2022

“No Matter Where You’re From, We’re Glad You’re Our Neighbor”: Enacting Justice Initiatives And Community Formation In Faith-Based Organizations

Jenna M. Smith
The College of Wooster, jsmith22@wooster.edu

THE COLLEGE OF WOOSTER

"No Matter Where You're From, We're Glad You're Our Neighbor": Enacting Justice Initiatives and Community Formation in Faith-Based Organizations

by Jenna Smith

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of Senior Independent Study

Supervised by: Heather Fitz Gibbon
Department of Sociology and Anthropology

2021-2022

Table of Contents

Abstract

Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in the United States offer a variety of services and influence social dynamics within their communities, specifically in northeast Ohio. Churches, service agencies, and ministries all often pursue immigration advocacy initiatives and ground their work in religious doctrine, using frameworks such as 'hospitality' and 'welcoming the stranger' to motivate their own initiatives and connect with uninvolved or antagonistic populations. Due to current climates of political polarization and dehumanizing rhetoric in immigration dialogues, this study seeks to analyze the ways in which religious actors define and enact community and explore the contributions of the groups in which they serve. I first review current literature regarding religious institutions and their intersections with immigration and social justice work. I then collect data through qualitative research methods, involving nine interviews conducted over the course of two years (October 2020 – February 2022) with leaders, volunteers, and organizers directly involved with FBOs. My study demonstrates a) agency conceptions of community and negotiations with internal tension; b) challenges and strategies in interactions with external audiences; c) primary outreach techniques for FBOs, including education and bodily work; and d) the interconnectedness of structural violence in precipitating and perpetuating social injustice, especially for immigrants in the United States. I conclude with a discussion of community and reflect not on notions of religiosity itself, but of *how* such beliefs are enacted as agents of change in local frameworks. This study expands upon current scholarship of immigrant and religious networks in northeast Ohio and illuminates the crucial role of FBOs in their justice initiatives.

Acknowledgements

Dr. Fitz Gibbon, I am so grateful for your thoughtful guidance, brilliance, and endless support throughout this project. You challenge me to not only be the best version of myself but also think critically about our world and the ways we might spread joy in it. Thank you.

Thank you to my participants, whose generosity, conversation, and compassion made this work possible. I look forward to growing together and hope to continue these collaborations as we celebrate our community's strengths and surmount its challenges, one cup of coffee at a time.

Thank you, Dad, for *always* answering the phone and inspiring me with your compassion for others. Mom, you are the embodiment of courage – it is a privilege being your daughter and the recipient of your pancake brunches. Grandma, your light and unconditional support have impacted me in immeasurable ways. Anna and Olive, your creativity, strength, and warmth ceaselessly amdazes me. Dana and Ellie, I would not be the person I am today without your strength and belief in humanity – thank you for keeping me grounded and editing the entirety of this project. You are all gifts to this world, and it is an honor to love and be loved by you.

Thank you, Molly, for always reminding me to embrace the beauty in every day, take care of myself and – above all else – laugh *at* and *in* and *with* the world. You are the sun.

Thank you to the Wooster Chorus, my funky and spunky Round of Monkeys, and the lovely COWBelles for warming my soul with the power of music-making and melodies of friendship. I am so grateful to my Pi Kappa Peanuts for filling every day with sunshine, and to the members of Ultimate Frisbee team, who bring out the best parts of me on and off the field (with loam of the utmost quality).

Thank you, Dr. Tierney, Dr. Thomas, Dr. Mamtora, Dr. Wong, Gillian, Ashleigh, Jenni, Mel, and Ben – you are each exemplar human beings, mentors, and agents of change whom I will always look up to. And, of course, to all of my delightful professors, APEX advisors, and staff at the Office of Admissions for encouraging me every step of the way – you have shared such invaluable wisdom, humor, and mystically endless reservoirs of coffee and bagels.

I am grateful to have built such extraordinary relationships at Wooster. Thank you to Nick, my best friends, classmates, teammates, and coworkers for being a part of the goofiest, most chaotic, most beautiful moments of my life. You are all fantastic, mind-bogglingly impressive people – as I reflect on everything we have been through together, I could not have asked for a better support system and admire your abilities to care for others and flourish no matter the circumstance.

Church of the Redeemer and Solidarity Urban Farms, thank you for teaching me the true meaning of community (and good food). I will forever be in awe of your vibrancy and resiliency.

Finally, thank you to Equaill, Amy, Cindy, Carrie, An'gel, Leigh Ann, Deb, Tonya, Tiffany, and all of the dining staff, custodians, and grounds crew at The College who work tirelessly to make our campus feel like home. Your stories, dedication, and chocolate chip cookies (thank you, Leigh Ann) fundamentally transformed my time here – you deserve the world.

Chapter One: Introduction

Imagine Audrey, the pastor of a small congregation located in rural, northeast Ohio – an immigrant from a European nation who arrived in the United States about two years prior. Her church sponsors weekly meal programs and invites members of the community to join the congregation for free lunch, so you decide to stop by and descend stairs into the (mostly) lit basement. The air is stiff and lazy, and you are overcome by the smell of freshly chopped celery – the magical ingredient of their locally famous chicken salad. Folks from the city drift in and out of the doors. You see Gertrude, the seventy-four-year-old powerhouse speeding to collect the nearest fruit cup, and Dave and Carlos, two drifters sipping on mugs of room temperature coffee, chatting about their newly friended neighborhood cat. Audrey seems intensely engaged with a peer organizer about recent spending cuts to service programs and waves Carlos over for a second opinion on her proposal. You try to make sense of the scene unfolding around you – they are seemingly independent actors but function as part of a larger whole, seamlessly blending their movements and interactions. What brought you here, and what brings others? Can you sense a certain energy in the room? Do you observe any tension, discussion, or nuance? What motivates or inspires the people in your midst? Where do you identify elements of community in this context? While fictitious, this scenario reflects the operations of local agencies and churches who engage in social justice work; an event clearly occurs on the surface (with, perhaps, a hint of organized chaos), but there exists a complex network of social relationships, power dynamics, faith motivations, resources and connections, politics, and outside structures collectively influencing the operations of even this one, routine meal program.

Justice dialogues in the United States occur in response to a variety of political, faith-based, and community actors, and are often fraught with tension and misunderstanding between

groups. Whether it be immigration, poverty, or homelessness, negative stereotypes and dehumanizing images circulate the nation; alongside climates of religious extremism and political polarization, this rhetoric disregards the realities of marginalized populations as they surmount tremendous barriers in their personal and professional lives. What becomes lost in these dialogues, notably, is the role of government actors in precipitating and enabling these injustices at the local, state, and federal level. Policy adjustments, funding cuts, and the removal of public support programs place an undue burden on local service agencies to fill these newfound gaps – stretching their time, resources, and labor across an already thin margin (see: Patton & Lier, 2020). This is especially true for Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs), whose umbrella includes religious institutions, congregations, churches, and any agency with efforts and missions grounded in a respective faith tradition. There are over *eleven thousand* religious organizations in Ohio, and they offer a variety of services to foster fellowship, distribute resources, and pursue mission-based initiatives throughout the state and as part of national networks (Cause IQ, 2022).

Although northeast Ohio appears removed from the militarized conditions along U.S. borders, there exists a significant presence of immigrants and migrant laborers in the region, many of whom routinely encounter hostility, exclusion, and violence. Subsequently, many FBOs sponsor services for these populations but do so in areas whose residents are, by and large, simply unaware they have such neighbors. Aside from evidence regarding working conditions in hidden industries like agriculture and manufacturing, little is concretely known about the lived experiences of immigrants – like, for instance, if and how they find belonging, engage with locals, navigate cultural and linguistic barriers, or establish networks of trust. These issues are rendered invisible and compel agencies to pursue a variety of outreach efforts to provide support,

generate opportunities for dialogue, and educate the greater area. Also of consideration is the fact that an estimated 83% of undocumented immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean identify with Christian faiths, any number of whom may attend local services to practice their respective traditions (PEW Research Center, 2013). Although demographics have likely shifted since the poll's completion, trends in PEW's (2013) study nonetheless project future increases in the number of immigrants adhering to particular faiths, including Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism; thus, an investigation of religious institutions and their justice initiatives offers a new perspective into the lives of marginalized populations.

My connection to this topic was forged several years ago, when I began a series of internships working with sustainable farms and entered realms of food access, farm-to-table living, and Ohio's expansive network of religious services. These experiences put into perspective the incredible role that hidden labor and invisible hands have in our food system, as well as the prevalence of FBOs in providing support for excluded populations. Thus, in my initial approaches to this project, I aimed to understand how FBOs connected with immigrant populations and residents at large. While I still pursued these ideas, I found myself at the crossroads of three major components – immigration and social injustice, religion, and community formation – which posed unique implications and collectively demonstrated the use of *faith* as a *driver of action* in my local spheres. As such, this study examines how FBOs respond to immigration advocacy efforts in northeast Ohio and specifically emphasizes their approaches to community formation, communication with internal and external audiences, and enacting conceptions of faith to achieve justice.

To begin my analysis, I investigate literature regarding the history and role of religious institutions in navigating immigration systems, definitions of human dignity, challenges to social

service agencies and their workers, and conceptions of the broader systems defining immigrant experiences in the United States. Next, I interrogate theoretical frameworks of human dignity, hospitality, and "welcoming the stranger" to understand the roles of such notions in society and apply them in the context of contemporary theological debates and the missions of FBOs. I then discuss my methodology and reasons for pursuing a qualitative research approach, and collect data through a series of interviews with local faith leaders and actors directly involved in FBOs. These conversations provided tremendous insights regarding the ways in which service agencies, churches, and FBOs navigate community formation, and allowed me to pose the following questions: What does community look like, and what is the role of fear and ignorance in these dialogues? How do organizations navigate difference and tension? How does religion inform efforts to attain justice for immigrants? My results outline four major themes arising from these discussions, including a) agency conceptions of community and negotiations with internal tension; b) challenges and strategies in interactions with external audiences; c) primary outreach techniques for FBOs, including education and bodily work; and d) the interconnectedness of structural violence in precipitating and perpetuating social injustice, especially for immigrants in the United States. I conclude with a reflection on the impact of healthy community and emphasize not the importance of religiosity itself, but of *how* such beliefs are enacted as agents of change in local, state, and national settings. In interrogating these questions, my study enhances current scholarship on immigrant and religious networks in northeast Ohio and illuminates the crucial role of FBOs in providing communal support and fronting initiatives to ameliorate injustice in the region.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Institutionally, systems of migrant labor in the United States are largely unseen and given little attention from government actors. In response to these gaps, many nonprofit organizations work to integrate migrants into the community by providing health and wellness services as well as faith-based guidance, support systems, and resource assistance. This brings forth questions about an agency's stated purpose – do organizations empathize with immigrants? How do they construct images of the 'immigrant' in their services? Why do they neglect or advocate for these populations in a contentious political climate? How does this work impact employees, and what kinds of religious or secular conditions drive people to act? An exploration of current literature provides a means of interpreting these interactions and their implications on the rest of society by bringing forth four major themes: the history and role of religious institutions in navigating immigration systems, definitions of human dignity, challenges to social service agencies and their workers, and a reflection of the broader, broken system that defines immigrant experiences in the United States. Looking towards the future, I conclude this chapter with a review of suggested frameworks by which the nation may approach the 'immigration issue' in a tangible, holistic manner.

The Role of Religious Institutions

Immigration is a complex system involving the interactions of travelers, residents, national institutions, economic and political forces, and a variety of other societal factors that serve to either accommodate or exclude populations in movement. What is most notable in the present literature, however, is the prominence of religious or Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) in providing social services specific to the migrant labor and immigrant populations throughout the United States. While many of these agencies emerged as a response to new communities

facing persecution in colonial America, the resulting 'melting pot' of cultural diversity, faith traditions, and nationality remains paramount in the contemporary context of Latin American support agencies. Thus, examining the foundations and social teachings of these religious institutions will provide tremendous perspective on the structure of current service agencies and contextualize their reasons for providing resources.

Immigrant Histories

In a literature review of studies on Catholic practices, Hollenbach (2020) examines the historical role of faith communities in integrating immigrants into American society. The author notes that religious institutions are the primary providers of humanitarian services in the nation, highlighting that "six of the nine agencies that the U.S. government relies on to resettle displaced people are faith-based" (Hollenbach, 2020, p. 155). The prominence of these organizations is largely due to the hardship Catholic immigrant populations encountered in their travels to the predominately Protestant American colonies during the 19th and early 20th centuries. In response to climates of persecution and isolation, Catholics created their own institutions as a means of promoting self-sufficiency and providing support for the transition into American life. They generated independent hospitals, service centers, expansive educational networks, and cultural frameworks as a means of survival that ultimately nurtured a legacy of social service agencies – a majority of which continue to provide these same resources in varying degrees across the United States today (Hollenbach, 2020, p. 156).

Williams (2015) expands upon these archives in a collection of writings describing the development of American religious communities over centuries of migration, democracy formation, and governmental policy. The author discusses the sheer amount of diversity among religious practices and identifies how their negotiations of identity, reform, revival, and ethnic

pluralism created distinct repercussions in American religious life. Williams explains how contentious relationships between these resettled Christian denominations led to church-sponsored immigration services, medical and educational infrastructure, and resources for the marginal members of society – particularly for Spanish and Latin American Catholic communities (p. 299).

Joselit (2008) continues this discussion of migrant movement to the United States, but specifically articulates how dialogues among diverse identities drastically sculpted the formation of American religion and its role in society. What is especially relevant about Joselit's argument is the description of immigrants of the late twentieth century – communities from the Middle East and Southeast Asia – as major contributors to the establishment and continuation of faith traditions. Whether it be in the Christian church, Jewish synagogue, or Buddhist temple, the author considers how various enclaves applied universal teachings to their specific contexts and ultimately generated unique applications of each lived practice. This not only extended "the range and meaning of religion" to new heights in America, but also preserved their own cultural interpretations, accelerated the importance and presence of immigrants in faith organizations, and sewed religious practices into the fabric of the nation (Joselit, 2008, p. 78). For example, the author describes an instance where Japanese Buddhists settling in the Western United States contacted missionaries to combat challenges in the immigrant community, who then established a women's auxiliary, conducted prayer services, facilitated holiday festivals, and formed new congregations in the mid-1900s (p. 84). Here, the author demonstrates how immigrants called on the church to address social problems and, in turn, bolstered membership, grounded spiritual guidance in Buddhist texts, and promoted the establishment of inclusive services responding to distinct local needs. In this example, Joselit (2008) offers clear evidence of how immigrant

communities not only propelled the development of many FBOs, but also contributed to their stability and success as religious institutions on a national level – a trend readily seen in a variety of other religious contexts. Overall, these vibrant and chaotic religious histories undoubtedly spurred the founding of so many well-established, lasting agencies grounded in mission-based work.

Tirres and Schikore (2020) examine an adjacent perspective of religious legacy through an analysis of Christian higher education. While the authors specifically examine the impact of an immersion-based classroom experience at a Catholic university with a local immigration center, they preface their survey with an articulation of the institution's continuity with the teachings of Jesus Christ. The mission of the university specifically originates from the work of St. Vincent de Paul to serve "those who are economically and socially marginalized" – in most cases, immigrants and the impoverished – through a holistic approach which intertwines charity, service, teaching, and professionalism (Tirres & Schikore, 2020, pp. 93-4). The authors represent the university with a "go-then" doctrine presumably adopted by its members, where students acquire knowledge or experience and then 'do something about it'; this institutional model aims to foster justice and serve the poor through patterns of seeing, absolving, speaking, and intentionally challenging the systems that enable cycles of marginalization, especially in the context of immigrant dehumanization and oppression.

In their account, Tirres and Schikore illustrate the overarching network of Christian colleges and educational systems that employ these ideals in conjunction with historical ties, sainthood, and authentic doctrinal adherence to inform their learning and professional environments. Such portrayals to the larger world advertise faith as a driver of action in these establishments, as well as a motivator for claims to migrant empathy as part of a longstanding

tradition of fighting inequity. Regardless of whether the context involves private healthcare, parishes, or higher education, FBOs clearly comprise a large portion of American immigration services because of their historical allegiance to scripture and divine teaching.

Religious Groundings

After recognizing the prevalence and history of religious institutions in the United States, exploring the services that organizations offer will prompt a deeper understanding of their mission statements and declared purpose. While many FBOs established themselves as a response to immigrant or regional need, it is interesting to consider the ways in which their religious doctrines may contribute to the delivery and frequency of services. Whether it be generating migrant empathy, gaining support from the greater area, or even motivating current members to participate in service opportunities, investigating an institution's adherence (or lack thereof) to a particular faith tradition will reflect the relationships and sources of conflict potentially present with the larger community. Should faith truly motivate social change and work to integrate migrants, analyzing rhetoric in scripture, creeds, and formal and informal teachings will provide a more solidified, holistic framework by which to interpret interactions with immigrants in a contemporary setting.

Presently, a common theme among scholars involves a sociological and religious concept known as "welcoming the stranger." This idea stems from many stories present in the major monotheistic religions where individuals embrace the unknown, the exiled, or members of other faith communities. This is particularly true in Christian texts, where the central divine figure of Jesus Christ lived as an object of exclusion, isolation, and violence for much of his time on Earth and later sacrificed himself to save future members of the Christian community. Thus, in approaching the 'stranger' with hospitality and protection, Hollenbach (2020) argues that

congregants serve individuals whose life circumstances directly reflect the primary figure of the New Testament. These acts would not only demonstrate respect for the divine, but would further uphold common creeds, biblical teachings, and shared roots as Christian immigrants in an unfamiliar nation (Hollenback, 2020).

May (2011) augments theological concepts of the 'stranger' as part of a greater work describing national relationships with the undocumented. The author examines the frequent application of this notion in ancient Middle Eastern and North American religions, specifically because of their notable encounters with immigration. However, May acknowledges the tumultuous side of this perspective: 'strangers,' while seeking tolerance, upset stability and disrupt the familiar. In larger masses, they become "foreigners" who are "tricky" and require distance because of their potential to do harm, which unsettles and inspires fear in the host population (May, 2011, pp. 125-6). In this context, they are assumed to be the *enemy*, a dangerous force, which the author analyzes through the treatment of the Puritans, Baptists, Jews, and Catholics during their subsequent arrivals to early America – many of whom fulfilled the role of 'stranger' for a length of time (and in some cases, still do). The response prompted by the scripture and biblical messages of these religions engages in rhetoric of "love thy enemy" and tasks the church with acts of blessing, forgiveness, and prayer with the assumption that "love will somehow disarm... enemies and turn them into compliant friends" (May, 2011, p. 126). Thus, despite initial fears from the host community, this grounding serves as a motivator of honor and respect in its most rudimentary application.

Although positioned in a slightly different context, Doerfler (2019) reiterates the same concept of "welcoming the stranger" through an examination of ancient stories, the Bible, and contemporary crises on the United States-Mexico border. The author uses evidence from Jacob's

homily to explicate the 'stranger' as an unknown, isolated, or vulnerable figure outside of the community who requires "spiritual as well as material assistance" and calls for a "liturgical response" from the greater community, which then responds out of religious necessity (p. 1169). Doerfler illustrates the church's intertwined relationship with the souls of these anonymous figures, particularly immigrants traversing the U.S.-Mexico border, and declares that members of the Christian community are called to moral, religious, and personal missions to serve and remember the forgotten – the 'stranger' – in acts of reciprocity. It is interesting to consider these notions in the broader context of hostile or antagonistic sentiment, especially those present in the American public and communities surrounding church institutions, because Doerfler's description suggests that prevailing attitudes towards these doctrines determines the fluidity and continuity by which FBOs may or may not effectively serve immigrants.

In relation to Doerfler's (2019) application, May (2011) engages with this construct through an interpretation of the relationship between the 'stranger' and groups in powerful, secure social positions. In the context of business ventures, commercial enterprise, and cheap labor, these individuals view immigrants and undocumented workers as a highly valuable resource who, because of their critical occupations and hidden services, are involved in deep, fuller contracts with the rest of society. The author demonstrates how such acts of giving and receiving between the 'stranger' and the host society bring forth questions of 'who owes who?' and transform this contractual association into one of a *covenant* – a doctrine present in Hebrew text and Jewish understandings of Yahweh, as well as other popular monotheistic religions. These teachings emphasize how dynamics between the divine and human persons, the powerful and the powerless, function as interconnected, binding exchanges grounded in obligation and responsibility: protection for faithfulness or, in contemporary applications, residency for services

(May, 2011, p. 128). This grounding in Israeli teachings applies a religious framework to host relations with migrants and provides insight into the reasons that FBOs provide services to immigrants. In applying these religious ideals, the author articulates a pledge to see the humanness and value in sustaining relationships with the 'stranger' – an interpretation that exposes populations to different ways of being in the world and allows them to achieve new understandings of social justice.

Nestled within this context of religiosity is a prominent articulation of the human dignity of immigrants, migrants, and the undocumented – a conviction that is not only spoken for in faith-based institutions, but also throughout a larger network of Latin American and immigration nonprofit organizations. Collective understandings of 'human dignity' often arise from rhetoric of the Enlightenment, where prominent thinkers and civilians alike considered the idea of tolerance – that, perhaps, underneath unfamiliar styles of dress, ethnicities, languages, or appearances, there exists a similar human body, "someone just like me," who breathes (May, 2011, p. 125). Although May (2011) later complicates the simplicity of this notion, this doctrine lit the fires of advocacy for unalienable rights, autonomy of the human person, and recognition of self-determination – concepts present in religious teaching as well as government documents – which serve as the primary tenets that institutions utilize to ground their faith, communities, and immigration services.

