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# Lost in Translation?

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*The Role of Religious Leaders in  
Mobilizing their Memberships in  
an Interfaith Context for Social  
Justice*

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary .....	3
INTRODUCTION .....	4
Chapter 1 .....	
HISTORY OF FAITH BASED ORGANIZING IN U.S. & LOS ANGELES .....	
Description .....	6
Challenges .....	7
Success .....	8
HISTORY OF CHURCHES, MOSQUES & SYNAGOGUES.....	10
Chapter 2 .....	
BACKGROUND OF CLUE L.A. ....	
Origins & Purpose .....	14
Mission .....	14
PROJECT VS. POWER BASED ORGANIZING .....	15
CHALLENGES TO ORGANIZING .....	17
Chapter 3 .....	
METHODOLOGY .....	19
LIMITATIONS .....	20
Chapter 4 .....	
MODELS OF ORGANIZING.....	
Financial Empowerment Through Congregations .....	21
Empowering Communities Through Actions and Protests.....	24
<i>Values-Based Organizing Model</i> .....	27
Neighborhood Partnerships .....	29
Political Organizing from the Pulpit.....	31
GENERAL THEMES.....	33
Chapter 5 .....	
RECOMMENDATIONS.....	35
Chapter 6 .....	
CONCLUSION .....	38
Bibliography .....	39

## I. Executive Summary

In this paper I will address one of the remedies to a nation that is filled with inequality, injustice, and oppression. The gap between the wealthy and the poor of our nation is widening at exorbitant rates<sup>1</sup>. Public schools are funded less than prisons in the state of California<sup>2</sup>. Peaceful protestors are raided with armies of police officers in order to break up their democratic congregation<sup>3</sup>. In this world there are communities who need to be organized. In this world there are needs that need to be met in those communities. One of the categories of people who do this type of work is community organizers. Community organizing is the relationship between empowerment and power based on research in community organizing contexts. It is the manifestation of social power at individual, organizational, and community levels<sup>4</sup>. In this paper the term empowerment will refer to enabling historically disenfranchised peoples to see the power: political, economic, and transformative in nature that they hold in their hands. This power is not achieved on an individual level but when communities come together. The job of the community organizer is to come into a community and learn from them what their needs are in order to help facilitate the process in which they will meet those needs for themselves<sup>5</sup>.

The work of a community organizer can be exhausting in many ways and forms. In this piece I will be looking at a particular type of community organizer, those who are leader's in particular religious traditions. In particular I will be looking at these leaders who organize across religious lines in an effort to be more effective in their work. This type of organizing can be difficult for many different reasons one of them being because of the issue of translation.

Translation refers to taking what happens in the interfaith context and relating it back to specific

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<sup>1</sup> Blow, "America's Exploding Pipe Dream."

<sup>2</sup> Steinhauer, "Schwarzenegger Seeks Shift From Prisons to Schools."

<sup>3</sup> Lopez, "Scores of Occupy L.A. Protesters Are Released from Jail."

<sup>4</sup> Speer and Hughey, "Community Organizing: An Ecological Route to Empowerment and Power."

<sup>5</sup> Arisman, "Alinsky for Teacher Organizers."

religious, cultural, and socioeconomic bases. This paper will explore the challenges in translation and how specific leaders deal with those challenges. Through interviews with Christian Pastors, Jewish Rabbis, and Muslim Imams I will find out the answer to the questions surrounding translations in the interfaith social justice realm.

## II. Introduction

In this paper I will be looking at the way in which religious leaders addressing issues of social injustice in an interfaith context translate this work back into their respective traditions. My interest in this topic emanates from my future place in this world. In the near future I will be attending Divinity school with plans to end up as a pastor in an inner-city church. My faith and my pursuit of a theological degree do not mean however that I plan to discard the gift of the education I have been given through UEP. This project is the beginning of a lifelong intersection between faith and social responsibility. My project will allow me to view the landscape of this intersection in Los Angeles; where it is happening, what it looks like, where is it not happening, and why not. I plan to address issues not only in my congregation but the neighborhood, community, and city the church is located in.

One of the most effective ways to do this type of work is through coalition building and across religious traditions<sup>6</sup>. Although this type of work is effective it is also difficult. What makes it difficult is that there is a level of difference that has to be overcome by people from various groups. Their willingness to enter into this space does not mean that it makes the work any easier. In addition to this basic level of work that needs to be done leaders then have to enter back into their home spheres and relate what they have learned back to their home congregations. In memberships with different theologies, cultural norms, and socioeconomic statuses make

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<sup>6</sup> Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*.

social justice look different for different groups. The religious leader's job is to take campaigns and make it accessible for her membership.

The way to explore this in Los Angeles I decided to look at a faith based community organizing group that does interfaith work. Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice Los Angeles (CLUE LA) is the group that I am working with for the project. This one central place allows me to look at the infrastructure of the organization as well as interview religious leaders who are currently working with each other or have worked together in the past. I will be able to ask these leaders questions about their experience working in an interfaith group. Furthermore the organization itself and their directors will give me a different perspective on this work as they are the ones who organize the leaders themselves.

### III. Chapter 1 / A History of Faith-Based Organizing in US and Los Angeles Description

Faith based organizing has always been important to the American landscape. The marriage between organizing and religious institutions has always seemed logical. There are many synergies that come out of this symbiotic relationship. Religious institutions have a critical mass of people from communities that often would not congregate in other places<sup>7</sup>. Recent numbers say that 83 percent of Americans claim to belong to a religious denomination, 40 percent claim to attend services nearly every week or more, and 58 percent claim to pray at least weekly<sup>8</sup>. This number of people who may not consider themselves to be particularly religious but have some type of tie to a religious institution is important because they provide a base of individuals from whom community organizers can pull as they organize communities and neighborhoods.

In a recent joint effort by the Dubai and Harvard schools of government the link between mosque involvement and level of civic engagement was made. In what was called Muslim American Public Opinion Survey, or Mapos, Islamic teachings were explored and their compatibility with the American political system. The empirical findings suggest that an association exists between higher levels of involvement in mosque-related activities, and participation in American politics. Mosques serve as important religious institutions that are no different than churches and synagogues in the communities they are located. Many religious institutions like mosques have been proven to be associated with a higher level of civic engagement, and to contribute greatly in creating a more informed citizenry. Muslims residing in

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<sup>7</sup> Bobo, *Organizing For Social Change*.

<sup>8</sup> Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*.

the US, with relatively higher levels of religiosity, tend to believe that Islam is compatible with the American political system<sup>9</sup>.

