith, which is organized by a core group of three young adult members. Each group attracts about 20-25 young adults with some crossover. Social connection among the core members of each of these groups is strong and encompasses primary-group attachments like those evident at St. Cecilia’s and The Paulist Center, absent the outreach activities that mark commitment at the latter churches.

At a recent day-long retreat at the Oblates of the Virgin Mary spiritual center near Boston, Br. Nathan guided retreatants through the practice of reading and meditating upon scripture using Ignatian spiritual exercises. Br. Nathan explains how to read scripture using *Lectio Divina*, a monastic method that combines reading, active listening, and meditation. After meeting with Br. Nathan as a group, the 10 retreatants in attendance scatter to find a quiet space in the public rooms of the center to read the assigned scripture. When young adults regroup later, Br. Nathan asks about their progress and success with the Ignatian method and then guides

participants through another exercise which is then again undertaken privately. Unlike young adult retreats at St. Cecilia's and The Paulist Center, teaching occurs through the guidance of a spiritual leader who emphasizes private interpretation and deeper connection to layers of meaning and spiritual messaging accessible through the disciplined reading of scripture. Through regular and sustained interactions like these, St. Clement young adults find spiritual support that reaffirms their religious commitment.

The community and the support at that has been a massive growth in my faith. Having people there who look out for one another. And when someone starts slipping away, I know that these people are gonna say to me, "Hey what's going on? What's happening to you?" I've done it to one of my friends, they've done it to me. If you see a dryness kind of approaching somebody or a lack of interest, I can trust that they're gonna look out for me and try to help lift me back up. That's huge. – *Adam*

As we see in the above descriptions, the liturgical practices and messaging at each church, based on differing models of community, shape the experience of the Mass for all congregants. Emotional connection marks the cultural ethos at St. Cecilia's, which guides understanding of the gospel message of compassion and care for others. In discussing formal Church teaching, Fr. John at St. Cecilia's clarifies the space between his own views and the traditional teachings of the Church, while at the same time honoring the traditional ritual practices of the institutional body. Rather than take sides in political debates like immigration or Supreme Court nominations, he negotiates a middle ground to ensure that parishioners with varied perspectives feel welcomed. The mix of progressive messaging and traditional Catholic ritual

appeals to young adults who enjoy the liturgical aspects of the Mass but seek authenticity and openness to and acceptance of the lived complexities of everyday life.

The cultural ethos of The Paulist Center is notable for its emphasis on rational action and direct help and outreach to the poor and disenfranchised. While the Paulist Fathers express progressive views on social justice issues like immigration reform and finding peaceful solutions to conflict in the world, their messaging leaves open opportunities for individuals to bring their own experiential perspectives to Catholic teachings. Thus, rather than speak to issues of the day that might dominate the headlines, or debate the merits of traditional views of Catholic teaching, their efforts are focused on ensuring that each individual regardless of background feels welcomed into the Catholic Church and finds opportunities to practice their faith through individual understanding and directed actions towards others. This mix of progressive messaging and embodied actions that loosely interpret Catholic ritual practice appeals to young adults who wish to express core elements of Catholic tradition without committing to the traditional practices and teachings of the institutional body.

Sacred mystery and communion with God mark the cultural ethos at St. Clement's, through which the gospel message of developing a deeper relationship with God is conveyed. The Oblates of the Virgin emphasize the importance of devotional activities that bring individuals into greater alignment with God's wishes.

In this sense, the traditional view of the Catholic Church and deference to the authority of God shape the experience of parishioners seeking deeper personal connection to God through the experience of Eucharistic Adoration and the traditional ritual of the Catholic Mass. The complexities of everyday life are addressed through the prism of divine wisdom that each individual has access to through the discipline of prayer and attentiveness that yield greater understanding of self in relation to God. This mix of traditional messaging and embodied actions that embrace the formal teachings and practices of the Catholic Church appeal to young adults who find meaning and purpose in the potential to hear and act upon God's message of love and support.

Further, we see there is considerable overlap in young adult programming at each of these churches. From spiritual retreats to discussion groups and social activities, young adults who participate in planning or by attending activities often form deep social relationships that motivate and sustain church commitment. As developed more fully in Chapter 4, young adult fellowship and deep social relationships greatly impact levels of voluntarism and attitudes towards how moral obligation should be engaged. They establish varying forms of community attachment based on key differences in public and private ritual expression.

In the next chapter, I explore how young adults become attached to each of these urban Catholic churches. As I show, patterns of parental socialization align with forms of organizational practice to shape collective identities and feelings of religious

belonging which then motivate continued engagement and commitment. In addition to the social boundaries that segregate young adults and drive commitment to progressive and traditional groups, I explain how young adult Catholics find fellowship and deep social connection through shared collective understandings of how Catholic faith and practice should be expressed.

CHAPTER 2. RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

In this chapter, I will explore how young adults, who might otherwise join their cohort in drifting toward disaffiliation, nevertheless manage to be attached to one of these three urban Catholic churches. My empirical findings show that the extent to which young adults interviewed for this study embrace particular shared understandings of Catholic faith and its expression in ritual practices has a distinct impact on their commitment to a church community. Patterns of socialization, along with forms of organizational practice like ritual and religious messaging, shape collective identity and role identities that drive motivation. In addition, young adult Catholics find fellowship and deep social connection through participation in church ministries which further motivates and sustains community commitment.

Socialization and identity

Religious organizations are important sites for constructing religious identities because they provide the roles, myths, rituals, and behaviors that establish the “grammar” for religious narratives and embodied understanding (Ammerman 2003; Lindbeck 1984; Hervieu-Léger [1993] 2000). According to Margaret Somers, social actors construct identities by locating themselves within a repertoire of “emplotted stories” that integrate past and present events in a coherent rationale that constitutes and expresses the shape of experience, expectations, and memories (Somers 1994: 614). Somers’ epistemological framing of the problem of identity

within a social ontology of meanings advances and deepens our conception of identity as a relational, layered, and active process that links past and present through intentional acts of discursive expression. However, this conception of identity expressed solely through narrative omits the unrealized and unknown experiential meanings that undergird embodied understanding. As Nancy Ammerman (2003) notes, the metaphor of narrative “runs the risk of allowing us to reduce social action to texts and words” when experiences are often guided more by affect than thought (Ammerman 2003: 215). Embodied practices such as gestures, music, and movements “tell the story and signal our location in it” and are essential to defining identity and membership (Ammerman 2003: 215). Thus, religious identity emerges in the shared patterns of action and embedded beliefs that constitute religious practice (Ammerman 2020: 7-8).

Research shows that American adults who grow up with parents active in their faith are more likely to identify with the same denomination as adults. According to a recent Pew Research survey (2016), 62% of those raised by two Catholic parents identify with Catholicism. By contrast, only 32% of those raised by one Catholic parent and one religious “none” and 29% of those from mixed Catholic/Protestant backgrounds identify as Catholic. My study shows that these differences extend to choices about local church affiliation as well. Young adult Catholics who grew up in dual-Catholic-parent households are more likely to attend St. Cecilia’s diocesan parish or St. Clement’s Eucharistic Shrine. The Paulist Center typically attracts young adult

Catholics from families in which one parent is Catholic and the other Protestant; or both parents are born into the Catholic faith but one has left the Church for a Protestant denomination or later self-identifies as atheist or agnostic. These findings summarized in Table 1 are also consistent with religious transmission studies which find that parents play a pivotal role in the behaviors and attitudes of adolescents and young adults.¹⁹

Table 2. STUDY PARTICIPANTS BY PARENTAL RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

Study Participants by Parental Religious Background				
	Dual-Catholic	One-Catholic	Convert	Total
St. Cecilia	11	2	0	13
The Paulist Center	6	4	4	14
St. Clement	9	2	3	14
Totals	26	8	7	41

Table 2 n=41 Religious backgrounds of parents of young adults interviewed for this study, by church.

As shown in Table 2, whether these young adults were raised in one- or two-Catholic parent homes, the majority (66%) of non-convert young adults interviewed for this study attended Mass at least once a week growing up. This rate of Mass attendance is higher than national averages for the years in which these young adults were growing up. Gallup counted just 46% in 1983-86, 50% in 1996-96 and 46% in 2005-2008. (Gallup Social Survey 2018). This suggests that the study sample

¹⁹ Numerous studies have examined this relationship. See for example, Bader and Desmond 2006; Myers 1996; Clark and Worthington 1990; Dudley and Dudley 1986; Hoge and Petrillo 1982.

represents a particularly active portion of the Catholic population which may also explain the strength of young adult commitment at these churches. Notably, my sample includes a disproportionate number of young adults from dual-parent families who attended church weekly growing up. Notably, young adults from single-Catholic parent households who participated in this study also grew up attending church regularly. This suggests regular church attendance may have influences on Catholic commitment independent of parental homogamy.

Table 3. Study Participants by Catholic Mass Attendance and Schooling

Study Participants by Family Catholic Mass Attendance and Catholic Schooling – All Churches	
Dual-Parent Weekly	20
Single-Parent Weekly	7
Dual-Parent Ad Hoc	7
Single-Parent Ad Hoc	0
Full Converts	7
Catholic School Attendance	
None	11
1 - 5 years	6
6 - 9 years	6
10 - 12 years	11

Table 3. n=41 Family Mass attendance and Catholic schooling among young adults interviewed for this study.

Further, it appears that parental influence has a more pronounced effect on religious identity and commitment than years of Catholic schooling. St. Clement’s has

the largest proportion (60%) of non-convert young adults who attended Catholic school for more than 10 years. St. Cecilia has the highest proportion of those who never attended Catholic school (38%) or who attended Catholic school for an average of six to nine years. Paulist Center young adults are broadly dispersed in their Catholic school experience. Although Catholic schooling is a significant factor in young adult religious identification (Smith et al. 2014), its patterns of influence are less evident in this smaller church-level study sample.

Collective identities and organizational roles

To explore how patterns of religious socialization shape collective identity among young adult Catholics, I focus on two key attributes of this process: *cultivation of sources of meaning* and *role preparation and performance* (Arnett 1995). As a process through which people acquire behaviors and beliefs about culture, socialization teaches the value of social practices that give purpose and meaning, like religion, personal relationships, and moral commitments (Arnett 1995: 619). While social identities demarcate the expressions of social class, race, ethnicity, and religion, socializing institutions like family, school and church model embodied practices that prepare actors for roles like parent, employee, and churchgoer. We may say then that transsituational sociodemographic identities are *activated* in particular social settings while role identities are *defined* through the specific logics of institutional practices (Thoits 2003). In this sense, Catholic identity represents both a latent

category of religious identity (“I was born Catholic”) and an active enactment of modeled practices that are salient to the individual (“the reverence of the priest during Mass stays with me”) which serve to motivate action (“attending Mass makes me feel more patience and compassion for others”).

One way of disentangling these distinctions is through role identity theory.²⁰ Role identity represents the idealized self in relation to the perceptions of others (McCall and Simmons 1978; Grube and Piliavin 2000; Thoits 2012). As a more structured, collective version of symbolic interaction theory, the concept helps us understand how people “make meaning” of their identity in the relationship between their sense of self and the organizational environment to which they claim membership (Grube and Piliavin 2000). Role identity has been used to explain performance in work and family roles (Wiley 1991), ethnic role identity (White & Burke 1987), and volunteerism in health and non-profit organizations (Grube and Piliavin 2000; Thoits 2012; Thoits 2013). For example, in an empirical study of American Cancer Society volunteers, researchers found that how volunteers feel perceived by relevant groups within the organization is the strongest predictor of how much time they contribute; past volunteer behavior also builds upon and

²⁰ In social psychology, (role) identity theory encompasses three main areas of focus: how social structure influences identity and behavior, how the interrelationship between the self and others influences behaviors, and how the internal dynamics of a person influences outward behaviors (Stets 2006). For purposes here I am referring to the first two strands developed by George McCall and JL Simmons (1978) and reinterpreted by Sheldon Stryker (1980), Jan E. Stets (2006) and Peggy Thoits (2003).

strongly predicts future commitment (Grube and Piliavin 2000; Thoits 2012). The same is true of motivations for donating blood: the perceived expectations of others and fear of social sanction initially drive volunteers to give blood, which then evolves into role identity as regular blood donor (Piliavin and Callero 1991; Grube and Piliavin 2000). The continued reenactment of particular roles shapes identities that merge more fully into a person's larger sense of self (Grube and Piliavin 2000). Thus, role identity researchers examine not simply what drives commitment to organizations, but how a sense of self *in relation to* the organization motivates and sustains these actions (Grube and Piliavin 2000; Thoits 2012).

Patterns of family socialization and identity that lead young adult Catholics to choose and commit to certain kinds of religious communities are based primarily on their sense of self *in relation to* the specific organizational practices of each local church. As noted above, role identity is helpful to our discussion of young adult Catholic commitment because it incorporates multiple elements of socialization and identity – the formal identification with a religious group, the enactment of roles through inculcated embodied practices, and the cultivation of religious meanings and values that motivate action. I believe this approach can potentially explain the arc of community attachment from patterns of socialization to motivation and sustained commitment.

Thus, the collective identity of young adult Catholics emerges from patterns of settled or contested understandings of Catholic identity which are *activated* in church

settings that speak to these socialized predispositions. Their commitment is *defined* through role identities that help them enact the organizational practices that give meaning to Catholic liturgy through the interpretive lenses provided by local clergy leadership. In what follows, I show how collective identity and role identity are shaped through the organizational practices and community models of local churches.

St. Cecilia Young Adults

The collective identity of St. Cecilia young adults is based on what I call a *settled* understanding of Catholic identity. Although they might at times question their connection to God, or whether they understand the spiritual path that God expects of them, none expressed doubt that God exists and remains present in their lives; only a few explored other faith traditions as part of their spiritual journey. Anna, who grew up in an extended Catholic family, explained that even during difficult periods, she might “set aside the Bible” or “put a hand up to the faith and...take a little break” but her sense of Catholic identity is inextricably linked to the Church.

I grew up with [Catholicism] and it's part of my identity...And even just thinking like going to my 91-year-old grandfather and being like, "I'm not a Catholic anymore." It would crush him. But what matters most to me is the fundamental beliefs of Catholicism, and I still have those beliefs, so I'm sticking with it. Even though I could probably do more research and find a denomination that may fit me better, I prefer to stay. – *Anna*

For St. Cecilia young adults, attachment to religious faith is often expressed through spiritual signs interwoven with lived experience (Orsi 1985; 1999; 2002; Greeley

1990). Religious faith is part of everyday life. Alison says she often intuitively trusts the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

I think if any of the Trinity is most real to me, it's the Holy Spirit that I feel the most. And that I do feel it. I feel it as if it's with me. And I think that's the answer I get a lot of the time is just knowing that that's there, that the Spirit is there, I think. I don't think I get answers in words; I get answers in that feeling. – *Alison*

Catholicism...help[s] me to grieve my lost loved ones. Having that faith is so huge and the way that I am able to get through it is know that they're out there. They're watching me. I have very clear symbols for my aunt. She's a particular butterfly and I see that butterfly all the time. And my grandmother's a dragonfly 'cause she always told me a dragonfly is a symbol of an independent woman, and she would give me dragonfly jewelry all the time and I'll have dragonflies just follow me when I walk. – *Anna*

Erin, frustrated in her attempts to find a condo she could afford in Boston, bought a St. Joseph candle at a bodega and googled a prayer. Within a week, her offer on a property in a neighborhood she had not previously considered was accepted. She cites this as an example of the possibility of spiritual intervention. Her brothers are skeptical but her father leaves the question open: “[N]one of us really know what we believe.” This example demonstrates the comfort with which many St. Cecilia’s young adults navigate religious ambiguity and doubt: “I think I was raised by people who had things test their faith [like the Church sexual abuse scandal] and had doubt and were not cut and dry, were not like, ‘This is what you do because you do it.’ So, they're okay with my doubt, too.”

Margaret describes her religious understanding in terms of what she calls a “childlike faith,” e.g., angels that live in the clouds and a God who looks like Zeus who

is “always there.” Her faith is such a part of her it is like “another arm” and she trusts this faith because, she says, it has gotten her through difficult times in her life. She described a mystical experience during college: “I’m in the Mass, just a regular daily Mass, and I smell these roses, and it was the most beautiful rose smell I’ve ever smelled in my entire life.” There were no flowers in the small chapel; she learns later that roses signify the presence of the Virgin Mary. St. Cecilia’s organizational emphasis on individual spiritual awareness resonates cognitively and emotionally with young adults more inclined to seek signs of God’s presence in everyday life (Greeley 1990). Like St. Clement young adults, they are more inclined to trust in the potential for God to guide them towards new meanings and understanding.