Hollenbach (2020) applies this concept specifically through the lens of the 'Catholic Normative Stance' – a tenet upheld by the Catholic church as a whole – which declares that members of the faith community are accountable for "theological and ethical traditions that call them to assist migrants" because of their relational position as family and individuals worthy of boundless respect and dignity (p. 158). In an acknowledgement of the common human

experience, Hollenback (2020) contends that support for migrants, regardless of status, is "both a Christian duty and a human obligation" that must be served in the true upholding of Catholic doctrine (p. 160). This establishes a baseline for religious institutions that, at the most fundamental level, immigrants are deserving of resources because their status as *people* trumps barriers presented by different nationalities, languages, or even religious traditions. The author declares:

> This understanding of justice is based on the insight that people possess a dignity and worth that should be respected by all, both Christian and not Christian. It also affirms that treating people with the dignity they have as members of the human community requires supporting their active participation as agents in society. (Hollenbach, 2020, p. 158-9)

Thus, dignity for immigrants involves their right to live freely as well as take part in the places where they reside, work, and establish roots. Kerwin and Nicholson (2019) expand on this approach of community engagement, articulating how institutions may similarly ground their programs in belief of the 'common good' – a phrase referring to conditions that allow all living beings to reach their own fulfillment in an unabridged way, particularly through internal exploration and the ability to express themselves (p. 44). In promoting access to self-realization, churches unify their missions, prioritize immigrant dignity, and spread messages to members through both religious texts as well as action in the real world. This not only empowers migrants to become active members of their new residencies, but also allows congregations to bridge gaps between folks of diverse life experiences and provide them with opportunities to form new relationships that transcend political tensions. This is especially true in the United States, where the bulk of integration and immigration service providers are not run via the government and instead depend on private or nonprofit religious organizations.

In an analysis of current political attitudes towards immigration, Ahn (2017) describes a spectrum of approaches circulating in the American conscience. Of particular alignment with the 'Catholic Normative Stance' is the author's summary of a "politics of compassion," where individuals foreground the humane consideration, respect, empathy, and solemnity of migrants as human persons. It is a framework widely adopted by religious scholars who highlight the aforementioned biblical practices of hospitality and communicate one clear sentiment: communities should provide for those who are in the most need and are most vulnerable. With language such as "conscience, good will, and religious faith," Ahn summarizes the pillars of theological institutions across the country as they ground community action in a thoughtful acknowledgement of a shared human identity (p. 255). Despite a wealth of moral teachings derived from prominent religious works, there are of course incidents where institutions fail to universally apply these doctrines and may not fully follow them in practice (see: Godfrey, 2020). Thus, while spiritually-based groundings inform the missions of FBOs, they serve as an interesting point of comparison to reflect on the tensions, flaws, differences, and unique circumstances that collectively impact *how* and *why* an agency exists.

While FBOs often ground their language in human dignity, it is a language that also surpasses religious settings and applies to many organizations working with immigrants. For example, Tyner (2002) recounts the experiences of Filipina women after migrating to rural Northeastern Ohio through a series of conversational interviews and ethnographic techniques. The author follows a biographical, narrative-style approach to articulate "hidden stories" and a "richer understanding of migration" as told by the individuals themselves, expressing how experiences of loneliness, isolation, and displacement are common themes among these women and those of similar identities (Tyner, 2002, p. 315). In sharing these stories, the author

highlights how perception and language surrounding immigration holds a powerful ability to reduce humans to obsolete figures – into nothing – and justifies mistreatment, inequality, marginalization, stereotypes, disrespect, ostracization, and abuse (p. 319). Thus, prevailing terms like 'criminals,' 'alien,' and 'illegal' pose implications not only on migrant health and wellbeing, but also reflect the greater community's choice to either integrate populations or exclude them through 'subhuman' categories (p. 321).

These patterns are also true on the opposite spectrum, where faith-driven programs may utilize affirming language to generate empathy, provide migrants with opportunities to rebuild senses of self-worth, and create stronger, more connected communities. Churches, because of their large local presence and tools for sharing spiritual guidance, may have the ability to overcome sources of conflict and provide avenues for relationship building between folks of different identities. Although this example is not particularly tied to a faith-based institution, Tyner makes clear the harm that occurs when tenets surrounding human dignity are *absent*. Dehumanization poses tremendous risks even in the smallest communities, and this work reinforces the importance of religious groundings and demonstrates the potential of FBOs to act as positive instruments of change. Overall, Tyner's example presents the complicated lived experiences of immigrants transitioning into American life and further promotes how spiritual understandings of human dignity have profound, tangible impacts on millions of people.

Analyzing religious foundations in hospitality, identifying a common good for people, and recognizing human dignity are all key pillars that faith-based institutions utilize to spur action and solidarity. FBOs possess such established attitudes in social justice and operate on the front lines of humanitarian crises, specifically immigrant equity, *because* of these groundings. They exist as part of an ecosystem of other religious practices and denominations that center

their frameworks on the teachings of sacred figures or texts, which allows them to enter discussions with the greater community *and* each other. This environment is unique to the United States because it engages with diverse perspectives who are both intertwined through complicated historical exchanges and work towards achieving similar goals. With a recognition of dignity and a foundation in religious principles, FBOs offer tremendous resources to affirm migrant life, build stronger networks of advocacy with one another, and combat disenfranchising systems.

Available Services

While these various faith-based groundings inform the missions of religious institutions, they also mobilize congregations to act. In a contemporary examination, Kerwin and Nicholson (2019) investigate the impacts of American immigration legislation on FBOs through the Federal Enforcement Effect Research (FEER) Survey. In their analysis, the authors consider 170 Catholic entities in 38 states that, among a wealth of other resources, offer services to immigrants in the form of legal aid, education, spiritual guidance, and other need-based opportunities (Kerwin & Nicholson, 2019, p. 43). Kerwin and Nicholson articulate the goals of Catholic institutions reflected in the survey, explaining how parishes, agencies, charities, and resettlement programs alike "'seek to promote justice' as well as 'integral human development' which encompasses social, political, economic, spiritual, cultural, and other human needs" (p. 44). This high religious presence in immigrant services is of no coincidence: in citing verses from New Testament scripture and doctrines of religious freedom, the authors demonstrate how FBOs possess a deep conviction in the "God-given dignity, rights, and equality of all persons, including those on the social margins like refugees, asylum seekers, unaccompanied children, divided families, detainees, persons without status, and low-income workers" (Kerwin &

Nicholson, 2019, p. 49). Here, it becomes evident that these service agencies deeply and holistically inform their interactions with immigrants and other displaced populations through the historical religious teachings of the Catholic church and continue their advocacy efforts by safeguarding vulnerable communities. This not only reflects the fundamental importance of religious structures, primarily the Catholic church, in fronting immigration assistance efforts as argued by Hollenbach (2020), but further reinforces widespread faith-based beliefs to empower and validate individuals of all backgrounds, regardless of legal status, ethnicity, nationality, language ability, or other identities.

While religious institutions front the majority of immigration services in the United States, the resources they provide are also localized and distinct among any given community. In a 2016 study, Babis explores the network of worldwide immigrant organizations to investigate why, how, by whom, and for whom these agencies are founded. Upon review of this data, the author imparts the holistic lack of uniformity among institutions that assist with social and cultural transitions into new countries. Spaces like churches, community centers, schools, extracurricular activities, sports teams, and other formal or informal nonprofits respond to broader social issues by addressing the local needs of populations. Thus, Babis (2016) illuminates that generalizing these services would be impossible due to the varying conditions of the hosting nation, specific immigrant populations, existing divisions or policies, and gaps in cultural practices (Babis, 2016, pp. 361-5).

Despite this diversity, however, several services are frequently offered among religious institutions. For example, McCarty (2012) recounts her position as an employee in a Catholic Worker house – a string of independently owned shelters committed to hospitality, voluntary poverty, and fighting violence and oppression – serving undocumented immigrants in Texas.

Regardless of geography, the author articulates that each house operates under a shared Catholic doctrine of meeting needs, absolving injustice, and supporting the poor and the most vulnerable (McCarty, 2012, p. 336). Specific operations in the Catholic Worker House involve spiritual guidance, referrals to relevant offices or external agencies, medical assistance, hot meals, cleaning, providing housing and food accommodations, promoting food access, social activities, prayer services, and solidarity among community members (McCarty, 2012). After gathering national survey data, Kerwin and Nicholson (2019) compile these opportunities in an exhaustive list of Catholic services identified by the agencies themselves. The authors provide overlapping evidence with McCarty's (2012) account and categorize the data under labels of legal aid, interpretation and translation, food pantries, naturalization, transportation and accompaniment, health screenings, advocacy, housing, employment, spiritual guidance, emergency and long-term shelters, clothing, GED certificates, language classes, pastoral care, and ministry (Kerwin & Nicholson, 2019, pp. 44-5). While the authors recognize shortcomings in services and suggest areas of improvement, they demonstrate the resilient and enormous network of Catholic agencies that work to bridge gaps left by government inaction.

In a more specific setting, Morrissey (1999) highlights all major service providers in the northwestern Ohio region through a review of government documents, law and policy comparisons, and interviews with former migrant laborers and providers. Regionally, nonprofits and FBOs offer childcare services, job placement help, English classes, transportation, educational opportunities, healthcare, housing, and legal aid, many of whom share partner agencies in neighboring states and counties. While the study acknowledges the grand scheme of nonprofit institutions, Morrissey clearly highlights the failure of the state to adequately advocate for and compensate migrants in agricultural, low-paying, or other unregulated positions – a

system which critically reinforces compensation efforts by private and mission-based agencies. As such, these analyses continuously demonstrate how FBOs play prominent roles in immigration dialogues throughout the United States. Their expansive establishments and array of services both constitute a significant portion of this sector and further inundate approaches to immigration with faith-based teachings.

Overall, FBOs are the sources calling people to "welcome the stranger," enter covenants with other populations, and engage in more complex, holistic relationships. Their work acknowledges broader systems of injustice and shared migrant pasts, and their religious groundings hold the power to instill moral frameworks in communities that acknowledge the dignity of excluded immigrant populations. In the absence of such respect, marginalized groups encounter a variety of experiences that deny them of their personhood and pose disastrous consequences, whether that be in Northwestern Ohio or on the U.S.-Mexico Border. FBOs are not only widely located throughout the nation, but also provide an incredible range of services that uniquely respond to the needs of immigrants and local social problems. In recognizing their influence over the way communities choose to acknowledge, perceive, speak about, and interact with immigrants, we can begin to unpack the unjust conditions facing populations and dive into more specific roles fulfilled by residents and the social service agencies themselves.

Challenges to Social Services Agencies and Their Workers

As noted above, social service agencies provide a litany of resources for immigrants as a result of their historical affiliations, religious groundings, and widespread recognition of human dignity regardless of legal status or nationality. However, despite these expansive networks and their great potential to positively impact the lives of migrants, multiple challenges confront FBOs in their attempts to offer services to the very populations that need them most. These trends

demonstrate how relationships between immigrants and service agencies are not isolated; rather, they operate within a larger, profoundly complex system that involves a host of actors who influence *how*, *when*, and in *what ways* an organization may contribute to the immigration 'issue' in the United States. While many religious organizations take on such established stances towards improving social justice and advocacy work, it does not make them perfect nor invincible in the face of complex dialogues and intense, hostile debates regarding 'illegal aliens' or negative perceptions of immigrants. Therefore, acknowledging the barriers, weaknesses, and internal tensions FBOs encounter will provide a deeper understanding of why humanitarian immigrant crises persist and further elucidate how institutions may allocate their resources based on available staff, financial assistance, and volunteer networks. While efforts to create change are persistent, they are not complete; this perspective will encompass these implications on the ability of social service workers to facilitate interactions between migrants and the greater community, as well as maintain the stability, initiatives, and health of their respective agencies.

External Factors

While FBOs operate independently from government structures, they are still subject to federal laws and policies that place limitations on their services. Institutions must respond to a variety of external factors out of their immediate control, which prompts an examination of these challenges and their overall impact on agencies. To begin, Kerwin and Nicholson (2019) illuminate the implications of the Trump era's legacy of discriminatory messaging and policy writing surrounding the immigration situation in the United States. The administration engaged in derogatory labeling of migrants, targeted DACA programs, and weakened or altogether eliminated family-based policies meant to protect immigrants from separation. They highly militarized borders, completed an unparalleled number of arrests and detentions, and generated

barriers to obtaining permanent residency. The administration also instituted a series of bans to immigrants across a variety of nations, including Muslim, Latin American, and Chinese populations, which fueled an uprising of anti-immigrant rhetoric and racist acts from the broader American public (p. 44). These occurrences complicate FBO relationships with immigrants on a variety of levels, whether that be by preventing populations from accessing services, imposing financial and social obstacles, or failing to achieve community cohesion. While this is certainly not the first presidential administration to impose limitations and spread harmful messages about immigrants, it spurred an unprecedented level of public dialogue surrounding the issue and led to the exacerbation of hostile, anti-immigrant attitudes throughout the United States.

Even prior to Trump's presidency, Khan et. al (2021) discusses how previous administrations instituted a line of federal barriers that not only elevated international tensions but also obstructed opportunities for migrant settlement and presented foreign populations as "a danger to national security" (p. 78). The openly derogatory sentiment arising from this climate introduced a spread of ongoing challenges for religious institutions as they answer to outside actors who often dictate their distribution and use of funds as well as the amount of social support they receive from the greater community – meaning they may encounter resource limitations, short-staffing issues, challenges to ideology, and conflict with the prevalence of anti-immigrant opinions. From President Bush's tightened travel protocols to various acts specifically made to prioritize 'the American citizen,' these situations heightened government animosity in the wake of a national disaster and perpetuated unstable humanitarian crises along the Southern border. Obama's "zero tolerance" policies introduced a record number of deportations, detentions, and obstructions to citizenship or naturalization that further destabilized immigrant communities and failed to slow the rate of incoming asylum seekers (Khan et. al, 2021). Clearly,

the legacy of antagonistic and ineffectual policy implementation instigated a national schism where an increasing proportion of the American public projected unreceptive, rejective attitudes towards immigrants – a phenomenon occurring outside of any given religious institution's control. The government's introduction of this isolating legislation generated status hierarchies between citizens and noncitizens and penalized undocumented or marginalized communities – simply excluding them altogether – thus, designating churches as vital actors in facilitating immigrant interactions, resources, belonging, and community development. These conditions force FBOs and other nonprofits to compensate with additional services, community forums, faith-based teachings, and positive rhetoric combatting stereotypes or other harmful tropes. As such, religious institutions must attempt to serve as primary support systems for migrants within polarized, unwelcoming environments that compound existing issues and complicate operations.

For instance, Kerwin and Nicholson (2019) demonstrate how harsh external policies generated tense, problematic relationships between host and immigrant populations. This poses a difficult setting for FBOs as they navigate national tensions on a smaller scale and encounter problems in their attempts to concretely engage with both immigrants and local residents. The authors report how, in former surveys of major Catholic organizations, "twenty-eight percent of respondents identified the 'receiving community' as one of the 'biggest obstacles' they faced in advancing immigrant integration" (p. 47). Additional results from the FEER Survey indicate how the primary obstacles of FBOs include: the continued problem of locating funding, government restrictions, hostility and prejudice among the host community, demand for services outpacing resources, difficulty retaining trained and culturally competent volunteers, lack of staff, and Trump's anti-immigrant rhetoric (Kerwin & Nicholson, 2019, p. 46). Here, the authors verify how the largest impediments to faith-based operations are often *directly the result of government*

(in)action, which suggests a larger, structural inequality that prevents religious organizations from ameliorating the very systems that perpetuate immigrant discrimination. Here, components involving the attitudes of local communities, racism and ethnocentrism, and the identity and nationality of marginalized groups all impact an institution's effectiveness to provide services.

Jordan (2017) articulates the impact of shifting public opinions regarding immigrants and migrant laborers. The author explains how, prior to the Trump presidency, residents of Willard, Ohio traditionally hosted and welcomed international workers each year for their agricultural growing seasons and maintained rather healthy relations with this community. Despite these roots, the large spike in overt anti-immigrant sentiment led to fiery conversations between city residents, clashing of ideals over nationality and human worth, and a subsequent cancelling of their annual 'welcome-back' festival. Local churches organized town meetings to discuss the event and facilitate dialogue among city members; along with nearby farmers, these institutions also advocated for migrants, articulated their value in maintaining the productivity and wellbeing of the agricultural sector, and exclaimed Latin American immigrants were instrumental as "part of the fabric of Willard" (Jordan, 2017, p. A13). In this work, Jordan illustrates how attitudes opposing acceptance of 'the stranger' not only minimize cohesiveness, sabotage previously healthy interactions, and prevent cultural acceptance, but they also place greater responsibility on FBOs to function as community mediators in *addition to* providing services for migrants and other components of religious life. These external pressures generate rifts that impact marginalized individuals via exclusion and dehumanization, and further raise alarms for agency workers as they navigate tension, decreased support, and, subsequently, a lack of funding for their resource-strapped organizations.

Morrissey (1999) expands on these external challenges and describes specific circumstances hindering the operations of institutions in Northwestern Ohio. For instance, the author outlines the situation of a publicly-funded legal advocacy organization – Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (ABLE) – which protects the rights of the undocumented, represents individuals in court, and demands proper labor conditions for migrant workers. With the introduction of federal restrictions, the organization refused to deny services to undocumented people and, as such, lost Congressional financial support as well as half of its staff. The organization was forced to downsize and instead obtain monetary compensation from a private sector, prompting a complete restructuring and limiting of its services. Morrissey also notes the struggles of other providers facing funding restrictions; from direct labor recruiters to religious organizers, these services do not receive any federal assistance and rely either on donations, grants, or self-generated funds to sustain themselves – all of which are frequently inconsistent sources subject to legislative or resource allocation restrictions (p. 112). This further impacts an organization's ability to hire and appropriately compensate bilingual or culturally competent employees, introducing further impediments to connecting with migrants or speakers of Latin American languages.

Despite all of these federal limitations, however, levels of immigration are reportedly higher than ever and place significant pressures on social service agencies to provide for even larger quantities of people with either the same or reduced resources. Kerwin and Nicholson (2019) contend that these enforcement policies introduce a paradox: the Catholic institutions examined in the study encounter increased demands for services like legal screenings, advocacy, representation, and integration, which they increasingly work to meet. However, they are simultaneously "impeded by federal immigration policies that effectively prevent immigrants

from driving, attending gatherings, applying for benefits, and accessing services due to fear that these activities might lead to their deportation or the deportation of a family member" (p. 43). These patterns function as tremendous stressors on agencies as they work to provide additional services yet struggle to gain immigrant participation because of government-generated fears. Although FBOs seek to provide more opportunities for outreach, fear of deportation, lack of awareness for services, difficulties in transporting to and from event sites, language gaps, legal statuses, limited internet access, and cultural barriers all thwart immigrant enrollment in programs (p. 46). These systems are counterintuitive and exacerbate preexisting inequity; those seeking help are unable to access services, and religious organizations cannot assist individuals with whom they do not know or cannot communicate. The former cannot share their talents, experiences, or perspectives with the larger community or participate as active members in society, and these trends deepen fissures between populations and deny the nation opportunities to form vibrant, culturally diverse communities.

From hostile government policies to negative host attitudes, lack of funding, and imposed restrictions, FBOs encounter difficulties in their attempts to provide services for Latin American immigrants. Despite efforts to promote trust, respect, and inclusion through spiritual groundings and advocacy work, institutions must navigate pervasive stereotypes of 'stranger' populations which generate conflict and hostility throughout the United States. The advent of restrictive federal laws stifles the work of immigrant-affirming institutions, primarily because such factors undermine tenets of human dignity, perpetuate cycles of dehumanization, and decline available financial sources. Negotiating such identities and polarized sentiments on a smaller scale introduces tremendous pressures on organizations to facilitate interactions while maintaining their fiscal and social health – an unlikely venture given these strained conditions. Without

proper support, funding, or sympathetic followers, FBOs cannot contact or provide services to vulnerable populations in a sustainable fashion. This is severely problematic given the major role of these institutions in integrating and advocating for immigrants and exacerbates complications when the institutions themselves experience discord.

Internal Conflict

In addition to external barriers, many religious and social service organizations navigate conflict within their agencies. Between internal debates on the acceptance or rejection of immigrants, the destabilization of church unity, workplace turnover, and rifts between religious attitudes and professional behaviors, many points of contention harm an FBO's ability to operate cohesively – especially when they occur alongside outside influences. Identifying these tensions illuminates the stressors that prevent organizations from supporting vulnerable populations and sabotage their ability to maintain a sustainable, productive work environment. These trends increase burnout and emotional stress for service employees and limit assistance to immigrants in the United States to an even higher degree. At the forefront of this conflict is a change in the dynamics of religious communities, which I shall discuss first.

In recent decades, progressive social transformations in language and identity blended with historical religious practices to produce a collection of church reforms, liberal congregations, and new ways of worshipping and practicing. These developments sometimes occur at odds with conservative views or traditional structures, forcing churches to reframe their sense of unity and reevaluate allegiance to particular ideas and ideological values. For instance, Hollenbach (2020) discusses the most recent legislative moves of the Trump administration, which introduced a host of intense policies restricting immigration, imposing consequences for immigrant sympathizers, and declining available government services for these populations. The

introduction of such strict policies catalyzed rifts inside churches who are largely split in their attitudes towards immigration justice and refugee assistance – especially Catholics. The author explains how a large portion of churches are not pro-refugee and do not necessarily align with the teachings of Pope Francis (a figure who advocates for immigrant dignity, recognition, and alliances among followers). This poses a series of implications when considering the state of the Catholic church as a whole: there exists a decline in the overall number of parishes and clergy in training, and an increase in the population of followers – indicating a priest shortage (a position that congregations require in order to complete the sacraments vital to Catholic life and practice). Thus, this denomination faces a reduction in leadership as well as a political divergence from many of these figures – a trend which destabilizes conditions, support networks, and community cohesion *within the church itself.*

This lack of unity weakens an institution's ability to be fully present and active against broader networks of injustice and reduces their effectiveness in mobilizing large groups of individuals to create progressive change in the realm of immigration – particularly regarding ethnicity and race. Hollenbach provides evidence of these matters in a survey of the Catholic community, indicating that 56% of white followers supported building the controversial U.S.-Mexico border wall in contrast to only 26% of Hispanic Catholics. Hollenbach declares that "the Catholic community will need to explore new ways to assist migrants if it wants to continue its contribution to their integration into U.S. society" because of shifting expectations of *who* deserves to belong in the church and the nation (p. 162). Divisions in the mission, direction, and future goals of religious organizations not only provoke distrust among followers, but may prevent immigrants from finding consistent and humane treatment at historical places of sanctuary. This disruption between church leaders, parishioners, and potential parishioners

weakens the foundations of FBO tolerance and negatively impacts those running and receiving services.