Religious institutions such as these not only provide people but they give organizers an already established infrastructure into which they can walk into to do their work<sup>10</sup>. This is important because in organizing work what can be difficult is finding the community members that you need in order to get a campaign going. The door knocking and one-on-one meetings that are pillars in the community organizing field can be tedious and in large communities quite infeasible. The religious institution serves as a hub of potential leaders and members.

Resources are also really important additions that religious institutions bring to the organizing effort. Their additions have been both traditional such as financial support but also nontraditional such building space, buses, and office equipment. Religious institutions have been utilized because many of the values of justice, charity, and community emanate from a religious context. The people in these spaces openly engage in conversation about how they can embody such values. Finally, religious institutions have also been valuable because of the diversity that resides in them. Many religious institutions are themselves quite segregated and serve specific communities. Nevertheless organized religion remains one of the main places people of different hues, cultures, socio-economic statuses and educational backgrounds all go to<sup>11</sup>.

## Challenges

This is not to suggest that this union is perfect and is not without obstacles. Three obstacles that often come up in a faith based organizing context are differences in issues, style, and overworked staff<sup>12</sup>. Different institutions will have unique concerns that are important to

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<sup>9</sup> Barreto, *National Survey of American Muslims Finds Mosques Help Muslims Integrate in American Political Life*.

<sup>10</sup> Bobo, *Organizing For Social Change*.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

their groups and their specific contexts. What can be difficult in organizing in these institutions especially in an interfaith context is that what may be important to one church or mosque may not be what is important to another synagogue. The same intersections that make these institutions such a powerful group to pull form and to organize make them a potential nightmare. Another potential obstacle would be the multivariate styles that demographics have. Groups have idiosyncrasies that define their language, dress, and behavior. These unique characteristics must be taken into consideration when dealing with a religious organization because it changes the way that one approaches, interacts, and strategizes with them as well. Finally another obstacle that often comes into play when working with religious organizations is an overworked staff<sup>13</sup>. The staffs at many congregations are not working on a typical eight hour work day. Parishioners many times expect their pastoral teams to be present with them in emergency situations as well as tending to the financial, administrative, and spiritual life of the church, synagogue, or mosque. This type of responsibility coupled with the social needs of the community often leaves leaders depleted and unable to support campaigns for the amelioration of communities. This means that faith based organizers have had to think hard about suggest simple ways the congregation can be involved that do not rely upon already overworked personnel, but rather through these leaders identify members who can contribute to the movement.

## Success

The reality of these difficulties has not hindered the success of many faith based organizing efforts. In the 1960's the young Black Christian leadership led the South in a fight over civil rights that produced national icons like Rev. Dr. Martin King Jr., Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth, and Congressman John Lewis<sup>14</sup>. The early 90's saw civil unrest that was a dry out

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> McRoberts, "Black Churches, Community, and Development."



to the oppressive system of privilege that trickled down inequity and injustice instead of jobs and civil right to Black and Brown communities in South Central Los Angeles. The cries were not answered by the entities that had through discriminatory practices over decades had brought the community to their knees but they were instead answered by religious communities. Organizers teamed up with churches and they organized themselves into demanding what they needed to survive<sup>15</sup>.

Chicago has long been a hub for cultural, intellectual, and religious innovation. It is no surprise then that it also the home of many community organizing establishments. Interfaith Worker Justice is a network of people of faith that “...educate, organize, and mobilize the religious community in the United States on issues and campaigns that will improve wages, benefits, and conditions for workers, and give voice to workers, especially workers in low-wage jobs<sup>16</sup>.” The work that they do and the impetus behind it are their religious values. In 2006 the Workers Interfaith Network (WIN), an offshoot of Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ), put forth a campaign to pass a city wide living wage bill ensuring that city workers were paid \$10.21 an hour with benefits or \$12.56 an hour without these benefits.

The Gamaliel network another group based out of Chicago is rooted in faith based activism. Their mission is three pronged. First they aim to assist local community leaders to create, maintain and expand independent organizations that will impact policy. Their emphasis is not staying in communities and doing the work for them but rather providing the infrastructure for these leaders to exist and sustain these new organizations after they have been started. Secondly they aim to support these start-up organizations with leadership training, and development. Coupled with this are the necessary tools needed to analyze the issues social

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<sup>15</sup> Stammer, “Churches Hear Cry of Inner City.”

<sup>16</sup> Justice, “Mission & Vision.”

justice through research. Finally the group matches and connects these groups together. What is then formed is a network for mutual learning environments and working coalitions where Gamaliel sits a central hub<sup>17</sup>.

One of these affiliate organizations Pittsburgh Interfaith Impact Network (PIIN) got over \$300 million dollars put towards the Pennsylvania mass transit system after pressuring former Governor Ed Rendell. A similar group in Minneapolis-St-Paul did the same for transportation efforts getting the state to adopt a constitutional amendment that now funnels a portion of the state's motor vehicle state tax into funding for transit. The amount impressively has grown from \$24 to \$120 million<sup>18</sup>. In low-income communities where access to a vehicle may not be feasible they depend on mass transportation in major cities. These organizations dedicated their time to ameliorating these services for these often forgotten and invisible citizens who depend on clean, reliable service to get to work, their families, and other everyday destinations.

### **History of mosques, synagogues and churches**

The Islamic Shura Council of Southern California assists Muslim organizations in serving the Muslim community and the society-at-large. They provide advocates on behalf of their member organizations. Additionally they foster leadership development among both clergy and mosque members. In 2009 the council participated in the first Annual South Los Angeles Health and Human Rights Conference. From there they were able to inform their membership mosques of the 8.5 liquor stores per square mile compared to 0.10 large-scale supermarkets per square-mile in South Los Angeles. This health and human right violation prompted the council to get members to join the signing of the health and human rights declaration.

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<sup>17</sup> Foundation, "About Us."

<sup>18</sup> Bobo, *Organizing For Social Change*.

More recently the Council led a group of Islamic centers and mosques in a class action lawsuit against the FBI. Judge Carney's ruling is the latest development in what is called the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act). The lawsuit filed by the American Civil Liberties Union, Southern California (ACLU/SC) on behalf of 11 Muslim American leaders and community groups was in order to obtain records of surveillance and investigations conducted by the FBI of them and their organizations since 2001. The FOIA request was filed over five years ago, but only four edited pages of documents were turned over by the FBI. The request was made after several prominent Muslim community leaders became concerned that the FBI has monitored them merely for practicing their religion. In September 2007, the ACLU/SC filed suit against the FBI alleging that the government's incomplete and long delayed response violated the Act<sup>19</sup>. On November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011 the Shura Council and their fellow partners won a decision that stated that the withholding of the information was illegal. Legal fees were awarded to the group. Perhaps even more important is the evidence that organized faith based groups like mosques are dealing with new prevalent issues even today such as Islamophobia.