As outlined in Chapter 1, the model for community attachment at St. Cecilia’s is that of the *community of disciples*, which suggests members participate in liturgical practices as a collective enactment of rituals that unite all in common meaning and purpose. At the parish level, young adults find their role identity in the traditional ritual practices of the Catholic Church experienced as a moral belonging with all those present during Eucharistic communion. This solidarity is enacted through the prism of the progressive Gospel message of the priest and his focus on good works that emerge through compassion and care for others. At the social level, the role of young adults is focused more specifically on social expectations around commitments to progressive interpretations of Catholic teaching, particularly around issues of sexuality (elaborated below). Thus, the ideal-type St. Cecilia young adult is

progressive in their views but also attaches significance to the traditional ritual aspects of Catholic faith. They actively engage with church-based practices like serving as lector, Eucharistic Minister, or choir member and are confident of God's presence in the interactions of everyday life. St. Cecilia young adults typically also feel settled in their understanding of the basic tenets and practices of their faith.

Paulist Center Young Adults

The collective identity of Paulist Center young adults is based on what I call a *contested* understanding of Catholic identity. Paulist Center young adults tend to question core elements of Catholic faith and practice, like the significance of the Eucharist (discussed in Chapter 3) or the capacity for God to infiltrate or intervene in daily life. These doubts often appear to stem from family conflict around Catholic faith. For example, a young adult from a devout Catholic family began to question the formal teachings of the Church but struggles with expressing these feelings to family members; another grew up in an interfaith home and attended Catholic church and schools but still struggles with Catholic identity after a painful break-up; still others shared parental discussions about decision-making around raising their children Catholic. Paulist Center young adults seem to draw upon a more fluid (unsettled) set of cultural resources (Swidler 1986) when faced with questions of religious identity.

Young adults are most likely to explain their commitment to the Paulist Center in terms of embodied action and service to others. For example, Lisa describes Catholic tradition as a lived experience through which certain spiritual experiences

“bring you back” to why you believed or did not believe before: “Do I completely understand and comprehend the Trinity? Sometimes, no. Do I completely understand or accept the Resurrection? Sometimes yes, and sometimes no.” Emma explains her understanding of Catholicism in tangible, physical terms as “walking through” sacramental acts and “living out your faith in a very embodied way” via sensory experience.

I think particularly in the very tangible human experiences, realities, elements of this world and so the sacraments were very important to me that sense of God being present in water and oil and fire and in bread and in wine. The very gritty real everyday sort of things of life. That was really important to me...I think Catholicism has a really good practice or good way of thinking about practice versus belief. I think the communities are built on practicing together versus everyone believing a certain thing. – *Emma*

Similarly, Mary says when she feels close to God, a warmth, like a physical sensation she likens to the Holy Spirit that gives her a sense of serenity, calm, goodness and love, particularly when she is honoring God in some way, or offering a kindness to another person. Cathy says she wants to “become more knowledgeable about God” but has little time to delve into her beliefs. Yet she speaks with visible enthusiasm about the feeling of flour on her hands when she distributes the homemade Eucharist host in church. These examples show how Paulist Center young adults tend towards a visceral understanding of religious identity expressed through embodied actions that make them feel part of the larger church community. Their commitment is less about firmly articulated religious beliefs or adherence to traditional liturgical practices, like kneeling in church.

At the Paulist Center, the model for community attachment is also that of the *community of disciples*, the interpretation of which leaves open the potential for multiple meanings and understandings (discussed in Chapter 4). Of the three churches, participants at the Paulist Center engage most fully with the *herald or messenger* community model that issues calls of action to all who want to share God's message of salvation as a congregation dedicated to meaningful outreach. Young adults find their role identity in openness to individual liturgical interpretation and a moral purpose shaped by the themes of Catholic social justice. At the social level, the role of young adults is focused more specifically on commitments to progressive interpretations of Catholic teaching, particularly around issues of sexuality. Thus, the ideal-type Paulist Center young adult is progressive in their views, actively engages in discourse about their religious faith, and openly disputes core tenets and practices of Catholicism. They actively engage with church-based practices like lector, Eucharistic Minister, or choir member and typically express more contested understandings of their Catholic identity.

St. Clement Young Adults

The collective identity of St. Clement young adults, like those at St. Cecilia's, is based on a *settled* understanding of religious identity. Theirs, however, is a commitment to the traditional teachings and ritual practices of the Catholic Church and affirms a taken-for-granted acceptance of the tenets of Catholic faith. They are also more inclined to actively deepen their commitment through prayer, spiritual

texts, and podcasts that align with Catholic Church views, and to seek to live their lives in accord with their Catholic beliefs. Joe expressed abiding confidence in his own ability to understand and adapt to the shifting landscape that brings him into relationship with God:

Overall, I think [my faith] is strong. I have a consistent prayer life. I feel like there's still... I'm far from being a saint. I think there's a lot more I could do to follow God and to trust God more. But it's consistent right now. There's always room to grow. Somewhat recently there's been just kind of some dryness, that's relatively normal. I've experienced enough to know that I'll get out of it eventually. – *Joe*

Miriam says in the past she questioned her faith, especially during college and earlier in preparing for her Confirmation, but now feels a strong pull towards deeper devotional practice.

It may be confirmation bias, but it was always coming from the point of view of no matter how much I question it, I still think on its foundation it's true. And so, what's my evidence for this? And what's my evidence against it? I think like the saints helps me through a lot, especially around my Confirmation and going into high school, St. Therese just grabbed me. [chuckle] And I kind of started to understand the saints better as pointing you toward God and toward Jesus. You could see it in your life, and you can see how it plays out. – *Miriam*

St. Clement young adults not only trust in the potential for God and the Holy Spirit to intervene in everyday life, they listen for signs and signals from God about what their life-path should be. Laura explained how she came to feel a real connection to God during her time volunteering for Eucharistic adoration in college. Unsure what to do during her allotted time monitoring the church, she began to read the Bible, from page one.

I started reading Genesis and then I got to Exodus. And it was in Exodus, it was Exodus 14:14, and I was reading and a line just stood out to me, and it was the line it says, "The Lord himself will fight for you, you have only to keep still." And it was just like... It just hit me, and it was that first moment I felt like God was speaking to me almost in scripture, of just saying like, "Hey, it really is in the silence." - *Laura*

Some St. Clement young adults shared personal stories about feeling guided by the Holy Spirit in direct and tangible ways, from making choices about dating to discerning deeper considerations of a vocational life. A few confided that were it not for wanting to marry and raise a family, they would likely have chosen a religious vocation as a priest, nun, or religious sister.

At St. Clement's, the model for community attachment is that of *mystical communion*, which emphasizes an intimate relationship with God through the Holy Spirit and with the communion of saints in the next life (discussed further in Chapter 4). At the parish level, young adults find their role identity in the traditional ritual practices of the Catholic Church and religious messaging that emphasizes individual paths toward deeper spiritual connection and a desire to discern God's message and path for them. At the social level, young adults are drawn together by the shared assumption that those participating in St. Clement activities are likely to hold traditional views of Church teaching. This contributes to strong social connections (outlined below). Thus, the ideal-type St. Clement young adult is traditional in their views, actively engages with ritual and devotional practices across multiple sites,

seeks signs of God's intended path for them, and feels settled in their understanding of the basic tenets and practices of their faith.

Institutional identity and commitment

My empirical research shows that contemporary reaffirmation of socialized orientations to religious practice motivates young adults to actively engage with others who share similar attitudes towards the expression of religious faith. The need for social approval and the importance of attachment to certain people who can provide this approval are key sources of motivation towards group commitment (Wrong 1994; Arnett 1995). To meet the cultural norms and expectations of socializing institutions, an actor must feel attachment towards others who are implicated in the socializing process. For example, parents who draw upon warmth, love, and attachment have more success in disciplining their children than parents who use only harsh control: "Love is the key link between the standard of behavior that parents prescribe for their children and children's adherence to that standard" (Arnett 1995: 625). Peers, teachers, and work colleagues are also socializing agents, although their attachment and influence are typically less intense (Arnett 1995: 625).

My study shows that this kind of attachment to fellow young adult community members is a strong motivator for continued social engagement and religious commitment at each church: *how* young adults engage with their Catholic faith connects them with others who share similar predispositions towards formalized

expressions of Catholic identity, as described above and in Chapter 1. Importantly, continued social attachment is made possible through predictable, regularly scheduled activities that generate sustained opportunities for building fellowship and close connection with others. Through sustained interactions at Mass and in ministry activities, young adults often develop primary-group relationships that extend to deeper forms of commitment and mutual trust.

It's one of my primary communities and sources of friendships, and I don't know if I would say it's second home because I guess I think of that as a corny thing, or... But it's definitely one of my... When I think of communities that I involve and invest myself in, it's one of the top three communities, I would say, in my life.

- Lisa, Paulist Center

I would say just very much about like I've found in St. Cecilia's. The type of Catholic I am, the type that's pro-life, still would pray the rosary every now and again, loves the Pope but is very liberal [chuckle] at the same time - that's where I found my home of like-minded people...At St. Cecilia's, just knowing that you don't have to really explain yourself or justify yourself, qualify what you just said. Everybody there is on the same train....I feel like these are people I relate to.

- Amanda, St. Cecilia's

The benefits of regularly scheduled activities are particularly evident at St. Clement's. Although young adults referenced their volunteer work with groups that support pro-life causes, from marches and rallies to protests outside the Planned Parenthood clinic to volunteer work with the Back Bay Mobile Soup Kitchen, the main source of commitment is the Monday night liturgy meeting. The only time the young adult ministry leader will cancel is if Christmas or Christmas Eve falls on a Monday. This consistency provides young adults with the secure knowledge that on any Monday

evening they can drop into the church to meet with like-minded Catholics, share liturgical discussion, and enjoy a group dinner nearby afterwards. The church becomes their established “third-place” for public-private community engagement (Oldenburg 1989).

It’s really nice to have people that I’ve met at Monday night who...wait for me after Mass and we talk to each other, and I’ve never had that actually.

– *Miriam*

However, the boundary lines between progressive and traditional Catholicism necessarily contribute to more conscious deliberations around which churches young adults initially choose. As the largest single religious institution in the United States, Catholics are a diverse, pluralist populace with divided feelings about social and political issues that dominate public life and exemplify their identity as Catholics. In their analysis of survey data spanning 25 years, D’Antonio, Dillon, and Gautier (2013) document the social changes that have occurred in the relationship between American Catholics and the institutional body of the Catholic Church. Differences are notably apparent in generational cohorts and in responses to the Second Vatican Council’s (1962-65) call for greater egalitarianism and lay participation at the parish level. The “New Mass” was introduced in 1964: congregants sang a processional hymn where before priests and altar boys entered in reverent silence; the altar that used to face the Eucharist was turned towards the congregants so they could witness the consecration and hear the liturgy as it is being enacted; scriptural passages were

read aloud not in Latin but in vernacular English; and women no longer had to cover their heads upon entering church (O'Toole 2008).

D'Antonio et al. argue that through this new messaging, Vatican II opened the door for Catholics to take greater responsibility for their actions based on the moral authority of personal conscience (D'Antonio et al. 2007: 90; Kennedy 1988). This process of self-guided moral action led to adherence to the principles of individual conscience in matters of faith but also to a widening chasm between traditional Catholics who view the Catholic Church within its hierarchical authority and progressives who view it from the perspective of personal autonomy and conscience. Thus, while American Catholics still formally identify with the Catholic Church, find meaning in Catholic doctrines like the resurrection, the sacraments, and the importance of ministering to the poor, they are increasingly less likely to attend Mass and often disagree with the social teachings of the Church, particularly on issues related to family and sexuality.

Mary Ellen Konieczny (2013) offers a vivid portrait of how local parish congregations advance and reinforce the boundaries between progressive and traditional Catholic identity through physical surroundings, liturgical styles, and parish programming (Konieczny 2013: 240). She argues that the Catholic shift towards multiple expressions of faith and practice in fact makes religious identities stronger not weaker. The "culture of choice" that is embedded in uniquely American congregational forms of decision-making speaks to its religious vitality; those who

choose a strong position for or against Church social teachings “are likely to invest deeply in religious belief and practice and its moral outcomes, since commitment and the presentation of personal authenticity are interwoven” (Konieczny 2013: 242). Choosing membership in traditional versus progressive voluntary groups that adopt their own interpretation of religious tradition thus provides legitimacy and a valid rationale for participation.

My empirical study of young adults similarly shows how symbolic and social boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002) shape identification with local churches. Cultural repertoires separate groups and classes though symbolic boundaries that shape collective identities and the normative practices that determine worthiness for group membership (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 171-72). In the case of young adult Catholics, we see how symbolic boundaries develop around the Church’s progressive social justice policies on the one hand and its traditional moral teachings on the other. The gap between traditional and progressive Catholics across my sample is apparent in their church commitments, but also in their deeply divergent interpretations of Church teachings, most notably those that relate to sexuality.

In interviews with Boston young adults, I asked a set of questions designed to invite them to name and describe the source of any disagreements with the Church:

- How strongly do you agree with the teachings of the Catholic church?*
- a. What aspects of Catholic doctrine do you agree with?*
 - b. What aspects of Catholic doctrine do you disagree with?*
 - c. Are there any aspects of Catholic doctrine that trouble you?*

Have you ever experienced conflict between your values and those of the Catholic Church?

If yes:

- a. Can you give me an example?*
- b. How did you react to this conflict?*
- c. Were you satisfied with the resolution of this conflict?*

Two key issues emerged most frequently among St. Cecilia and Paulist Center young adults who expressed disagreements with Church teaching: the Church's exclusion of gays and lesbians²¹ from the sacrament of marriage and its excessive emphasis on pro-life issues. Of lesser significance was the question of whether women should be ordained as priests.

Gay marriage

Vast majorities of young adult Catholics nationally support gay marriage: 85% of Catholic ages 18-29 say that "homosexuality should be accepted by society" and 75% of Catholics under 30 support legal same-sex marriage (Pew Research 2014). This support is evident among St. Cecilia and Paulist Center young adults who typically put this concern on the top of their list for both theological and personal

²¹ The *Catholic Catechism* states: [Homosexuals] close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from a genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved. The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial. They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. These persons are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and, if they are Christians, to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter from their condition. Homosexual persons are called to chastity. By the virtues of self-mastery that teach them inner freedom, at times by the support of disinterested friendship, by prayer and sacramental grace, they can and should gradually and resolutely approach Christian perfection. [2357-2359]

reasons. One man from St. Cecilia's emphasized the beauty of the sacrament of marriage and its model for how to live out God's calling.

Access to the sacrament of marriage really troubles me because I think at its core that because I'm Catholic I believe that marriage is this beautiful thing that we should not exclude people from and that we should seek to model for everyone and that it is our highest... It's a high calling. – *Bill*

Others cited friends who were gay and empathized with their feelings of being excluded. One Paulist Center woman remarked that a roommate was gay and she was heartbroken that she would not be able to experience the joy of a Catholic wedding. She also expressed gratitude that The Paulist Center held a prayer service for victims of the shooting at a gay night club in Orlando in 2016.

I feel like they're just much more out in the world and acknowledging that these things do exist. I feel like they're realistic about complex issues that people bring to Mass, and the reasons why so many might not go to Mass. I like the inclusivity. A lot of my friends at Paulist Center are gay. And I like that they...keep coming to the Paulist Center. – *Cathy*

Another Paulist Center woman asked rhetorically whether she is comfortable getting married in the Catholic Church knowing her friends who are gay or bisexual would not be allowed to, ultimately leaving the question open. The only participant among the progressive churches to express support for the Church's position said she changed her mind after taking a course in *Theology of the Body*, based on Pope John Paul II's treatise on the spiritual dimensions of love and sexuality and the primacy of the relationship between a man and woman: "It was just like a huge upending of my soul when I was learning all of that."

Of the 14 St. Clement participants in this study, only three named the exclusion of gays as their main disagreement with Catholic social teaching. One woman asked how this issue takes precedence over so many other more existential concerns in the world:

And then homosexuality is a thing that I'm like, I feel that anything that comes from love comes from God and that's something that I get a lot of flak for...Cause it's also like... Guys, we have nuclear war and evil and all these things and you're mad because somebody's gay? That's what you wanna focus on? [laughter] – *Miriam*

Another woman changed her opinion after developing a deeper appreciation of the difficulties for Catholic men and women who are gay.

It's a very challenging thing to live out, and I have not struggled with same sex attraction, but I think that that would be something, that I would think a lot about. But, I think ultimately hearing the stories and the voices of people that had, that did live that lifestyle and that they understand and appreciate the challenge that God puts on us in some ways of having to give [yourself] to God and I think that's what's changed my attitude on it. – *Amelia*

One man who agrees with Church catechism nevertheless cites the failure of the Church to give clear practical or political direction to gay and transgender people, for example, by supporting the institution of civil gay marriage and welcoming gays into the Church in a meaningful way.