As a result of these turbulent community dynamics, religious institutions encounter issues of staff retention and wellbeing. Morrissey's (1999) work concludes with a description of the small but intimately connected network of service agencies and indicates how the field is underfunded; as such, FBOs are unable to hire enough staff or properly compensate them. Here, the author recognizes the limitations of social service and religious work: these fields strive to aid injustice yet *lack the ability to cure it* due to external stigmas associated with the immigrant community and the overwhelming responsibilities of agency workers who cannot singularly solve the nation's problems. This fact is disempowering for individuals who may feel their work is ineffectual or hopeless – a sentiment reinforced by elevated employee turnover rates in FBOs, reports of burnout and destituteness, frequent career changes outside of this field, and a lack of culturally trained individuals available or prepared to speak with immigrant populations (Morrissey, 1999, p. 112). Without steady foundations within institutions themselves, FBOs cannot deliver their services as effectively or efficiently nor build better relationships between different populations in their own communities – much less the broader United States. Agency workers front resources and opportunities for immigrant safety, assistance, and legal aid; in the absence of reliable or healthy leaders, immigrants cannot form connections or establish roots in settings where they increasingly experience or anticipate fear and abuse.

In addition to institution destabilization and burnout, immigrant worker experiences involve friction between professional and religious identities. Church schisms between contemporary and traditional belief systems impact individual institutions as they become daily tensions in the lives of employees, who must negotiate their religious attitudes with personal

boundaries and workplace behaviors. Zorita (2017) articulates the conflict between secular social work protocols and Catholic religious practices, particularly on platform issues like abortion and contraception. In an examination of published ethics codes, texts, and other moral-declarative documents, the author identifies how contemporary doctrines of 'professionalism,' workplace separation, and bureaucratic authority undermine Catholic approaches to immigration service because of the secular field's emphasis on detaching faith and moral claims from their work. Zorita contends that when religious employees respond to socio-economic affairs and other conditions regarding human dignity, they are forced to negotiate personal values, follow the protocols of the agency, provide services which defy their principles, or simply ignore areas of tension altogether by referring clients or remaining silent – pushing Catholic employees into a "religious closet" via socialization, marginalization, and negative portrayals of the faith (p. 125). While the author approaches such arguments from a traditional, conservative perspective, she articulates a sentiment commonly held among individuals operating within polarized churches or FBOs. Conflicts in ideology and work protocols – regardless of political alignment or religious practice – generate feelings of discomfort, cynicism, and confinement among agency workers. This is particularly true among large denominations like Catholicism, where diversity in opinion and life experience is inevitable; despite identifying with an overarching tradition, employees and FBOs may practice different interpretations *within* the same religion and thus encounter ideological tensions. These rifts introduce experiences of cognitive dissonance and negatively impact an employee's ability to perform as they work with an organization which proposes to equally emphasize values yet neglects individual understandings. Further, they generate fractures *between* workers of various religious and non-religious ideologies which ultimately injure team collaboration, communication, and productive use of resources (Zorita, 2017).

McCarty (2012) engages in a similar comparison between religiosity and social work ethics in the United States. Drawing from her licensed background as a member of the National Association of Social Workers, the author compares her institutional Code of Ethics with Catholic Teachings and rarely discovers conflict between the philosophies. Unlike Zorita's (2017) critique, however, McCarty asserts that shared attention to human dignity and social justice allows employees to more easily navigate sources of conflict within FBOs. Because institutions like the Catholic Worker House operate independently and do not hold official relationships with the greater church, they are able to meet the needs of guests by suggesting additional contacts or existing external resources. As such, McCarty argues that it is not the responsibility of the agency employee to opine personal beliefs when serving those in vulnerable positions or difficult life circumstances. The author states, "both Christian and social work values agree that people should not exploit power relationships with clients or persons needing help to impose either religious or secular agendas" (McCarty, 2012, p. 335). Thus, the author provides additional tools for religious workers to avoid internal conflict in their practice by asserting claims to neutrality and building meaningful individual relationships. However, it is important to note that some FBOs respond to donors who establish strict funding guidelines, such as refusing to pay for birth control and certain healthcare services, which may complicate matters for employees. In these scenarios, referrals to other organizations or agency partnerships may be of particular use to religious institutions who wish to still accommodate immigrant needs without violating the parameters of their donors.

Bruce (2006) discusses dilemmas facing faith-based institutions through an examination of the Los Angeles Catholic Charities' Immigration and Refugee Services. As a religious institution adhering to state regulations and secular authority structures, the author communicates

how FBOs must develop an "adaptive discourse" that enables agencies to combine their spiritual beliefs while following the laws and policies brought forth by the United States government. Rather than engaging in purely *religious* versus *nonreligious* work, many organizations must adjust their ideologies or adapt their language to function within public systems – a task that does not require FBOs to fully adopt government attitudes, but rather perform regulated services with "a more explicitly religious worldview" (Bruce, 2006, p. 1491). This outline not only demonstrates the resiliency and flexibility of religious programs in a changing nation, but introduces complicated situations whereby individuals must negotiate their identities and prioritize certain roles as part of their labor routine (i.e., a nun who leads religious services in church but then abides by secular laws during office work).

However, Bruce's example outlines employees working at a Catholic charity who, unlike Zorita (2017) or McCarty's (2012) accounts, are also *not* religious. These individuals perform the professional tasks of filing paperwork, arranging phone calls and interviews, and scheduling services for immigrants without demonstrating a religious adherence to the beliefs upheld by the organization itself. This separation of administrative work from ideological motivation introduces fractures within FBOs, primarily because these institutions ground their work in faith-based teachings. Bruce quotes an agency worker who claims, "my job is only, just to do the paperwork" – a sentiment not reflected by the agency's overall leadership, who vocalizes action as 'God's people' or representatives of other divine figures (p. 1493). Within environments so heavily laden in religiosity, such ideological differences may cause workplace tensions or reduce connections with practicing immigrants. However, separations between professional and spiritual behaviors are not necessarily negative and often serve strategic purposes. For instance, the author articulates how interview respondents reported having "two business cards, two bosses, minimal

ties to the church, and being essentially an extension of the county" in order to secure funding from non-secular sources and incorporate government expectations of nonprofits (pp. 1494-5). Thus, social service workers must operate at extremes – either separating themselves from prevailing religious convictions or ignoring their personal beliefs – in addition to serving as intermediaries between FBOs and the government. Toggling these ambiguous, complex roles poses both professional and personal challenges for individuals as they face tremendous pressures while consistently defending or disregarding their principles. Regardless of identity, affiliation, or faith, such circumstances are incredibly stressful for all actors involved and generate unsustainable work environments for immigrant service providers.

McCarty (2012) echoes these conflicts between solidarity and professionalism, but specifically indicates how boundaries established in social work environments significantly differ from immersive, religious-based approaches to service within Catholic Worker Houses. From an outsider's perspective, the author articulates how employees may appear "too involved" with their clients because they live in the same spaces with virtually no separation (p. 335). American social work practices often require employees to remove themselves from clients and remain distant; while these protocols are in place to protect individuals from aforementioned experiences of burnout and emotional or physical harm, many faith-based approaches firmly believe that true service requires all of their attention, all the time – a trend which McCarty claims reinforces solidarity and interdependence as a connected, unified family between people of ranging identities and backgrounds. She states:

In the mainstream of the profession of social work today, the social and physical distance between ourselves and those we serve is so vast as to make it very difficult to achieve solidarity with the poor in any but the most abstract sense. Even in the most progressive organizations, you

are paid to do a job, and when that job is over, you go home to a life far more comfortable and far safer than the lives of the marginalized. (McCarty, 2012, p. 336)

As such, these two definitions of social work generate a breach in the expected levels of commitment and engagement with individuals in need of resources. In the case of McCarty, the author views formal titles and government guidelines of professional workplace behavior as limiting and obtrusive in achieving solidarity with clients – undocumented immigrants – who otherwise have sparse local resource options. Any two FBO employees may hold strong attitudes in either direction, viewing one approach as an opportunity to build intimate relationships or the other as necessary to maintain their personal health and welfare. Such a decision poses significant consequences for FBOs, however, because these strategies determine their scope of outreach, resource allocation, community investment, staff retention, and ability to establish genuine connections with immigrants as well as fellow workers. Tensions in ideology or practice negatively impact institutional wellbeing regardless of approach, and addressing these internal dialogues will allow organizations to ameliorate issues of injustice with greater unity and productivity.

Overall, internal conflict within organizations poses risks to the effectiveness and long-term security of FBOs. The destabilization of church cohesion, rifts in political and religious attitudes, and misunderstandings of immigrant roles in the United States all create conditions which weaken abilities to achieve human solidarity and respect. External influences like government statutes, funding sources, diverging attitudes in host communities, and hostile public opinion generate fears which prevent immigrants from seeking resources and undermine institutional missions to build community and trust. With the onset of these factors, organizations must face tremendous responsibilities that lead to instances of employee burnout, high turnover

rates, and strains between workplace and religious attitudes. Such internal challenges prevent FBOs from consistently connecting with immigrants and present barriers to obtaining life-saving services or receiving humane treatment. While institutions encounter a range of individual difficulties, these overlapping themes among hundreds of reports suggest a broader, more problematic system that dictates the ways in which these organizations must operate.

A Broken System

In examining the foundations of religious institutions, their groundings in faith-based teachings, and shared missions to provide services to immigrants, a trend appears. After centuries of active immigration justice work in the United States among hundreds of thousands of organizations, FBOs still encounter severe barriers to achieving internal and external solidarity. Conflict with administrative government agendas, local community attitudes, divisions in church leadership and within congregations, pervasive dehumanizing rhetoric, and negative portrayals of immigrants all indicate the existence of a deeper, structural issue which perpetuates the hostile nature of the 'American immigration issue.' Rather than isolate these challenges to individual incidents, the experiences of FBOs more accurately reflect cycles of disenfranchisement and injustice built into the fabric of the United States. This broken system perpetuates a paradox, whereby the success of an organization is reliant on the very issue it attempts to combat – in other words, one cannot have a social service agency without the existence of a social problem. Thus, despite actions to improve societal circumstances, religious institutions have not yet changed the structures by which they operate and, inevitably, enable the continuation of immigration injustice.

Morrissey (1999) identifies evidence of a broader institutional problem through the perspective of migrant labor assistance organizations. These agencies and their employees

support themselves through external sources which provide funds to counter labor inequity; as such, their livelihoods and incomes are dependent upon a demand for their services. The author notes how, due to limiting situational and policy factors, social services can only provide temporary solutions and are unable to ameliorate the cause of the injustice that keeps their agencies in business *because they rely on this reality*. Morrisey states, "Nevertheless, the dependence of migrant seasonal workers on farm work; the low wages and unavailability of substantial government income, food, or medical supports; and lack of alternative work create the conditions elsewhere for social service agencies – whatever their intentions and goals – to act as labor recruiters and supporters of the farm labor system" (p. 116). While they seek to connect immigrants with stable jobs and provide advocacy networks, agencies must still function in a system that depends on the exploitation of immigrant workers and ultimately support the agricultural structures that deliver abuse, poor working conditions, and unequal pay. This is also true for the operations of FBOs and the greater branch of nonprofit institutions, who participate in these acts of reinforcement, intentionally or not, by simply being part of the nation's immigration structure.

Doerfler (2019) expands on these ideas of complicity in an examination of immigrant death tolls. Over recent decades, the reporting of massive grave sites along the U.S. – Mexico border generate outcry from local churches and spur responses towards the "commemoration of strangers," achieved via burial practices and funeral ceremonies for the unknown (p. 1165). While FBOs in this context intend for such acts to celebrate and remember victims, these communities overarchingly fail to acknowledge the institutional and political causes of such harms and do not make attempts to mitigate their source. They take responsibility in 'remembering' migrant death by caring for bodies and guiding souls through the afterlife, yet are

unable to identify their names – thus, forgetting the very bodies they claim to support, later replaced by others in a numbing cycle. Doerfler explicates how FBOs hold degrees of "complicity in the process of cultural violence that lead to migrants' deaths even in the very activities —including those by academics, human rights advocates, and those invested...that serve to bring to public consciousness both migrants and their deaths" (p. 1171). While not all service organizations engage in these exact practices, Doerfler's arguments articulate the recurrence of dehumanization and anonymous suffering holistically experienced by immigrants in the United States. Whether it be travelling, applying for citizenship, or finding adequate legal representation and appropriate healthcare resources, migrant populations face life-threatening situations that continue *regardless* of their location or connections with FBOs.

Religious institutions and immigrant advocacy organizations are situated within a complex, seemingly impossible system. They provide resources with the hope of creating better conditions for immigrants to survive and succeed in American life, yet are unable to cure the ailments causing such injustices. The livelihoods of employers and employees alike depend on the continued demand for their services, which signifies their participation in this damaged national structure – one which causes, justifies, and overlooks immigration abuses in the United States. Ultimately, the goal of ameliorating human rights issues must involve the termination of social service agencies altogether, in a world with diverse, tolerant communities, smooth immigration transitions, and environments that *no longer require FBO intervention*. The foundations of religious institutions and service agencies normalize the existence of the 'stranger' while never providing the latter with opportunities to achieve another title; this maintains their ambiguous status and circulates fear, social hierarchies, and hostile treatment of these 'other,' 'foreign' populations. Despite their groundings in equality and social justice, FBOs

remain trapped in a system that prolongs external and internal challenges while preventing them from addressing the causes of movement in general (themes like poverty, government corruption, sexism, racism, economic disparity, food shortages, or violence). Moving forward, a recognition of this paradox will allow organizations to reevaluate their place in society and advocate for new ways of structuring, participating in, and thinking about immigration in the United States.

A Look to the Future

Matters of immigration in the United States appear destitute given the amalgamation of barriers, hostility, complex histories, human rights abuses, and unjust systems that collectively dictate our interactions with one another and our ability to navigate various sociopolitical structures. Current frameworks of citizenship, status labeling, and disenfranchisement will never allow the United States to unify as a supposed 'free' nation or uphold affirming religious practices so commonly held by its residents. This is not to suggest that developing alternative approaches to immigration will be impossible; rather, America must rethink its entire origins, regardless of the individuals in office, to form proficient pathways between populations of different identities. Because of their vast networks and influence, FBOs possess the power to serve as tremendous actors in this transition and spearhead efforts to hold the nation accountable for its claims to unalienable rights and freedom. This begins with a reevaluation of internal organization, and then involves political reconfigurations and changing the ways in which policy is written and understood. With a restructuring of governing bodies and their attitudes, the public may finally reach stability, solidarity, and justice regarding issues of immigration and humanness.

Hollenbach (2020) notes a common theme among FBOs: a majority of the immigrants utilizing their services acutely lack opportunities to hold leadership roles within these agencies,

particularly in Catholic and other religious institutions. The author contends that recruiting immigrants and the second or third generations of their families will allow religious institutions to address their needs in culturally specific, relevant, and empowering ways. Providing avenues for immigrant leadership within service agencies will only improve outreach efforts, allow them to articulate their experiences most clearly, better establish expectations of acceptance and belonging, and hold greater authority and confidence when advocating for themselves in the larger community. Hollenbach calls upon FBOs to engage in an "improved institutional response" and reground themselves in their historical missions to serve, so that migrants may actually be seen as valued members of a community who sustain its economic and social prosperity (p. 164).

In response to immigrant roles within FBOs, Babis (2016) articulates the impact of these integration measures within practicing nonprofit organizations. Immigrant-led institutions provide deeply validating spaces which offer culturally appropriate services, fellowship among host and guest populations, and opportunities to overcome stigma between people of varying nationalities and backgrounds. Models that include marginalized groups in the decision-making processes experience greater longevity and further retaliate against institutional frameworks meant to silence and ignore these populations, as well as engender respect for immigrants. Providing platforms for immigrants to speak and act serves as a rudimentary example of how FBOs may restructure their programs to become more inclusive and effective. This work must be done in order to bridge gaps between hostile and sympathetic public attitudes and overcome humanitarian crises – a task which occurs on numerous scales.

While Hollenbach (2020) and Babis (2016) present suggestions for FBOs to improve themselves internally, Ahn (2017) proposes an entirely new political framework to address

immigration crises on a national lens. The author introduces the Christian concept of *jubilee*, an ancient practice found in central Hebrew scripture which encompasses debt forgiveness and liberation of slaves (p. 258). In breaking cycles of loan repayment, this practice assisted in achieving freedom for Israelite populations and abolished needs for debtors, thus serving as an active social reform mechanism. Contemporary applications of this technique remain highly debated as populations question their historical and practical permissibility; however, Ahn contends that "the jubilee vision still inspires us today offering a word of encouragement to social reformers" as seen via nongovernmental organizations and other international coalitions who successfully practice debt forgiveness to reduce poverty and global debt crises (p. 259). Ahn applies such *jubilee* initiatives to the American immigration system by describing two incomplete political solutions circulating throughout the public: the hostile "politics of punishment," which seeks to criminalize 'illegals' and eliminate their participation in society, and the human-driven, often religious "politics of compassion" which appeals to the emotions and sensibilities of populations but falls short of exercising these tenets in concrete practice (p. 251). Because neither approach is sustainable nor physically viable, Ahn proposes a new framework – the "politics of forgiveness" – which seeks to address the political, social, and legal components of the immigration crisis, rather than purely prioritize religious or moral doctrine (p. 256).

The author founds this paradigm through a recognition of the unjust global economy, particularly the North American Free Trade Agreement, which causes extreme poverty, violence, and destabilizing circumstances that force Latin Americans to involuntarily seek refuge in the United States. Thus, the author asserts how the host society and visitors are bound in a cyclical relationship whereby immigrants owe the former an "invisible debt" during their stay in the

nation that is only absolved upon their exit (p. 260). However, migrants do not consent to these agreements; their unauthorized border crossings are the result of global inequity, and they rely on the nation for their security and success while host populations become the creditors. There is no definitive solution by which migrants are able to repay this 'debt,' particularly given the severity of the host's authority through social, political, and economic privileges not afforded to immigrants and asylum-seekers. Thus, Ahn introduces a resolution where citizens forgive the "debtors' unpayable debt" – not as a gift, as the "politics of compassion" suggests – but rather through hospitality and tolerance. In policy, the author incorporates a particular kind of rhetoric that would accommodate these changes within institutions:

> The jubilee-inspired politics of forgiveness becomes possible, if we would successfully demonstrate how the word 'illegal' should be legitimately incorporated into the original principle of the jubilee order*: no humans should be kept under permanent indebted or enslaved status*. In other words, the politics of forgiveness regarding the immigration crisis is organized based on the newly revised principle of the jubilee order: *no humans should be kept under permanent indebted, enslaved, or illegal status*. (Ahn, 2017, p. 260)

Embracing this language acknowledges that migrants are victims of geopolitical and economic circumstances resulting from the tumultuous global history of American colonial policy. Eliminating dehumanizing terminology and overcoming dangerous, criminalizing stereotypes will allow host populations to subside detrimental power dynamics and instead engage in mutually beneficial relationships with immigrants. Given current transnational conditions of inequity and significant rises in migrant populations, Ahn articulates an absolute necessity for the adoption of a holistic approach – one which addresses the *structural* problem – in order to survive as a nation and claim responsibility over the injustices it perpetuates. The "politics of

forgiveness" is framework that includes all members of society who live within and sustain this broken system; as such, it holds host governments, FBOs, authority figures, and bystanders equally accountable to reconstruct their positionalities and appreciate the dignity present in all human beings. Engaging in these intentional acts provides a valuable opportunity for improvement within the American immigration system, and further illustrates the ways in which FBOs may themselves create change.

Overall, there is much work to be done in the realm of immigration injustice. From a litany of external and internal disputes to the continuation of a deeply flawed institutional model, governments and FBOs alike must act immediately and intentionally to halt the humanitarian crises and disenfranchisement of marginalized immigrant groups. Internally, FBOs must take responsibility to include immigrant actors in community dialogues, whether that be recruitment for leadership positions, involvement in decision-making processes, or simply being intentional about their integration *within* FBOs. Such techniques will allow faith agencies to provide effective and relevant resources, overcome membership rifts, and provide sustainable methods for creating diverse, flourishing communities. In order to restructure broader systems in the United States, however, residents and political figures alike must reframe their current ideologies, language usage, and policy writing to move beyond hierarchal schisms of illegal or nonhuman status. Rather, adopting models of forgiveness and hospitality provide feasible outlets for a national response that both admits responsibility for the United States' role in global immigration crises and holistically ameliorates the injustices this country perpetuates.

Conclusion

Immigration dialogues occur on a global scale and involve a litany of actors, whether that be among scholars, Faith-Based Organizations, government bureaucracies, city officials, local

residents, or migrants themselves. There exists a vast network of religious institutions throughout the United States who seek to address issues of immigrant injustice and affirm migrant identity and dignity among their social and political spheres. Regardless of location, size, mission statement, or religious adherence, FBOs possess an enormous outreach capacity and frequently utilize religious doctrine to inform their work – faith as a driver of action – which signifies the deeply influential role of religion in the nation and its abilities to mobilize congregations, for better or for worse. Despite their expansive networks, however, social service agencies encounter a variety of complex challenges. From situations beyond their control – such as dehumanizing government policy, hostile community attitudes, and funding restrictions – to internal conflicts involving ideological rifts, the destabilization of church unity, and balancing professional and personal convictions, FBOs repeatedly report complex, exhausting narratives of their operations within a broken cycle of injustice and confinement. Moving forward, involving immigrant populations in decision-making processes and adopting new institutional frameworks of forgiveness, hospitality, and affirming language will allow the nation to achieve some semblance of equality for all of its inhabitants.