Michael Walzer's *Exodus and Revolution* does a good job of making the connection between Judaism's theology, history, and the real need for Jewish communities to engage the needs of their communities<sup>20</sup>. One the ways to make this connection is by using the story of the Exodus<sup>21</sup>. The story is that of Moses leading the Israelite slaves out of Egypt out of the tyrannical hands of Pharaoh. The reason why this is such a powerful link to make for Jews is that it cements the idea of remembrance that is so prevalent in the faith. The Passover is a celebration of the last plague that God sends, in the Hebrew tradition of their emancipation that makes the Egyptians want to free the Israelites. The Passover is celebrated every year in synagogues and homes all

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<sup>19</sup> Carney, *Islamic Shura Council of Southern California Et Al. Vs. Federal Bureau of Investigation Et Al.*

<sup>20</sup> Walzer, *Exodus And Revolution.*

<sup>21</sup> Finfer, "Organizing in the Jewish Community."

over America because in remembering the history from which they come Jews are reminded of how far they have been taken. The use of the Exodus story has helped Jewish communities and synagogues understand their privilege and lens of the world's injustices. Perhaps more important the Exodus story has been an effective tool in coalition building between Jewish and Christian leaders. There can additionally be a special resonance between Jews and African-Americans in use of the Exodus story because the story of freedom from slavery has inspired both groups through histories of oppression. A faith reflection using passages from the Exodus story and questions about where people identify their current "Egypt" or "wandering in the wilderness" or "promised land" can lead to powerful story sharing and connection.

This deep seated understanding in the connection between their faith and social justice has made it so that Jewish coalitions, synagogues, and believers alike participate in faith based organizing. One such group is Jewish Funds for Justice (JFSJ). The group's vision is that in 25 years, Jews and Jewish institutions will partner with other non-Jewish communities for social change. Their belief is that the network of institutional and personal relationships is an indication of the interdependency of community members across racial, religious, and economic lines. The group wants to get to a point where it will be normative for Jewish organizations to work across lines of race and faith. They work so that non-Jews will one day participate in social change efforts led by Jewish organizations<sup>22</sup>. After joining with the Progressive Jewish Alliance (PJA) the group sent out a statement in support of the growing Occupy Wall Street movement that has been spreading throughout the entire nation. In the past PJA and their affiliates supported sweatshop free clothing through organizing events such as "Rags to Righteousness: From the Red Sea to the Red Carpet A Passover celebration of Sweat-Free Fashion"<sup>23</sup>. In addition to this

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<sup>22</sup> Justice, "Our Vision: Progressive Jewish Alliance & Jewish Funds for Justice."

<sup>23</sup> Alliance, "Rags to Righteousness."

in 2008 they researched and compiled an extensive list of sweat free alternatives that featured t-shirt and sweatshirt producers that treat workers fairly.

## IV. Chapter 2/ Background on CLUE

### How CLUE got started and its purpose

CLUE LA began out of a desire that older clergy members had to train up the next generation of social justice leaders whose foundation was faith based. Their idea was to create a network of justice that would expand throughout Los Angeles throughout churches, synagogues, mosques and other religious institutions<sup>24</sup>. In San Diego, Los Angeles, San Jose and the San Francisco Bay Area, clergy from various traditions came together around issues of economic justice. Economics are such an integral part of our society that everything from labor relations, the ever-growing gap between the wealthy and the poor, and the beginnings of the great recession prompted the organization to form.

In November of 2005, representatives of these four areas came together to form Clergy and Laity United for Economic Justice - California (CLUE-CA). The organization "...aims to end low-wage poverty in California by building a faith-rooted movement for economic justice throughout the state..."<sup>25</sup> CLUE understands the power that lies within the faith community and the resources that can be used for this fight against poverty. The vision of CLUE was one where moral leadership would help shape social and political movements<sup>26</sup>. Because this is the case, CLUE has put in place a moral framework for the economic debate, empowering workers, and engaging clergy and congregations in economic justice campaigns.

### What is its mission?

CLUE's mission is to build the capacity of their founding groups by four essential things. The first is to provide mutual support and sharing resources. Secondly, they aim to establish effective statewide collaboration on public policy and corporate campaigns that will then

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<sup>24</sup> Salvatierra, "Background Interview."

<sup>25</sup> LA, "Clue LA."

<sup>26</sup> Salvatierra, "Background Interview."

improve the lived conditions of those who live on the margins of society. Third, CLUE provides hands-on technical assistance, training and capacity-building to emerging interfaith worker justice groups throughout California. Finally the coalition seeds new interfaith worker justice groups in strategically important communities<sup>27</sup>. Reverend Alexia Salvatierra, former executive for CLUE-LA explained in an interview I had with her that the last part of the mission is vital<sup>28</sup>. CLUE identifies talented leaders from the community who can then go into churches, synagogues, mosques, and other institutions and organize within the spaces that religious leaders may not be able to.

### **What type of organizing (project or power based) does CLUE do?**

In their piece “Rowing the Boat with Two Oars” Callahan et. all look at two different types of community-based development. They explore the differences between "power-based" and "project-based" development looking at the benefits and merits of both types. In power based development broad based organizing of large masses of people, developing leaders, and systematic changes are often goals and benchmarks for success. Project based development however is different in that the primary focus are specific services such as "affordable housing, commercial retail development, childcare, job counseling and training, job creation enterprises etc.<sup>29</sup>" There are good things about both of these approaches in achieving change in communities which the article explores. The penultimate conclusion of their research however is that a combination of the two approaches is most effective. The reason why this is important is because project-based endeavors can at times be a reflection of a vision of an institution or of a leader and not an entire community. The things being done “for” the people thus become disconnected from

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<sup>27</sup> LA, “Clue La.”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Callahan et al., *Rowing the Boat with Two Oars*.

local interests. Similarly power-based organizing can seem more talk than concrete goals for communities who do not see the tangible results of organizing for systematic change.