I very much agree with the teachings of the Catholic Church although I have difficulties with gay rights and transgender rights, not necessarily from the Church's teachings. I understand that. But then how it's lived out politically I don't understand. If there is already a difference between sacramental marriage and civil marriage, why can't civil marriage change more, and sacramental marriage stay the same? There hasn't really been a strong feeling of "the Church says we love people who are gay and experience this." Then it

seems like those are just words. There isn't a practical [dimension that says] "and this is how we actually live it out." - *Joe*

Another woman explained how the Church's position comes from the fact that the experience of being gay must be understood in relation to what God is asking, which cannot be "taught" but must be felt. By committing to celibacy, a person is making a sacrifice undertaken within a relationship with Jesus.

So, that's why it is really hard for me, because I can't talk from experience [about this]. That is part of the reason why we do need really good witnesses that are homosexual that live in the Church. Because, they are the ones that really can be that witness to other people, of the joy that can come from living that life. Because I think there is a lot of joy. It's not like God is calling you to be miserable, but...I think there [is] joy that comes from it. - *Laura*

Three young adults defended the Church's position purely on theological grounds and in deference to its traditional authority.

I would put it this way. If it's in the catechism, that means that the Church has said, "This is not only truth, but this is written in a way that we can teach it to you as truth." If it's taught infallibly by the Church, it's true. And if I disagree with it, I'm the one who's wrong. - *Adam*

The scholarship [in] our tradition is just so strong. Some of the greatest minds, philosophers, everyone else that I know that this stuff has gone through fire. If it got through this, that whole process of centuries and all these great minds with book smarts and practical smarts, people smarts, all of that, it's dependable. I don't need to pick it apart. I'm not any smarter than all these other people before me. But so whenever there's any controversy about something specific that the church says, I'm not really one to go along with it. - *Patricia*

If you believe in the Church, you should believe all of it and or at least be humble enough to defer to it, even if you don't understand, or even if there's not the grace of faith. - *Charles*

Abortion

In national polls, 48% of American Catholics say abortion should be legal and a nearly equal proportion (47%) disagree (Pew Research 2018). A similar pattern applies to younger millennial Catholics: 52% say it should be legal and 48% say it should be illegal (Pew Research 2018). Many St. Cecilia and Paulist Center young adults who expressed disagreement on Church teaching about abortion framed their responses less in terms of their own personal pro-life position²² and more as it relates to larger issues of social justice and welfare. In interviews, both men and women expressed conflicted feelings over the question, on the one hand knowing they would not choose abortion for themselves but on the other also aware that there are larger societal issues that make these decisions nuanced and difficult. Some highlighted inconsistencies in the Church's position on the dignity of life, which they argue focuses heavily on the quality of life for the pre-born but demonstrates less concern for the quality of life for the child and parent(s). These often-nuanced explanations are worth quoting in their entirety.

I think teaching on the dignity of life needs to apply to all life. And so, do I hate abortion? Yes. I think everyone does. But do I think that there's a lot of complexities around [this] and what does dignity of life mean for that child as they grow up, for the woman who bears them, for a society where that continues to be an option that people feel like they have to take? And I would love to see the Church have a bigger conversation that isn't just about what happens at birth to the child or not, but a much bigger question, conversation about life in general. – *Emily (Paulist Center)*

²² Of those who expressed disagreement with an aspect of Church teachings, only two openly stated in interviews that they are pro-choice.

I have a very complicated view of abortion. I think it is an evil, but I don't think that the best way to address this evil is to craft public policy which bans it. I also do not feel empowered to tell women in general, and women in positions of material or emotional distress, what to do with their bodies. I do think that there is a failing of society and of the individual when we come to a place where we need to terminate a germinating life within a woman's body. How to best address that failing, I think, is definitely not by banning abortion, and demonizing women who go through with an abortion. Is that very different from what most Catholics would hold as dogma? Probably. Is that different from the liberal orthodox creed? Probably. [laughter] But I think, to be a believer, as I said before, is to wrestle with questions. – *Jim (Paulist Center)*

I think bringing a child into the world, you need to be... It needs to be something intentional and thought out and you need to be ready for it, and even though so many things happen, and it could be a surprise and that's okay. But people should have the choice if they wanna be socio-economically ready, emotionally ready and not run the risk of having to choose if you wanna have an abortion because it's just... And so those avenues of birth control can be helpful, and I think... So, that's my belief in just having that, like saying you can't use protection at all. It just... doesn't make sense. – *Anna (St. Cecilia)*

I've always been fairly conflicted because I really hate abortion. And I hate any circumstances that lead to it being necessary. But I also have heard the teachings of the Church many, many times. I feel like that sort of, for my own self, have come to the conclusion that I could never presume to...cast judgment on the painful decisions of somebody else. But, at the very least, I hope to contribute to a society that makes it as unnecessary as possible. From the Church, I hear a complete lack of understanding of the circumstances that lead for that to be necessary. And I really...I've been in a lot of sermons where people sort of blame promiscuity and other things for that being necessary. – *Richard (Paulist Center)*

It just irks me tremendously because setting that priority prevents so much collaboration on other aspects of what I would consider to be a pro-life agenda. Like the fact that there's still a stigma around unwed mothers. There are very, very poor social services for single parents, for people who have a difficult time finding a good place to live, putting food on the table. And we have an economic and political system in our country that is anti-life. In a lot of different ways. And so when you start talking about pro-life and your number one priority in that policy agenda, is to try to limit access to abortions...So, why is it that the Catholic Church chooses to emphasize the banning of abortion,

over other policy initiatives that are also pro-life? Ones that have fewer unintended consequences, ones that make a difference for more people, that have broader political support across the country. It's just, you could pick all of the low hanging fruit, and the result would probably be a much more significant reduction in abortions, than if you would have actually banned the act of doing it. – *James (St. Cecilia)*

One study participant from St. Cecilia's expressed a sense of comfort with the views of fellow parishioners who may well take both pro-life and pro-choice positions.

I think there's a lot of pro-choice people probably at St. Cecilia's. And I would say most of the young adults I know are pro-life, honestly, but not like the pro-life movement that like I said gets the airtime... So it's a place for me to be like, "Wow, these are all the social issues I'm concerned about too." But at the same time, I don't have to feel afraid to be pro-life. It's all understood here that even though you might be personally pro-choice, this is a pro-life establishment, you know what I mean? – *Amanda*

Ordination of women

The issue of whether women should be ordained as priests emerged in interviews over the course of conversation, with two St. Cecilia's and one Paulist Center young adult indicating their support, and another Paulist Center member simply noting her ambivalence ("it's not a thing that is tearing at me"). Those who agree see the matter as a way of bringing women more fully into the faith and institutional hierarchy of the Church:

And I think in general, this also speaks a little bit to my feelings on women priests...I think that it's not up to us to determine who is called to what. And I think that the Catholic church has a certain level of arrogance on who can be called to what. – *Bill (St. Cecilia)*

I think that we should allow women to become priests. I think that that would help with the space that women don't occupy in the church...And I think that

if women were allowed to be part of the priesthood, they could also do that. -
Terry (St. Cecilia)

I do think women should be ordained and given space for their voices to be heard and given authority and power in decision-making. - *Emily (Paulist Center)*

Thus, in their views supporting gay marriage, young adults at St. Cecilia's and the Paulist Center focused on how this exclusion feels to the actors involved, often referring to friends who are gay and Catholic and therefore not fully welcomed into the Church. This aligns with the churches' emphasis on inclusion and welcome to all church members. St. Clement's young adults who expressed disagreement on the issue of gay marriage were more inclined to frame their argument in terms of the coherence and priorities of the argument. This comports with their deference to the traditional authority of the Church, with dissension focused less on the doctrine and more on its communication. On the issue of abortion, St. Cecilia and Paulist Center young adults express dismay in the way the issue is addressed by the Church, which comports with the social justice emphasis dominant at the two churches. As a broader social issue, young adults would like to see more thoughtful discourse around how to protect women and children, and not simply the unborn child. The few St. Cecilia and Paulist Center young adults who volunteered disagreement with the Church's reluctance to ordain women framed their explanations in terms of resistance to power and authority but without additional arguments that speak directly to the values and benefits of this for the institutional body.

Social boundaries

Among the three churches examined in this study, social relationships are circumscribed and commitment defined according to traditional versus progressive views on Catholic Church social teachings around sexuality. At St. Clement's these issues rarely arise, as the understanding is that if you attend Mass and young adult ministry activities at the church you are a traditional Catholic: "You get a sense of, 'I know what people around me believe.' Whereas maybe in other services, you don't know, you're like: 'I don't know, maybe we're not on the same page with some things.'" St. Cecilia young adults have a similar sense of identification with the people and culture in their parish. They appreciate the traditional ritual of the Mass and the tenor of progressive messaging spoken from the altar and say they appreciate the fact that they can express their Catholic identity without qualifiers.

Just knowing that you don't have to really explain yourself or justify yourself, qualify what you just said. Everybody there is on the same train...Especially when I was going to [school] and I was feeling like this split life. It was my place to be like, "Okay, these people get it." - *Amanda*

Dividing lines become apparent when otherwise unspoken elements of culture are transgressed, especially when men and women seek acceptance of their own expressions of sexuality. One St. Cecilia young adult says he used to go to St. Clement's with friends, but after he came out as gay, they "would have nothing to do" with him.

So those types of views on sexuality, on being very judgmental, friends if they might cohabit with a boyfriend or girlfriend – those types of doctrine around social teaching I think are definitely by-the-book Catholicism but I'm not sure [they are the] intent of Catholicism...But what is more valuable to me

is feeling welcomed and feeling in an environment that is welcoming [that] allows me to not think about all the other stuff. I can just think about the Mass. Whereas I realized, particularly after I came out that I would get very distracted at places that I felt were more conservative. And it wasn't really their fault. It was more of my own stuff. But in a place that I could tell maybe wouldn't be so welcoming of me if they knew who I was distracted me from my relationship with God. So, the sense of community allows me to not focus on the community if that makes sense. [*Name withheld*]

Another St. Cecilia young adult explained how she felt ill at ease socializing with traditional Catholics at a St. Cecilia's retreat, feeling her views about sexuality in relationships were out of step with theirs:

The other group of people, they just... They're more like hard and fast with the rules, and so, they... I guess it's, they're stricter if I... If I'm in a group with them ever or in a social gathering, and they're there and I'm talking to them, I just see the looks on their faces. They just... I just get the sense that they don't... They just know I don't fit in...I get a non-verbal reaction or if people are talking about saving sex until marriage and I say something like, "Well, but I think it's important to really get to know your partner and have it be a gradual getting to know each other, so there's not going zero to 60. I don't think that that is a good thing. And I think that it's detrimental to..." I say the term "sexual health" and they're like, "Are you kidding me?" And I'm like, "It's a thing, it's a thing." And you have to acknowledge that. - *Anna*

Or, as one woman from St. Cecilia's frames it, she is open to finding community with all Catholics but has reservations about those who express views entirely dissimilar from her own.

When I meet Catholics who, not think like me in everything, but that have similar values to me, and I do think there's a really broad range of values that take priority differently in Catholics. And when I meet people who are even a little bit similar to me, I feel very connected. But if I meet someone who would really like to discuss how gay marriage is destroying the fabric of the American family, [chuckle] I don't feel any particular connection to that person. [chuckle]
- *Alison*

In my observations, progressive young adults who attend The Paulist Center were more likely to highlight the differences that separate their progressive views from those of traditional Catholics, especially when interacting beyond their own parish. A few Paulist Center young adults noted the difficulty of knowing in advance where a potential dating partner stands on the Church's teachings on social issues. One woman commented that she checks off "extra" belief statements about Catholicism on the *CatholicMatch.org* website to boost her profile among potential matches. Their compatibility list includes beliefs about the Eucharist, contraception, sanctity of life, papal infallibility, premarital sex, immaculate conception, and holy orders. She says she fully agrees with three of the seven items but throws in a fourth item to help boost her profile in searches. (Items like the Catholic Church's opposition to contraception and sex before marriage she does not support.) Another woman, after describing one date with a man she thought was too traditional asked half-jokingly "Am I really Catholic?" One Paulist Center man says he wants to surround himself with fellow Catholics but is cautious: "With Catholic people I kind of say, 'Oh, what's your stance on this?' I would never do that with any other religion or anything like that 'cause I'm pretty respectful in that way, but if now I feel like I'm Catholic and so somebody else says they're Catholic I almost have to [ask] such questions." He broke off a serious relationship with a Catholic woman over their disagreement about the Church's views on gay marriage and how this might practically play out in their future together:

And then when it came to the marriage equality stuff, we disagreed on that. And then we started talking about, "Well, what if your future child was gay? How would you raise this person?" And she was very much in line with what the Catholic Church would teach to raise a child, to be celibate, to have a life like that, and not get married. And I said, "Well, what if your child wanted to get... Well, would you go to the wedding?" "No, I wouldn't." And I said, "I cannot do that, that's not what I want." There were other things too. I think as with any relationship. But that was kind of a big one, and I thought, "Geesh, if this is what the Catholic Church is... " And maybe it was a little unfair in some way to maybe put that much on her or her views of the Catholic Church, but she's very well read in things on this, and that's the reason I read the *Encyclical* and all that sort of stuff, is to figure it out.

And so in that process, I said, "If these are the types of people I'll be meeting or potentially marrying someday, I'm not sure if I want that." And so that was the big thing that made me say, "I don't know if I wanna be Catholic anymore." Plus, some of my best friends in the whole world are gay, and they told me the struggles of trying to find love or falling in love and heartbreak and things like that, and that just tugs at my emotions, and so, to have these two competing parts of my life, and I've decided to go with supporting my gay friends, basically. *[Name withheld]*

The above-described difficulties expressed by young adult Catholics from The Paulist Center raise important questions about how religious identity shapes belonging and attachment to community. We often think of Catholic identity as divided primarily along values-and-beliefs boundary lines, with pro-life conservatives on the one side and progressive social justice activists on the other. But my research adds additional dimensions by illustrating how differences in settled and contested understandings of Catholic faith inform these processes. St. Clement's young adults share similar views of traditional Catholic practice and assume that those who participate in church and young adult activities likely share the same interpretations of Catholic social teaching. St. Cecilia and Paulist Center young adults

are progressive in their views and more inclined to rely on the moral authority of personal conscience (D'Antonio et al. 2007) in navigating the terrain of social relationships. However, because young adults at St. Clement's and St. Cecilia's have more settled understandings of their Catholic faith, they are less inclined to openly distinguish between their stance and those of potential friends and romantic partners. Paulist Center young adults on the other hand articulate these distinctions in both negative and positive terms, as statements that distinguish their views from traditional Catholic teaching and establish their status as *a certain kind* of Catholic.

In sum, the identity of young adult Catholics is *activated* in social settings but *defined* through role identities that enact organizational practices of the local church that are meaningful to the participants. Whether young adults were raised in single- or dual- Catholic parent homes has a direct bearing on their choice of church setting: young adults who grew up in dual-Catholic parent households are more likely to attend St. Cecilia's or St. Clement's; those who grew up in one-Catholic parent households are more likely to attend The Paulist Center. Young adults at St. Cecilia's and St. Clement's collectively express settled understandings of their Catholic faith while those at The Paulist Center typically express contested understandings. Progressive and traditional views of Catholic social teaching further reinforce the social boundaries around friendships and dating and contribute to close social connections among young adults at each church. As will be discussed in the next chapter, how young adults view their roles as members of vibrant church

communities and how clergy leadership frame these moral obligations has important implications for our understanding of community commitment.

CHAPTER 3. RITUAL MEMORY AND RESONANCE

In this chapter, I illustrate how ritual memory links religious habitus to community choice through the cognitive and emotional resonance of organizations, and how individual understandings of Catholic faith align with the liturgical interpretations of local church communities. Religious habitus is articulated through embodied understanding and the institutional interpretive frames that value and prioritize some religious forms and meanings over others, which in turn resonate for actors conditioned towards similar patterned expressions of faith and practice. I explain how the differing modes of interaction shaped through organizational leadership engender religious belonging and sustained attachment to religious communities.

Organizational resonance

Taken from social movement theory and more recently organizational studies, framing is the dynamic interaction that occurs between an institution and the orientations, needs, and aspirations of its group or members (Giorgi 2017). Frames are “schemata of interpretation” that enable individuals “to locate, perceive, identify, and label” occurrences within their life space and the world at large (Goffman 1974: 21, quoted in Benford and Snow 2000: 614). While schemata reference discrete objects, events, concepts, activities and patterns of information, frames organize experience and action towards particular outcomes. To be effective, frames must resonate, or

“strike a responsive chord” (Snow, Rochford, Worden, and Benford 1986: 477) which occurs *cognitively* by establishing a familiar connection between previously established meanings and new interpretations; and *emotionally* by establishing a “felt” connection to previous experiences that “enmesh” with the aspirational identity of a group (Giorgi 2017: 716; 721).