A consideration of the current literature poses a significant question – where do we go from here? In acknowledging widespread injustices, community rifts, and severely discouraging climates, FBOs find themselves located in a critical position where they may either accept or reject their complicity. There are many reports of these challenges, but there exists little evidence regarding *how* such institutions address this conflict, particularly with the advent of contentious Presidential policy and public human rights abuses. As long-standing influences in their cities with deep social networks, the ways in which religious institutions confront these conversations will determine whether or not communities recognize the nation's reliance on invisible labor, the

presence and value of immigrants, and their role in stabilizing our economies and communities. This topic will benefit from future studies that explore changes in FBOs that hire immigrants in leadership positions, particularly in rural or smaller areas, as well as those which more concretely identify how churches or other faith groups influence popular culture, media, and public attitudes towards immigrants. More broadly, though, the nation would learn from examining the role of immigrant children and second-generation Latin American citizens in supporting church populations and providing creative cultural expressions of identity formation.

Thus, given current health situations and the parameters of Independent Study, my research will examine faith as a driver of action for FBOs in a post-Trump world. Moving forward, I will investigate both the power of hostile and affirming rhetoric as well as the ways in which religious institutions respond to community rifts in tense city climates. While several studies have already investigated nonprofit migrant agencies in previous decades, an updated analysis of conditions in northeast Ohio will reinforce the relevancy of immigration issues beyond Southern U.S.-Mexico border states, and identify tangible solutions to crises as well as the impact of such conditions on social service workers. Overall, these topics introduce serious theoretical considerations about the ways in which Americans define, form, and practice community. Perceptions of the ‘stranger’ and definitions of ‘who counts?’ signify how institutions frame and justify social issues to the broader public, as well as reflect how such attitudes connect to the work of FBOs. Analyzing these principles will determine the viability of hospitable frameworks and ascertain whether or not communities are able to transform the nation from the ground up.

Chapter Three: Theory

Difference is situated at the forefront of the immigration 'issue' in the United States. Constructed hierarchies of language, race, gender, nationality, religious affiliation, and socioeconomic status all work to divide populations based on their identities, and many agencies strive to overcome these chasms through their services and local networks. In particular, Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) emphasize the importance of building community when discussing matters of social justice and immigrant inequity. However, their efforts coexist with societal frameworks that constantly assign and redefine the boundaries of "who belongs" in a given context. In light of these conditions, what does it mean to establish "community," and who decides? How do these definitions engage with immigrants? I will first explore these developments through Émile Durkheim's concepts of "conscience collective" and the division of labor to understand the ways in which groups formulate, justify, and reinforce senses of community, primarily in immigrant and religious settings. Then, I will employ Georg Simmel's frameworks of the "stranger" to analyze the ways in which marginalized or 'otherized' identities negotiate models of inclusion and exclusion. In order to grasp the tensions, resiliencies, and complexities present within community environments, I will examine two responses to populations occupying intermedial status: first, Carvalho and Chamberlen's recognition of hostile solidarity, a means of reinforcing identity through animosity, and second, Jacques Derrida's notions of hospitality, which offer an obligation-based model of generosity and benevolence towards immigrants. Deconstructing these approaches illuminates how social groups mediate conflict, approach community formation, and perpetuate divisions in society. In my conclusion, I will critique these structural frameworks in the context of American immigration and propose new avenues for FBOs to achieve sustainable, healthy relationships.

Durkheim on Community Formation

Émile Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society* discusses societal formation and the ways in which communities achieve solidarity. He describes a system where "the totality of beliefs and sentiments common to the average members of a society forms a determinate system with a life of its own" – the conscience collective (Durkheim, 1984, p. 39). Here, Durkheim emphasizes how populations form social structures, institutions, and cultural expectations on the basis of a *shared morality* which is unique and crucial to the identity of a population. Individuals with shared life experiences establish rules that oversee communal attitudes, and these values transcend individual relationships to bond the entire group in a specific, meaningful way. In the context of immigrants, however, these populations introduce new cultural understandings that may not align with prevailing attitudes and instead challenge the host's conscience collective – for instance, exposing vulnerabilities in the community's social fabric, revealing fragile or problematic tendencies, or testing the strength of presumably ubiquitous values. After all, social interactions do not occur in a vacuum – they are subject to fluctuations, environmental changes, and external dynamics that occur as generations evolve and negotiate their principles over time. In these confrontations, immigrants or individuals of other nationalities serve an alternative role – one of the transgressor – and prompt a particular, often negative, social response.

Durkheim (1984) explicates violations to the conscience collective in an exploration of crime and vengeance. While certain actions may not pose any inherent danger to society, any act perceived as an infringement on the morality or ethics of the community may result in serious punitive consequences. As such, the sociologist defines "crime" as an offense against these largely endorsed morals – for instance, consider the prevailing assumptions of immigrants as 'criminals' who endanger public safety and wellbeing. These affronts provoke an intense

emotional reaction meant to reinforce common values and the "passionate tendencies" of the populous, and responses to transgressive offenders indicate the population's level of cohesion (p. 44). Durkheim explores this tendency in pre-modern societies, particularly because they employ harsher acts for the sake of punishment and retribution. He contends that, although it is a grim form of making amends, suffering works to repair wrongdoings against society and brings individuals together in united retaliation. Societies punish transgressors in order to uphold their conscience collective and, therefore, practice this system as a defense mechanism meant to strengthen values and the foundations of their institutions (Durkheim, 1984). This model appears in a variety of contemporary settings, but most notably manifests itself in situations where public opinion in the United States presents immigrants as 'illegals,' aliens, and figures who undermine the 'proper' conditions of citizenship and government. When such populations travel into the nation, existing groups perceive this entrance as an attack upon their ideals of democracy, citizenship, and nationality – prompting a visceral reaction from the host community. Resulting justifications of violence along the U.S.-Mexico border, advocacy for anti-immigration initiatives like the construction of border walls, and the writing of extreme deportation laws all serve as manifestations of emphatic attempts to assert a 'true' patriotic, American identity – their conscience collective.

Durkheim (1984) elaborates on the role of these criminal acts and community formation through a nation's division of labor. While the sociologist initially described this process as one of managing employment and partitioning economic roles, it ultimately serves as the "fundamental basis of social order" where individuals fulfill specific, clear responsibilities in society (Durkheim, 1984, p. 3). These divisions influence human dynamics, morality, and cultural customs, and adjust in accordance with a population's size and spatial concentration –

like, for instance, the job placement of migrant workers in comparison to that of citizens. While this organization does not aim to achieve a certain end goal, it allows individuals to "share in some way in their nature" and feel "less incomplete," and this inevitably generates friendships, alliances, and other bonds between parties – sponsoring feelings of social solidarity (p. 17). Durkheim later expands upon these relationships through the laws of penal evolution and examines levels of social cohesion throughout a particular populous.

Durkheim evaluates two primary societal structures and how these compositions impact the role of crime and responses to such offenses. First, he describes how moral insults against societies with a high conscience collective (which, often, are grounded in a religiously sanctioned sovereign) greatly distress individuals and upset their routine obligations. Durkheim's concept of mechanical solidarity elicits this community response as many families share historical lineages, village occupations, and homologous mindsets – essentially, groups of people who are all very similar. Thus, responses to crime are often carried out in gruesome, spectacular, and visceral ways to represent public wrath and calm disruptions in their daily lives (Durkheim, 1984, p. 31). FBOs generally fall under this categorization due to their uniform structures and ideological bases; although established beyond the context of Durkheim's writing, they declare statements of purpose with historical groundings in a religious mission and often harbor a homogenous group of followers. Although some engage with outreach and grow in their attempts to seek diverse membership, they largely constitute models of mechanical solidarity and encompass Durkheim's notions of a highly passionate, morally driven institution. These programs encounter a series of difficulties when attempting to engage with populations who do not share the same identities or principles – particularly in the context of immigrant communities, who often carry differing life experiences, socioeconomic statuses, family

structures, spiritual beliefs, and languages. Members encounter challenges to their normative values and, thus, may respond to minority groups with hesitancy, minimized opportunities to connect, elevated punishments, or an inability to embrace alternative perspectives.

In contrast to these organizations, Durkheim's (1984) model of organic solidarity embodies more developed societies that maintain a low conscience collective and an augmented division of labor. Notwithstanding that morality has "no deep roots" and serves as a "less central part" of society, a shared, collective regard for individualism binds these populations together through a different lens of solidarity (Durkheim, 1984, p. 69). In environments of capitalism like the United States, modern economic structures generate immense freedoms, senses of autonomy, and financial motives that propel populations to fight for more time and greater social status. With decentralized political powers and democratic participation, citizens can more easily challenge authority figures and hold an incredible assortment of opinions and actions. Rather than respond with harsh punishment, societies commonly utilize institutions like prisons, detention centers, and restitutive laws to effectively handle transgressors; they not only deprive incarcerated individuals the liberty to participate in society, but further remove their ability to control the direction of their lives and do so on a massive, anonymous scale (Durkheim, 1984, p. 70-1). Altogether, these divisions of labor reflect the importance of the conscience collective in maintaining societal values and determining the community's response to challenge.

When applied in the context of immigration, Durkheim's concepts illuminate how structures perpetuate and justify divisions among populations. For example, contemporary social systems in America follow models of organic solidarity and possess an array of backgrounds, skills, economic and social roles, and diverse interpretations of the world; these types of societies are inherently stronger due to their connectivity and dependency on each member. In theory, this

framework should possess the flexibility and space to accommodate individuals among a variety of statuses – including immigrants, who often involuntarily fulfill roles of the 'other.' Despite these claims, however, American society struggles in its attempts to acclimate populations in movement. From humanitarian crises in the Sonoran Desert to racism, dehumanization, abhorrent detention facilities, criminalizing rhetoric, scapegoating, and false assumptions about particular ethnicities and nationalities, the United States constantly engages in behaviors that reflect the punitive mindsets of older, homogenous societies. While the nation may outwardly reflect an organic model in its economic functions, the U.S. still informs its social interactions and societal values through a mechanical model in both FBOs as well as larger political structures.

Although problematic, these responses indicate the presence of fear throughout the American public. Fear of the unknown, of change, of confrontation, or of the prospect of reevaluating their worldviews; regardless of the source, there exists a widespread inability for the United States to humanely integrate Latin American immigrants (and most others) into the community. Here, terms like 'tolerance,' 'assimilation,' and 'belonging' each carry a distinct weight that, while used interchangeably, hold a different meaning according to the intentions and composition of the host group. A small city may integrate migrant laborers into their economic structures without considering them active contributors of the community's social infrastructure; such relationships of 'coexistence' fail to uphold the same obligations as 'fellowship,' and these minute distinctions disunite groups and introduce complicated tensions in the current American immigration situation. This rhetoric specifically challenges FBOs as they strive to build relationships and spread empathy through a mechanical lens because, in asserting a unique, specific identity, they inherently exclude others who do not subscribe or contribute to these same

belief systems. Despite their mobilized or emotional claims to morality, these homogenous tendencies may occupy a weaker, less resilient, and easily broken status because they rely on a virtuosity that is in constant motion and negotiation throughout society – one that may fracture or change at any time. Churches and FBOs must rethink their exclusive approaches to social action and religious movement, particularly in the event they believe they serve as harbingers of morality or widespread 'justice,' because they exist within a transitioning nation. With the emergence of racial, economic, ethnic, occupational, and other forms of diversity, the United States is actively moving towards more effective, heterogeneous models of community, where a collective ethical commitment is of diminished significance. Thus, programs must adapt to these changes and overcome fears of difference should they hope to sustain their institutions or achieve any semblance of immigration justice.

The Stranger

Public dialogues surrounding immigration and nationality generate images of the "other" – a mysterious, remote, or unknown party situated outside of the community – and tout distinctions between *us* and *them*. These concepts permeate national structures, whether it be in FBOs, political and government actors, or service agencies, and influence daily social interactions throughout the American public. Religious institutions often confront this discourse through faith-based teachings and inform their interactions with 'othered' populations through scriptural examples, which generally involve divine figures experiencing harsh, isolated realities remedied only by the compassion of communities. As such, many organizations discuss ideologies of "welcoming the stranger" to serve unfamiliar, vulnerable, or marginalized populations as a means of reaffirming these religious doctrines and upholding morally 'just'

actions. This rhetoric permeates theological approaches to community development and prompts further discussion regarding the meaning of such a position.

Georg Simmel (1950) addresses this term of "the stranger" at its most fundamental level – not as a person, but as a spatial relationship between proximity and distance that individuals, groups, or entire populations negotiate according to their identities and societal occupations. As "the person who comes today and stays tomorrow... the potential wanderer," strangers are outsiders who enter a community and occupy a liminal space that unifies "nearness and remoteness" (p. 1). While they do not leave, they never achieve a sense of belonging with the original populace because they do not contribute to its moral fabric, character, or genuine essence; they do not own anything, nor do they belong to anything or anyone.

Given these conditions, Simmel (1950) identifies several patterns of interaction that engage the stranger. The first involves an economic component, where individuals serve as actors in trade, bodily work, and other necessary yet hidden occupations that allow the remainder of society to function properly (for example, undocumented migrants performing manual labor on agricultural lands, dairy farms, or in the meat-packing industry). The second consists of objectivity, whereby strangers are not committed to the moralities or prevailing ideologies held by the dominant group. While they are not necessarily unattached or passive from situations occurring on the social level, they serve as critical observers with opportunities to either engage or disengage. Lastly, Simmel articulates notions of a "commonness" to describe human connection and complexity. The author asserts that the qualities individuals or groups share determine their ability to relate to one another. In the case of the stranger, Simmel contends that the only factor grounding their relationships with the greater community is a general, common 'humanness' – being of the same nature. Because this attribute is the most basic and minimal

characteristic shared among populations, it pronounces differences between outsiders and insiders. It binds the stranger to a social position where they embody an identity, like a racial or ethnic category, and "are not really conceived as individuals, but as strangers of a particular type" without unique personality traits or life experiences (p. 3). Simmel illuminates how these perceptions of the 'other' are distinctive, isolating, and complicated because populations must navigate their own expressions alongside their assigned spatial and societal roles.

The stranger's distance from other parties is not inherently a negative position. Statuses of exchange and proximity hold incredible potential to benefit host communities because outsiders challenge norms and allow groups to rethink their values. In times when such interactions are healthy, the stranger is able to offer vital perspectives to resolve internal tensions. However, such relations may starkly shift into something more dangerous; despite moments of charisma or profound discussion, the spatial distance that exists between the stranger and the host group permits the quick dissipation of personal bonds. As seen in Simmel's accounts of Jewish refugees and political exiles, strangers are excludable; they serve as ideal figures for communities in need of a scapegoat. The latter possesses the ability to permeate negative stereotypes and assumptions because of the stranger's medial, exterior position. They do not contribute to the moral fabric of the group and, therefore, their roles as arbiters, traders, or confessors may abruptly become futile during times of social disorganization or confusion. Overall, Simmel's account of the "stranger" articulates a social phenomenon still present in contemporary structures. From undocumented refugees to migrant laborers operating along the outskirts of the national social fabric, these themes pervade the way American citizens treat and interact with marginalized populations and continue to influence the experience of the 'other' (Simmel, 1950). In recognizing these liminal bodies – groups who occupy the space between

acceptance and isolation – communities face a significant crossroads in their responses to 'outsiders.' While groups may engage with a variety of behaviors that differ according to their composition, geographical and social positioning, communication infrastructures, and overall health, I shall examine two theoretical approaches to the stranger which embody the extremes of cohesion, obligation, and fear: hostile solidarity, and then hospitality.

Hostile Solidarity

In the case of the stranger, the mere presence of a body opposing the normative values and understandings of a given society potentially violates Durkheim's notions of the conscience collective – or, rather, their existence may be considered a crime. Generally, responses to such offenses work to reinforce the host community's solidarity in a positive, useful manner, such as engaging with conflict resolution or achieving a unified front regarding social issues. However, Carvalho and Chamberlen (2018) identify destructive effects of practices involving intense penalization and ostracization in modern societies. They first articulate how punitive measures communicate social values and expectations, as well as assert dominance and control over the greater populous. The authors investigate the impact of these systems in a contemporary setting and examine how populations are trained to think with efficiency, insert purpose with every action, and prescribe utility to routine procedures. This mindset transcends spheres of criminality as "scapegoating, othering, excluding and controlling in the name of order, security and prosperity" are all practices that emerge from modern forms of punishment, particularly in the context of immigration detention (p. 217). Carvalho and Chamberlen contend that groups naturally view punitive measures as useful, purposeful, and beneficial to the public, which allows them to ignore these abuses and reproduce cycles of institutionalized violence and inequality. This is omnipresent in conditions along America's borders, where immigrants face perpetual

harm and dehumanization; because they occupy space ‘illegally,’ citizens justify maltreatment of Latin American migrants and affirm their beliefs in hostile government structures. From this standpoint, the scholars express that developed societies hold a variety of “complex and contingent” morals where individuals experience institutions and values differently; thus, while it is necessary to have sources of social cohesion and order within a society, punishment binds the public in a manner that diverges from Durkheim’s (1984) moral concepts of solidarity and generates unity in a manner that is aggressive, exclusive, and antagonizing of other groups (Carvalho & Chamberlen, 2018, p. 221). Carvalho and Chamberlen declare that “the image of community which arises from punishment is problematic, in that even if it promotes a set of normative values and a sense of belonging, these are primarily established in contrast to others who must be treated as outsiders” (p. 225). In relation to immigration, this argument proves how groups labeled as ‘criminal’ or ‘transgressive’ are otherized for not meeting normative expectations. The stranger, in this sense, plummets into isolation due to prevailing environments of anger, exclusivity, and injuriousness (Carvalho & Chamberlen, 2018).

Carvalho and Chamberlen label this concept as ‘hostile solidarity’ and describe the implications of its perpetuation in modern penal practices. While exclusion may reinforce certain identities, it pits the collective values of one group against those of another to alienate and isolate populations. This proves incredibly troublesome as a community formed out of hostility is one which constantly requires protection from the ‘outcast’ group and, thus, generates high levels of social instability and insecurity. Since punishment is the primary source of solidarity for these societies, they depend on these measures to function and are unable to formulate healthy practices or better the community in a non-destructive way (Carvalho & Chamberlen, 2018). This dependency is most prevalent along the U.S.-Mexico border, where countless detention

centers, border patrol agents, private prisons, and holding facilities police migrant behavior in violent and inhumane ways. Carvalho and Chamberlen (2018) recognize the foundational flaws of modern societal structures as they enable populations to place blame on the 'criminal' and figures most clearly occupying positions between dehumanization and affirmation. The scholars explain how "individuals fashion and target specific threats and fears in order to cope with deeper, more generalized feelings of insecurity – but to do so while also believing that they are on the side of right, that they are being violent in the name of justice" (Carvalho & Chamberlen, 2018, p. 227). This complex of hostile solidarity allows the populous to condemn strangers and ignore institutional shortcomings; it justifies the poor treatment of individuals on the basis of their identity and social positioning, clearly ignoring society's failure to care for or integrate its people in a healthy and productive manner. While FBOs may not necessarily utilize these means to generate community, Carvalho and Chamberlen's arguments indicate the prevalence of such behaviors in the broader American public as well as the cities and neighborhoods where social service agencies operate. Legal policies, discriminatory attitudes and representations, and exclusive understandings of belonging collectively sustain an antagonistic approach to social interactions which is both harmful and unsustainable.

Hospitality

An alternative response to community formation, particularly towards minority and immigrant populations, is that of hospitality – a holistic, yet complex approach involving tolerance and personal autonomy of individuals residing in the stranger position. As a French philosopher writing in the late 20th century, Jacques Derrida (2000) articulates these notions in *Of Hospitality* where he first interrogates accounts of the 'foreigner' to discuss strangeness, respect, and interdependent relationships between host and guest populations. The author

synthesizes texts from Greek philosophers Plato and Socrates to situate the stranger as one who operates on the outskirts of social situations and remains in a position of challenging authoritarian structures through alternative forms of speech, language, and culture (p. 5). Derrida embodies Simmel's (1904) framework of the 'stranger' and utilizes these understandings to inform his interpretations of communication and obligation (translated with the word 'foreigner' rather than 'stranger,' but I shall use the latter here), most notably through the ethics of hospitality and the conditions by which communities choose to navigate a liminal presence.

Derrida introduces the notion of hospitality utilizing two dimensions. First, the author describes hospitality as an *unconditional law* whereby members of the community are obligated to receive the stranger in "absolute," "pure," and true forms. It serves as a blind commitment "to give the new arrival all of one's home and oneself, to give him or her one's own, our own, without asking a name, or compensation, or the fulfilment of even the smallest condition" (p. 77). This lens upholds hospitality as a *right*, as a statute or universal policy, which grants respect and unquestioned reception of even the most removed, unknown figures – the stranger, immigrants, or unidentified visitors. In tension, however, exists the *conditional laws* of hospitality which comprise and reside *within* the law itself. They establish rules and the duties of hosts in accordance with the social and political circumstances, state power, family expectations, civil relations, and traditions of any given society – the 'terms and conditions,' per se, of when, where, and how hospitality should be exercised. Therefore, in determining the boundaries and actions of groups, these conditional laws actively challenge, threaten, and disobey the universal, singular law of unconditional hospitality and generate an interesting paradox between the two dimensions. Derrida responds to this tension with an acknowledgment of their incompatibility – an antimony, or aporia – where the act of hosting itself must confront its own self-contradiction.

The former requires the latter, and vice versa, as an "inseparable" pair which simultaneously includes and excludes populations (Derrida, 2000, p. 81).