CLUE-LA based on what their mission states is more of a power based organizing group. CLUE is looking to overturn the systems of privilege in places that create an environment of marginalization and oppression. The organizing that they do does not deliver social services. Their impact is felt in the form of court rulings, laws passed, unions formed, and political elections won. This year after a long and arduous battle for the 7-10,000 workers of car washes across Los Angeles, the industry has finally listened to the cries of the people. CLUE LA spent three years organizing alongside the Community Labor Environmental Action Network (CLEAN) Carwash Campaign activists to organize and unite community members, religious and labor leaders, to denounce the countless injustices that the carwash industry has committed. Due to the key partnership they made and the hard work done by the community members the coalition achieved their first union contract<sup>30</sup>.

CLUE organized more than 4,000 Security Officers to win union recognition in 2007 and the signing of their first contract in 2008. The contract raised salaries as much as 40% over five years. For the first time ever these officers and their families had access to health coverage. The religious leaders who organized these officers were organized by CLUE themselves and stood with the officers from their public demonstrations to the bargaining table. In July of the same year, CLUE was involved with sixty thousand grocery workers in Southern California eliminating a two-tier employment system. This meant that workers who were long term and full time had access to health benefits and managerial positions that paid better while their new hire

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<sup>30</sup> LA, "Clue La."



counterparts did not. Through pledges to participate in strategic lockouts of certain stores this system was disbanded<sup>31</sup>.

These types of victories make it so that corporations are court mandated not to discriminate in hiring practices, barriers to income are diminished, and the invisible have a respected seat at the table. It is very different than addressing the symptoms of oppression in our society. Instead of helping the ill paid car washer or cashier finding affordable housing CLUE in addition will find out why they are ill paid to begin with. The target of their energy is then the employer who because of unfair hiring and payment practices is unfairly subjugating their employees. These victories also suggest that CLUE LA is masterful at linking pertinent and talented clergy with specific projects and campaigns. A process I hope to observe more as I work with them in the near future. As I continue to work with CLUE I will see what has proved to be beneficial to their work. I will explore to see whether the group partners with project based organizations to balance out their efforts.

### **Challenges for CLUE Moving Forward**

Although I have yet to see the challenges that CLUE has ahead of them in the LA area in my conversation with Rev. Salvatierra she identified some parts of the CLUE process that brings up challenges for organizers and the leaders of CLUE alike. The first challenge for CLUE is bringing talented clergy from different traditions in one place and having them work out their differences<sup>32</sup>. Their conflicts may be inherited culturally or from indoctrinated teachings but nonetheless they must be worked out when these leaders get to CLUE. Leaders from Islamic, Christian, and Jewish backgrounds are brought together at a table and get to know each other intimately. This space can become contentious at times. It is the process of getting to know each

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Salvatierra, "Background Interview."

other, learning what works for one context and what does not in others, making mistakes and learning from each that makes the space a powerful one but challenging as well.

The second challenge that Rev. Salvatierra identified was that many times leaders who are working in this type of work is that many times they do not understand the limits of community members<sup>33</sup>. Organizers often go into contexts and get frustrated because the institutions and their members are not as active as they would like. Salvatierra believes that this is an incorrect approach to organizing because especially in a faith context you will have some who have the same vision at the same intensity as the organizers and leaders and others will not. To expect the same of everyone is put unnecessary stress on one's self. The challenge then is to meet people where they are and build an effective movement when people, neighborhoods, communities, and institutions are at different levels and all these pieces must work in tandem to achieve justice.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

## V. Chapter 3 / Methodology

### Methodology

When I embarked on the journey of this comprehensive senior project I knew that the most effective way to get the answers to my questions was to be face to face with experts. By experts I mean ministers, rabbis, imams, and faith based organizers who I could look at, question, and be in the presence of. I intentionally sought out leaders who I knew were already involved with organizations like CLUE or ARISE. I started by receiving suggestions from professors and colleagues about who to speak to. I used these initial interviews as a preliminary round of interviews to gain background information about my topic. Once these interviews were done I reached out to the subjects of my interviews for introductions to other people they believed I would benefit from speaking to. This “snow-ball effect” landed me my second wave of interviews.

Regardless of who I spoke to I used a set of interview questions that allowed me to cover a range of topics and ideas in regards to faith based organizing. I would start the interview by introducing myself to the person I was with. I would explain a bit more about who I am and why I am interested in this topic of study. After this I would ask these questions shaping them to fit the religious context I was in:

#### Interview Questions-

1. Your Story: How and when did you become a (type of religious leader)?
2. What is the role or purpose of the (type of religious institution)? In society?
3. Where does the motivation come from to get involved in these issues?
4. Take me to the homiletical moment, how do you approach the text in light of the world around you?
5. What does getting involved look like for you and your congregation?
6. Is there ever push back? Do people want you to help them spiritually and not get involved in other aspects of life?

7. How do you balance the need for both spiritual growth and political consciousness of your congregational?
8. Do you rest? How?
9. How do you feel about an inter-faith movement?
10. Is it difficult to take what happens in an inter-faith realm and translate that back to your home congregation?
11. What is your advice for the future generation of religious leaders who want to get involved in this type of work?

## Limitations

One of the difficult parts of this process has definitely been getting busy individuals to meet with me. The religious leaders and organizers I met were all definitely willing to help but when someone is an organizer they do not always have the luxury of staying put in one space. Whether it was Joe Hopkins, the Worker Center Network Assistant of the Industrial Workers Justice group, or Rabbi Jonathon Klein the director of CLUE LA; scheduling interviews was a tall order. Another thing that made collecting data difficult was attempting to focus strictly on the interfaith discussion when the conversation often turned into advice sessions from the person I was interviewing. They at times got me off track but it was always positive. My data does not reach the next generation of leaders. I did not profile or really engage leaders who are 18-35 years of age and I think this is where my research will lead me to next. I will be looking to my colleagues to see what ideas are being developed for more effective and transformative faith based organizing.

## VI. Chapter 4 / Specific Institutions & Findings

### I. Different Models of Organizing

In the realm of faith based organizing places of worship, non-profits, and other entities have different approaches to how to better the communities that they are a part of. Some institutions I have found in my research and interviews decide to focus on five major models of organizing and base building. They include 1) **Financial Empowerment through Congregations**, 2) **Empowering Communities through Actions and Protests**, 3) **San Diego Organizing Project (SDOP) Faith-Based Model**, 4) **Neighborhood Partnerships** and 5) **Political Organizing**. In this section of my paper I will give examples of these different models in order to explain their strengths and weaknesses. The organization of focus in my paper CLUE LA will also be discussed in this part of the paper as part of the Empowering Communities model of organizing.