In the Catholic context, framing may best be viewed as a process of “activating” the understandings or passions of a target audience (Giorgi 2017: 729). At each church examined in this study, cognitive resonance is achieved through interpretive frames that contextualize traditional understandings of Catholic teaching and messaging that offers new and compelling ways of understanding. The homily given during the Mass typically articulates the church’s religious messaging which can take the form of calls to action. For example, the pastor at St. Cecilia’s provides avenues for cognitive connection by making the laity “modern-day disciples” who are called upon to deliver and enact the love and fellowship of gospel teaching; the immediacy and relevance of the message resonates with young adults seeking to make sense of their faith through personal reflection and compassionate outreach to others. Paulist Center clergy leave open the possibility for individual interpretation of scripture and emphasize the gospel message of welcome and acceptance to all God’s people in their calls to action. Direct outreach towards others and the relevance of the message to daily life resonates with young adults seeking to make sense of their faith through embodied action and open, discursive questioning. The Oblates director at St. Clement’s draws upon prosaic

stories and metaphorical examples to convey universal messages of God's continued love and guidance and expresses calls to action that emphasize discernment and greater awareness of God's desire to connect. The religious message resonates with young adults seeking models for how to enact practices that promote deeper understanding of the liturgy and their relationship to God.

In addition, emotional resonance at the organizational level occurs through "feeling rules" that regulate the extent to which individuals express their feelings, values, and experiences (Thoits 1989: 322; Hochschild 1983). Perhaps the most well-known example of institutional emotion management comes from Arlie Hochschild's (1983) study of flight attendants who manage the expectations of their employer against their own personal feelings as they recalibrate the often-charged reactions of airline passengers. Emotions are "signals to the self" that help "enmesh" individual roles and identities with the expectations of the institution (Thoits 1989: 332; Giorgi 2017: 721). My findings show that emotional resonance figures most prominently at St. Cecilia's. Fr. John openly draws upon the affective dimensions of Catholic faith to bring parishioners into greater self-awareness and vulnerability. He also entreats parishioners to act with grace and humility in their interactions with others and to reflect earnestly on a teaching from the gospel that they can then carry out in their own lives.

Father John was talking about one of the homeless men who lives around here. [He] was doing his rounds [at Boston Medical Center] and walked by this guy's room and kinda did a double take when he saw him and went to see this guy.

And this guy was like "Father, what are you doing here?" And he said, "...I was just walking by and I saw you." He's talking about going there and he's like, "Yeah, we prayed together." I broke down, [laughter] 'cause I think there are so many people...who don't have anybody. And I think that's one of the beautiful things about the Church, that we can be there for people. That's kind of what gives me faith in God in a lot of ways I think. – *David*

Young adults experience the emotive qualities of the liturgy through embodiment and the reverence with which ritual is engaged and enacted. Fr. John honors Catholic ritual by moving through the blessing of the Eucharist with deliberation and care, calling all of those present to share in the lived experience of the Lord's sacrifice.

At St. Clement's, young adults also experience the emotive qualities of the liturgy through embodiment, but typically prefer to engage with the emotional dimensions of faith privately, that is, in the individual relationship between themselves and God. They will speak affectively about the Oblates' morning prayer and chants.

The sort of little gestures of reverence. At the Low Mass last night, every time [the altar server] handed the priest the... I think they're called cruets that hold the water and the wine for the consecration. Every time when the priest handed them back, he kissed them before he put them back...or when the priest does a very slowly and deep genuflection to the host after he's consecrated it. That kind of stuff stays with me. – *Charles*

Marie cites the importance of quiet reverence that marks the religious experience of worship at St. Clement's. She expects that others will share and maintain a similar decorum, for example, by not talking during the service or making their way to the restroom during the readings and homily ("You should probably be here for this part. He isn't going to talk for very long and it's okay, you can hold it for a few

minutes...Let's keep it real here.”). What resonates most for Marie is the meditative quality of the service that is created by the darkened church and candlelight at Sunday evening Mass.

The things I like about [St. Clement's] are the things that other people don't like about it, and why they like St. Cecilia's better [laughs]. It's because St. Cecilia's is more boisterous and open with that community part, which I love. But I just need for me for it to have its time and place and it needs to be outside of the church physically...It should be important but the reason you're there is for the Mass. It should be about the Mass. – *Marie*

And St. Clement's young adults express the deeply moving experience of giving themselves over to the will of God to fulfill his plan for them. As such, they experience the emotional qualities of devotional practice through organizational practices like Perpetual Adoration and devotional prayer and reverence that make this private connection to faith possible.

At The Paulist Center, young adults experience the emotive qualities of the liturgy less through the embodied practices of Catholic ritual and more through discursive messaging. The Paulist message of inclusion of all religious and social backgrounds strikes a chord for young adults who often cite the joy and gratitude they feel in response. The Center's emphasis on evangelical outreach and service to others emotionally resonates with young adults like Lisa who ties her religious practice to social action in the world and outreach and care for others. She says being Catholic makes her feel grounded in the world, connected to “where she is and who she is” which prompts her to ask what Jesus would want her to do, especially during

moments of difficult, uncomfortable choices. Lisa believes that she can grow closer to God through concrete action, such as “embrace(ing) the idea that the guy on the street belongs to me.” Other Paulist Center young adults similarly express their Catholic faith through work on behalf of the underprivileged. Samantha said, “I’ve spent my adult career trying to figure out how I can spend my day working toward helping the disenfranchised or people that are feared or ignored.” They find resonance in receiving welcome and, in turn, embodying welcome in outreach to others.

The organizational resonance that guides community attachment to the three churches examined in this study thus depends on how young adults identify and locate key practices that resonate for them emotionally and cognitively (Bell 1997; Benford and Snow 2000; Giorgi 2017). As I elaborate below, the interpretive framing that brings ritual memory into present perceptual and emotive processes flows not from a discursive, interpretive cognition that values the content of one kind of discursive messaging over others but rather involves a complex associative process through which some forms of religious expression are more highly valued than others. Young adults gravitate towards membership in groups that motivate commitment in ways that speak to the underlying unconscious²³ (embodied) and

²³ I hesitate to differentiate between “unconscious” and “conscious” because I believe Bourdieu is correct in saying that embodiment should not be construed in terms of therapeutic psychology. In this case study, however, the difference highlights the more cognitive and discursive elements of standard constructions of resonance. See for example Terence E. McDonnell, Christopher A. Bail, and Iddo Tavory (2017).

discursive processes that emotionally and cognitively resonate. Understood this way, we see how young adults commit to religious communities that “speak” to their aspirational desire for familiar connection and an affective belonging socialized and expressed through embodied understanding.

Ritual meaning

As a logician, philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein opposed interpretations of religious faith that rely on logical attempts to prove God’s existence (Richter 2001). Although he rejected any belief in God, he retained a childhood attachment to Catholic rituals and symbols; he believed that although the mystical aspects of religious faith cannot be expressed meaningfully, they are still important in that they move us towards a kind of “grand gesture” that gives ritual its singular meaning and expression.²⁴ As Norman Malcolm noted in reference to Wittgenstein’s view, placing flowers on a grave does not indicate belief that the deceased will be pleased with the offering; rather, it signifies respect, a way of honoring the dead (Malcolm 1995: 21). I believe the idea of a *grand gesture* helps us imagine ritual – and in fact, religion itself – as embodied understanding that is passively and actively expressed in multiple forms through the shared practices of designated communities.

²⁴ Norman Malcolm (1995) explains that for Wittgenstein both symbols and rituals signify meanings that are not based on any actual belief. Duncan Richter (2001) makes an important distinction between Wittgenstein’s thinking in the role of person and his role as logician and philosopher.

Ritual is a universal dimension of social life which bonds persons together into like-minded communities (Durkheim [1922] 1995). However, Durkheim rightly predicted that over time the advance of science would overtake the legitimacy of religion as the dominant explanation for all aspects of social life. Ritual would remain a means for building and maintaining social solidarity, albeit in more secular forms such as civic memorials and national events (Bell 1997: 25). Ritual theorists like Robert Bellah (2003), Randall Collins (2004), and Seligman, Weller, Puett, and Simon (2008) have extended Durkheim's thesis to argue that rituals are the fundamental building blocks of all social interaction (Goffman 1967). Ritual is essentially a performance or "the simple imperative to do something in such a way that the doing itself gives the acts a special or privileged status" (Seligman et al 2008: 10).

What then distinguishes religious or sacred rituals from secular and ordinary ones? Or are sacred and secular practices and processes necessarily intertwined? As Daniele Hervieu-Léger reminds us, with each new telling of liturgical memory we must ask by whose authority the narrative emerges (Hervieu-Léger [1993] 2000). Catherine Bell ([1992] 2009) offers the most compelling case for the significance of ritual as a generative process of creating community. Criticizing thinkers like Bellah and Collins in their assertion that ritual and social action are interchangeable (Bell [1992] 2009: 73), Bell argues that ritual is neither an "entity" nor an "embalmed" historical model but rather a creative, productive act (Bell [1992] 2009: 124). In fact, ritual is creative and strategic even when it is reproducing the past. She gives the

example of liturgies developed in the early Christian Eucharistic meal, the Roman rite codified by the Council of Trent, and the post-Vatican II non-Latin folk mass. All the liturgies express different conceptions of Christ's Last Supper and how this ritual should be reenacted and expressed. We may say then that with each interpretation of liturgy there emerges a new and different kind of community (Bell [1992] 2009: 124).

However, although Bell notes that power relations dominate all ritual action, she tends to speak of ritualization in abstract, self-referential terms, that is, as a process that "does not see how it actively creates place, force, event, and tradition, how it redefines or generates the circumstances to which it is responding" (Bell [1992] 2009: 109). Bell's concept of ritualization as a self-referential process of "seeing" and "not seeing" recalls a kind of Heideggerian meta-reality in which being-in-the-world (*Dasien*) achieves its own incorporeal reflexive status. As such, *ritualization* is cast in universal, god's-eye terms, making the ritual actor into a kind of free-floating entity incorporated into the creative potential of the ritual process.

In contrast, I would ground ritual in active, experiential terms as a *gesture* that encompasses both the symbols of material objects and the embodied actions that signify and express their meanings. Just as Robert Orsi directs us to material bodies that enact ritual meanings, he also points to objects, relics, statues, and images that exist in a sacred space (Orsi 1985, 1999, 2002). Further, religious "place" is fundamental to ritual because it sets the stage, demarcates physical space as sacred,

and changes cognitive awareness so that within its confines religious actors adopt prescribed attitudes and behaviors (Smith 1987). Religious place “acts upon us” and “we act upon place” bringing emotions, memories, and cognitive understandings to symbolically marked surroundings (Smith 1987: 101). We may say then that rituals are embodied actions whose objects and symbols signify meanings in designated settings which are perceived to have their own sacred properties.

In the Catholic context, rituals are “chains of embodied practices” that can activate devotional feelings of spiritual connection as well as feelings of connection to others (McGuire 2003: 4). In order to explore how young adults at each church community in this study interpret their connection to Catholic ritual and how the dominant organizational practices of each church setting shapes that commitment, I turn to the centerpiece of Catholic tradition, the ritual of the Eucharist and the formal belief in the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus Christ through consecration. How young adults frame the narrative of the Eucharist tells us a great deal about the features of the ritual they find most resonant.

When asked how they would explain the ritual of sharing in the bread and wine of the Eucharist to a non-Catholic, young adults at each church frame their understanding in patterns that demonstrate similar shared emphases on ways of expressing ritual action. St. Cecilia young adults typically frame the ritual as something personal and sacred that occurs in the living present. They will state for example: “We are at the Last Supper with Jesus”; “the actual sacrifice is happening all

over again”; this is “the most intimate you can be with God”; this is “when the Eucharist is becoming Jesus.” Only one study participant said “I don’t really know. I should really figure that out [laugh].” The spiritual reality of the ritual is very present for most of St. Cecilia’s young adults.

They also often frame their explanation in terms of its implications for their everyday lives.

I would say that outwardly it looks like bread and wine, but we believe it's the body and blood of Christ. I wouldn't explain transubstantiation to them. I would say the reason that I know it's the bread of Christ is because of the fruit that it bears throughout my week. I believe in Pope Francis when he says that the Eucharist is not a prize for the perfect. It's for the struggling. And I feel more strong after having gone and gotten communion. – *Amanda*

That spiritual strengthening, then, has consequences for both the self and the larger community. As one man said, Christ is present on behalf of all the marginalized. James aspires to be and do as Jesus by giving over this hour and a half of time each week to God and including everyone in the bounty of the blessing.

I have a new answer inspired by Father Jim Martin's book *Jesus Pilgrimage*. And he describes that the act of going around all of the sites in the Bible like on pilgrimage made him realize that when Jesus is saying, "This is my body, this is my blood, I give it up to you," he is literally talking about his life that he dedicated to caring for the marginalized and the people who needed him. And that the sacrament is commemorative of a very real sacrifice that he made running himself ragged to care for his people. And that that is both a gift to us, but also a challenge. – *James*

These themes of the immediacy and intimacy of the Eucharist and their extrapolation to caring for the marginalized echo the messaging at St. Cecilia’s. There is emphasis

on personal enactment of faith, traditional ritual practices, and developing a deeper connection with God through both means.

Paulist Center young adults tend to articulate their understanding of the Eucharist within the variety of interpretive frames their church embraces. Some turn to official Church teaching (even if they are not quite sure what that is).

I would say exactly what the Eucharist is, which is the body and blood of Christ, and why we believe that and where it is in the Bible. And I would need some help with that, with my handy-dandy catechism, 'cause I don't always remember off the top of my head. And just that we take it very literally. – *Cathy*

Others assert their own interpretation, quite apart from Church teaching.

Based on how I interpret it, which is not even based on any scripture or Catholic doctrine or anything, I would say it's more of a bonding with other humans and then also a bonding with God. I think most people take the Eucharist. Some don't for various reasons, but for the most part you're in this community and you all agree this is just something that bonds us. So, it's like a bonding mechanism. – *Sam*

Still others talked about their doubt and ambivalence about the significance and meaning of Catholic ritual practices.

It's why I've never volunteered as a Eucharistic minister, because I don't know that I, on a spiritual, intellectual, whatever level, can really understand what exactly [transubstantiation] means. That the body, and the bread, and wine are transformed in substance, but not in appearance. You know? I'm a very literal person. So, what does that mean? – *Lisa*

While still others found their own version of a deep spiritual connection with the ritual of the Eucharist. When prompted to say more, Jim explained how his religious upbringing made him want to fully experience the Eucharist through the taking of the consecrated host.

It's this part of my being in the world [that] makes sense in this ritual. It makes sense only in this ritual. There's something about me, there's a question inside of me that is only answered in the Eucharist. It doesn't necessarily feel any one way or another emotionally. But I guess if I had to describe... If I had to map it onto emotional terms, it's a type of feeling you get when you hear a sublime Bach Cantata or a symphony or you stare at work of art that you know is sublime in this sense that you feel almost too small to appreciate fully. It was that feeling or something akin to that. – *Jim*

These examples align with the Paulist Center's emphasis on the analytical framing of religious questions and openness to individual interpretations of ritual meaning. Pastoral themes of welcome, compassion, and acceptance of all participants are present in this welcoming of disparate ideas and experiences in the ritual of the Eucharist.

St. Clement young adults tend to express their understanding of ritual and identity through reference to the Church itself. They are sharing communion with others, but it is in the context of the “imagined community” of the universal Church in this life, and with God and the Communion of Saints in the next life.

It's a kind of connection with the whole body of Christ all at the same time, in a way that you really can't get in any other way. It connects you to the Communion of Saints and to the people who are in heaven right now and people who you're close to on Earth who you're not physically close to right now, and it's just a beautiful way to just be together as a Church. – *Miriam*

By our taking in the body and blood of Jesus we are uniting in him and through that uniting with the each other, and uniting with the church, so really inviting Jesus into our hearts to share with others and growing closer as a community.
– *Joe*

Another young adult framed her understanding this way:

Most of my life, I would say I still don't totally understand it, but I guess...The Church has an official answer to this question, but for me, just to keep it personal, it's sort of a reminder that I'm invited, I've been chosen. "I did this for you. Come be part of this. I yearn for you. Come." And a challenge of, "Be this great thing that I've made you to be." Right? So it's just a reminder of all of these things. And by taking the Eucharist, it's sort of an acceptance and saying, "Yes. I want to live up to what you ask of me. And yes, I want to join you." - *Patricia*

Charles, a convert, frames his understanding of the Eucharist in terms of the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church:

It means that Christ is truly present and to eat of his body and drink of his blood also means that that not only fulfills his command at the Last Supper, but because he's living, it means that...we participate in his life. And he lives in us. - *Charles*

St. Clement's organizational emphasis on the traditional ritual of the Mass, which includes the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, resonates with young adults seeking to engage with the devotional practices and rituals of the Church. The Eucharist connects them to God through the institutional practices and spaces of the Church.