In wrestling with these dialogues, Derrida introduces questions regarding the negotiations of the hosting family, society, or individual – does hospitality begin with asking the person their name, where parties then engage in a pact of responsibility and ownership? Is it the unquestioning body, who welcomes without interrogation or knowing the true identity and intentions of their guest? Or does the answer lie somewhere in between, so as not to create hostile environments nor tout unrealistic Utopian visions? In critically engaging with inquiries of 'who belongs,' 'who accepts,' and the meaning of obligation and reciprocity, Derrida reminds us that hospitable interactions are not only highly contingent upon prevailing moral sentiments and government powers, but also inextricably bound in debt between parties as the limits of the 'conditional' prevent hosts from fulfilling 'unconditional' hospitality – a constant cycle of 'owing' more to a guest than the host can offer, and the former's indebtedness for occupying the space of another rather than their own. Here, Derrida acknowledges the "finitude" of hosts to choose, filter, and select their guests; hosts establish time restrictions on the duration of stay for those to whom they may "grant asylum, the right of visiting, or hospitality" (p. 55). For instance, the American government occupies this host position as it navigates arriving populations, citizenship documentation, travel restrictions, and other human enforcement mechanisms – all with the possession of these aforementioned rights and abilities to create policy as a sovereign, autonomous body. Despite these circumstances, public discourse circulates notions of the government being 'too generous' and 'too hospitable' to refugees, asylum seekers, undocumented immigrants, other displaced individuals, and those of different nationalities. According to Derrida, however, such observations are empirically false; hosts in the form of

nations, governments, individuals, families, and service organizations alike establish their own restrictions and expectations by which they allow others to enter their own 'homes' – and, therefore, decide the terms of the visitor's reception. Thus, although hospitality rests in a complicated framework of contradiction, obligation, and power dynamics, the hosts themselves elicit a great deal of control over their interactions with the stranger – particularly in the context of the United States, where identities and norms are constantly changing, discussed, and reevaluated.

Through Derrida's lens, it is impossible under *all* circumstances to achieve a state of being where citizens unconditionally welcome 'strangers.' This resonates particularly well, however, with current American structures, contingent social frameworks, intense political climates, and disagreement among personal and national priorities. The circulation of anti-immigrant rhetoric with derogatory, fear-invoking stereotypes alongside possessive attitudes regarding property and material resources poses many challenges in instituting a particular kind of absolute and, in the words of Derrida, a "hyperbolical" or extreme hospitality (p. 75). Derrida, while neglecting to provide answers to these dilemmas, discusses a critical element of life which determines a stranger's status and population's ability to host, build relationships, and welcome others – *language*, "the home that never leaves us" (p. 89). The stranger, often isolated through geographic location, birthplace, and nationality, most presently resists dehumanizing structures with the use of speech – a tool that is most closely connected to the body and provides ethos to the anonymous. Language empowers individuals to represent their communities and engage with their surroundings in meaningful interactions.

Although not his intention, Derrida illuminates a critical path by which FBOs, agencies, and populations may more broadly approach marginalized or immigrant communities.

Acknowledging another's language, particularly the 'other,' one who is not fully considered part of society, functions as a sovereign recognition of self, humanity, dignity, culture, life experience, and empathy. Thus, organizations may accommodate the stranger with a significance that transcends the physical act of opening one's home for a limited amount of time. It provides avenues for integration and fellowship, where guests become *known*, and could, in theory, eclipse their stranger position to enter one of acceptance and unity. Whether this occurs in the literal act of learning and speaking another's native tongue or through developing cultural and social understandings, language recognition incorporates an ethical dimension where hosts bond with guests and allow them to express their ideas, needs, and truest selves. It represents a derivative of hospitality that welcomes the stranger's needs while preventing groups from becoming lost in Derrida's endless cycles of debt, exclusion, and negotiation between the impossible and the limiting.

Appreciations of identity, especially in the context of immigration justice efforts and advocacy, have the potential to occur everywhere; acts of hiring translators to communicate with isolated groups, training staff to practice culturally competent behaviors, hosting bilingual church services and prayers, and celebrating multicultural meals, traditions, holidays, and dialogues as a community all serve as acts of *power* for both the host and the guest. Engaging in hospitality in this manner embraces differences in identity and generates effective forms of communication which ease the intricate and often fraught nuances of hosting marginalized populations within hostile environments. Although Derrida (2000) contends that each act of acceptance and welcoming occurs at the cost of excluding others, there must be an outlet by which the United States can model its immigration system so as not to be so violent, so dangerous, and so negative.

Conclusion

Overall, these theoretical lenses synthesize interactions with difference and identify how communities respond to fear, the unknown, and the position of the 'other.' In analyzing community formation and strategies of exclusion and inclusion, these concepts, in fact, left me with more questions (guided ones, at least) regarding the implications of historical and contemporary social trends – how do community organizations grounded in human dignity, religious teachings, obligations to other living beings, and social-action oriented missions respond to questions of the stranger? What are their perceived responsibilities to this liminal position, and how do societal conditions and the visibility of particular identities advise their actions? While I do not immediately possess the answers to these inquiries, the aforementioned theoretical frameworks will inform my analysis of qualitative interviews with religious leaders and a range of Faith-Based Organizations – first, by identifying the conditions by which communities welcome, receive, and interact with immigrant or 'stranger 'populations, and second, by investigating relationships within the organization as well as their external communication and interactions with the greater area.

Chapter Four: Methodology

My Independent Study Thesis seeks to identify how Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) and social service agencies respond to immigration advocacy efforts, particularly in their approaches to community formation, definitions of social justice, and communication with internal and external audiences. I investigate the role of faith, fear, and difference through qualitative interviews to understand how these trends impact individual lives and operate within organizational models and broader structural networks.

My first iteration of this project occurred in the fall of 2020, when I received approval from the College's Human Subjects Research Committee to conduct interviews with members of the Wooster community. There, I met with the leaders of local organizations and folks connected to Latin American service agencies to discuss external communication and community development. I used this experience as a framework for my Senior thesis, where I again employed qualitative methods and met with individuals involved in these dialogues. I chose to conduct interviews, rather than surveys, for several reasons. First, qualitative interviews provided an arena for in-depth, focused conversation and allowed me to form relationships with local, involved representatives. Interviews also offered opportunities to engage in discussion best suited to the experiences of each participant and further encouraged individuals to clarify questions or elaborate on their answers and topics of interest. These conversations provided tremendous insights regarding the ways in which service agencies, churches, and FBOs navigate community formation, and allowed me to pose the following questions: What does community look like, and what is the role of fear and ignorance in those dialogues? How do organizations navigate difference and tension? What is the role of religion in efforts to attain justice for immigrants? In the following pages, I will outline how I selected my participants, review

processes of data collection and coding, and articulate the strengths of my study as well as areas for improvement to analyze immigration advocacy efforts in northeastern Ohio.

Participants

In the initial stages of this project, I hoped to speak with migrant workers about their experiences in this region of Ohio – primarily regarding community formation and resource accessibility – yet reconsidered my research aims after reflecting on ethics guidelines, current relationships and networks, limited resources, and the duration of my study. I decided instead to contact individuals working *with* and *alongside* immigrants – those who interacted adjacently or directly with immigrant populations, primarily from the Latin American or broader Hispanic community. As such, I planned to connect with six to ten local leaders engaged in significant work with Faith-Based Organizations who could more safely and freely discuss these topics. Due to my personal, academic, and geographic ties to northeast Ohio, I connected locally and primarily spoke with individuals in the Wayne, Ashland, and Medina County areas. More importantly, however, and I emphasized this region because it houses a significant number of religious organizations and social service agencies that partake in immigration justice dialogues, and I wanted to know *why*. In the interviews I conducted in 2020, my participants articulated two key understandings: first, that there are a significant number of migrant laborers in nearby agricultural, dairy, and meat production industries, and second, that most permanent residents in these counties do not, in fact, acknowledge having such neighbors. Although these circumstances are greatly removed from the violence and visibility of conditions present along the U.S.-Mexico border, immigrants are nonetheless present in Ohio and experience trauma and hostility in their communities. Thus, the work of FBOs to include advocacy, relationship-building, and consciousness-raising efforts in addition to providing services for immigrants emphasizes how

such issues are *local* and *intertwined* with the greater population – especially when these groups enter the community via religious networks and routinely attend services. While they often complete 'invisible work' and remain unseen in the eyes of many Ohioans, *the lived experiences of immigrants are part of this region's spatial and social realities,* and these observations established the foundations of my methodology.

After identifying a participant group, I consulted with my advisor as well as staff at The College of Wooster well-versed in topics of immigration and social justice. This phase of recruitment primarily involved snowball sampling techniques, where I asked faculty members for potential contacts and then directly communicated with recommended participants. Upon speaking with these individuals, several offered unprompted information for their colleagues, partners, or nearby professionals, whom I also contacted. Additionally, I researched regional FBOs and wrote to those who clearly promoted immigration advocacy – whether that be through online platforms, paper advertisements, newsletters, or signs (for instance, after seeing a website section titled "Immigration Justice"). After identifying these institutions with whom I had no prior relationship, I directly emailed specific representatives or sent messages through their website server in attempts to connect.

Overall, I acknowledge that my participants do not embody the totality of FBOs and immigration agencies present across the state and nation – they are 9 religious organizations of the 11,225 (Cause IQ, 2022). I also only emphasized those institutions which clearly promoted immigration justice to ensure that our conversations would entail actual experiences and specific accounts serving immigrant populations in northeastern Ohio. Given that this is not a universal mission for all churches in the region, it felt most appropriate to focus on the institutions that were transparent and passionate about these advocacy endeavors. Lastly, my participants

represent six different Christian traditions and a host of unique identities, leadership styles, work experiences, and subsequent congregations. With their guidance, I hope to build relevant, meaningful, and holistic accounts of their endeavors to celebrate difference and foster vibrant communities.

Data Collection

As mentioned above, the source of my study's data derives from a series of qualitative interviews. Each meeting occurred on an individual basis, including only myself and one participant, and lasted anywhere from 45 to 90 minutes. During these conversations, I inquired about the individual's field experiences, primary mission and interests, techniques for community formation, and immigration and social justice advocacy efforts. In the fall of 2020, I spoke with three individuals regarding migrant labor populations, framing strategies, and a small body of local Latin American service organizations. The remainder of my interviews engaged with more concentrated, specific questions about the role of religion in immigrant justice initiatives and occurred between the months of October of 2021 and February of 2022. I offered both in-person and virtual meetings; two interviews took place in my participants' offices, and the remaining seven were conducted over Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Given the global health situation and difficulties with the COVID-19 pandemic, these online platforms provided comfort for both myself and my interviewees to reduce travel, avoid scheduling conflicts, minimize opportunities for exposure to the virus, and ensure each party's safety. Additionally, I was able to record these interviews with the consent of each participant, and these accounts supplemented my handwritten notes and tremendously streamlined the transcription and coding processes.

As is often the case with qualitative studies, each interview was unique and explicitly outlined the interests and responsibilities of the participant. I aimed to investigate the ways in

which FBOs define, form, and mediate community, as well as better understand their underlying strategies and motivations to partake in immigration advocacy efforts. I began every interview by asking participants to explain their professional paths and current roles, and further requested an outline of their respective organizations' services, partnerships, and communication networks with immigrants. Oftentimes, this spurred dialogues regarding parishioner contributions and the broader goals of the institution. As such, questions like "Are there internal tensions or differing attitudes present within your congregation?" and "do you see any potential strategies on how to move forward?" attempted to grasp the scope of the FBOs' relationship-building and outreach techniques, along with their reasons for engaging in such behaviors. After these questions, I invited participants to recount their dialogues with the greater conservative area and asked them to elaborate on these interactions; whether that meant expressing frustration, personal experiences, ties to structural damage, or moments of hope and support for their mission, my interviewees spent as much time discussing immigration as they did larger social justice frameworks and the role of religion within them. As such, I inquired about language usage, scripture, spiritual teachings, and the ways in which these institutions used faith as a driver of action, if at all (for full outline of questions, see: Appendix A).

Upon completing qualitative interviews, I began my data analysis. I recorded these conversations on a password-protected personal laptop and then uploaded audio tracks to *otter.ai*, a private software which provided automatic transcription services. I later reviewed and edited these materials and plan to destroy all interview-related recordings and documents at the conclusion of my study. I initially compiled my observations in a document to compare dialogues, including similarities, unique or unshared accounts, potential themes, and frequently used language among my participants. These individuals remain anonymous and the names

referenced in my results are pseudonyms, which I selected at random. I then completed a latent coding process where I sorted through transcripts and assigned appropriate keywords summarizing the messages of these conversations. Clearly, such a technique centers researcher interpretation and personal synthesis of content, but I chose this approach in order to best identify the meanings and emphases of my participants' responses given their unique sociopolitical, geographical, and religious contexts. I sorted keywords of this data into several primary themes: *internal community formation*, *external dialogues*, and *the interconnectedness of structural violence*, each of which were rooted in religious framings and employed faith as a driver of action. I engaged with an ethnographic, qualitative approach throughout the collection process and aimed to authentically articulate the commitments of FBOs in northeast Ohio.

Study Strengths and Limitations

My project's methodology considers participant safety, comfort, and flexibility. I closely followed research guidelines established via The College of Wooster and its Human Subjects Research Committee; every individual signed a consent waiver, read the study description, and was aware of their ability to end or redirect the conversation at any time. I crafted an informed setting geared towards the relevant experiences and interests of my participants, and did so with the intent of generating lively discussion. They were each incredibly passionate, knowledgeable, and thoroughly engaged within their respective organizations.

While individuals shared baseline similarities in their attitudes and broader goals to work for justice, the qualitative approach poses several weaknesses. My results are not generalizable; they speak specifically to the experiences of FBOs engaged with immigrants and social justice in a particular region of northeastern Ohio – they cannot, nor should they, be applied to other geographic contexts with a high migrant labor and religious institutional presence. As an

interviewer, I acknowledge that my prior life experiences, biases, and informational networks influence my interpretations and coding selections; therefore, it is not guaranteed that another researcher would formulate the same conclusions should they choose to repeat this study in the same interpersonal manner.

Additionally, I conducted interviews at different hours of the day on varying days of the week over an assortment of mediums. My participants represented a range of churches, service agencies, denominations, or branches of the same faith tradition. While some overlap occurred, they did not occupy the same social, political, religious, or professional networks and their accounts nonetheless posited concretely distinct realities and histories. Given these considerations and the dynamic factors which so often shape peoples' daily lives, my study does not reflect high reliability in this regard. It does, however, pose a variety of opportunities to illuminate previously unvoiced concerns and spur larger investigations of the patterns present across this region.

I chose to conduct qualitative interviews because of their ability to engage with strangers and colleagues in a thorough, informative, and interactive setting. Every meeting substantiated and allowed me to more closely define my research question while also providing a litany of surprising and new perspectives to the same problem: hostility and exclusion of people who represent "difference." In these conversations, I ascertained how local FBOs define community and advocacy, identified strategies to build relationships and overcome stereotypes, clarified the missions of organizations, and examined the role of religion and faith teachings in the actions of members and leaders alike. I explained questions to ensure mutual understanding of concepts between parties, particularly for terms like "hospitality" and "welcoming the stranger," and was further validated when several participants used this language without my prompting. While I

measured the attitudes and motivations of FBOs, I captured *more* than I intended as the sphere of answers and experiences proliferated with each additional interview. Although one cannot possibly discuss all of the topics relating to social justice in an hour-long conversation, I ensured participants had the freedom to share their most pertinent arguments and recount specific, firsthand experiences. Thus, my study embodied a high level of validity and exceeded my anticipated measures, particularly when discussing community; it involved participant views on formation, establishment, tension, interactions with the broader residential area, the impact of fear and ignorance, structural issues, and hopes for a more just, open future.

Positionality

I employed sociological techniques to complete this research and applied skills from my religious studies background to synthesize my participants' encounters with racism, sexism, hegemonic and xenophobic attitudes, and harms committed in their communities. In ethnographic interviews, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which researcher identity and positionality influences interpretations, results, and interactions with faith leaders in this setting. I seek to demonstrate reflexivity among this network of experienced and committed professionals, representatives, and organizers who, despite their position in a broken bureaucratic system, utilize their talents to act and mobilize community members. My motivations for engaging with this body of research began several summers ago, when I worked on sustainable farms and observed the critical role of migrant laborers in northeast Ohio. In later internship experiences, I collaborated with hometown churches and social justice groups who prioritized fellowship and redefined my conceptions of acceptance, belonging, and the continuity of space. They adopted programming models which gave people the space to heal and be their fullest selves, "no matter how messy or complicated" – including me. Thus, my study aims to analyze

strategies of community formation and the impact of these efforts in communicating with internal and external audiences, whether that be immigrants, parishioners, or the broader residential area. In illuminating local forms of resiliency and ingenuity, my research hopes to generate consciousness of this region's brilliant perspectives and contribute to dialogues that confront injustice.

Chapter Five: Results

I conducted nine interviews across the span of two years, and much of our world has changed during that time – the onset and navigation of a global pandemic, a heated Presidential election and extreme political and religious movements, dramatic shifts in immigration and economic legislation, intensified conditions along the U.S.-Mexico border, escalating climate degradation, and an ongoing polarization by which populations across continents must relearn how to live and rethink how to do so alongside others. My participants each represent small, but undoubtedly interconnected pieces of this world as they continue efforts to ameliorate inequity within a complicated web of policy, partnerships, and local politics. While my sample hardly embodies the complete network of actors involved in this kind of work, religiously focused or otherwise, it presented several themes repeating in dialogues across agencies and geography: *internal community formation* as it relates to mission, solidarity, tension, and models of inclusivity within organizations and the populations they serve; *external dialogues,* the interactions and engagement efforts of Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) with the greater area (particularly outside actors, government officials, law enforcement, and uninvolved residents); and *the interconnectedness of structural violence,* regarding the overlapping spheres and sources of injustice. My participants articulated overwhelming degrees of truth and passion about their life's work, particularly in their efforts to promote inclusivity, just immigration experiences, and atmospheres of acceptance. These sentiments prompted me to think critically about what I wish to accomplish in my research and interrogate why I find these subjects to be profoundly meaningful both personally and in the context of my local proximity. As such, this chapter seeks to reflect on the ways in which FBOs approach immigration advocacy or social justice efforts

more broadly, navigate difference and fear, and operate within and contribute to support systems city, county, state, and nation-wide.

My research specifically investigates FBOs because of their critical role in providing services and relational care when government programs establish limitations or remove resources altogether, not to mention their considerable presence throughout this region. The faith communities of this area are tremendously diverse in size, congregant capacity, political ideology and practice, faith approach, geographic and social location, denomination, tradition, service work, mission, and community involvement. Although my participants are all aligned with Christian-based organizations, they embody an overwhelming network of personal, professional, and religious relationships that work to support one another and the community at-large regardless of their respective faith identities. In northeastern Ohio alone, my participants either represented or indicated collaborations with Mennonite, Presbyterian, Catholic, Lutheran, Unitarian, Episcopal, Jewish, Muslim, nondenominational, and other ministry-based organizations, alongside public figures, politicians, agency employees, former affiliates, and places of worship in other cities across the state and near the U.S.-Mexico border. Thus, religiosity served as a foundational, omnipresent lens by which my participants communicated their experiences; they utilized the resources of either their own or nearby religious organizations to pursue advocacy efforts, and therefore ground the themes below in purpose, resource, mind, and struggle.

Community Formation and Internal Dialogues

In our meetings, each of my participants provided testimony of their professional experiences at current and former institutions. The degree of congregational difference amazes me in retrospect; from communities with forty regular members to those with hundreds, each

pursued avenues of relationship building through a variety of means and audiences. Some described very intentional, structured approaches to community building, including hosting workshops, weekly dinner outings, book studies, group prayer meetings, and supply drives to bolster the fellowship of current members. Others offered open events by way of food programs, fundraisers, mobile pantries, accessible live-streamed and in-person worship services, and shared meals to invite local residents. Regardless of the strategy, the primary goal of my participants and their respective FBOs aimed to generate healthy, sustainable environments that foster productive dialogues and allow individuals to present and develop their fullest selves – regardless of identity or life experience.

One approach for such work engages with a fundamental act: providing the physical space for people to sit and converse among themselves. As a leading public figure in social justice efforts and community organizing, Phil sponsors a variety of events in his centuries-old church. He carries decades of ministry experience and commands attention with his paced, intentional speech, and even though we conversed through laptop screens, he intricately illustrated his strategies to build rapport and opportunities for fellowship among individuals. These instances did not require leadership intervention or formal dialogues, but rather nurtured the development of friendships in an organic, unrefined way in a relaxed setting. In the spirit of observation and patience, he declared, “I just stand there every morning with a cup of coffee in my hand, and things happen around me.” Despite Phil’s tremendous contributions to his FBO, from his description of the process, he neither micromanages nor regulates the social dynamics unfolding around him; rather, he positions himself as a small piece of the messy, beautiful jigsaw puzzle under construction. In doing so, he embodies a critical perspective of robust community:

one which is vivacious, self-sustaining, and prioritizes the agency of community members to develop relationships naturally and on their own terms.

Church basements, kitchens, dining halls, and meal distribution sites consistently appear as venues primed for similar forms of communal mingling. In seeking to address issues with food accessibility in his city, Dave began a hot meal program before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. As the pastor of a small, rural congregation, he joined the church out of appreciation for their scriptural imperatives for social justice and tangible community action. Their team has since served thousands of meals – both rallying the current members, while also engaging residents who now visit regularly to support and/or receive meals despite never before setting foot in the church. All participants but one also mentioned this pivotal role of shared meals, both in-person or delivered, in bridging gaps between folks with different identities and providing opportunities for parishioners to grow closer – marginalized and privileged alike – alongside their mission of feeding those who are hungry. Regarding immigration justice, FBOs offer a variety of culturally specific events to gather for holidays, raise funds for materials or services, enjoy music, and celebrate the language and traditions of nearby immigrant communities in lively intercultural spaces. Other churches host gatherings before or after worship for members to share grievances, prayers, joys, struggles, questions, and other responses to the service or current events. Many FBOs welcome frequent visitors and extend broad invitations for all to join in their activities, faith-driven or otherwise.