#### Financial Empowerment through Congregations-

Important for me in learning about these different models of organizing was understanding that these philosophies emanate out of distinct schools of thought and ideas about how to work with ailing communities. Groups that operate under an ethos of financial empowerment believe that the answer to many of the ills in communities of color, especially Black and Latino communities lies in economic stability. If banks and other lending institutions do not exist then wealth building cannot exist. Without a critical mass of wealth in these communities of color social, political, and economic respect will not be given to these groups on any level.

In her book, *Talking Dollars and Making Sense: a Wealth Building Guide for African-Americans* Brooke Stephens writes about a 1996 study that John Wray, an economic development specialist in Washington, D.C., did. Wray studied the flow of dollars through comparative ethnic communities. To examine how long a dollar circulates among a particular

community's banks, brokers, shopkeepers, and business professionals. Wray reported that in Asian communities the flow was as long as 28 days before it was spent with outsiders, in the Jewish community 19 days and in the White community 17 days. In the African-American community however it was only 6 hours<sup>34</sup>. Although this study is outdated the truth it speaks is still true today. Communities of color have incredible purchasing power but what ends up happening is that money is funneled into corporations and entities that take the money out of the communities. This phenomenon is likened to bleeding or leaking a community dry. Organizers who decide to take a financial approach to organizing believe that aggregating wealth and creating institutions will be the best way to treat the symptoms of poverty. Instead of organizing people these organizers have decided to take the small amounts of money the people have and collect it so that it can work for them.

One example of this is the Greater Christ Temple, a church in Meridian, Mississippi. With fewer than 50 members and no support from foundations or federal, state, or local authorities Bishop Luke Edwards and Greater Christ Temple were able to make a tremendous impact on their community. Pastor Edwards founded the church in 1974 with 33 of its original 35 members on welfare. Edwards convinced the members to pool their food stamps and buy their groceries wholesale. They saved from buying wholesale and used the money left over to buy and sell peanuts in the church basement. By 1975, church members had created a makeshift food market set up in the church. In 1978, the congregation had generated an \$18,000 savings fund that allowed them to buy a small local supermarket. During this period, the congregation created a nonprofit corporation, Research Education And Community Hope (REACH) Inc. Today, Reach owns two motels, three restaurants, a bakery and a 4,000-acre farm among other things<sup>35</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Stephens, *Talking Dollars and Making Sense: A Wealth Building Guide for African-Americans*.

<sup>35</sup> Reese and Clamp, Ph.D., *Faith-Based Community Economic Development: Principles & Practices*.

The vision of Bishop Edwards is one that is important because he was making sure that money was circulating and staying within the Mississippi community that needed it the most. Within this model of organizing a leader encourages a congregation or faith community to pool their resources in an effort to buy land, purchasing or borrowing power. A common problem that many non-profits have is not having enough money. The unique thing about faith communities is that they have the potential to be self-sustaining. Because members bring offerings, tithes (ten percent of their gross income), and gifts. These contributions are then used to carry out the mission of the institution. For many places like Greater Christ Temple this means that the socio-political endeavors of the church will be funded by the pockets of the parishioners themselves.

Another example of impactful programs being funded at least initially by the collections taken in a religious institution is First African Methodist Episcopal (F.A.M.E) Los Angeles. I had an interview with the former pastor of the church, Rev. Dr. Cecil Leonard Murray. His view of organizing, social justice, and the responsibility of the church were shaped by the poor education, health, and lending practices around his community. One of the things that he said really encapsulates what F.A.M.E accomplished during his tenure and beyond. In the opening moments of our interview as he discussed what was wrong with society today he said, “Give a man a piece of fish and he will be hungry again. Teach a man how to fish and he will never be hungry again. Empower that man to buy the pond and he and his family will eat for generations<sup>36</sup>.” It is subtle but the last addition to a commonly held mantra really showed what Rev. Murray is passionate about seeing in traditionally marginalized communities: wealth building.

It was this understanding that spearheaded the creation of The Business Resource Center. In 1992 Los Angeles experienced an unforgettable period of civil unrest that was the result of the

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<sup>36</sup> Murray, “Interview with Cecil Murray.”

acquittal of the police officers accused of beating motorist Rodney King. Prior to the civil unrest, F.A.M.E had a long and proud tradition of providing education and social services. In the wake of the devastation the church began to commit its considerable resources and influence to work for economic development. As part of the Business Resource Center F.A.M.E developed a Revolving Loan Program that makes loans to inner-city businesses ranging from a few thousand dollars to a quarter million. There are two different loan programs: the Micro Loan program, which provides loans in amounts up to \$20,000, and the Financial Restructuring Assistance Loan program, which provides loans in amounts from \$50,000 to \$250,000. The program has made more than 60 five-year loans, for a total of \$1.4 million. All payments go back into the loan program so that the Business Resource Center can continue to provide financing. Successful businesses assisted by FAME include a shopping center, PrimeTech Electronic Manufacturing, Athletic Apparel Retailing, Pyramid Art Gallery, and several restaurants<sup>37</sup>.

Dr. Murray is dedicated to making sure that he sees his community flourish. The way that he does this is by ensuring that F.A.M.E create financial possibilities for the community members and businesses. Perhaps telling of his leadership and wisdom Dr. Murray explained to me that he did not rely on his own knowledge to run the church's organizing efforts. "Put ten people to work instead of doing the work of ten people," he told me. He used the minds and hearts around him to put together a team and core of people who could actually get work done. It is this that has allowed F.A.M.E's notoriety to grow both in the faith and political realm.

### **Empowering Communities through Actions and Protests-**

My time at Occidental and in the Urban Environmental Policy has taught me that there is nothing more powerful than showing communities the agency they hold. Realizing one's power

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<sup>37</sup> Reese and Clamp, Ph.D., *Faith-Based Community Economic Development: Principles & Practices*.



allows one to see the world differently. What may have seemed as impossible to overcome may all of a sudden become attainable. This became clear to me while in Chicago over winter break of this year. I was slated to meet with executive director Rev. C.J. Hawking of ARISE Chicago. ARISE is a faith based organization focused on meeting the organizing needs of the laborers of Chicago and elsewhere.

As I made my way to the West Bryn Mawr St. office I was informed of an action happening in Lincolnwood, IL. I hopped on a bus and made my way to West Touhy Avenue where news cameras, reporters, and most importantly 50 wrongly terminated workers lined the sidewalk down the street of *Rolf's Patisserie* a high-end bakery. The workers were all in frenzy as they grabbed picket signs that demanded equality now. On the back read the mantra of ARISE, "Faith—Labor—Action." The workers had learned through the company's website and word of mouth that they were not to return to work the week before Christmas December 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011. What made a terrible situation worse was that the final paychecks that the workers received, bounced. The holiday season was encroaching and many families were left with almost nothing. The workers were left with a bounced check, no job, and no answers from management. That is where ARISE stepped in.