Ritual memory

The experience of the Catholic Mass is a cacophony of bright sounds and dramatic movement intermixed with solitary moments of meditative prayer and private devotion. Ritual memory evokes the smell of burning candles or incense, grand hymns piped from a majestic organ, meditational and grand music sung by a choir, and the somber and joyful prayers and processions that mark the emotional

ebbs and flows of the Christian calendar. St. Cecilia young adults in particular note how the music links them to their childhood and memories of Mass in often startling ways. As others have found, music has remarkable power to define a community (Wuthnow 2003; Warner 2008; Heider and Warner 2010). One woman cites the somber Taizé hymn “Jesus, Remember Me” as an example of a powerful piece often sung during Lent which remains with her long after Mass has ended.

That is actually something that I think probably ties into the sense of community that the same songs that I sang as a child with grandparents and family are the same songs, particularly when you go to traditional mass. That you know and you don't have to open a book for it because you sung it a million times. – *Amanda*

I love the choir. The music is just lovely, and they have a mix of different styles. They will sprinkle in some gospel music. They'll sprinkle in some very traditional Celtic. And then you'll get a contemporary piece, and they'll have a guitar or a flute or even a saxophone. And so it's just this really nice mixture. – *Anna*

The music was strange to me, cause I was like, "Wow, this is the liberal parish and we're singing, 'How Great Thou Art'" You know what I mean? – *Bill*

Hervieu-Léger shows how ritual memory is continually rekindled through rituals and ceremonial acts; religious tradition unfolds as a hermeneutic process which continually interacts with institutional narratives of the past and the “interests and aspirations” of the present (Hervieu-Léger [1993] 2000; Halbwachs 1992: 25). To Maurice Halbwachs (1992), collective memory is a social process that gives narrative to our experiences in a structured and orderly way (Halbwachs 1992). The narrative of memory emerges out of the shared expression of actors who experienced

the same events with similar understandings and who generate collective narrative accounts of their experiences.

Max Weber's conception of *elective affinity* similarly points to the resonance between ideas and life experience. In his original conception of the *religious carrier*, we see that the primary social carriers of religion are not the religious *virtuosi* who strive for perfect connection with God, but the demographic groups whose social status and rational interests have an elective affinity with a way of being religious (Weber [1922] 1993). Weber explains how artisans and craftsmen became primary religious carriers of Christianity in the Near East and later Europe and the West because the principles of salvation and compensation resembled their own commitments to honesty and the faithful performance of obligations (Weber ([1922] 1993: 97-98). He effectively demonstrates that the religious messaging of the early Christian movement cognitively resonated with the rational economic interests of small-scale producers and their collective identity as honorable tradesmen.

The key question here of course is how religious tradition and ritual memory then translate into active religious belonging. In addition to the framing that generates commitment to organizations and social movement causes, we need to better understand the dynamics that shape actors' sustained commitment. In other words, what are the mechanisms that shift frames and resonance into modes of directed behavior? Community attachment can be defined by locality, based on determinative territory and geography, but few of these young adults have chosen to

attach themselves to churches identified primarily by geography. Community attachment in this case is better defined relationally, as commitment based on social interactions through membership and participation in formal organizations (Heller 1989).²⁵ Understanding this attachment requires that we examine how community is shaped through specific modes of interaction that are shaped by the resonant frames at each church.

These community distinctions are crystallized in each church's response to Covid-19 stay-at-home orders which led to the closure of all Boston archdiocesan churches from March 13, 2020 through a partial lifting of restrictions on May 18, 2020.²⁶ During this two-month period, St. Cecilia's offered a livestream Mass every Sunday at 10:00a. The most watched Mass was on April 19th with more than 15,000 views on YouTube; other Masses, including that for Easter Sunday, generally garnered about 5,000 views. In addition to livestream Masses, the parish created a provisional landing page for the website dedicated to supporting parishioners through direct help for the homebound (grocery shopping, medications pick-up, health needs, mental or emotional support) and volunteer opportunities for parishioners able to assist. In addition to Zoom church ministry meetings and livestream Evening Prayers led by volunteers, "Midday Reflections" were posted to St. Cecilia's Facebook and

²⁵ To this list Heller adds a third dimension, community as collective power (Heller 1989: 3). Barry Wellman (1979) is perhaps the most well-known researcher exploring the tensions between local and relational attachments.

²⁶ Although the Massachusetts ban on house of worship gatherings was officially lifted on May 18, 2020, restrictions on maximum capacity and requirements for social distancing remained.

Instagram pages with Fr. John, parish staff, and parishioners posting short videos with words of encouragement, personal perspective, poems and prayers, and solo musical performances.²⁷ Fr. John recorded his posts not inside the church but from the rectory or during walks outside and in casual (“civilian”) clothes, further blending the expressive modes of the priest and those of the church community.

Staff and parishioners often shared deeply personal stories about how their Catholic faith and their St. Cecilia parish community kept them grounded. One woman spoke about how difficult it is to cope with the isolation during this pandemic, especially as a recovering alcoholic, and how the St. Cecilia’s community has helped her deal with the stresses and uncertainty one day at a time. A parish couple spoke about the serious life-threatening illness of their child the previous year, and how the support of the parish community gave them strength through his recovery. Others spoke about the hymns that stay with them or the passages from scripture they turn to for comfort. These stories often reflect the same openness to emotional immediacy and intimacy that marks Fr. John’s homilies.

One staff member, Mary Kaye, Pastoral Director of Operations, focused on finding joy in everyday moments and sharing that joy in tangible and immediate ways. She described a walk under a bridge near her home that moved her to start singing and used this as a metaphor for how these kinds of moments occur in her experiences

²⁷ Midday Reflections by St. Cecilia staff and parishioners were viewed from about 600 to 1,700 times; those posted by Fr. John were viewed between 7,000 and 21,000 times.

at St. Cecilia's. When she drops off her 95-year-old mother for Mass at the front of the church before parking, she says she knows someone from the parish community will bring her safely to her usual spot in the pew, that acquaintances around her will greet her warmly, and that Fr. John will come to give her the Eucharist.

The ritual memory of Catholic faith is expressed at St. Cecilia's through interactions that emphasize collective sharing in the bounty of God's love and the gospel themes of forgiveness and care for self and others. Fr. John's emphasis on growing in self-awareness so as to help others who are struggling, just as Jesus did, is an abiding theme that guides modes of interaction at St. Cecilia's. Not only do frames resonate and motivate actors to participate, they cue behaviors that reinforce shared feelings of attachment to the larger religious community.

Like St. Cecilia's, The Paulist Center offered a livestream Mass every Sunday at 12:00p. Over the initial two-month period, the most viewed Mass was on Easter Sunday with about 1,400 views. At one Mass, Paulist Center Director Fr. Michael McGarry, C.S.P., spoke to how the pandemic has pulled back the veil on social inequality, how society takes care of the most vulnerable, like the elderly, and the most alone, like those in solitary confinement. He explained how he was writing down one or two such items (elderly care and solitary confinement) that he wants to personally address after the pandemic is under control. Fr. Mike urges church members to do the same so that they will also address the problems that came to light

for them during this time of crisis, which he likens to the work Jesus did to alleviate the pain and suffering of others.

On the Paulist Center website and on Facebook and Instagram, Fr. Mike posts weekly written reflections which include inspirational poems and quotes, gratitude to volunteers and staff, plans for virtual gatherings, requests for the designated charity of the week, and links to family prayer services and Sunday Mass. Fr. Mike also shares notes from Paulist Center members offering support and connection and a link to Covid-19 support and prayer resources on the Paulist Fathers national website and podcast, *Busted Halo*, designed to help people learn about the Catholic faith as “God’s children” who are “saints in the making.”

The ritual memory of Catholic faith is expressed at The Paulist Center through modes of interaction that emphasize carefully crafted words and intentional actions in the world that bring to life God’s love and presence as followers who journey in Jesus’ footsteps. In speaking about the pandemic, Fr. Mike says he hopes a return to “normal” does not include human rights crises like the 900,000 Syrians who have been displaced or the wars and hardships that inflict suffering on innocent victims. Jesus ventured out into the world to bring God’s message of love and hope, and it is our responsibility as Christians to follow his lead and help those suffering who most need care and God’s love. The Paulist Fathers thus provide an actionable model for how to engage with Catholic faith through service to others. They provide pastoral support through access to internal and external resources, shared prayer and the

weekly liturgy, and reminders to trust in God's wisdom through the inspirational words of others.

Before the church closures, St. Clement's already offered a livestream Mass each weekday at 12:10p. With the pandemic, St. Clement's replaced this with a livestream Mass at 8:00a on weekdays and 11:00a on Saturdays and Sundays. The church was closed to Eucharistic Adoration but the Oblates posted a few Eucharistic exposition videos, each about 20 minutes long as well as a few Oblate Holy Hour worship videos on YouTube. Over the initial two-month period, Easter Sunday Mass was their most viewed Mass on Facebook with about 26,700 views. A Sunday Mass during the same period typically receives about 1,100 views and the weekday Mass about 700 views. With their livestreams of each Mass on Facebook, they ask people to post their prayer intentions in the comments, and they thank commentators for positive feedback. The typical 10 or so comments posted in response to Masses express gratitude to the Oblates for continuing to broadcast the service, mention their own prayers, offer peace to all, and convey a few requests for Oblate prayers for sick family members.

Like St. Cecilia's and the Paulist Center, a small group of singers, musicians, and lectors participate in livestream Masses in the sanctuary. At St. Clement's a handful of Oblate brothers and seminarians collectively gather, reading the scriptures, singing solo hymns with an organist, and assisting as altar servers. The Oblate who reads the gospel is not the priest who presides; he holds his hands in

prayer over the book of scripture as he solemnly moves through the text. In one homily during this period, Fr. Peter tells a story about how his parents came to visit him as a seminarian in Rome. They planned a trip to the Alps to a hotel by a beautiful lake, which from the brochure looked stunning. But when they arrive, they find their hotel has no views, no pool, and no windsurfing on the lake. The brochure we see as “life,” he says, is not in fact the truth that understanding from God gives us. The spirit’s truth instead comes from moments like Fr. Peter’s mother sitting with him on a rock after a gondola ride. That memory, Fr. Peter says, was truth captured in a photograph. He closes by saying that when Jesus met the disciples in the Upper Room on the night before he died, he promised them the reality of the spirit of truth, not the brochure that makes everything perfect. Living with the spirit takes hard work and commitment but, in the end, we find opportunity for real connection with God.

The ritual memory of Catholic faith is expressed at St. Clement’s through modes of interaction that emphasize personal relationship with God through practices that deepen the spiritual reception of God’s message. The Oblates are not simply suggesting that we find communion with God through devotion and prayer, but that we make sense of life itself through the prism of God’s understanding as it is revealed to us both in scripture and in the experience of our daily lives. In this sense, they model Jesus as an intermediary who guides, supports, and walks alongside those who need comfort, encouragement, and spiritual insight.

Even with in-person gatherings cancelled, each church community adopted modes of interaction that reflect their dominant organizational frames. At St. Cecilia's, outreach to parishioners during the Covid-19 pandemic meant the creation of an online platform for sharing feelings and perspectives and care for others during a difficult and unprecedented time of isolation and confusion. This resembles the ways in which Fr. John himself connects with the community. The Paulist Fathers encourage even greater assistance to those less fortunate, noting the importance of their own charities providing meals to the homeless. Homilies remind church members of the realities of life for those suffering and offer hope that those following Jesus's gospel message will help. The Paulists provide inspiration through their own commitments and actions. The Paulist community looks outward to those in need rather than focusing on a call to spiritual self-understanding. By contrast, the Oblates teach that spiritual connection comes through listening and reflection both in the words of Jesus and in the practices that sustain the message of love and salvation promised in scriptures. In seeking deeper connection to God, parishioners find awareness of God's abiding grace and presence that deepens spiritual connection and commitment to the Church's devotional life.

Given how the charisms of each church community guide differing interpretations of Catholic faith and practice, I suggest that it is not religious habitus itself but the *patterned institutional expressions of habitus* that shape community attachment. The young adults in this study were imbued with a repertoire of Catholic

ways of thinking, acting, and feeling which also yields multiple strategies for forming adult attachments to the Church. How ritual memory is tapped through the interaction of varying institutional offerings is what guides decision-making around church choice and commitment. Ritual memory connects habitus to community commitment through the cognitive and emotional resonance of organizational framing. Each institutional setting and respective community adapts their own modes of interaction to communicate the resonant message via social practices that conform to dominant organizational frames.

In the next chapter, using the Catholic parish model as an example, I further examine how questions of community may better be addressed in terms of models, roles, and identities as these intersect with public and private forms of institutional expression. Because religious identity grows stronger with each repeated articulation and validation, we can consider the emergent properties of religious identity that are seeded through embodied practices and activated within the public-private expectations of the local church.

CHAPTER 4. CHURCH AND COMMUNITY

In the preceding chapters I have shown how organizational resonance offers a valuable analytical tool for explaining how groups cohere through patterned social processes that motivate community commitment. Young adults tap into ritual memory through the interaction of varying institutional offerings which guides church choice and commitment. Young adults are motivated through patterned expressions of religious habitus to select church settings that comport with their socialized pre-dispositions toward Catholic faith and practice. Now it is possible to show more specifically how young adults make commitments to community life both inside and outside the church. I show how differences in the public and private dimensions of ritual practice interact with models of Catholic community to produce distinct forms of communal moral obligation. Building on this empirical base, I examine how elements of these Catholic community models can provide new insight into the community questions articulated most prominently by Robert Putnam and Robert Bellah. From our example of young adult Catholic commitment, I show that community attachment requires: a) socialized collective identities that facilitate social connection and resonate with dominant forms of cultural expression; b) organizational practices that instill a sense of moral obligation to others; and c) calls to action that motivate community commitment. In their focus on the formal properties of voluntarism, like membership in civic organizations, Putnam and Bellah overlook underlying calls to action that drive motivation and community

commitment. Finally, I argue that the community question can be more fully addressed by acknowledging the massive change in roles and identities over the past five decades that require bespoke calls to action for moral obligation to resonate.

Catholics and voluntarism

In her analysis of Catholic voluntarism and civic commitment, Mary Jo Bane (2005) outlines five predominant Catholic Church social teachings that one might expect to lead to voluntarist action: 1) Christian life is social and based on the idea of community; 2) believers are called to discipleship or to work for justice and peace in the world; 3) the mission of the Catholic Church is toward salvation and liberation of the oppressed; 4) the Church has a special place for the poor and the vulnerable; and 5) Christians should be responsible citizens and participate in civic and political life to promote justice (Bane 2005: 65). However, in her analysis using data from Robert Putnam's Social Capital Benchmark Survey (2000), Bane finds that Catholics are less likely to volunteer, contribute to secular charities, belong to formal groups, or participate in electoral politics or activism. Thus, while Catholic teachings encourage community participation and service, she argues that Catholic parishes are not providing the right opportunities or social settings to do so (Bane 2005: 75). These findings comport with other research that shows lower levels of volunteering and donations to charitable causes among Catholics (Bane 2005: 70; Ammerman 2005; Smith and Emerson 1998; Wuthnow and Evans 2002). Bane identifies key

organizational and structural features that help explain these patterns, namely the Church's hierarchical structure; the extensive reach of Catholic Charities, the largest social services network in the country; and challenges to Church credibility, like the sex abuse scandal; as well as its position on abortion and the exclusion of women from ordained ministry.

In her study of religious and community practices across multiple denominations, Ammerman (2005) finds as well that, while Catholics are the most likely to have an *activist* orientation to the world, they display lower levels of civic activity than members of liberal Protestant and African-American Protestant churches (Ammerman 2005). Catholic rates of participation are on par with those of conservative Protestants, who are more likely to be active in congregational church activities but less likely to give to charitable causes or volunteer time outside the church. According to Ammerman, only 20 percent of Catholic parish members in her study donate more than \$1,000 a year to their parish and just 29 percent report providing informal support to others on a regular basis (Ammerman 2005: 166). Ammerman finds that, across all churches, those who were most active in the church itself are also most likely to be involved in community service and to offer informal help (Ammerman 2005: 167). The fact that Catholics are less likely to participate in activities beyond Mass attendance explains in large part this lack of voluntarism and community outreach.

Catholic parish culture provides ample justification for community involvement, but lacks the mechanisms of deep congregational interaction and extensive participation that channel larger numbers of Protestants into formal and informal networks of service. When Catholics do more than just come for worship, they too are likely to be drawn into a web of expectations and activities that connect them with the community (Ammerman 2005: 170).