Internal Tension

Overall, these models of community provide avenues for individuals to engage with diverse identities and participate in formal or informal programming. This is not, however, meant to assume an idealized, illusory image of neatness or internal perfection. From opposing political

dockets to a range of identities and residential statuses, members of FBOs carry an array of attitudes which inherently give rise to disagreement. As a result, faith leaders frequently encounter tension within their organizations as individuals navigate personal matters and assert opinions about agency operations. Regardless of congregant ideology, every participant recounted both major and minor disputes; whether it be selecting "the colors of the carpet" for a renovated office, deciding which ministry or outreach efforts to pursue, conducting dialogues about racism and immigration, denomination-wide stances on human rights issues, or how to best address the needs of nearby residents, FBOs encounter a variety of difficulties in mobilizing their members for a universal cause.

My participants were by no means surprised by these matters; they openly recognized their own limitations as well as those of their partners, leaders, affiliates, volunteers, and congregants. Rather than expect perfection, they chose to critically engage with this friction and utilized moments of struggle to strengthen relationships across difference. Louis is a young, spirited leader of a smaller suburban congregation in frequent communication with a larger denominational network. He explained how, after regional debate regarding social justice initiatives and ministry structure, certain churches not in support of these efforts decided to leave the cohort. Although the years-long process proved exhausting and was fraught with tension, the experience encouraged congregants to address personal contestations in healthy, productive ways. Through book studies, "listening work," facilitated conversations, presentations, and understanding logic in arguments, the pastor explained how they generated "fuller" and "richer" communities that "show love for one another" regardless of their perspectives. Similarly, Dave navigated a denominational split and reflected upon the resulting state of his parish. After describing the timeline of the affair, he indicated that "the folks who left went on and are part of

congregations that they're actively involved in and, and are relatively healthy... those of us who were left, uhm, have learned a whole lot about love and about listening and about community and are probably happier and healthier than ever in... the history of the congregation." Later, both organizations employed these learned techniques in settings of church involvement with immigration injustice and found themselves well prepared to negotiate conflict. Personally, they served as "translators" between groups of different stances and enhanced their mediation skills – mentioning strategies like "listening across difference" and "merging worlds" – to bring about patience and understanding, and continue their efforts to foster stable, vibrant communities.

After clumsily navigating my way through the parish building, I met Molly in her newly repainted office spotted with eloquent wooden furnishings. We brewed coffee, toured the sanctuary, and spoke for a while about her church's recent operations before finally settling in velvet-covered chairs. She approached my question via a comparison of her experiences in ideologically dissimilar congregations. Before moving to Ohio, Molly attempted to spearhead justice ministry in a largely conservative church and struggled to gain member support for social justice initiatives – spending much of her time not implementing action, but rather debating its relevance among an internally stratified congregation. She then left and pursued work with a small church both historically and theologically rooted in social justice efforts, and discovered drastic differences in the FBO's speed and like-mindedness in decision-making. However, she noticed that such homogenous tendencies posed a new kind of challenge – one of recognizing positionality and accountability within liberal-leaning, white-presenting congregations in the region. Here, Molly expressed the importance of education and self-work to acknowledge privileges in race, class, status, and identity as it relates to tradition and service. The FBO sponsored book discussions, study groups, weekly gatherings, projects, and outside speakers to

assist members in their personal journeys, reminding me – "but we try to do it together too." Time and time again, faith leaders and community organizers referenced similar efforts to grapple with matters of social justice, offer support and places for reflection, and create intentional, reflexive environments.

Apart from one individual without direct leadership experience, each of my participants described specific methods of overcoming internal strife in FBOs. For example, Nick oversees social justice initiatives for a Christian agency and often coordinates educational opportunities among an expansive lattice of parishes, local governments, and community leaders. He is in constant conversation with FBOs and possesses a high-level overview of their respective struggles, successes, and strategies due to the nature of his position; this, alongside his own experiences working in a large organization, provides him with a wide arena of observations regarding patterns of disagreement and relationship building in the area. He embodied these dynamics in a simple question: "If you just keep doing what you're doing, do you ever really grow?" As much as FBOs may seek to provide services or foster a particular atmosphere, they hold an equally firm belief that individuals must challenge themselves to "take a step back" and "embrace some discomfort" in their lives. Thus, Nick encourages members to share space with one another, educate themselves, volunteer at new and ongoing events, and demonstrate a willingness to engage in dialogues no matter how difficult or uncomfortable. Doing so, he argues, is necessary in order to transform perspectives and cultivate genuine fellowship across barriers of 'difference.' In these circumstances, demonstrating acts of courage and humility allows faith leaders to better themselves and their organizations – serving as powerful instruments of both change and relational depth.

Defining 'Community'

'Community' was perhaps one of the most frequently referenced words in my interviews. Interestingly, it often succeeded an adjective – 'Hispanic,' 'Spanish-speaking,' a geographic location, or 'faith,' to name a few – and preceded words like 'awareness,' 'education,' and 'dialogues,' but was rarely explained on its own accord. After noticing this trend, I began asking participants what they meant by 'community.' Many offered a general description including the words "inclusive" or "welcoming," but these terms prompted further elaboration on how FBOs actually define, negotiate, or even make accessible such a space. Who belongs, and when, and where? Who decides what a *community* is, and what power dynamics are present in these relationships? Subsequently, my participants provided examples to more concretely encapsulate their perspectives – all of them. The shared nature of their responses suggested a larger behavioral trend among the agencies: identifying healthy community through their observations of *words* being *physically enacted*. When FBOs "put theory into action" or, as Molly likes to say, "walk the walk," they deliver ongoing attempts to promote inclusive spaces and present invitations in both word *and* deed – defining community as such.

Dana is a spiritual leader with deep, personal connections to immigrant rights issues. Although not currently serving in an FBO, she holds decades of experience working with and for social justice organizations and couples her religious convictions with contemporary activism. The advocate, educator, and organizer contemplated the meaning of "inclusive community" and, after a careful sip of hot tea, provided what she found to be a tangible example. Recently, a church in her partnership network offered Sanctuary to a father with deportation orders and prevented separation from his Ohio-born son. They sheltered the family "with the understanding that no one knew how long they would be in Sanctuary," and the pair lived in the church for over

two years until the deportation order lifted. During that time, the congregation raised funds, provided materials, and mobilized support, but the relationship was never one-sided; the father developed skills in woodworking and carpentry throughout this time, which he then utilized to pursue projects for congregants and the parish itself. Here, Dana illuminated a definition of community that not only included the welcoming of folks in danger, but also expressed the capacity of each party to positively engage with and make active contributions to these relationships. Regardless of whether an FBO possesses the physical infrastructure to unconditionally host a family (most do not), they certainly have the opportunity to generate an environment that celebrates the talents, life experiences, languages, and abilities of each individual who participate in their services.

Largely, my participants defined 'community' through tenets of hospitality and welcome. In a soft-spoken yet fervent tone, Louis recounted the "boundary of the community" as something which is "very porous," where individuals "should be able to enter without feeling like, 'oh, I have to check these boxes to find a sense of belonging.'" For him, "hospitality means... giving space for people to come in from other traditions or other places in life and welcoming them" through invitations to activities, space at meals, and opportunities for service or involvement. Such a "vision of hospitality draws us out of ourselves, it draws us out of our sense of identity, our sense of culture, into something larger... you realize that hospitality is both an opportunity to give and to receive, as both the host and the guests, become givers, and are blessed." Here, the pastor demonstrates the reciprocal nature of relationships across difference both regionally and globally, where "you gain more than you give" by developing new, often unexpected perceptions of experiencing and being in the world. In Dana's case, she again emphasized this relationship between "host" and "guest"; often thought of as a binary

relationship between, for instance, a *giving* parish and a *taking* immigrant or 'stranger,' she challenged these linear images and instead articulated an ongoing generosity and reciprocity between groups. Whether it be a carpenter in Sanctuary or members entering FBOs from outside faith traditions, notions of hospitality grounded my participants' explanations of community and championed the gifts and perspectives of those involved.

An additional component of hospitality includes prioritizing the agency of marginalized populations and involving them in social justice dialogues. For instance, several of my participants articulated how the addition of immigrants in leadership positions completely transformed their FBOs. They increased representation, contributed invaluable perspectives, and revolutionized initiatives through their abilities to relate to and communicate with regional immigrant communities. Dave recounted his experience with a volunteer from Guatemala who increasingly took on responsibility for their weekly meal programs. Although she was not formally a member of the church, her efforts introduced creative cooking techniques, streamlined distribution, and revitalized their geographic outreach. This instance further indicates how, while FBOs obviously ground their work in religiosity, their notions of community building transcend 'member' versus 'non-member' status to involve actors regardless of faith affiliation.

Similarly, my participants often mentioned the power of language as both a barrier and a bridge in FBO operations. In demonstrating conceptions of welcome, leaders discovered the importance of speech and contacting audiences for whom English was not their first language (nor even Spanish, in many cases, for immigrants from Indigenous communities in Latin America). Louis described accounts where his congregation hosted bilingual services, learned phrases of welcome for a visiting family from an international sister organization, and partnered with two other churches for a trilingual service as part of a refugee and denominational support

network. As an FBO with many Spanish-speaking members, Dave also offers bilingual and Spanish worship and participates in a variety of multilingual services with regional agencies. Other congregations sponsor translation resources and more broadly assert the value of knowing and making attempts to communicate with others, regardless of skill level or mastery. This is particularly true in the case of immigrants, whereby Dana explained how volunteers practicing Spanish language skills ease power dynamics and anxieties for communities seeking assistance in English-dominated areas like hospitals, government offices, and even grocery stores. In her words, "most folks are thrilled, if you know, even just a little bit of Spanish. Because there is more, shame and fear in the other direction... if you don't know English, you're cut off from everyone." Here, Dana highlights how language is a powerful tool of community building and trust – it asserts respect for one's culture, recognition of identity and life experience, and intentional care for peoples' needs. Such endeavors function as a distinct act of community inclusion and reaffirm the value of other languages in environments where English is expected or deemed superior.

As FBOs developed models of hospitality, they expressed the importance of listening and compared their approaches to nearby agencies. Time and time again, faith leaders and employees alike expressed that their services were most well received only after asking populations, directly, what would be helpful for them. Molly emphasizes these components of humility, whereby her leadership works to acknowledge when "we are not the greatest source of authority" and critically considers the power dynamics, privileges, and assumptions present within her congregation. Others continued further, asserting how agencies who impose thoughts of 'correct' action reproduce power dynamics and cycles of inequality; they assume the needs of the populations they wish to serve, and, in turn, dedicate their attention and resources to projects that

do not effectively address these problems. Here, Phil reinforces the need for FBOs to avoid "rigid agendas" and instead embrace spontaneous, "random" opportunities that achieve a "greater understanding of... the world, and human nature." In adopting flexible attitudes, organizations can best utilize their resources and seize opportunities to support community members. In addition to meal programs and fundraisers, FBOs provide a litany of services through transportation and translation, acquiring specific items, completing repairs, connecting folks with legal services, developing sanctuary facilities, and fostering mentoring programs. Dana maintains, "hospitality and welcome and justice-making has to be seen and felt." These FBOs universally discussed the connection between speech and action in these endeavors, and constantly seek new avenues to generate environments of inclusion through their immigration and social justice efforts.

Community Navigation and External Dialogues

The physical location of my participants' FBOs ranged widely and included urban, suburban, and rural areas. Although Ohio contains some regional diversity, these agencies are largely located in conservative areas and frequently encounter tension when navigating political ideologies, lifestyle, and religious practice. Pastors recounted incidents where local residents expelled dehumanizing, hostile rhetoric and retaliated both verbally and physically against their social justice efforts. Others spoke more broadly about residential misconceptions and a lack of awareness regarding the realities of immigrant communities and processes of entry into the United States. Regardless of the cause, my participants found the overarching presence of anti-immigration sentiment and its appearance within their congregations to be concerning. This rhetoric fails to produce vibrant and healthy environments – eroding possibilities for FBOs to create inclusive and tangible 'community' – and therefore became a significant topic of

conversation in interacting with, attempting to gain support from, and negotiating relationships with external populations, if at all.

Perception and Fear

In their experiences at institutions in both northeast Ohio as well as across the United States, my participants consistently identified the role of *fear* in preventing external communities from engaging in immigration justice efforts. From media portrayals of 'dangerous' and 'criminal' figures to an overarching apprehensiveness of 'unknown' populations, faith leaders explained how their interactions with Ohio residents were fraught with social divisions and misconceptions about the realities of immigrants. In his observations of dozens of FBOs across the region, Nick noted:

> I think that there is a sense of... um... entitlement? A sense of power? That people have. And if somebody is coming in-somebody, new – especially somebody who does not look like us – is coming into the community? There is, automatically suspicion about that individual. That they are trying to take something from us. (short pause) A-and I think that, people who are here, who are entrenched, look at that as a threat. That, 'my' way of living, that I am comfortable with, is going to change. And not necessarily change for the better, but an automatic assumption that it is going to change for the worst.

With the entrance of unfamiliar groups into often homogenous communities, Nick demonstrated a common theme among my participants – fear of difference, specifically in identity. He witnessed populations resorting to distrust or hostility in their encounters with immigrants before thinking to engage in dialogue or ask questions, and his statement challenged *why* such behaviors occurred almost instinctually. This record reinforces the prevalence of these attitudes in the American populous, who often assume immigrants pose a "threat" and will negatively "change"

lives once in proximity to their Ohioan communities. Molly elaborated on this "fear factor" present at her former FBO, where members spoke antagonistically and tended to "think all kinds of things" about populations in movement – even while my participant, a pastor actively processing visa paperwork, was in the room and listening to these conversations. She explained, "they were so comfortable with me. And they totally saw me as a different person... they, would, totally ignore that I was also from an immigrant background" and draw distinctions between who, what, and how they feared. Such definitions held assumptions and exceptions, and dynamically shifted in accordance with congregants' political views, media or environmental influences, and personal relationships. Here, my participants articulated how external groups approached immigration dialogues not with consideration of their contributions, human dignity, and life experiences, but steadfast assumptions of harm and violence.

Dana elucidated how other sources of fear relate much to "social standing and status and capital" and that populations are highly concerned with appearance due to the politics, approval, and peer expectations which dictate social relationships throughout their cities. In her experiences with local Christian communities, she notes that congregations are "known and recognized" by measures of finance and the resources of members; they assign value to attributes like wealth, property ownership, personal connections, and pursuance of 'appropriate' volunteer efforts to maintain their reputation. She explains that upsetting the dynamics of home churches or participating in efforts that alienate them from friends causes tremendous "fear, and anxiety about appearances," and that such things "really did stifle the degree to which folks were more active." Despite the wide political spectrum represented across the incredible expanse of church networks in northeast Ohio, liberal, conservative, and moderate congregants alike impose these unspoken but visible expectations on their adult peers even in places of worship and proposed

fellowship, and these relationships hold the power to determine an individual's desire to engage in immigration justice initiatives.

Framing Strategies

Despite observing discouraging dialogues, my participants nonetheless acknowledged the inevitability of disagreement and worked to involve a range of actors and 'listen across difference.' They utilized a variety of strategies to communicate with non-sympathetic populations, even in environments of extreme ideological polarization, and heavily relied on techniques to present messages to audiences in distinct, accessible ways. I spent a great deal of time discussing these endeavors during my first interview for this project, which I conducted on my bedroom floor during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. I distinctly remember fidgeting with my Zoom meeting invitation and attempting to look professional despite my lack of a desk, and anxiously waited for Jill to join my call. Eventually, the face of an energetic and quick-witted professor, researcher, and academic popped up on my screen. In addition to conducting her recent study focused on the experience of migrant laborers in northeast Ohio, she volunteers her time working with a nonprofit organization offering an extensive number of services for immigrants and holds much experience in the field. One of the most prominent aspects of our discussion was a concept coined 'framing' – the way an individual, institution, or entity presents material and adjusts their behaviors for different audiences. She suggested that, because ministries and churches ground social justice efforts in spiritual beliefs and sacred figures, they utilize religious frames to garner support from the area. Through messaging whereby "faith *calls* us to be servants, to our... to the *least* among us, in our community, right? And it's our job, as good Christians, our job as good Muslims or whatever the faith based, uh, practice is, to serve... the interests and to be in service to the m-the least advantaged in our community," Jill

demonstrates how FBOs utilize this language to change the perspectives of unsympathetic groups by reinstating the very commitment that brings them to worship. Several other leaders in my study articulated similar claims and emphasized the importance of spiritual calls to action in attempts to bridge gaps with either antagonistic or uninvolved populations.

Dana explains how this approach is helpful in politically charged atmospheres, particularly when approaching audiences in rural and racially homogenized settings. She considers this framing as a means of inviting folks to the conversation through accessible, more approachable conventions, especially for older, white audiences who are "well-meaning" but require an additional degree of educational awareness. In what she characterizes as "packaging the message," Dana encourages community members to volunteer their time and resources in ways that are personally authentic and also meet the needs of FBOs. Here, she recounts scripture passages and specific Bible verses in Matthew, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy to "call folks back" to the experiences of Christians in Exodus. She states, "Remember when you were wanderers in Egypt. When you were foreigners in a strange land. Be hospitable to these folks, even if they're not from, quote unquote, 'from here.' Um, care for them, welcome them, shelter them. Uh, in the same way that, folks did that to you. When you were in that same place." Here, her language reminds individuals about the histories of their faith communities as asylum-seekers and grounds these messages in both religiosity and justice – two intertwined, inseparable practices. She applies these stories in a modern context to reframe hegemonic perspectives and powerfully reconstruct narratives of displaced populations, refugees, and immigrants.

Louis' congregation is located in the downtown of a polarized area and employs religious framing techniques to bridge political, cultural, and situational differences. Here, his FBO uses "language that is accessible and grounded in terms of our biblical imagination," and celebrates

the love and vitality present in communities of faith. He articulates the meaning of words like 'partnership, 'embrace,' and 'sharing' because they imply "that we have something to give... that others, uh, want to join us in that action... that together, we can do something" in the likeness of God's image and "overflowing love." He denotes that these metaphorical frames imply direction and reach external audiences through their appeal to Christian principles; they motivate communities to engage in journeys of reflection, growth, and strength as they carry out justice dialogues and call others to join them.

Aside from faith conceptions, FBOs primarily employed two other frames by which to approach community members: human rights and economic advantage. In the case of the former, Jill discussed her appeals to American beliefs in autonomy and self-determination. She explains:

> So this would be the idea that even aside from, someone's legal status. How they enter the country, what their documents are, every human being – has *inalienable* rights – solely for being a human person. Right? So regardless of these questions over here... we still, right, in a democracy, in a free society, in a country that claims to be committed to human rights, we *must* care, that these rights are being violated for persons.

Here, Jill calls attention to the ideals of universal freedom and respect which often circulate in the United States; in theory, articulating such a frame should remind populations of their democratic proclamations and assert the value of any and all human life. In a testimony of his personal beliefs and subsequent interactions with the community, Nick avows this same language, stating, "every person has a certain dignity that is inherent in each of them. And if we truly believe that we are sisters and brothers in God's... big family, then why would we want to treat... somebody less than what we would want to be treated?" Here, the outreach coordinator declares a shared humanness among different identities and emphasizes the inherent worth of the

person in all contexts. Notably, he also blends this mentality with a religious lens and utilizes imagery of kinship, connection, and empathy to support these claims, expounding the fluid nature by which FBOs may utilize these communication styles.

A similar stance applies to employers and farmers who require migrant labor to keep their businesses afloat. In another interview, Anna described the intricate layers involved in undocumented labor, intermediaries, and legal policy. As a former employee of a nonprofit agency, she spent over a decade advocating and ensuring safety for immigrant populations. During strikes, sickness, injury, and poor housing, she confronted business directors and persuaded them into improving conditions for workers with one simple notion: happier and healthier employees will be more productive and, in turn, more profitable for the company. She explained, "[I] try and find these farmers who know they depend on immigrant labor. If they're willing to admit it, they know they can't run their dairy farm without it … So, if nothing else, trying to help them see the benefit to themselves … if they won't see the humanity of the person." This is often the language that FBOs and agencies must enforce to reach compromises over safety agreements, workers' rights, wages, and labor conditions. When folks are not driven by human rights or religion or morality, organizations can almost always count on finance to be the primary motivator of immigrant justice and negotiate external tensions in this way. Presently, these dialogues serve as a positive means of ameliorating antagonism in the greater community and grant faith leaders the flexibility to engage with audiences both authentically and realistically. Such techniques require skill, extreme nuance, and familiarity with regional attitudes, and the FBOs in my study demonstrated a spectacular grasp of colloquial and local understandings in order to effectively employ these methods.

Education and Bodily Work

My participants accompanied their framing strategies with a variety of awareness-raising techniques involving components that are both educational and corporeal – involving bodies and physical presence. For instance, FBOs mentioned their frustrations surrounding immigrant stereotypes; thus, they began informing groups about the realities of injustice by delivering statistical information, providing updates on policy and legislation, and demystifying falsities about social justice issues more broadly. Louis elaborated on his experiences hosting open dialogues, conducting interviews, sponsoring speakers, showing films, and relating "the conversation to practical things" like financial issues and housing to illustrate the lived experiences of immigrants. One pastor invited city residents to listen, learn, and participate in these conversations through public arenas like libraries and parks. Several participants organized book study groups and communal events, and others distributed fliers or informational packets at weekly meals. As individuals holding positions in higher education and outreach, Nick, Jill, and Anna all described weaving social justice dialogues into their classrooms and challenged students to consider their positionalities when discussing these subjects (like defining who has a 'right' to be and live in the United States). Collectively, the FBOs in my study articulated how their educational efforts not only dispelled misinformation, but further engaged the greater community in mutual processes of growing – practicing humility *together*, working in partnership, and learning alongside one another.