The ARISE Chicago Worker Center headed up by organizer Adam Kader supports workers to confront and prevent workplace exploitation. They work from the premise that organizing is the most effective way to make positive change in the workplace. Because of this conviction they assist workers in organizing themselves on the job, and partner with unions when workers desire a more formal and long-lasting voice at work. In the case of the *Rolf Patisserie* workers they contacted Mr. Kader and an action was planned immediately. The ARISE staff did not want the company to have time to hide assets and liabilities so they wanted to hit the

company with a suit, quickly. The demands were clear: the workers wanted their final paychecks and compensation for the not being warned of the plant's termination. The workers did an incredible job of organizing themselves and came in great numbers to speak to the media persons in attendance. Two workers were chosen and they did a powerful job of conveying emotion, controlled anger, and a cry for justice. This is an example of empowering a community because ARISE really put the action into the hands of the workers. They organized, encouraged, directed and teamed up with each other in order to make the action happen. The workers themselves taped the lawsuit they were filing against Rolf's on the door of the establishment in a symbolic showing of power.

One the things that stood out to me in my interview with Rev. C.J. Hawking was her commitment to making sure that people saw their own power. She reflected on her growing up as a volunteer in the church and she said that one day she “got tired of more cots and bowls.” She got tired of seeing the thousands who are homeless in Chicago and the thousands that go hungry each day there as well<sup>38</sup>. Hawking contends that we as human beings are all made in the image of God and it is because of this that we all deserve dignity. That dignity should not be surrendered when we cross the worker line.

CLUE LA the focal organization of this paper believes this as well. The work that they do is centered around working with religious leaders in order to have congregations, communities, and work sites mobilized and organized when need be. Rabbi Jonathon Klein and his team identify campaigns that can use their support and they go into the affected communities. They then work with clergy and supporting officials who can help them in the campaign. This is being seen recently with the work that CLUE is doing with Pomona College where 16 dining hall

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<sup>38</sup> Chicago Alliance to End Homelessness, *Homeless in Chicago; 2007 Numbers and Demographics; Point-In-Time Analysis*.

workers were fired because of expressing interest in forming a union. The Pomona College administration followed through with a threat to take action against 84 workers based on immigration status. Many of these loyal employees had been with the school for decades. CLUE goes to places like this all over California as their schedule permits. Their goal is to put power into the hands of the people. What was interesting about my time at CLUE is that in the short time I was there the faith base of the organization was present but at the same time not entirely defining of the space. The reverends and other staff workers acknowledge that they are doing this work from a faith initiated place but I did not get the sense that they made the link as clearly as other places I have visited.

### **Values Based Organizing Model-**

Focusing on critical areas such as Youth issues, good schools, fair housing and public safety the San Diego Organizing Project is an organization that does similar work to Community Coalition in South Los Angeles. Their model of organizing is one that at its root is an interdependent relationship between congregation and community. Congregations of all denominations and faiths serve as the institutional base for community organizations. SDOP is different from other organizations because they do not bring people together to tackle common issues like housing or education. Instead the broad-based organizing model makes values and relationships the glue that holds organizations together. This approach for SDOP advocates creates a bond among social justice advocates that is harder to break. This is also the approach that is taken because for many communities of color and low-income communities the only stable civic gathering places are religious congregations. Because of this, SDOP congregations

engage thousands of people and work to sustain long-term campaigns to bring about systematic change at all levels of government<sup>39</sup>.

The reason why this model was important for me to identify and include in this paper is because I believe that in my research there were many communities like this one where the values of different faith is what made different leaders and congregations get involved in certain campaigns for justice. Unlike a place like CLUE LA or ARISE that has a target demographic of laborers who have had their rights violated or are seeking unionization, organizations under the SDOP model are operating under a value system that then propels them to do some good in the world. This may take different forms but one of the forms may be tackling crime in a neighborhood, a beautification project, a building of a school, or registering folks to vote. One of the leaders that I interviewed for this project spoke to how salient this idea was in his work.

In October of 2011 I sat down with Imam Shaikh Muhammad ibn al-Faqih of the Islamic Institute of Orange County (IIOC). Muhammad Faqih is originally from Yemen, where his ancestors settled after emigrating from East Africa<sup>40</sup>. The conversation that I had with Muhammad Faqih was informative because it demonstrated that the way that the mosque operates is very different from the way that other religious institutions do who are involved in social justice work. The mosque is governed by a board of members. These members are the ones who really have the power in the mosque. Unlike a synagogue or more likely a church where the pastor or priests is both the religious leader and one who makes decisions about the day to day operations of the institution a mosque is different.

The board makes these decisions and at the IIOC this board is the one that makes decisions about which social endeavors to get involved in. The reason why this falls under the

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<sup>39</sup> San Diego Organizing Project, "SDOP Faith-Based Community Organizing Model - SDOP."

<sup>40</sup> "Shaikh Muhammad Ibn al-Faqih Bio."

SDOP category is because the impetus to fund a school building, register voters, meet with city council members, fight against Islam phobia etc. are not things that Muslims do because of the issues per say but because of their values held as followers of Islam<sup>41</sup>. The difference is subtle but powerful. The organizations under this model could be seen as sustainable as the SDOP website says they are tied to a faith that calls them to do justice. This could be seen as in contrast to being tied to an issue or particular campaign that can stand at the whim of a political season or dissipate once a victory is secured. One of the things that make this model of organizing different from the next one is that the decision to work with communities and issues can at times be disconnected from the actual experience of the people who need assistance. If you hand someone a rake and what they need is a shovel you may be doing them good in the sense that they have someone they did not have before but they are still left wanting what they need in order to accomplish what they need to do.

### **Neighborhood Partnerships-**

The story of a church in Brooklyn, NY showed me how to make an impact alongside neighborhood members. In what can only be justly described as an incredible piece of literature Samuel G. Freedman chronicles the story of Saint Paul Community Baptist Church under the leadership of Reverend Johnny Ray Youngblood. From the church's naissance to the development of Rev. Youngblood, Freedman tells an intricate story of the church's transformative presence in the East New York section of Brooklyn. Rev. Youngblood came into Saint Paul not really sure what to expect. He was a young minister whose only concern was not messing up the opportunity he had been given by being handed the pulpit of a slowly decaying church with old and seemingly stagnant members. Youngblood, originally from New Orleans,

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<sup>41</sup> Al-Faqih, "Interview with Imam Shaikh Muhammad Ibn al-Faqih."