My empirical research on young adult Catholics shows the impact of such active involvement. There are ample opportunities for young adults to get involved in liturgical, fellowship, and outreach activities at each church. As the largest church in this study, St. Cecilia's offers more than 30 church ministries. Internal ministries include hospitality and event staff and liturgical and musical volunteers like lectors, Eucharistic ministers, choir members and instrumentalists. In addition to the Young Adult Ministry, fellowship ministries include the Rainbow Ministry for LGBTQ Catholics, the Young Families Ministry, and the Prison and After Ministry, a support group for formerly incarcerated men. Outreach ministries include visitations for the homebound, an advocacy group for social and racial justice, and direct assistance to designated organizations like Pine Street Inn, Community Servings, Catholic Charities of Boston, The Women's Lunch Place, Nativity Preparatory School, and Ecclesia Ministries, which provides pastoral care to the homeless.

The Paulist Center offers more than 20 church ministries, which include internal liturgical and musical ministries like greeters, lectors, sacristans, Eucharistic ministers, and choir members as well as Eucharistic Bread Bakers and Art and Environment volunteers. In addition to the Young Adult Ministry, fellowship

ministries include an LGBT & Friends group, a 40+ Group, a Family Activities planning group, and Small Faith-Sharing Groups. Outreach ministries include Communion to the Homebound, the Paulist Center Emergency Food pantry, the Immigration Advocacy Group, Walk for Hunger, and the Sister Community Group, a partnership with a farming community in El Salvador.

St. Clement's offers six church ministries. The liturgical and musical church ministries are Adoration Boston and Music at the Shrine. Fellowship groups are St. Clement Shrine's Young Adults, Pure in Heart® Young Adults, and The Legion of Mary Sancta Maria Praesidium, an international lay organization devoted to the Virgin Mary. The church's outreach ministry is the Back Bay Mobile Soup Kitchen, which is organized by young adults who visit and deliver sandwiches, fruit, socks, and rosaries to the homeless.

Of the 41 young adults interviewed for this study, 17% volunteer in liturgical and music ministries, 61% in fellowship and outreach ministries, and 15% as volunteer activities independent of the church, like advocating for income and health equity or organizing pro-life and social justice events.

Table 4. Voluntarism and Career Choice among Study Participants

Voluntarism and Career Choice among Study Participants				
	<i>Liturgical and Music Ministry</i>	<i>Fellowship and Outreach Ministry</i>	<i>Outside Volunteer</i>	<i>Religious or Human Services Profession</i>
St. Cecilia	23%	54%	31%	46%
The Paulist Center	21%	43%	14%	29%
St. Clement	7%	93%	14%	36%

Table 4. n=41 Commitments to internal and external volunteer activities and vocational career choices among young adults interviewed, by church.

If we look at each church (Table 4), we see that young adults interviewed for this study are heavily involved in fellowship activities. Paulist Center and St. Clement’s young adults are less inclined to volunteer in community activities outside the church. St. Clement’s young adults generally limit their participation to the Monday evening liturgy or Pure in Heart® meetings; they are also less inclined to serve as liturgical volunteers. This may be due at least in part to fewer calls to action issued from St. Clement church leaders, who are supported during Mass by the Oblate brothers. As Bane (2005) explains, lay Catholics have generally deferred to the leadership of priests and bishops, which has led to fewer opportunities for discipleship and weaker civic activity within traditional parish churches (Bane 2005: 88).

At St. Cecilia’s and The Paulist Center, young adults who actively participate in young adult ministry activities typically merge their social and volunteer activities into wider ad hoc commitments. In their emails, these young adult ministries

highlight upcoming events like happy hour, karaoke, small faith-groups, and rosary prayer as well as activities like packing up meals for the homebound, serving food to the homeless, and wrapping Christmas gifts for families in need. These activities encompass outreach to both church-supported charities and local non-profits. Sharing in social and outreach activities with peers thus becomes a launching pad for wider community commitments that serve both as a source of friendship and connection and as a valuable opportunity to build mutual trust and goodwill and the bridging capital that leads to stronger social networks across diverse communities (Lewis, MacGregor and Putnam 2012; Putnam 2000).

Additionally, as indicated in Table 4, more than one-third (37%) of all young adults interviewed for this study work in human services-related fields like medicine, education, religion, and non-profit services. Nearly half of St. Cecilia young adults work in a human services profession, with St. Clement at over one-third and The Paulist Center slightly lower. After listing her volunteer activities, one woman added: “[B]ut then there is [also] the [place] I work at...It’s always about helping other people.” For another woman, the fact that many young adult friends at the church shared similar occupations helped forge deeper social connections.

We’re very close. I feel like they’re very supportive. We made an interesting observation: there’s an incredible disproportionate amount of us that are human service workers. Social workers, teachers and lawyers. And so, we always talk a lot. And we’re very supportive of each other. *[Identifying information withheld]*

These examples suggest that some Catholics may live out their commitments to Catholic social teaching less in voluntarist activities and more in occupations that merge their social identity as Catholics with their role identities in the helping professions.

Although sample sizes are small, the slightly lower proportions of Paulist Center young adults who work in human services professions might be attributable to more varied patterns of parental socialization and inculcation in Catholic social teaching. Although not well-studied, the proportion of social actors who feel a sense of vocation in their chosen field ranges from 15% among members of Protestant congregations to 33% among university employees (Hernandez, Foley and Beitin 2011). Additionally, in a small qualitative study of Christian African American undergraduates active in their faith, a majority felt a desire to help others and believed their life's purpose was being fulfilled through their career choices (Constantine, Miville, Warren, Gainor, & Lewis-Coles 2006; Hernandez, Foley and Beitin 2011). As discussed in Chapter 2, Catholic commitment incorporates three key processes of socialization and identity: formal identification with a religious group, enactment of roles through inculcated embodied practices, and cultivation of the religious meanings and values that motivate action. The integration of these interlocking processes may instill in some Catholics deeply held worldviews about the importance of contributing to the greater good.

Ritual community and moral obligation

In Catholic teaching, it is believed that the grace of the Holy Spirit cleanses the person of original sin in baptism and that this grace is reinforced through the sacraments. Both sacramental rites and the performance of good works are required for salvation: "My brothers, what good is it to profess faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save one, has it?" (James 2:14). The Holy Spirit thus flows from within and extends outward through embodied practices that simultaneously encompass public performance, private devotion, and fellowship with others. Lutheran and Calvinist conceptions of religious faith emphasize a grace from God that flows from the outside in: grace is not "infused" in the soul as in Catholic faith but "imputed" in the person through Christ as "...a living, bold trust in God's grace, so certain of God's favor that it would risk death a thousand times trusting in it."²⁸ In Calvinist sects like Puritanism, salvation is possible only to the elect and evidenced externally through a capacity for hard work and proven vocational success in the secular world (Weber [1922] 1993). In Catholic tradition, good works operate along both public and private dimensions, as internalized values that shape social interactions in the form of compassion and care for others, and as dedicated acts of service that individuals extend to others in the spirit of Jesus. In what follows, I show

²⁸ Luther, Martin. 1983. "Preface to Romans by Martin Luther." Translated by Bro. Andrew Thornton, OSB. Saint Anselm Abbey.

more specifically how the public and private dimensions of ritual practice shape differing models of Catholic community and moral obligation.

In his messaging at St. Cecilia's, Fr. John typically begins with the premise that relationship with self and others informs and guides connection with God ("take a moment and ask yourself this: do you know how much God loves you?"). Such emotional intimacy can evoke quiet sniffles and stirrings in the pews, as personal insights are privately pondered. When it comes to ritual, Fr. John's interpretation is focused on gestures that bring the church community into enacted public expressions of shared compassion and belonging. For example, on Holy Thursday all parishioners (not just priests) reenact Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet. In the packed church, parishioners slowly proceed barefoot to the altar so that they can wash another parishioner's feet who will then do the same for them.

Some parishes will just have representatives from ministries, or just have 12 men do it like it's the 12 apostles, but Saint Cecilia's has eight wash stations and everybody goes and washes each other's feet. And it's so beautiful, people are crying while they're up there, people are giving each other the biggest, warmest hugs after serving each other. I'm just like, "Oh, my gosh." I'm like, "Do you even know that person?" No. But you go to Saint Cecilia's so this is just how you are. – *Meredith*

Fr. John will also "welcome" catechumens entering the church for the "first time" by announcing the knock he hears. Making the walk from the sanctuary to the narthex ("late to Mass, I can't believe these guys") he opens the glass doors and welcomes the group of 10 or so who will begin their Roman Catholic conversion program at the church. As they later collectively process to exit the Mass before the blessing of the

gifts, the choir sings the moving farewell hymn “May the Word of God Strengthen You” (Christopher Walker).

In their roles as parishioners, St. Cecilia parishioners respond to a call to deeper personal insights in the private dimensions of their faith, enacted through grand gestures of public ritual. Public and private roles provide layered opportunities for parishioners to commit to the community and to a life of faith. As individuals, they are finding their own connection to God through humility and compassion for others as modeled in Jesus’ care for his disciples.

Table 5. Dominant Religious Expression and Community Model by Church

Dominant Religious Expression and Community Model by Church			
	Messaging	Ritual	Community
St. Cecilia	Private	Public	Discipleship
The Paulist Center	Public	Public	Discipleship
St. Clement	Private	Private	Mystical Communion

Both St. Cecilia’s and The Paulist Center draw upon public expression in liturgy to guide their congregants to communal connection (see Table 5). But at The Paulist Center, both the messaging and the ritual are engaged outwardly. In its religious messaging, The Paulist Center calls upon congregants to go out into the world and help those in need. They engage in direct action, problem-solving, and education,

such as organized panel discussions on racism. St. Cecilia's offers similar kinds of group discussions on contemporary social issues, but its religious messaging focuses more on the personal growth that leads to change, like understanding implicit racial bias. The Paulist Center enacts the ritual of the liturgy through communal public expression, to which lay participants can contribute dramatic elements. For example, a dedicated Youth/Adult Liturgical Dance Ministry choreographs an enactment of the Christmas and Easter liturgy, which is intended not as "performance" but rather an embodied expression and natural movement of liturgical events that congregants collectively experience:

Dance helps us to highlight movement in particular places within the liturgy, including processions and rituals that naturally call us to "journey" through a space. Through embodied expression, the minister of dance "speaks" for all, just as the presider, lector, or cantor "speaks" for the entire assembly. Paradoxically, dance breaks open the mystery of the Word in a way that mere words cannot.²⁹

Church members renew their understanding of the Gospels through reenactments of the stories and words of Jesus expressed in both narrative and embodied form. During heightened liturgical periods like Christmas and Easter, the grand gestures of public ritual, enacted by the parishioners themselves, provide connection to God through greater understanding of the lived experience of Jesus.

St. Clement's on the other hand draws upon private cultural resources to instill engagement with religious faith among parishioners. The Oblates' call to action

²⁹ Source: The Paulist Center website. <https://www.paulistcenter.org/get-involved/prayer-worship-overview/liturgical-ministries/>

centers on deeper relationship with God through private paths that set the course for spiritual connection. Devotional rituals like Eucharistic Adoration and the *Lectio Divina* are typically accessed through private means and expressed in parallel rather than in shared, communal terms. For example, the Exposition and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament occurs at the prayer after Communion so that the Eucharistic host may be placed into the monstrance for Adoration. It is a quiet and solemn period after Mass for prayer and reflection, symbolized by the priest standing or kneeling before the Blessed Sacrament for a few minutes before departing. Following the service, parishioners may choose to process to the altar so that the priest can touch the top of the monstrance to the lips of those who approach, wiping it with a cloth after each turn as one might the chalice of wine during Mass.

In their roles as church members, St. Clement congregants respond to a call to action as devotional actors seeking individual connection with God through the fullness of the Catholic liturgy. They experience both the message of the homily and the ritual of the liturgy as a private experience and as such carry out their actions more as parallel actions toward a higher mystical communion with God and the heavens than in consort with those present.

These differing organizational practices around the public-private expression of Catholic ritual have important implications for our understanding of the relationship between moral obligation and community. My general assumption is that Catholic rituals have as their essential component weakened elements of Emile

Durkheim's collective effervescence and Randall Collins' interaction ritual schema. Durkheim describes collective engagement as the process through which a group performing a sacred ritual in unison experiences a mutual sharing of emotion: "Probably because a collective emotion cannot be expressed collectively without some order that permits harmony and unison of movement, these gestures and cries tend to fall into rhythm and regularity, and from there into songs and dances" (Durkheim [1912] 1995: 218).³⁰ For Randall Collins (2004) collective engagement occurs when a group of at least two people is physically assembled; there is a mutual focus of attention on the same object or action of which all members are aware; and there is a shared common mood or emotion (Collins 2004: 38). For both Durkheim and Collins, the members of a group feel a sense of belonging to others sharing the same experience and a sense of moral obligation to one another through shared focus on a given object. The very act of engaging with ritual meaning and sharing in its expression elicits feelings of collective identity and moral obligation with others present.

However, I believe my empirical research on how Catholics experience their faith shows that we err if we equate symbolic meanings that represent collective identity with ritual acts that instill moral obligation.³¹ As we see in the public and

³⁰ Excerpts from *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* by Emile Durkheim © 1995 are reproduced with the permission of Simon & Schuster, Inc.

³¹ I am less inclined to link Durkheim's collective conscience with moral obligation because it encompasses a theory of knowledge that I believe overly structures and collapses distinctions between social meanings and social action. For our purposes here, collective identity refers to the

private expressions of Catholic ritual described above, the interpretation of Catholic liturgy can vary from quiet devotional prayers facilitated by sacred objects with calls to action that elicit feelings of mystical communion with God to dramatic gestures and calls to action that bring all church members into a shared reenactment of Jesus' life on earth. The specifics of organizational practice shape the meanings of ritual performance and therefore the differing levels of moral obligation that emerge. The *community of discipleship* model evident at St. Cecilia's is interpreted through the prism of Jesus' compassion to others, which instills in the faithful a moral obligation to act with kindness to others, which begins from self-awareness and extends to care and charitable acts. The *community of discipleship* model evident at The Paulist Center instills a moral obligation to act in service to others by lessening their hardships and helping them hear God's message of support. In both cases, calls to action and moral obligation center on those participating in the ritual of the Mass and the expectation that they themselves will enact their Catholic faith in compassion and service to others.

When liturgy is aimed toward *mystical communion*, as at St. Clement's, calls to moral action take the form of prayer for others and private devotional acts that bring all Catholics closer to God and the community of saints in the next life. The ritual creates a communion in shared mystery and with the more abstract presence of all

community that emerges through the shared understanding of religious symbols and meanings and moral obligation refers to community that emerges through actions.

who are gathered with God. Contrary to assertions made by Durkheim ([1912]1995), Collins, (2004) and Bellah (2003), I would suggest religious actors do not necessarily feel a moral obligation to one another simply because they are engaging in shared ritual performance. How ritual actions are framed within the specifics of organizational practice determines how they act as guiding motivations for committed moral action.

These public and private dimensions of ritual, with their differing calls to moral action, thus preclude one-size-fits-all categorizations of the link between ritual and community membership and belonging, and also the kind of communities that emerge from Protestant and Catholic forms of religious expression. Religious meanings are expressed through varying public and private dimensions across layered tiers of community that guide participants to differing kinds of moral obligation inside and outside that community. Organizational practices directed towards combining personal growth in connection to God with greater compassion for others establishes a different set of criteria for belonging than organizational practices that emphasize actions directed at outreach and problem-solving to help resolve social ills. Finally, community organizations that speak to the aspirational collective identities of individuals resonate through expressions of faith that comport with their socialized understanding. As outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, young adults embrace particular shared understandings of Catholic faith based on patterns of

socialization that shape collective identities, resonate with organizational practices, and provide different paths of social connection into church communities.

The community question

Based on our examination of young adult Catholic commitment, we may say that community attachment requires: a) socialized collective identities that facilitate social connection and resonate with dominant forms of religious expression; b) organizational practices that instill a sense of moral obligation to others; and c) calls to action that motivate community commitment. As outlined above and in preceding chapters, we see that not all communities impose the same kinds of moral obligation on their members. Organizational leaders play a central role in the interpretation of public and private expression and calls to action. Patterns of socialization influence the kinds of community individuals seek, which tells us that generic appeals to established models of community may well not resonate across social groups and time periods (Wuthnow 1998; Ammerman 1997).