A critical component of what Dana identifies as the "educational piece" of immigration justice work is *storytelling*, which my participants mentioned in countless iterations. Their respective FBOs found that the delivery of personal narrative is fundamental in humanizing marginalized communities and challenging the circulation of hostile rhetoric – especially

towards immigrants in this region. At times, leaders chose to relay their own stories; however, at its most basic implementation, they found that providing a space for willing individuals to comfortably share their first-hand accounts transformed the perspectives of audiences who were otherwise removed from their complex experiences and negotiations. Dana explained that such anecdotal and narrative-based dialogues "put hands and faces" to the work of migrant laborers, draw students "outside the 'safety' of the classroom," and challenge the community to consider the "ethical questions and dilemmas" of the current immigration system in the United States. After reflecting about her professional experiences in several states and cities, she affirmed that the messages of storytelling "land in a different way" because they confront privileged, unaware, or removed populations with the realities of social injustice. My participants indicated that, after witnessing local inequalities, poverty, racism, or any form of stigma, audiences have three options: participate in these systems, do nothing and become complicit in these systems through their inaction, or work to change these systems. Developing personal relationships with folks or, at the very least, simply knowing someone's name in an unjust position, holds people accountable in ways that may drive them to act or reject responsibility altogether.

As a teacher of both Spanish and English language classes, Anna recounted many dialogues with students who circulated hostile rhetoric and disputed assignments to engage with immigrant communities. However, as an activist and volunteer, she held steadfast to the importance of face-to-face interaction and brought her classes together in an event where each student prepared vocabulary and conversational skills. Her Spanish-speaking students prepared traditional dishes, and everyone ate their meals together, exchanged music, and engaged in lively intercultural dialogues. At one point in the night, one of her Spanish-speaking students voluntarily shared her experiences of deportation with the group:

> She ended up telling them … her story of what it meant to be, to be picked up by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, to be in shackles, to be put on a plane to get off a plane with nobody there, you know... what do you do? Where do you go? She had to beg for a phone to be able to call family to get some money to, you know, she told all of it without reservation. And one of my female students cried. She said 'I didn't know it was like that. I was wrong.'

Here, Anna demonstrates how these narratives transformed the perspectives of her formerly antagonistic students and engendered atmospheres of vulnerability, understanding, and fellowship across barriers of language and nationality – some even remained in contact after the event. She provides further testament to the power of storytelling in bridging gaps between the FBOs, immigrants or other marginalized groups, and the external community "because now, you know, you've sat at that table, you've had the same teacher... how do you look somebody in the eye, and say, 'No, you don't belong here'?"

Additionally, my participants discussed the value of taking visible action to amplify their missions for immigration justice. This component of external dialogues involves a variety of 'on-the-ground' strategies where FBOs mobilize volunteers to physically "do the work" in political, social, and legal settings. For instance, Phil highlighted the necessity of calling representatives, writing letters and emails, hosting conferences, communicating with politicians, and holding elected officials accountable for meeting their constituents' needs. He further described public prayer demonstrations where his FBO contacted local media sources to create a "public witness" (the affair was then written about and published in a newspaper) and mentioned how members of his congregation confronted law enforcement about racial profiling and disproportionate arrests

of Hispanic folks (they took the case to city hall, won, and removed the offending officer). In a reflection of effective approaches to justice work, Phil stated:

> Ah-and, so... churches do charity very well. We can raise money and, send it somewhere (chuckles). That's not gonna help... the church, have an understanding of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Ya know? And so.. we do charity, but-but, it's not enough for us to do charity. We also have to change the structures that have created this inequality. And so the church also has to be involved in advocacy, and it has to be involved in justice... and we have to be informed, and, uh... engaged in political process, at the local, the state, and the federal level.

The pastor articulated how, although funds support the implementation of programs and acquire materials, congregations must supplement these endeavors with action in order to uphold genuine models of their faith and challenge the systems enabling injustice. He calls upon his congregants to utilize their privileges, voting power, citizenship, communication, and time to confront local realities and "truly be transformed" as members of both the church and the American populous. Here, Phil shared a novel of creative techniques to engage with the community, and his FBO continues to generate tangible, local change through these efforts.

Similarly, Molly's congregation participates through downtown protests, advocacy efforts at city-sponsored events and county fairs, and "being present" in acts of taking up space. She describes this process as "putting our bodies into the community" and denotes how members volunteer their time, vehicles, resources, and literal beings to provide support. Regarding physical engagement, Dana contends that, while financial contributions are helpful and necessary to the successes of FBOs, "you need someone to go buy those supplies. You need someone to drive, people around who don't have transportation. You need someone to do the stuffing of the

envelopes, you know... all of that little stuff, that is really, really important to keeping, the momentum. On, trying to make change." Without the "people power" to physically accomplish tasks, FBOs – and all agencies, for that matter – cannot sustain their efforts nor hope to spread their missions, initiatives, and relational networks into the greater community.

Clearly, there exists a lattice of nuance, strategy, and local knowledge in external dialogues, and FBOs are not unilaterally successful in their endeavors. Community members reject messages. People turn away out of fear, ignorance, or some other combination of geopolitical factors. In fact, not all organizations and faith leaders even pursue these outreach efforts because they are arduous and could be considered fruitless in the context of extreme polarization or stubborn attitudes. In Dave's case, his FBO prioritizes efforts to directly serve populations and simply does not engage in external outreach because their margin is filled with meal preparation, residential visits, family support and childcare, worship, and translation and transportation services. When I inquired how his FBO approaches folks with mindsets adverse to social justice, he responded "I don't know that we do!" Although individuals likely hold in their own dialogues, the ethos of his congregation is to "live your life and let people see... rather than confront and convince," and they instead focus their energies on fostering a vibrant, welcoming community for folks who actively seek these environments. Other participants faced difficulty in prompting community members to cross "that threshold" – an unspoken, invisible barrier that prevents individuals from attending events or fully engaging and requires the act of being physically present to overcome it. For Phil, it proves quite a challenge to encourage individuals to move beyond their immediate spheres and introduce themselves to those who are different from them in whatever capacity, whether it be class positioning, racial or ethnic background, sexuality, first language, or housing status. "It would be wonderful for them. It would be a great

experience for them" if they chose to show up, but such endeavors require people to consider their positionality and chance discomfort. He exclaims, "You don't grow until you risk a little! And you don't risk a little until you step beyond your comfort zone." These sentiments are true not only for navigating internal community relationships, where congregants may participate in varying degrees, but are also vital in communicating the value of this fellowship to the external community and overcoming misconceptions, stereotypes, and ignorance through direct experience.

The Interconnectedness of Structural Violence

The FBOs in my study all commit to physical work, conversations, and service in their communities; however, each demanded an examination of the broader systems that precipitate and perpetuate cycles of local inequality. These oppressions are intersectional, compounded, interdependent, and united by a common denominator: a structural condition which normalizes injustice in the United States and across the world. In the implementation of government policy, corrupt financial operations, polarized media, and political power imbalances – including subtle or glaring behaviors of racism, sexism, homophobia, extreme nationalism, and hatred more generally – each of these components impact the lived experiences of populations in their efforts to promote personal and familial wellbeing.

Political Barriers and Domestic Government

My participants and the people they work with surmount tremendous political barriers and frustrations with government actors. While anti-immigrant sentiment is not a new phenomenon, antagonistic rhetoric has escalated in recent decades and increasingly circulated during and after the 2016 Presidential election. The Trump administration instituted a series of restrictive policies, fronted the construction of a U.S.-Mexico border wall, augmented Obama-

era deportation procedures, and highly militarized Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations. This, along with the use of dehumanizing language and racist tropes during campaigns and public speeches, fueled acts of hostility towards current and future immigrants in the United States – even in northeast Ohio, a place seemingly removed from ports of entry into the nation where racism and fears of 'border transgression' prevail.

At its most simplified core, the government commits structural violence wherein it prevents people – this includes citizens, permanent and temporary residents, immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and speakers of all languages – from meeting their basic needs. Phil explains how "these problems are systemic"; with every election and legislative change, welfare programs, public safety nets, and social support services continuously decline. He reflects:

> We're really up against uh, a tough, uhm, oligarchy... it's really tough to break through with, with real change? Because of the political processes? And, you know, I mean, i-it's easy for a lot of us to be, um, pessimistic about the future? Seeing... a lot a' laws falling, that, you know, we've depended on and... seeing, uh, social services cut, year in and year out.

From housing to poor infrastructure and prolonged court proceedings, he explains that the economic and social conditions of this nation privilege white, elite identities and rely on neoliberal mindsets of the 'American dream' where, if folks simply 'worked hard enough' they would not find themselves hungry, as asylum seekers, or in poverty. However, FBOs provide services *alongside* federal programs; as government assistance deteriorates, it places greater pressure on faith leaders and their agencies to 'fill in' gaps (now chasms) with limited economic resources. He frequently observes the greater community assigning individual blame to folks who are homeless or without status, quoting them, "'they made a mistake,' or 'it's their fault'...

'It's your own darn fault.' I mean, that excuse has been around forever." In reality, these local circumstances are the result of structural inequities and are reinforced by voting and political procedures, wealth distribution, job opportunities, individualistic convictions, and measures of professional and personal success. In casting responsibility onto individual actions rather than the systems which maintain inequality, populations undermine community struggles and neglect the larger frameworks of policy, politics, and violence generating these conditions.

Similarly, Jill vocalized the blatant inaccessibility of legal operations and government services in the region and found herself particularly frustrated by immigration courts. For any hearing, criminal trial, sorting of paperwork, or minor logistical note, immigrants have only *one* court in the *entire state of Ohio* by which they may resolve the issue. Many do not own American driver's licenses and work long, rigid schedules, especially in the case of migrant laborers. Thus, driving upwards of four hours to and from Cleveland's court is not only a dangerous risk, but also impedes their ability to locate reliable, frequent transportation. Here, FBOs funnel resources into paying for vehicles, volunteering drivers, and hiring legal advocates to compensate for these lacking services – actions resulting from inadequate government attention. Jill summarized these observations of poor accessibility, forceful policy implementation, and neglect of local conditions as living in "this period of what, again, I would characterize as unjust immigration enforcement."

Nick rearticulates these sentiments and more specifically explicates the consequences of American policy in Latin America. In his travels to cities along the U.S.-Mexico border for mission and service work, he explained how the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) capsized formerly flexible employment arrangements and prevented Mexican laborers from returning to their homes after busy agricultural seasons or factory-based

work. Floods of multi-national corporations placed mere miles south of the United States exploit residents and finance poverty by paying citizens "pennies on the dollar for, for their work" – engendering unstable economic conditions, dangerous working environments, and 'hands-off' mindsets for American employers and consumers deeply removed from these export-driven facilities. NAFTA is only one of the countless globally deployed policies that favor profit-driven enterprises at the expense of individual lives and wellbeing, all the while fronting the beauty of capitalist, free-market economies which make illusory the injustices of our financial and political structures. Nick relayed how, in "looking at [workers in Mexico] through the walls, through the-the steel, the 20-foot wall that is there now" and researching and witnessing the implications of government policy, these rifts physically manifest between nations and throughout the United States. Whether it be a literal 'border wall,' intergenerational poverty, or access to quality employment and working conditions, he argues that there exists hierarchical injustice which visibly and invisibly perpetrates violence on the basis of difference.

Additionally, financial operations pose challenges for FBOs in particular because many receive their funding through grants either from the government or larger religious agencies. Most external offers regulate the use and appropriation of funds and limit FBO action in situations involving debated subjects like abortion or undocumented immigrants. Thus, despite their convictions of autonomy and human dignity, some of my participants turned services away from populations so as not to violate grant contracts and lose their primary source of income. Anna explained how, in assisting a migrant woman locate birth control and reproductive services, she encountered a juxtaposition – "I don't want to mess up a grant. And I don't want to you know, lose funding because of getting somebody good healthcare." Rather than serve as an employee and risk an agency's financial stability, she left her position and opted to work

alongside organizations to practice her own convictions with freedom from these pressures. Regardless of a religious agency's internal stance, my participants argued that wealth and financial dynamics in the United States are incredibly problematic because of their power to dictate when, where, how, and under what circumstances funds may be utilized. Such arrangements can quickly stifle the flexibility of FBOs and prevent them from developing immediate, informed responses.

Furthermore, the global health crisis exposed chasms in governmental assistance by isolating populations and limiting support networks. With closed businesses, restricted supply chains, and reduced opportunities for medical care, education, and legal assistance, the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated demographically disproportionate health impacts and reinforced preexisting inequalities. One particularly relevant obstacle for FBOs was their sudden inability to engage with typical community building practices; social distancing guidelines and occupation limitations prevented communities from sharing meals, working and worshipping together, and engaging in positive social interactions because their members simply could not all be in the same room together. Further, the pandemic perpetuated isolating media discourses and prevented intercommunal dialogues. Nick explains how people "are turning to, technology or they're looking for their own resources to not- get diverse opinions, but rather, enhance, what they believe. And as a result, they become more entrenched in their, their opinions. And it, actually, the conversations have become much harder." Dave corroborates these sentiments, declaring that media owners possess "the idea that we oughtta make a big profit off of this and, extra clicks and extra readerships and extra, all that, which means a-anything sensationalized." In turn, these portrayals represent, reify, and normalize violence, and further polarize communities through repeated stereotypes about both religion and immigration. His frustration grows as he considers

extremism and social divides, contending “part of the reason why the media is part of the problem is we only ever see the 10% of nutcases on either side. Rather than, all the rest of us who occupy the middle. Uh, and actually want to like our neighbors. (chuckles) Even though they're wrong about this and that.” Here, bias and consumption of American media sources hinder communities from overcoming differences because of the truth they ascribe to what they read in newspapers, hear on the radio, or see on television. Such representations are neither accurate in their depiction of the nation’s body nor are they productive in resolving sources of injustice in the first place.

This hostility proves particularly frustrating for my participants because of the media's ability to serve as a powerful agent of change; it makes affirming messages, support, awareness-raising, and communication accessible to a variety of audiences, and holds great potential to be employed in a positive manner. However, in the context of heated political environments fraught with tension and disagreement, it contorts the realities of immigration injustice, incites fear, and poses structural challenges for FBOs seeking to build relationships – especially amid a global health crisis with limited opportunities for social interaction. Phil considers the positions of residents in an angry America, at times so full of hatred and misunderstanding:

> You don't have to carry all that around. That's a pretty heavy burden. You know, carry all that stuff around. Be anxious all the time. And I know a lot of people are anxious when they see somebody sleeping on the sidewalk, or... they see somebody that's got a backpack, and they're disheveled or something. ‘I was afraid.’ And I said, ‘You’re afraid of a guy sleeping on the sidewalk?’ (chuckles) I was afraid for that guy! You know? I mean, (laughing) you just gotta flip your perspective. But that's not the- that's not the way, I think our media trains us to think? You know, because we're always so security

> conscious and uh, you know. ‘Be afraid’ and ‘don't go here, don't go there’ and ‘do this’ and ‘don't do that.’ And uh, you know, security's a, uh, big industry in America.

As citizens learn to define their relationships on exclusion, broadcast individual autonomy, and protect rather than share what they have with others, Phil argues that what FBOs must “teach people is... that we are all connected. You know, we're all part of that fiber, as [Martin Luther King Jr.] said. And you pull one strand, and they all move.” We cannot separate ourselves from the ‘otherized’ people, nor isolate one injustice from the next because they operate interdependently. American national structures weave together actions, consumer choices, religious communities, employment opportunities, legal statuses, media subscriptions, and political dockets. It is in this system of globalization where cultural, national, linguistic, and social boundaries are blurred, and the experiences of populations occur as part of a collective, inextricably intertwined network. Dana holistically considers these same sentiments, summarizing: “it’s all connected. Racial justice, immigration justice, um. You know, anybody who is on the margins, um, the church should be showing up for.”

Overall, the United States’ domestic structures fuel cycles of inequality and raise tremendous challenges FBOs in both creating community and providing services to their neighbors. The national climate of political polarization, hateful rhetoric, and normalized misconceptions generates economic divisions and social hierarchies among populations; it dually obscures the destructive, unique geopolitical implications of American policy on other nations. It justifies the assignation of blame to individuals for systemic problems and binds FBOs as they navigate the parameters of grant sources, all the while negotiating tensions of a fraught Presidential election and national extremism. In combination with the vulnerabilities of a global pandemic and potent media representations, these factors contribute to the imposition of

structural violence, strain faith leaders, and fuel hostility towards marginalized communities – namely, immigrants.

The American Immigration "System"

Universally, the community organizers, educators, academics, employees, and faith leaders in my study articulated the visible difficulty of entering the United States. Whether it be obtaining citizenship, visas, guest worker claims, temporary licenses, asylum seeker or refugee statuses, or other immigration-related ventures, they discussed the complicated, extended nature of these processes and further exclaimed how the nation's permanent residents either lacked knowledge or were largely misinformed about them. In their justice efforts, FBOs expend significant resources and time abating these misconceptions and assisting immigrants through complicated webs of legislation, changing policy, and law enforcement.

Charlie was five minutes late to our session. He appeared on screen with a button-down flannel, short salt and pepper hair, and a brightly colored background, and was one of my earlier interviews. I remember feeling uncertain before our meeting, but his charismatic voice and smooth gestures immediately calmed my fears; we spoke for several minutes before I even had the chance to properly introduce myself. "Well," he began, "what do you want to know?" In that moment, it became very clear to me that the next hour would look considerably different than my other conversations. Charlie moved to the United States in the early 2000s, and served as a pastor at a nearby church for over a decade before moving to his current ministry. We spent a great deal of time talking about his transition into the nation as well as his experiences with the local immigrant community. He discussed the nine-year process of obtaining his "papers," explaining:

> [It] was a long haul...because of the immigration system, it's a broken system. And five years later, I had my, uh, citizenship. And then it was fourteen years. But if it's someone

> from Mexico, this-in, on the same situation, that I was, on the lower category, it'd take 25 to 30 years to get citizenship. Or India as well. (pause) Yes. And people, ask, 'Oh why don't [they] come here with the documents?' There's no law, that gives you the opportunity to come here with documents. At least right now, OK?

Here, he mentions a "lower category," in reference to the United States' verbalized list of 'desirable' versus 'undesirable' immigrants, which filters the 'quality' of travelers from specific nations based on stereotypes, reputation, and international relations. Charlie reflects that the United States government inscribes commodified values to human life by ranking the skills and résumés of individuals seeking entry, which dehumanizes populations and conceals the violence of their circumstances. He frames the situation through his personal experiences and first-hand accounts of folks in ministry to demonstrate the challenges of obtaining documentation. With complex legal processes and few resources available for many immigrants and displaced persons along American borders, they encounter structural problems inhibiting a smooth entry and do not possess the wealth, safety, or time to wait decades in their home countries for paperwork. These situations are antithetical to common portrayals of 'illegal' or 'lazy' populations who 'fail' to enter the United States in 'the right way'; rather, according to Charlie's experiences, such processes are far more complex and must be understood in the context of a "broken system" riddled with barriers, founded on social hierarchies, and dependent on violence.

As an immigrant herself, Molly explicated the incessantly complicated nature of entrance into the United States and outlined her year-long visa renewal alongside a variety of documents and expiration timelines. Through her endeavors, she stated, "I had all the support I could even imagine, and it was still so stressful at times. And we were hanging on... a little thread." Even with experienced lawyers, English-language skills, "white-passing privilege," and communities

of support in both her home country and the United States, she imparted that entry is “almost like an impossible, going against the current.” Molly contextualized this for other communities fleeing persecution, poverty, violence, climate change, and conditions engendered by American policy without access to these same resources. She explained, “sometimes there are just no legal avenues open to you. And then – when it's about your survival...” immigrants have no viable options.

Similarly, Dana navigated United States policy as a climate refugee with ethnically and racially mixed parents. She characterized American immigration as a “machine” which operates on rational, removed, and highly regimented structures to define and conceive of personhood. She argues that, because they remove individuals from their unique, often distressed circumstances with simplified ‘black and white’ or ‘legal and illegal’ legislative rhetoric, such systems are incapable of acknowledging the humanity of immigrants and fail to consider their reasons for moving. Dana recounts, “it's not because they necessarily want to, leave their home. They are forced out” due to a variety of larger economic, political, social, and environmental factors. Charlie exemplifies this mechanical imagery through his description of immigration as an *industry* or enterprise which exploits the vulnerabilities and unstable conditions of folks without government-prescribed status. In recounting “private prisons,” “telecom...companies,” and the sponsoring of a “transportation business” for immigration detention centers, he argues that the United States government responds to humanitarian crises by amplifying capitalistic interests and generating tremendous profits. He exclaims, “they’re making *billions* and *billions* of dollars. On the costs of – uh, family separation. People – dying.” Here, Charlie embodies the transactional nature of the American immigration system and its ability to cloud violence and abuse with economic reward. He judges that immigration policy is “a pot of gold for politicians”

because it offers opportunities for corporate connection, gains the favor of powerful or wealthy constituents, and capitalizes on national polarization to justify the incarceration and criminalization of immigrants. Although he concluded with messages of hope and trust in religious authority, Charlie's extensive personal and pastoral accounts reinforced the presence of structural subjugation and violence in immigration processes.

The coalescence of political polarization, dehumanizing rhetoric, complicated legal proceedings, extensive timelines for document processing, corporate responses to human crises, and national policy produces a destitute and restrictive reality for communities immigrating to the United States. Through both first and second-hand accounts, my participants voiced how the nation's immigration system not only endangers lives, but also creates and reinforces social hierarchies, dehumanizes marginalized populations, and sponsors exploitation. In their efforts to serve immigrants and migrant laborers in northeast Ohio, FBOs witness the local implications of these structural dynamics and work to demystify misconceptions about this "broken system" – normalizing not dialogues of hate, but those of flexibility, agency, and understanding.