Louisiana looked around the community in which his church was founded and wanted to do more than just conduct services. He could not tolerate that his own parishioners refused to leave their apartment buildings after dark or that children did not have a safe place to play in their own neighborhood. He teamed up with other religious and community leaders on a council called East Brooklyn Congregations (EBC)<sup>42</sup>.

An affiliate of Industrial Areas Foundation, East Brooklyn Congregations was founded in 1980. Its members worked to improve everything from housing, schools, safety, streets and neighborhoods in East Brooklyn. EBC is a non-profit composed of religious congregations, schools, and homeowner and voluntary associations. It is an interfaith, multi-racial and strictly non-partisan organization. EBC is supported by dues collected from member organizations, foundations, corporations and individuals who believe in making Brooklyn a better place to live, work and raise a family. I believe that the secret to EBC's success lies in their commitment to identify and develop leaders in every neighborhood where they work. They meet people face-to-face and build relationships, which we have learned here at Occidental, is the only way to groom and sustain leadership. EBC tackle big problems by breaking them into issues that be addressed<sup>43</sup>.

The commitment to training leaders is what is so powerful about this story. It falls within Alinsky's golden rule of organizing for sure, but beyond that it shows that organizing gives people a new outlook on life. It reminds them of their self-worth and what they are capable of when they put their minds to it. One scene that comes to mind in the book is a meeting that Rev. Youngblood attends in an apartment building with some of his fellow members of EBC. They are looking to organize tenants for a real revolutionary plan, the Nehemiah Homes. The idea for

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<sup>42</sup> Freedman, *Upon This Rock*.

<sup>43</sup> Congregations, "Our History."

these homes grew out of the conviction that only widespread home ownership can create the kind of pride essential for renewed community pride and freedom from fear. Teaming up with a well-known Daily News columnist and former developer, I.D. Robbins, EBC adopted his controversial argument that for half the cost of high-density, high-rise apartments, it would be possible to build large numbers of single-family homes that could create stable neighborhoods<sup>44</sup>. When Rev Youngblood was in the apartment building Freedman did an excellent job of taking us through his thought process. He sat in the room watching the mostly elderly women who showed up but he was listening for which of them would be better organizers, spokespersons for the group, visionaries. The connection building that was exemplified in the book really showed that when an organization is tied to a geographic location the alliance has the opportunity to run deep and affect many more lives.

### **Political Organizing from the Pulpit-**

Perhaps one of my favorite models for organizing entails using the liturgy of a religious service in order to convey explicit political ideas to congregants and visitors. Liturgy refers to the rituals that happen during any service of a religious faith or tradition<sup>45</sup>. Whether it is the Muslim Salat, the Jewish reading of the Torah, or benediction in the Protestant Christian church these elements are all considered to be liturgy. One of the most effective tools that a religious leader can do is to capitalize on the attention and attendance of the folks in the room on particular days of worship. Unfortunately announcing a meeting about protesting for undocumented workers will not yield as big a crowd as regular worship services. Because of this some leaders have capitalized on this time to feed people both spiritually as well as challenge them to make change in their communities.

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<sup>44</sup> Congregations, "East Brooklyn Congregations Build Nehemiah Homes."

<sup>45</sup> Fisher, *The Jewish Roots of Christian Liturgy*.

Trinity United Church of Christ on the Southside of Chicago, Illinois reflects this approach and model. It was a powerful experience because of the connection to the pastor Emeritus, the Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright, but also because of the passing on of the torch to Rev. Otis Moss III. While I visited in early January, Rev. Moss preached a sermon on the Old Testament book of Nehemiah. He spoke about the way that this ancient character of Nehemiah was called to rebuild the walls of a desolate and broken city of Jerusalem and the obstacles he faced. In spite of people outside of his community attempting to dissuade him and his comrades Nehemiah stayed fast to their task. Rev. Moss encouraged us in the audience to be game changers as Nehemiah was. More than a sermon however, the entire service was replete with reminders of the church's mission. The church's mission is as follows:

“Trinity United Church of Christ has been called by God to be a congregation that is not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that does not apologize for its African roots! As a congregation of baptized believers, we are called to be agents of liberation not only for the oppressed, but for all of God's family. We, as a church family, acknowledge, that we will, building on this affirmation of "who we are" and "whose we are," call men, women, boys and girls to the liberating love of Jesus Christ, inviting them to become a part of the church universal, responding to Jesus' command that we go into all the world and make disciples!

We are called out to be "a chosen people" that pays no attention to socio-economic or educational backgrounds. We are made up of the highly educated and the uneducated. Our congregation is a combination of the haves and the have-nots; the economically disadvantaged, the under-class, the unemployed and the employable.

The fortunate who are among us combine forces with the less fortunate to become agents of change for God who is not pleased with America's economic mal-distribution! W.E.B. DuBois indicated that the problem in the 20th century was going to be the problem of the color line. He was absolutely correct. Our job as servants of God is to address that problem and eradicate it in the name of Him who came for the whole world by calling all men, women, boys and girls to Christ<sup>46</sup>.”

There were constant references to the church's responsibility to affect the destitute area of Southside Chicago. Buses were announced for a political action in front of Bank of America. In the front of the church, carried out in the final choir procession were signs from the Occupy Wall St. movement that started in New York in the fall of 2011 and swept the globe. What this did was show the congregation that the theology being preached was inextricably tied to the

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<sup>46</sup> “Trinity - About Us.”



outside world. The fact that these problems are denounced and addressed in the religious realm gave congregants the confidence to go out and tackle them also. To stay silent about them would be a silent approval of the way that things are.

The fact that a within the United Church of Christ Denomination (UCC) is doing this type of work does not surprise me at all. For years the UCC has been on the cutting edge of faith based social justice. While many denominations spend their time and energy addressing moral messages such as the use of alcohol, caffeine, and other drugs UCC churches have taken a stake in having hard conversations and doing something about their outcomes<sup>47</sup>. This is powerful because many UCC churches address in their pulpits that their congregants are experiencing Monday through Saturday. Like Dr. Jeremiah Wright once said, just because congregants are walking into the church does not mean they are leaving the world they walked in from at the door<sup>48</sup>.