Robert Putnam's (2000) community lost thesis focuses on the mechanisms through which *social networks* that build a cultural ethos of civic participation are established and nourished. Robert Bellah's ([1985]/1996) thesis examines *cultural shifts* in ideal-type role identities. Both lament the lack of a shared moral discourse that would shape cultivation and commitment to public practices that maintain civic

community life.³² In engaging each argument, I show how young adult Catholics teach us the importance of socialization and collective identity in shaping commitment and how organizational practices and messaging must align with aspirational ideals to resonate. I argue that examining patterns of public commitment through the lens of the congregational model of civic engagement limits our ability to identify more relational aspects of belonging like compassion, connection, and empathy that motivate moral commitments in meaningful though less public forms.

Essential to all models of community are elements perhaps most difficult to source: a socialized sensibility that instills community's intrinsic value. Like other socialization processes that instill meaning, developing common concern for others through acculturation in shared practices is essential to cultivating the norms that shape social cohesion. Schools, religious institutions, and parents provide important means for socializing children into the importance of social concern, civic activity like voting, committing time to volunteer in the community, and raising funds for shared causes. Deep social connections among young adults was a driving force behind sustained engagement and motivated commitment to performing voluntarist good works. Although voluntarism was limited to ad hoc events and temporary commitments, shared experience and social connection encouraged young adults to make deeper commitments of time and resources, like taking on leadership roles on

³² For recent discussions of historical trends in voluntarism and civic life in America, see in particular Philip Gorski (2017) and Theda Skocpol, Marshall Ganz, and Ziad Munson (2000).

the young adult committee. Given that parental socialization influenced which churches young adults gravitate towards, it seems fair to assume that socialization patterns contributed to the collective identities that emerged. As will be elaborated below, this research therefore highlights the importance of collective identities within social networks which, through aspirational calls to action, elicit a sense of fellowship and moral obligation to others.

Connected social networks

In what has become the most influential *community lost* thesis, Robert Putnam (2000) contends that Americans over the last generation participate with less depth and frequency in civic organizations like voluntary organizations, member associations, and social clubs. Social capital is embodied in the norms, networks, and social trust of civic engagement that facilitate coordination, cooperation, and mutual benefit (Putnam 1993). Through extensive analysis using data from the General Social Surveys (1972-1999) and the DDB Needham Life Style Surveys (1975-1999), Putnam explains that the steady decline in community engagement “from city to smallest hamlet” arrived with the onset of television in the home (Putnam 2000: 208). News and entertainment have become more individualized and have replaced low-cost entertainment in public settings, such as baseball, dance halls, amusement parks, and theatre, all popular in the mid-twentieth century. As such, according to Putnam, watching television has become the dominant evening activity for most Americans (Putnam 2000: 228). In addition, the aging of generations who valued common

understandings of civic life and voluntarist commitment has contributed to a steady decline in social capital. In this view, Putnam suggests that Americans have increasingly withdrawn into their private world of family, work, friends, and online interactions through social media and thus towards an increased *privatism* (Fischer 2005).

However, in response to Putnam's conclusions, two MIT researchers, Dora L. Costa and Matthew E. Kahn (2003), conducted their own study of declines in social capital using a broader range of datasets, incorporating demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, and applying fewer measures (volunteer activity, organizational membership and activity, and home-based entertaining with friends and neighbors). Their key findings show that rising income inequality is the primary explanation for declines in community participation and that social capital declines are most pronounced among women (Costa and Kahn 2003: 18). For example, rising wage inequality explains up to 77% of the decline in volunteering among men during the period between 1974 and 1989. For women, 100% of the decline in home-based activities like visiting family or friends occurred through the 1990s, which the researchers attribute to women's greater participation in the labor force (Costa and Kahn 2003: 37). Contrary to Putnam's analysis, it is fair to say significant social and

economic changes have reshaped family roles and identities and reduced the capacity of middle-class Americans to meaningfully participate in civic life.³³

In later research, Putnam more fully explores the relationship between religious and civic engagement (Putnam and Campbell 2010). He finds that religious Americans are more engaged in voluntarism than non-religious Americans and that religious congregations offer spaces for Americans to build social connections through activities like small discussion groups, prayer groups, church potlucks, and suppers (Putnam and Campbell 2010). Further, Putnam and colleagues argue that strong friendships and social networks underlie motivations for civic engagement which they suggest may be due in part to the opportunities for greater social connection, volunteer recruitment, and norms and sanctions around helping that mark congregational life (Lewis, MacGregor and Putnam 2013).

This supports our thesis that social connection among young adult Catholics motivates greater community outreach. As we see in young adult Catholic voluntarism, sharing in fellowship with peers becomes a launching pad for wider outreach to local non-profits, both church-sponsored and external. Fellowship with young adult ministry members at church provides a valuable bonding mechanism that generates the kind of mutual trust with like-minded others Putnam envisions as a key source of social capital (Putnam 2000). Their outreach to non-profits both

³³ In *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (2003), Putnam, Feldstein, Lewis and Cohen identify pockets of successful community-building in narratives of their travels across the US.

within and outside the purview of the church provides bridging mechanisms to diverse demographic groups that generate the kind of interlocking social networks Putnam believes are essential to a thriving civic life (Putnam 2000). Catholic churches nurture outreach by providing the messaging and mechanisms needed to push young adults into sustained encounters with fellow parishioners and direct contact with economically and racially diverse groups. Further, as outlined in Chapter 2, regularly scheduled activities like Mass and young adult meetings help reinforce social connections that sustain these contacts and commitments.

Although Putnam's data analysis is useful for highlighting patterns of voluntary activity, it is less helpful in assessing multidimensional processes like the quality and depth of network ties (Lichterman 2005) or the strength of moral obligation to others felt by the actors. Putnam's analysis isolates key data points like hours of volunteering, donations of money, attendance at public meetings, and political activities that demonstrate the effects of bridging mechanisms at work. My research highlights aggregate connections between organizational practices and voluntarist activity and the importance of a unifying message that drives commitment to these processes. Through specific calls to action, St. Cecilia's and The Paulist Center provide the organizational mechanisms needed to push the faithful into greater community engagement. St. Clement's, with its emphasis on deepening religious faith and connection to God, lacks organizational practices that would instill similar obligations and commitments.

James Coleman's (1988) elaborated development of the concept of social capital offers promising avenues for explaining the multidimensional aspects of religion, voluntarism, and civic community. For James Coleman (1988), social capital in fact takes three interrelated forms, which are also identified in the above-mentioned research by Lewis, MacGregor and Putnam (2013): obligations and expectations that depend on trust, shared knowledge and resources through information flow, and moral criteria like norms and sanctions. Social capital gives rise to a shared mutual obligation that engenders trust but is also most effective when *directed towards a specific purpose* (Coleman 1988: 110). For example, Coleman's research shows that high school students are more likely to drop out if parents do not provide the expectation for college and if the strength of the parental relationship is diluted among multiple siblings. According to Coleman, students who attend Catholic school and religious services are the least likely to drop out largely because socializing institutions like family, church, and school operate best as conjoined, overlapping social networks which cultivate social capital and a shared moral purpose that stresses the importance of education (Coleman 1988: 111-13). Thus, although Coleman excludes the bridging mechanisms of social capital, he emphasizes shared norms and expectations and the "public goods quality" (or moral purpose) that motivate attachment to social networks (Coleman 1998: 118).

Paul Lichterman reminds us that social network ties in and of themselves do not automatically translate into greater community attachment (Lichterman 2005).

In his study of a community network comprising nine Protestant churches, he finds that none of the churches in the study succeeded in leveraging great interest in volunteer outreach programs for the homeless. The one church that elicited the greatest volunteer support from its congregants framed its calls to action in terms of a sacred duty to God. That is, they instilled an aspirational purpose for commitment (Lichterman 2005: 147). As my study of young adult Catholics illustrates, collective efforts achieve greater success if the stated goals relate back to shared collective identities and an aspirational source of shared moral obligation which gives weight to the shared commitment. To maintain the social network ties that generate greater social capital and commitment requires not simply attending town hall meetings and volunteering in community organizations, but aligning collective identities, aspirational purposes, and calls to action that shape moral obligation.

Calls to action

Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton ([1985] 1996, hereafter “Bellah”) base their ideal of *public citizen* on the voluntary actions of the congregational church model of townspeople who built churches, hosted town meetings, elected selectmen, and who fused religious and social roles and habits into a single public-private identity (Bellah [1985] 1996: 174).³⁴ Bellah’s view of America’s founding democratic

³⁴ Bellah acknowledges in the introduction to the 1996 edition of *Habits of the Heart* that ascetic Protestantism maintained an ethic of isolation from civic and political life and was also exclusionary of those who were deemed morally unsuitable. He notes that this is the contrary to Catholic tradition which emphasizes consideration for the common good and inclusion of all members. (Bellah 1996: x).

spirit is one in which social roles like husband, wife, child, farmer merchant, and township officer are organized into an interlocking network of public-private, religious-secular, social roles and identities (Bellah 1996: 40-41). According to Bellah, dominant social roles today are either too utilitarian or too expressive and, in either case, overly individualistic. This is perhaps most vividly portrayed in Bellah's critical characterization of "Sheila".

Today religion in America is as private and diverse as New England colonial religion was public and unified. One person we interviewed has actually named her religion (she calls it her "faith") after herself. This suggests the logical possibility of more than 220 million American religions, one for each of us. Sheila Larson is a young nurse who has received a good deal of therapy and describes her faith as "Sheilaism." "I believe in God. I'm not a religious fanatic. I can't remember the last time I went to church. My faith has carried me a long way. It's Sheilaism. Just my own little voice." Sheila's faith has some tenets beyond belief in God, though not many. In defining "my own Sheilaism," she said: "It's just try to love yourself and be gentle with yourself. You know, I guess, take care of each other. I think He would want us to take care of each other." Like many others, Sheila would be willing to endorse few more specific injunctions. (Bellah et al. [1985]/1996: 231)

To Bellah, personalized religious faith threatened the very heart of American life because it gradually removed the possibility of maintaining a shared sense of moral community. Christianity, republicanism, and voluntarist commitment are so intertwined that to lose their moral cohesion would risk jeopardizing the entire foundation of our participatory democracy and hopes for remedying America's social and political ills. With increased individualism, Americans risk losing the sense of moral obligation to others that has sustained the republican tradition of voluntarist commitment since the country's inception (Bellah 1992; Bellah [1985] 1996).

However, as social identities and role identities take shape and evolve, their grammars become less attuned to the traditions and parlance of previous generations (Wuthnow 1998; Ammerman 1997a: 365). This suggests we need to take seriously the cultural resources that contemporary Americans, like Sheila, do draw upon to make their claims of commitment and belonging.

Personal spirituality and religious community are not mutually exclusive. As we see in the example of St. Cecilia's, Fr. John draws upon Jesuit teachings about spiritual development and mainstream literature on therapeutic self-healing to tap into the very qualities of personalized spirituality Bellah discounts. Fr. John's popularity and empathetic connection with parishioners illustrates how greater self-awareness and vulnerability can be a resource for personal connection to God, especially amid the uncertainties of our increasingly complex lives (Roof 1999). Thus, I prefer to think of Sheila as a young nurse who helps others, exhibits sincere compassion, and authentically believes that "God would want us to take care of each other." Sheila's experiences as a caregiver who has suffered her own losses and constructs narratives of religious experience that are meaningful for her should not be dismissed because they fall outside the researchers' expectations of what religious belief and commitment look like (McGuire 2008: 151-52).

For our purposes here, we may say Sheila's social identity and role identity are fused into a model of self-care and compassion towards others. Rather than dismiss her spirituality as self-centered because it is private, expressive, and individualized, I

believe she exhibits a latent sense of moral commitment that would require a call to action issued by some institutional authority – church or state – to be made manifest: moral obligation in collective form is absent not because Sheila is remiss but because no one is asking -- or asking in the right way. Americans largely internalize universal moral narratives (such as the “Golden Rule”) which guide their interactions towards others, even if these are unrealized or fail to align with the forms and expressions modeled by earlier generations.³⁵

As we found in our study of young adult commitment among Catholics, latent religious identity and interpretations of ritual meaning find their expression in organizational practices that resonate cognitively and emotionally and reaffirm socialized orientations to religious practice. Churches like The Paulist Center make institutional religion accessible by acknowledging the divergent experiences and practices of church members and by accepting multiple interpretations of ritual meaning, both personal and collective, that reinforce connection to God through the gospel message. Calls to action that emphasize good works through outreach to others through embodied actions in the world resonate because they emphasize embodied actions and openness to multiple interpretations of Catholic faith and tradition. Thus, young adults are not obligated to share the same understanding of Catholic faith to feel a sense of religious belonging to their church community.

³⁵ I am referring here to the Christian-based moral dimensions of goodwill such as those that underlie spiritual narratives (Ammerman 2013) and parental socialization beliefs and practices (Smith 2019) of both non-religious and religious study participants.

In our contemporary life, social critics are right to note that unifying messages that help instill moral purpose, reciprocity, and mutual trust appear more and more elusive. But the problem rests not simply with an ethos of individualism, with Sheila as its importune representative. Putnam and Bellah draw upon models of the ideal American public citizen whose collective efforts in church and town once shaped a moral concern for the common good. But, as this study of young adult Catholics makes clear, socialized collective identities shape feelings of religious belonging that ascribe value to particular forms and expressions of organizational practice. Building social capital requires more than establishing and reinforcing bridging mechanisms and reiterating a moral discourse that held sway for previous generations. It requires aligning collective identities with aspirational purposes and bespoke calls to action that drive feelings of shared moral obligation, particularly amid the evolving needs of multiple groups and constituencies.

CONCLUSION

Institutions are spaces that bring public and private interactions and meanings into a formalized arrangement of accepted social practices. Echoing Max Weber, we may say the affective, personal ties which mark the communal quality of *Gemeinschaft* inform and potentially mediate the rational, impersonal effects of *Gesellschaft*. In this study, each institutional setting provides a blueprint, articulated by its leader, for how to *be* Catholic: the charismatic priest who offers an aspirational model for how to navigate the spiritual terrain of daily life; the missionary priest who offers an actionable model for how to live out the gospel through service to others; and the devotional priest who offers a spiritual model for how to find deeper connection with God.

Young adult commitment to these churches may be explained through the interaction between their socialization into Catholic faith and its expression in organizational practices that resonate cognitively and emotionally (Benford and Snow 2000; Giorgi 2017). Cognitive resonance occurs when young adults find a familiar connection between previously established meanings and new interpretations of Catholic faith and practice. Emotional resonance occurs when young adults feel connections with experiences that “enmesh” with the collective identity of the church (Giorgi 2017: 716; 721).

Bourdieu’s (1971) early, open-ended conception of religious habitus perhaps best explains how patterns of religious inculcation generate multiple expressions of

community engagement. At the meso level, religious habitus links past inculcation to current situational context through ritual memory that reinforces collective identity and shared commitment to a religious tradition (Hervieu-Léger [1993] 2000). Religious habitus is articulated through embodied understanding and organizational frames that value and prioritize religious meanings which resonate for actors conditioned towards similar patterned expressions of Catholic faith and practice. Clerical leadership shapes differing modes of interaction which become the mechanisms for religious belonging and sustained attachment to religious communities (Davie 2000). In a departure, my empirical research suggests it is the *patterned expression* of habitus and not habitus itself that guides community attachment.

The traditional ritual of the parish and progressive messaging of St. Cecilia's pastor typically resonate for young adults from dual-Catholic-parent households who exhibit a *settled* understanding of their religious identity. The emphasis on voluntary activity and discursive questioning at The Paulist Center resonates for young adults from primarily single-Catholic-parent households who typically exhibit a *contested* understanding of their religious identity. The traditional ritual and messaging of the Eucharistic shrine resonate particularly with young adults from dual-Catholic-parent households who are *settled* in their religious faith.

Socialization and identity encompass three key processes that are essential to our understanding of organizational commitment in religious settings: formal

identification with a religious group; enactment of roles socialized through embodied practices; and the cultivation of meanings and values that motivate action. Catholic identity represents a latent category of religious identity and an active enactment of modeled practices that are salient to the individual which then motivate their commitment. Catholic identity and commitment are thus defined through role identities shaped by organizational practices and messaging that give meaning and value to the liturgy. I suggest role identity theory, which examines the intersection of roles, identity, and commitment within organizations, can be fruitfully applied to the question of what motivates religious community commitment.

For many young adults in this study, this commitment extends to participation in church and young adult ministry activities. My research finds that 17% volunteer in liturgical and music ministries, 61% in fellowship and outreach ministries, and 15% as volunteer activities independent of the church. These findings align with previous research that shows that, given the right mechanisms (like a thriving young adult ministry), Catholics will volunteer in church activities which then engender larger community commitments (Ammerman 2005). Importantly, this research also supports previous findings that show that social connections within congregations motivate voluntarism and commitment (Lewis, MacGregor, and Putnam 2012). Through friendships and strong primary-group attachments, young adult ministries at St. Cecilia's and The Paulist Center become launching pads for increased voluntarism both inside and outside the church. This fellowship provides a bonding

mechanism that generates the kind of mutual trust Putnam envisions as a key source of social capital and bridging mechanisms to diverse demographic groups that generate the kind of interlocking social networks Putnam believes are crucial aspects of civic life (Putnam 2000). Catholic churches like St. Cecilia's and The Paulist Center nurture outreach by providing organizational mechanisms and calls to action that push young adults into engagement with diverse groups.