Church Complicity

Amid these discussions, my participants held firm convictions about the legacies of structural violence and the government's role in perpetuating injustice. However, a few did so with an acknowledgment of the complicity by which their churches and respective organizations engaged with these dynamics, particularly through racism and brutality against Indigenous communities across North America. For example, Louis delineated the history of his faith tradition and explained how congregations enacted violence through the founding of Christian boarding schools, whereby missionaries abused generations of populations, forcibly imposed religious doctrines, and sponsored intergenerational cultural erasure of Native American

populations. Alongside acts of discrimination against immigrants and people of color, he asserted that organizations must examine their "institutional realities" and act on the power dynamics present between church, state, and "the racism or inequality, [that] has occurred in our religious institutions, throughout history." He explained how "privilege and power" are "still present" not only in the American immigration system, but also inside spaces of worship, decision making, and service; they are as deeply involved and connected to systems of structural injustice as the government, both nationally and internationally, and cannot be so quickly removed or freed from these heritages of hostility.

This centuries-long complicity confronts current FBOs with tremendous responsibility as they critically evaluate their pasts and struggle to identify ways of moving forward – repairing, if at all possible, some of these harms. My participants did not attempt to possess a comprehensive solution, but did discuss efforts to develop reflexive environments and analyze their accountability. Louis suggested that "we need to lament and try to... seek restoration" with both outward *and* inward reflection followed by advocacy and support – accompanying personal recognition with local, immediate, and tangible action. Dave similarly considered his FBO's participation in injustice and contemplated potential avenues for his congregation, stating:

> In terms of racial, what do you call it, reconciliation? Advocacy, learning? Getting in touch with? You know, healing? Getting over? What-right? Mix in all of those, all together, right. Uh. We have spent, uh, the last year, looking at a number of things, in terms of learning, ourselves. Sunday school groups have, have done book studies into history to, try and, trace the church's complicity and all- in, in all the madness. Uh – we've done a lot of, examination about power? In terms of the teaching of the Church.

> Uh, and – and trying to identify, and, and observe where churches, where people have misunderstood power-the power of God that we hold. Uh, and how to apply that.

Similarly, the pastor recognized power dynamics exercised in religious institutions and embodied the deeply complicated, cruel histories of misuse with his language – is it possible for one to "get over" the "madness" of cultural genocide or centuries of racism? While he does not claim an answer, Dave reiterates the work required of congregants to acknowledge these systems of privilege in their past and current lives – a recognition mentioned by only three participants in my study – and build fellowship through demonstrations of hospitality across ideological, demographic, or theological differences. As institutions situated in the social, political, and economic structures of the United States, FBOs operate within systems of discrimination and carry legacies of trauma and violence. Such an acknowledgement provides opportunities for religious institutions to deconstruct power relations, but whether or not congregations respond to these dynamics will determine their ability to ameliorate inequalities within their own communities. Overall, we are all entangled in webs of capitalism, violence, political tension, and inequity. If American structures continue to rely on these interconnected injustices to reassert privilege and exclusion, the work of FBOs may never be complete.

Conclusion

My participants relayed their experiences during an unprecedented time as actors involved in immigration justice. They navigated internal dialogues, created and challenged definitions of community, and outlined their service efforts in a range of geographical arenas. Externally, FBOs navigated tension and fear, utilized framing strategies to approach unaware or unsympathetic populations, and committed to acts of educational and physical engagement. These negotiations occurred in the context of structural violence, whereby they expressed

frustration with political barriers, governments actors, a complicated and dehumanizing immigration "system," and their own complicity in these interconnected, multifaceted injustices. They also did this work within a global health crisis and unparalleled polarization in the United States, communicating their primary reflections in these situations *and more* as organizations grounded in, and increasingly critical of, their respective faith traditions.

And yet, my participants persist. Their organizations, volunteers, newfound friends, and service attendees collectively fight back – they demonstrate extraordinary resilience and commitment and continue to develop creative solutions despite the structural violence perpetuating unjust circumstances. In response to the pandemic, churches live-streamed worship services and prayer. FBOs held drive-through fundraisers and to-go community meals. Nonprofit agencies sponsored GoFundMe accounts and spread justice-oriented messages on social media and their websites. Agencies raised funds for wi-fi and cable payments and found employment opportunities for immigrants whose jobs had been indefinitely suspended. Immigrants volunteered their resources to bolster program outreach, their time to connect friends with services, and their skills to refurnish building spaces and communicate with the greater community. In response to political barriers, members listened across difference and provided physical space to host dialogues and facilitate complex conversations. Others led by example and offered support and attention to their neighbors during times of struggle. Congregations protested, advocated, and searched for new avenues of assistance and relationship building by tending to peoples' actual needs – and they will continue to do all of these things. The faith leaders, educators, activists, and public figures in my study did not present their FBOs as faultless models of immigration justice; rather, they acted reflexively on their positionalities and participation in structural violence, accompanied efforts to inform the community with work to

educate themselves, and acknowledged ongoing capacities to learn, demonstrate kindness, and experience their own journeys of spiritual and personal growth.

In establishing these extensive networks of support, personal and professional relationships, and outreach efforts, the FBOs in my study actively sought to build community and overcome systemic barriers in their work. However, while their efforts appear quite similar, what distinguishes my participants from other Non-Governmental Organizations and secular agencies is the fundamental role of religiosity in fueling their social justice efforts. My participants may hold academic, personal, or professional stakes, but such motivators were *always* accompanied by theology in some capacity. Through "the grace of God" and "faith communities" and the "image of God," and in demonstrating "God's love for others" or in seeing it "overflow" and "spill out of our lives on others," and "showing hospitality to the immigrant or the 'stranger,'" the FBOs in my study illustrated their faiths as fluid, ongoing commitments – a *lifestyle* to be practiced daily. They seamlessly incorporated this rhetoric into our discussions – not purely in religious frames or appeals to external communities – because it informed their reactions to injustice, strategies for program development, and passion for engaging in this kind of work. Given that not all churches take on immigration or social justice advocacy efforts, what distinguishes these FBOs is how they *conceptualize* and *enact* their religiosity as an agent of service and regional change.

In manifestations of their spiritual missions, my participants embodied forms of theological and theoretical conceptions. For instance, they rearticulated notions of 'host' and 'guest' populations, but enhanced these understandings through a lived hospitality whereby FBOs 'welcomed the stranger' through mutual engagements. Rather than view justice as an act of unconditional giving, FBOs and immigrant populations demonstrated ongoing contributions,

expanded personal perspectives, and worked to surmount political and social barriers through an embrace of identities and diverse life experiences. These results make tangible the power of language and recognition in nurturing communities of inclusivity, wholeness, and flexibility, yet also accept the inevitability of disagreement so long as it is productively utilized to bolster healthier practices of fellowship. Here, my participants exhibited how the multiplicity of perspectives brought forth tension and posed challenges to action or decision-making, but such circumstances did not have to serve as permanent obstacles. Rather, their FBOs' efforts to overcome friction provided opportunities to enhance negotiation and listening – skills which they later employed to bolster community events, prepare for external dialogues, and authentically and realistically manage the needs of their members alongside the realities of the greater area.

Retrospectively, what FBOs *do* with their religiosity and language and bodies and multiplicity became the subject of importance in my study. My participants not only reflected on the political, theological, social, and lived contexts of their operations, but also critiqued society, themselves, and their communities for the ways we navigate 'difference.' Immigration is not a binary system, nor is religion; each respectively and collectively carries characteristics of complexity, nuance, tension, fear, love, violence, mobilization, frustration, protest, and hope for better ways of seeing and being in the world. Rather than disregard structural inequalities out of anxiety, ignorance, or complicity, my participants demonstrated that individuals are capable of contributing to their communities in positive and productive ways. Organizations can meaningfully analyze their roles in unjust systems and remove labels of 'stranger' from immigrant populations. Leaders can build problem-solving, listening, critical thinking, and conversational skills, and engage with their immediate and distant neighbors to grow together. Cohesion and solidarity begin with how we define such terms, and reconciling these realities will

provide organizations with the opportunity to cultivate communities that are fuller, richer, always messy, and most certainly vibrant.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Humans are social, relational beings. We are interdependent, inextricably linked, and reliant in the sense that every single act or legislative change or wage dollar decrease impacts another person in some direct or indirect capacity. How, for example, when a new policy reallocates funds or removes public services, one individual receives a higher paycheck while another loses their apartment. How, when someone passes through any given city in northeast Ohio, they will likely spot a dozen churches and a collective book of fliers, pamphlets, signs, event listings, and posters from local agencies offering resources the government no longer provides. And how, when people establish networks of support and love, they redefine conceptions of personal worth and become agents of change in their own lives as well as the lives of others. This project taught me many things about myself and about community, but my most prevalent takeaway is that our lives are deeply, wholly, inescapably connected, and there is no doubt this includes the systematic injustices that prevail in the United States and impact the rest of the world.

I am not a religious person. I was raised in the Catholic Church and completed the sacraments, but time and distance from these spaces led me to critically analyze the role of spirituality in our current society – how it may be used to heal, mobilize bodies and resources, justify hate or exclusion, assert power and subjugate populations, or provide a plate of food for people seeking an ounce of stability, kindness, or both. Thus, my study does not attempt to declare the superiority of faith traditions or glorify images of religiously driven service; rather, I sought to understand how actors applied their religious convictions to immigration injustice and structural violence. I investigated FBOs in particular because of their overwhelming presence in northeast Ohio and, after dynamic reductions in social support, witnessed their increasing

attempts to fill the vacuum left by government inattention. They carry much of the burden to supplement lacking services, and I wanted to know why, how, and for whom FBOs committed to this work.

Additionally, my aforementioned internship experiences with community organizers reconstructed my previous conceptions of service and expanded my limited observations of religiosity in practice, further guiding my interests in faith-based work. I have always been fascinated by community formation and hold sincere, deeply personal convictions in its power to foster unabridged vitality and vibrancy – particularly in newfound experiences of acceptance, or when people rediscover meaning in their lives and find it in each other. I frequently find myself thinking about the United States' polarization and how we, as a populous, choose to draw distinctions or embrace new ways of thinking to spite them. Thus, my research question blended, quite beautifully, three transformative subjects in my life: the building and defining of community, local social justice initiatives, and questions about religiosity and whether/how communities enact their beliefs.

This journey led me through a series of weekly existential crises where I toggled ideas yet never declared a concrete, singular objective (or, perhaps, was unwilling to do so because of this subject's utter complexity). I did, however, possess in my mind a reservoir of questions and met brilliant individuals who were willing to share their experiences with me. They guided me through scores of topics duly requiring anthologies of attention, but in the interest of time and feasibility, I chose to reflect upon those which most related to concepts of relationship-building in proximity to polarized, tense, or hostile conditions. Of course, religiosity served as an integral framework for immigration justice dialogues. Whether it be through personal motivations or as a means of encouraging others, my participants engaged with an array of spiritually driven acts,

citations of scripture and various biblical teachings, interfaith partnerships, and intercultural and cross-faith collaborations to ground the work of their agencies. The intersection of these primary figures with a largely invisible immigrant labor force in the region provided a new perspective for research of this nature: a small insight into the experiences of immigrant communities in northeast Ohio, of which little information is known, and the primary locations by which these groups engage with the rest of the community.

As I reflect on the connections between existing literature and my own results, I noticed the presence of several themes and their lived applications in this context. Along with the number and type of efforts with which their FBOs engaged, my participants communicated the importance of community development and providing opportunities for fellowship. Despite very challenging and, at times, hopeless encounters, they chose to pursue these initiatives because of their religious traditions, moral ideologies, and greater belief in humanity; they held the conviction that people deserve love and care, and their communities of faith possessed the resources, skills, and passion to create those kinds of spaces for others. Notably, this sense of 'community' incorporated specific language found in both theoretical and theological work: conceptions of the 'stranger' and 'hospitality.' Definitions of the stranger remained similar throughout – a figure on the outside of the society or social situation who does not share characteristics in identity, origin, belief, culture, etc. with the residing population. In response, FBOs demonstrated acts of hospitality through meal preparation, providing Sanctuary, fundraising, education, 'on-the-ground' action, and a host of community events and worship services. They rooted these activities in notions of human dignity, biblical stories of sacred figures, and assertions of what a just, healthy life requires, and further opened the term's

umbrella to include individuals rendered invisible or hidden due to the nature of their occupations and legal statuses.

While many FBOs shared ideologies and social support techniques to bolster community formation, they held differing relationships with external audiences and applied notions of hospitality in accordance with these experiences. For instance, those working directly with immigrants employed language of 'acceptance' and 'welcome' to demonstrate concern for individual well-being alongside their goals for organizational transformation. However, institutions who provided indirect services often used terms like 'integration' and 'tolerance' in their descriptions of social justice efforts. While such ideals are still important, they suggest that hospitality is enacted and defined based on the relationships between agencies and the populations they serve – for some, this involves belonging, trust, and intimacy, while others are further removed in their approaches. Additionally, my participants imparted a unique appreciation of the stranger's *participation* in relation to this 'host' and 'guest' relationship, specifically when immigrants and other folks on the margins shared their perspectives, talents, ideas, and time in return. These experiences illuminated an exchange of generosity which not only benefited both parties, but also fostered understanding and growth among seemingly different people. Through these acts, my participants implied a sense of longevity and agency; 'strangers' were not just victims of structural violence and inequality, but became consistent, valued members of their communities who critiqued the systems they entered and challenged FBOs to revolutionize their perspectives. In engaging with these agencies, immigrants and 'othered' populations enhanced and redefined 'host' conceptions of community and consistently strengthened institutions through these contributions. Here, my study not only reiterates the presence of 'stranger' and 'hospitality' dialogues in faith communities, but further complicates

binary distinctions of *giving* and *receiving*. Such conceptions involve a larger web of social interaction carrying nuance, resistance, and change, and celebrate the mutuality of actors involved in these initiatives.

As I review everything I have recorded, written, synthesized, and summarized, I find myself in shock of how much was left *unsaid* due to the time and resource limitations of my study. My participants provided additional insights regarding conceptions of diversity; the value of interfaith and intercommunity partnerships; understanding the selectivity of church engagement with justice efforts; the impact of 'mission' trips and intricacies of continued versus surface-level travel; legal proceedings and local government interactions; the positions of employees themselves; and potential scenarios of burnout or hopelessness in FBOs and nonprofit organizations. This area of research would benefit from a more comprehensive demographic analysis of immigrant communities performing hidden labor in the American Midwest, as well as case studies of dialogues between and within churches negotiating political and theological tension. In future studies, individuals could pursue dialogues with a wider scope of faith leaders, including those who do not advertise or practice immigration justice as part of their religious lives. An application of these techniques to other regions across the United States would prove fruitful in expanding information regarding local social dynamics and the influence of faith institutions on a broader scale. Additionally, if researchers possess the appropriate resources and relationships to do so ethically and collaboratively, speaking to immigrants directly about their experiences with churches or other religious actors will clarify the responsibilities of service agencies in this regard. FBOs serve important roles in northeast Ohio to support populations otherwise abandoned by government actors, and they operate within intricate local, state, federal, and global networks. The complicated structural dynamics of these subjects provides limitless

avenues to collaborate with faith leaders, immigrants, and community actors in their efforts to ameliorate injustice.

Overall, the FBOs in my study surmounted a tremendous number of challenges in their social justice work and acknowledged responsibilities to grow, learn, educate, and act. Time and time again, they provided individuals with the space to be the messiest, fullest versions of themselves and actively demonstrated creativity and brilliance in their missions to support themselves and one another. They do so imperfectly, but with fervor and commitment to deconstruct the systemic problems permeating their personal and professional endeavors. They remind audiences that, at the end of the day, people are simply... people. We all share the same basic needs, the same humanness, the same hunger. We all fear. We are capable of love and fellowship. Regardless of status, regardless of identity, regardless of life experience, we imagine better worlds and hope for our own futures (whatever that might mean). We all dream. We all seek recognition and wish to be heard. We can be that bridge for other people – a shared cup of coffee, an invitation to dinner, a handcrafted wooden cabinet – and they can be that bridge for us, too.

Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. How did you first get involved with your organization? What brought you there? Why a religious institution as opposed to a secular one?

2. Can you describe the role of the immigrant or migrant labor community in northeast Ohio? Are they present? Are permanent residents aware of this population and their nearby work?

3. I noticed several outreach opportunities on your website. What kinds of services does your church specifically provide? Who leads these services, and what members of the church community are involved?

4. What does your leadership structure look like? Are immigrants involved in this leadership or decision-making processes in any way?

5. How do you connect with members of the immigrant community? For example, is it mostly by word of mouth or through a particular platform?

6. Describe your relationship with Latin American immigrants. Are there any barriers that prevent immigrants from attending the services your organization provides? How do you respond to them?

7. I'd like to shift the lens of your work for a moment towards the larger system of immigration in the United States.
    a. Do you have conversations with the broader community about immigration? What do these dialogues look like? Do you face any challenges when having these conversations?
    b. What about internally? Are there differing attitudes within your congregation? How do you navigate tension? Do you have any strategies to overcome it?

8. Can you think of moments where your organization's stance on immigration justice conflicted with widespread national attitudes? Have government policies or officials made your work easier or more difficult in any way?
    a. How does your church operate within the larger structural network of immigration services?

9. How does your agency portray this population to the area? What kind of language do you use when trying to gain the support of particular demographics or institutions?

10. 'Framing' is a strategy that many institutions use to present an idea or issue to various audiences. Can you think of a time when you either observed this or utilized the strategy yourself?
    a. Do you use religious groundings in this framing, like quoting scripture or biblical teachings? How important is this language?

11. Can you provide a description of a positive experience with a client or community member? Did this instance spur any future connections or friendships?

12. Have you found any partnerships to be especially meaningful, either with individuals, other churches, or nonprofit agencies with similar missions?

13. Can you share a time when your congregation best embodied community?

References

Ahn, I. (2017). Proclaiming the jubilee year for undocumented migrants: Anti-immigration biopolitics and a Christian theopolitical response. *Political Theology*, *18*(3), 249–268. https://doi.org/10.1179/1462317X15Z.000000000177

Babis, D. (2016). Understanding diversity in the phenomenon of immigrant organizations: A comprehensive framework. *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, *17*(2), 355–369. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12134-014-0405-x

Bruce, T. C. (2006). Contested accommodation on the meso level: Discursive adaptation within Catholic Charities' Immigration and Refugee Services. *American Behavioral Scientist*, *49*(11), 1489–1508. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764206288460

Carvalho, H., & Chamberlen, A. (2018). Why punishment pleases: Punitive feelings in a world of hostile solidarity. Punishment & Society, 20(2), 217–34.

Cause IQ. (2022). *Ohio religious organizations*. Retrieved March 1, 2022, from www.causeiq.com/directory/religious-organizations-list/ohio-state/

Derrida, J. (2000). *Of hospitality* (R. Bowlby, Trans.). Stanford University Press. (Original work published 1997)

Doerfler, M. E. (2019). Gone but not forgotten? Retrieving the Migrant in late antiquity. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *87*(4), 1153–1177. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfz044

Durkheim, E. (1984). *The division of labor in society*. The Free Press.

Godfrey, M. C. (2020). "Much suffering among Mexicans": Migrant workers in Idaho and the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company, 1917-1921. *Agricultural History*, *94*(4), 600–628. https://doi.org/10.3098/ah.2020.094.4.600

Hollenbach, D. (2020). Welcoming refugees and migrants: Catholic narratives and the challenge of inclusion. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *690*(1), 153–167. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716220936608

Jordan, M. (2017, June 19). Welcome for migrants reveals a farm town rift. *New York Times*, A1–A13.

Joselit, J. W. (2008). *Parade of faiths: Immigration and American religion*. Oxford University Press.

Kerwin, D., & Nicholson, M. (2019). The effects of immigration enforcement on Faith-Based Organizations: An analysis of the FEER Survey. *Journal on Migration and Human Security*, *7*(2), 42–51. https://doi.org/10.1177/2331502419854103

Khan, R. B., Bhatti, M. N., & Mustafa, G. (2021). Understanding of Mexican migration to the United States: Rifts and challenges. *Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, *8*(1), 72–82. https://doi.org/10.46662/jass-vol8-iss1-2021(72-82)

May, W. F. (2011). Keeping covenant with immigrants and undocumented workers. In *Testing the National Covenant* (pp. 121–138). Georgetown University Press. https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2tt5c6.11

McCarty, D. A. (2012). The works of mercy at a Catholic Worker House: Combining Catholic social teachings with social work practice. *Social Work & Christianity*, *39*(3), 327–339.

Morrissey, M. (1999). Serving farm workers, serving farmers: Migrant social services in northwest Ohio. *Aztlán: Journal of Chicano Studies*, *24*(2), 95–118.

Patton, W., & Lier, P. v. (2020, August 26). *Cuts, costs and CARES Act funds*. Policy Matters Ohio. www.policymattersohio.org/research-policy/shared-prosperity-thriving-ohioans/basic-needs-unemployment-insurance/basic-needs/cuts-costs-and-cares-act-funds

Pew Research Center. (2013, May 17). *The religious affiliation of U.S. immigrants: Majority Christian, rising share of other faiths*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pew forum.org/2013/05/17/the-religious-affiliation-of-us-immigrants/

Simmel, G. (1950). *The sociology of Georg Simmel*. (K. Wolff, Trans.) Free Press. (Original work published 1908)

Tirres, C. D., & Schikore, M. C. (2020). Faith in action and community engagement: Realizing mission through immersion experiences. *Christian Higher Education*, *19*(1–2), 91–108. https://doi.org/10.1080/15363759.2019.1689199

Tyner, J.A. (2002). Geographics of identity: the migrant experiences of Filipinas in Northeast Ohio. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, *43*(3) 311–326. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8373.00179

Williams, P. W. (2015). *America's religions: From their origins to the twenty-first century* (Fourth Edition). University of Illinois Press.

Zorita, P. M.-B. (2017). Social work professional identity and Catholic identity: A critical exploration of the source of conflicts. *Social Work & Christianity*, *44*(3), 115–134.