## II. General Themes

Two more themes that were evident in my interviews were the themes of overcoming difference and congregations of color having more of an investment in challenging social injustice. In my interview with Keron Blair of the Midwest Academy we discussed what it meant to work across religious lines on issues of social injustice. The main theme that came up for him as well as other leaders I spoke to was the understanding that leaders who engage in interfaith work do not harbor on their differences but what brings them together. No leader wants to walk into a space and have their core beliefs challenged when there are issues like hunger, poverty and homelessness on the table. The willingness to be intentional in focusing on what brings them together is what I think makes translation then easier. If issues were framed in one specific

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<sup>47</sup> Ellison, "Religious Involvement and Subjective Well-Being."

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin, *Bill Moyers' Journal*.

religious tradition it would be difficult to have them cross faith tradition lines. However poverty is poverty and there is not much to refute when numbers and strategies are placed before a coalition. Working together from a premise of equality makes this type of work that much more effective<sup>49</sup>.

One of my major questions going into this project was who is involved in this type of work? Which congregations tend to be involved in social justice and what type of social justice work? I have not completely answered this question but two instances come to mind that show that communities of color seem to make more concerted efforts to work in their communities as opposed to send money far away. One of the churches in Eagle Rock called Verdugo Community Church led by Pastor Anny Genato is an example of a church that used their purchasing power to combat a social ill. They decided to stop buying coffee and chocolate that was not fairly traded. This was especially salient for the congregation since it is predominantly Latino and countries like Columbia, Brazil, and Guatemala deal with this very issue. This is different from a church like Trinity who did a more politicized social action in downtown Chicago. The church purchased and collected crutches that they handed out to congregants. The congregants walked with the crutches and then left them at the door of Bank of America to show how American tax dollars had bailed out big banks, essentially being a crutch for them, while people's homes were foreclosed and they were displaced. Both were communities of color that took a direct approach to social justice. From what I saw in my interviews there was more direct organizing going on with congregations of color. I look forward to seeing what else may come up and what conclusions will be derived from these findings.

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<sup>49</sup> Blair, "Interview at Midwest Academy."

## **VII. Chapter 5 / Vision Moving Forward**

### **So What?**

One of the critical questions for me as I think about this subject is the “So what?” Why does this matter? Furthermore, what does what I found out during my data collection mean for interfaith based organizing? The reason why this matters is that as my findings indicated the days of separatism are becoming obsolete. The stakes are too high, violence is too pervasive, test scores are too low, and the young are dying too young for groups to segregate themselves along religious lines or otherwise. This understanding was evident in almost every space that I walked into and it was inspiring to hear these leaders describe how they put aside their differences for the betterment of the community

### **Recommendations**

#### **Organizing for Policy Change**

One of the things that I did not see as much in my literature review, in my visits to different places of worships, or in my interviews with different religious leaders is a push for policy change. The type of organizing that went on whether it was financially based, project or power based, values based etc. it all seemed like to treat the symptoms of problematic or damaging policies but there was not much done to make sure that new policies were put in place. One of the reasons why this is important is because the instrumental policy plays in how this society is run. Policy decides where freeways are placed in relations to communities of color. Policy decides how much funding schools get in respect to tax dollars. Policy decides the ability for corporations to buy the right to pollute. Policy is important and if faith based institutions organized more intentionally to affect policy I think that more would be done to empower

congregations to understand their power over the ballot, elected officials, and government in general<sup>50</sup>.

### **Continue to Groom the next Generation of Leaders**

As I did my research many of the leaders and organizers I met were excited to meet me. They were excited because they had not met a young person in a long time who was interested in the same type of work I am. They may have had interns and young people working for some of the better-known organizations such as a CLUE LA or ARISE Chicago but smaller churches, mosques, synagogues did not. The leaders I met with were dynamic, dedicated, and determined to effect change. I also saw that they were tired and needed help. One of my recommendations is that programs and intentional steps are taken to groom the next generation of social justice oriented ministers. Without reaching out to the leaders who are in undergraduate or graduate level programs, in congregations and neighborhoods these leaders are not being taught the critical lessons needed to organize effectively.

One example of this type of reaching out is the Passing the Mantle (PTM) Clergy and Lay Leadership Institute, the brainchild of Rev. Cecil Murray who I mentioned earlier in my paper. The premise that the program operates under is that one cannot be successful unless someone or an institution sows into them. As far as the Black church goes there has been a decline in prophetic preaching and activist inclinations and so Dr. Murray decided to do something about it. Now in its fifth year PTM is designed to help African American churches reclaim the activist legacy of the 1960s. The program desires that religious leaders become agents of positive social change in their communities. PTM "...equips pastors, clergy, faith-based nonprofit leaders and church board members for better mission conceptualization, civic engagement modeling,

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<sup>50</sup> Chirot, *How Societies Change*.

strategic planning and partnership building with the public and private sector<sup>51</sup>.” It is one thing to simply say that pastors and other leaders should be more socially conscious. That is not what organizing is about. Effective organizing is about casting vision but also training up leaders so that they can execute that vision. PTM is all about giving these leaders the adequate training so that when the Cecil Murrays, James Lawsons and Jeremiah Wrights move on there is not too much of a gap existing. The program creates a learning environment with leading practitioners, politicians and professors with expertise in areas related to civic engagement and community development<sup>52</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Street, “Passing the Mantle: A New Generation of Leaders in the Black Church.”

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

## VIII. Chapter 6- Conclusion

In the fall I will be a student at Yale Divinity School. I will be studying to become a pastor in the Christian church. As I look at the way that institution of the church has been both damaging and uplifting to the lives of marginalized groups I know which direction that I would like to shape my ministry and work. This project has meant so much to me because I have been able to hear the rewards and challenges of faith based organizing. There are a lot of disappointments, long nights, and problems in trying to organizing a demographic that at times has no desire to be organized. Nevertheless there are successful examples of how this works and it is off the strength of these programs that I go forward.

As a junior I marveled at the book *Cold Anger* by Mary Rogers because of the self-sustaining power of religious institution. There is bond that people have with their place of worship that is unparalleled in other spaces. If religious leaders understood this and used for the transformation of their communities and the lives of their parishioners instead of using it to raise salaries so much could be done. Churches have the potential to not need outside financial support. Synagogues have the potential to fund policy change campaigns. Mosques have the potential to build new schools in ailing neighborhoods. It is this power that I was excited to explore.

I am left with the understanding that this power exists. Furthermore I am excited to report that there are organizations and leaders out there who are more than willing to work across faith lines to bring their resources together. They are willing to combat injustice no matter the cost. I am excited to join the ranks and look forward to what life has to offer. I am looking forward to the journey and the communities I will learn from as well as lend a helping hand.

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