My research also finds that 37% of these young adults work in the helping professions. While additional investigation is required, this finding suggests that patterns of religious socialization may have a direct bearing on career choice. The bulk of young adults working in human services professions (46%) attend St. Cecilia's, which also has the highest proportion of young adults who grew up in dual-Catholic parent families. I would at least preliminarily suggest that religious identity and role identity are intertwined processes that instill in some Catholics deeply held worldviews about the importance of good works as a core component of religious faith. This finding also raises questions of whether voluntarist action is the only means through which social actors develop the worldviews required to sustain a sense of civic duty and fellowship with others.

In Catholic tradition, charitable acts operate along both public and private dimensions, as internalized values that shape social interactions in the form of compassion and care for others, and as dedicated acts of service that individuals extend to others in keeping with the gospel message. In this study, I show how moral

obligation depends not simply on gathering participants in ritual acts of faith, but on the distinct organizational practices and calls to action established and issued by the local church. In the Catholic case, we find three models of community at the local level, the *community of disciples* model dominant at St. Cecilia's and The Paulist Center and the *mystical communion* model at St. Clement's, each of which imposes differing forms of moral obligation on their congregants. The *herald or messenger* community model is evident in the coherence and intentionality of the religious message at all three churches (Dulles 2002).

At St. Cecilia's, congregants engage their faith through private devotional practices that bring greater personal insight and grand public rituals that draw the entire community into the ritual experience. At The Paulist Center, congregants engage their faith through public, embodied expressions in clerical calls to action towards others and in ritual practices that also bring all those present into the experience of the Catholic liturgy. Both churches thus impose moral obligations to all those present, either through entreaties to greater compassion and care to others or calls to action that enlist congregants into the Mass and the sharing of the Eucharist. At St. Clement's, congregants engage their faith through private prayer and devotion through ritual acts that encompass in more abstract form all those present in this life and the heavenly body in the next. Because the ritual is engaged privately through side-by-side actions intended to generate deeper spiritual practice and connection with God, we may say that these organizational practices and clerical calls to action

instill feelings of moral obligation to all those who share in the experience of mystical communion with God through the Catholic Church.

Therefore, contrary to the assertions on ritual made by Durkheim ([1912] 1995), Collins (2004) and Bellah (2003), I suggest religious actors do not necessarily feel a moral obligation to one another simply because they are engaging in shared ritual performance. Organizational practices and calls to action by clerical leadership determine the form and expression of moral obligation to one another. This argument has implications for the community lost arguments framed most persuasively by Robert Putnam (2000) and Robert Bellah ([1985]/1996). Although Putnam's general thesis of community decline in American life is enlightening, his research methodology tells us little about the strength of network ties (Lichterman 2005) or the moral obligation felt by the participants that drives their attachment. James Coleman (1988) provides a fuller development of the concept of social capital by incorporating three dimensions into his analysis: obligations and expectations, information flow, and norms and sanctions. As Coleman argues, social capital gives rise to mutual trust and shared obligation, but primarily relies for its success on commitment directed towards a specific purpose (Coleman 1988: 110). As my study of young adult Catholics demonstrates, collective efforts achieve greater success if the stated goals relate back to the aspirational models, moral purposes, and collective identities that motivate attachment. Thus, in response to Putnam's emphasis on social networks, we may say that the successful cultivation of social capital requires

an alignment of collective identities, aspirational purposes, and calls to action that generate shared moral obligation.

Although Robert Bellah laments an increased individualism in American life that has diminished a shared sense of moral obligation to others (Bellah 1992; Bellah [1985]/1996), we must ask at the institutional level which forms of moral discourse resonate most for social actors. Americans may well feel moments of shared collective identity during a performance of the Star Spangled Banner or by watching Fourth of July celebrations and parades on the main streets of towns and suburbs, but these sentiments of shared identity activated within social settings are separate from roles taken at the institutional level which then engender mutual trust and moral obligation. As with the experience of Catholics inside and outside of religious settings, American identity represents both a latent category of national identity and an active enactment of modeled practices that are salient to the collective identities of groups. Our research into the organizational practices of local churches shows how young adults find connection to communities through an emotional and cognitive resonance that links socialized understanding, ritual memory, and collective identities with aspirational models for *how to be Catholic*. But it is clear that young adult Catholics are faced with competing narratives of how faith should be engaged and expressed, from traditional versus progressive interpretations of Church teaching to varying emphases on the importance of public and private dimensions of religious practice. Young adults are not simply committing to local churches, but to their aspirational

ideal of what Catholic community represents to them and to the moral discourses shaped by this collective understanding. Therefore, rather than ask why individuals seem to lack a coherent understanding of shared moral discourse that once marked American participatory democracy, we should perhaps be asking whether institutional calls to action are connecting with the multivariate interests and identities of groups in ways sufficiently meaningful to motivate action; and whether there is sufficient overlap among these diverging interests and groups to elicit shared goals and purposes.

Further research

Unlike their American counterparts who feel “untethered” to their Catholic faith, the young adults in this study belong to churches and peer groups that welcome their particular collective expressions of Catholic faith. As we discovered, young adult commitments to particular forms and expressions of religious practice are shaped largely by parental socialization, which also raises the question of why some young adults, particularly from the same family, choose to continue practicing their Catholic faith while others do not. Meso level investigations that formally examine the cross-over effects of institutional influences of school, family, and peer relationships would likely prove useful in shedding light on the interrelated mechanisms that build social connection and lead young adults to commit to their religious faith.

Further, my research suggests that regional differences underscore the importance of cultural ethos in shaping forms of religious commitment. For example, my empirical data show that St. Cecilia's has higher numbers of young adults who were raised in Massachusetts and who never attended Catholic school (38%). By contrast, St. Clement's has higher numbers of young adults who grew up in the Midwest and who attended Catholic school for more than 10 years (60%). Although preliminary, this suggests the importance of region and place in the formation of religious identity, which is particularly relevant to the decentralized, geographically based diocesan structure of the Catholic Church. Although each archdiocese or diocese decides how the Catholic catechism will be disseminated in their schools, there are also "place effects" (Brown-Saracino 2015) that likely influence how these teachings are rendered and perceived. In her study of sexual identity, Japonica Brown-Saracino (2015) shows that the degree to which individuals express their sexual identity is determined largely by the identity culture of a given place; individuals express their sexual identity along a continuum from life-defining to ancillary and integrationist (Brown-Saracino 2015: 24). Thus, *place effects* interact with identity to constitute its unique character and expression. Examining how religious practices are encountered and interpreted across diocesan regions would help us better understand how socialized religious identity interacts with place to shape patterned forms of Catholic faith and expression.

Contribution to the field

As outlined above, my research on young adult Catholics contributes to the sociology of religion and community by advancing three key attributes of community attachment: a) socialized collective identities that facilitate social connection and resonate with dominant forms of cultural expression; b) organizational practices that instill a sense of moral obligation to others; and c) calls to action that motivate community commitment. These key attributes of community attachment differ from the more public, voluntarist, action-oriented quality of the congregational church model that tends to dominate discussions of the community question in the sociology of religion.

My empirical research shows that religious identity is activated through embodied practices that take different forms and shapes in institutional settings. In the Catholic context, ritual memory is continually activated through experiences that shape and reinforce religious identity and validate commitments to the institutional priorities of local churches. This suggests that we must consider the institutional dynamics that shape multiple expressions of religious identity and belonging through the socialized understandings, experiences, and collective identities of multiple groups. These socialized collective identities help facilitate the sustained social connection necessary for motivating community attachment. Religious institutions are particularly adept at instilling inculcated patterns of practice and a predictable rhythm and coherence that punctuates and structures the experience of everyday life.

The regularity of the Sunday Mass, and the meditational qualities of the Mass itself, are a value-laden structuring of space and time. These regularly scheduled activities help build social connection with like-minded others which comports with Michel Maffesoli's (1995) contention that social groups maintain temporary, self-conscious, stable tribal connections for however long they are engaged with one another. These "little masses" are heterogeneous, but also linked through shared lifestyles and preferences which reengage actors in the present, albeit temporarily (Maffesoli 1995: 129). Thus, I would suggest perhaps most neglected in Putnam's (2000) *community lost* thesis is the importance of regularly scheduled activities that build sustained social connection with like-minded others and help develop commitments and actions towards larger civic purposes, like volunteering in the community, developing organizational skills in leadership and planning, and working towards shared goals and purposes.

Further, this research shows that emotional resonance in religious organizations is a key component of community attachment: the aspirational and emotive qualities of institutional practices are essential for understanding the multidimensional qualities of collective identity, ritual memory, and religious belonging. Cultural roles and identities have undergone major transitions over the past fifty years which have radically changed the way institutional spaces are managed and negotiated, most notably through rising income inequality and the mass transition of women into the workforce. These transitions require calls to action that

align with models of community and embody both public and private aspects of cultural expression with implications for how attachment and moral obligation are experienced and felt by organizational actors.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

I. Demographic Data

[To be completed in writing at the beginning of the interview]

1. Are you male or female?
2. In what year were you born?
3. Where were you born?
4. Where do you live now? If in Boston, which neighborhood?
5. What is your occupation?
6. What is your highest level of formal education?
 - less than high school
 - high school diploma
 - Associates degree or other post-high school work
 - Bachelor's degree Major: _____
 - Master's degree Field: _____
 - Doctorate Field: _____
7. What is your approximate total annual household income?

<input type="checkbox"/> under \$30,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$80,000 – \$89,999
<input type="checkbox"/> \$30,000 - \$39,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$90,000 - \$99,999
<input type="checkbox"/> \$40,000 - \$49,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$100,000 - \$109,999
<input type="checkbox"/> \$50,000 - \$59,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$110,000 - \$119,999
<input type="checkbox"/> \$60,000 - \$69,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$120,000 - \$129,999
<input type="checkbox"/> \$70,000 - \$79,999	<input type="checkbox"/> \$130,000 or more
8. From what part(s) of the world does your family originally come? Check all that apply.
 - Africa
 - Asia
 - Europe
 - North America (e.g., American Indian)

Latin America Caribbean Pacific Islands Middle East Other

9. When did your family come to the United States?

5 years ago or less Between 6 and 20 years ago Between 21 and 39 years ago

More than 40 years ago

10. Who else lives in your current household? Check all that apply.

no one, I live alone roommates : how many? ____

spouse partner (not married) children: how many? __ ages? ____

Interview Questions

II. Religious Background

1. Did you grow up Roman Catholic?

*[If yes, go to **Section A**. If no, go to **Section B**.]*

Section A

1. Were both your parents Catholic?

2. Did your family attend church regularly when you were growing up?

3. How often did you attend church when you were a child?

4. How often did you attend church when you were a teenager?

5. Did you go to Catholic school? If so, during what years (elementary, middle, high school)?

If yes:

- a. What words come to mind when you think about your time at Catholic school?

6. Did you receive the sacraments of First Communion and Confirmation as a child?
What are your memories of these events?

7. What do you remember most about going to church?

If no reference to the Mass:

a. What do you remember most vividly about the Mass?

8. Did you have extended family and/or friends who attended the same Catholic church?

9. Can you describe what being Catholic meant to you when you were young?

10. Do you remember becoming aware of having a sense of religious faith when you were young?

11. Did there ever come a time in your life when you questioned your religious faith?

If yes:

a. Can you describe what prompted these questions?

b. Did you share these concerns with your family or friends?

12. Did you ever think about not being Catholic?

13. How would you describe your religious faith now?

Section B

1. Into what religious faith(s) were you born?

2. Can you describe what religion was like in your family when you were growing up?

If religious:

a. How often did your family attend church [*religious services*] when you were a child?

b. How often did you attend church [*religious services*] when you were a teenager?

3. Can you describe what being religious meant to you when you were young?

4. Do you remember becoming aware of having a sense of religious faith when you were young?
5. About how old were you when you started identifying with Catholicism?
6. What is the main reason that you are no longer [*religious faith*] [*unaffiliated*]?

If religious:
 - a. Would you say you were comfortable with the feeling of community at [*your local congregation*] [*religious service*]?
7. What is the main reason that you became Catholic?
8. How did your family react to your decision to join the Catholic Church?
9. Did there ever come a time in your life when you questioned your religious faith?

If yes:
 - a. Can you describe what prompted these questions?
 - b. Did you share these concerns with your family or friends or anyone at your church?
10. How would you describe your religious faith now?

III. Church Selection

1. What church do you attend?
2. Do you attend any religious activities or services at any other parish or religious community?
3. What year did you start attending this church?
4. How often have you been attending [*name church*] in the past six months? The past year? Previous years?
5. Can you remember what drew you to [*name church*] ? Why did you choose this church?

6. Did you explore other churches before deciding on this one?
If yes:
 - a. Which churches did you visit? Where?
 - b. What were your feelings about these other churches when you visited?
 - c. How does [*name church*] compare to other churches you've visited?
7. Would you say you are comfortable with the feeling of community at [*name church*]?
8. When do you usually attend Mass at [*name church*]? Why at this time?
9. If you could select the top three things you enjoy most about the Mass at [*name church*] what would they be?
10. Do you participate in other activities sponsored by the church?
11. How would you describe your relationship with your fellow churchgoers?
12. How would you describe your relationship with the clergy at [*name church*]?
Have you ever called on a priest or a church friend for assistance of any kind?
Have you had any contact with the priest outside of the Mass?
13. How connected do you feel to [*name church*]? In what ways?
14. How connected do you feel to the priests at [*name church*]?
15. How connected do you feel to other churchgoers at [*name church*]?
16. Overall, what do you value most about your experience at [*name church*]?

IV. Catholic Faith and Identity

1. How connected do you feel to the Catholic church? Would you describe yourself as a strong Catholic? Why or why not?
2. How would you describe the relationship between [*name church*] and the Catholic Church as a whole?
3. How strongly do you agree with the teachings of the Catholic church?

- a. What aspects of Catholic doctrine do you agree with?
 - b. What aspects of Catholic doctrine do you disagree with?
 - c. Are there any aspects of Catholic doctrine that trouble you?
4. How do you think being Catholic influences how you go about your daily life?
 5. Have you ever experienced conflict between your values and those of the Catholic church?

If yes:

- a. Can you give me an example?
 - b. How did you react to this conflict?
 - c. How did you resolve this conflict?
 - d. Were you satisfied with the resolution of this conflict?
6. Have you experienced any changes in your perception of the Catholic church since the sexual abuse scandal emerged 15 years ago?
 7. What does being Catholic mean to you today?

V. Place and Urban Neighborhood

1. Where do you live now? For how long have you lived there?
2. How do you get to [*name church*]?
3. When you see the church building as you arrive, what words come to mind?
4. When you see the [*name church's*] interior, what words come to mind?
5. In what neighborhood is [*name church*]? How would you describe this neighborhood?
6. Were you first drawn to the church or to the neighborhood? What drew you?
7. Do you spend time in the neighborhood when you attend church services? What do you do?

8. How often do you visit this neighborhood when you are not going to church?
Where do you go?
9. If you were to walk me through an imaginary map of the church and its environs, where would we start? What sites would we visit along the way? Where would our tour end?

VI. Ritual, Liturgy and Meaning

1. What words would you use to describe the Mass at [*name church*]?
2. When did you last attend Mass? What do you remember most vividly about that service?
3. If you were asked by a non-Catholic what the most important part of the Mass is, what would you say?
4. Do you remember what the homily was about? What words come to mind?
5. How would you characterize the music at [*name church*]?
6. How would you describe how music affects you during Mass? If the music were different at [*name church*], would you still attend this church?
7. Did you take Communion at this Mass? Do you normally take Communion?
8. If you were to explain to a non-Catholic what sharing in the bread and wine means, what would you say?
9. Do you go to Confession? If so, how often?

 [*If yes*]:
 - a. Why do you go to Confession?
 - b. Do you go to Confession at [*name church*]? If so, do you try to visit with one priest [*brother*] in particular?
10. At the last Mass you attended, did you speak with the priest(s) [*or brothers*] or other staff members before or after the service?

11. At the last Mass you attended, did you go to Mass hoping to see friends or acquaintances? Did you make plans to see friends or family members?

12. At the last Mass you attended, what do you remember about the people around you? What stands out the most about other church members?

13. In your quiet moments away from church, what feelings about the Mass stay with you?

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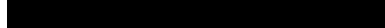
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Curriculum Vitae

