By Their Fruits:
Examining the work of faith-based organizations in two midwestern metros

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Abstract:

Many cities today struggle with problems of violence and economic development, particularly in areas of concentrated poverty. In many of these communities, faith-based organizations are highly prevalent. Scholarly consideration of faith-based organizations, particularly in communities of color, has historically centered on their role in political mobilization and advocacy efforts directed at outside entities such as the government or the police. However, given the severity of current levels of economic underdevelopment and violence, it is worth examining how faith-based organizations address these key issues within their communities. By employing a comparative model using interviews with clergy, nonprofit administrators, and community members affiliated with various faith-based organizations in Chicago and the Twin Cities, I explore the various forms of programming undertaken by these organizations to address issues in their community. I also explore the barriers they face in their work. I find that faith-based organizations in both metropolitan areas employed a broad array of approaches in their work, ranging from direct service to philanthropy, and faced similar challenges when navigating relationships with other agents. Based on these findings, I formulate recommendations for both faith-based organizations and for government actors. I argue that both groups should further invest in partnerships with each other and with secular organizations. These findings can help inform approaches to community organizing, economic development, and violence prevention, as well as the ways in which policymakers approach their relationship to faith-based organizations and their communities

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Introduction

Joblessness, poverty, and violence all have become major concerns for both community members and policymakers across the United States. Chicago and the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) are no exception. While Chicago saw a decline in crime, including homicide, throughout the 2000s and into the 2010s, it experienced a spike in violence in 2016 with a total of 762 homicides. In subsequent years, homicides have declined, although the incidence of homicide in 2018 was higher than pre-2016 levels with a total of 561 homicides (Chicago Data Portal n.d.). In a similar pattern, The Twin Cities had seen a decline in crime since the 1990s, but in 2019, homicides increased sharply in both Minneapolis and St. Paul, with incidences of homicide doubling in St. Paul (Jany 2019). In both metro areas, violence is not evenly distributed, with the South and West sides of Chicago and North Minneapolis and Eastern St. Paul experiencing the most violence (Chicago Data Portal n.d., City of St. Paul 2019, Open Data Minneapolis n.d.). This being the case, communities of color (and especially African American communities) are disproportionately affected. In Chicago, nearly eighty percent of homicide victims in 2018 were Black, despite Black residents only constituting on 30.5% of the population (Chicago Police Department 2018, United States Census Bureau n.d.). Other social issues like joblessness and income levels follow similar trends. The median family income for whites in Chicago is $81,702, while the median income for Black families is $36,720 and similarly, the Black unemployment rate in the city is over four times higher than the unemployment rate for whites (Henricks et al. 2017). There is also great racial inequity and economic inequality in the Twin Cities, with non-white groups—and especially Black communities—having consistently lower rates of educational attainment, household income, and employment (DEED 2018).

Because of these disproportionate levels of poverty, unemployment, and violence, many people have looked towards community organizations to try to meet the needs of affected communities. Within communities experiencing high rates of poverty, violence, and joblessness, some of the most ubiquitous institutions are churches and other faith-based organizations. However, much of the research that has been done on churches in urban communities, and more specifically in urban Black communities, has highlighted the role that the Church has played in politics through organization and mobilization. This research has shown how churches can be hotspots for gathering resources, and thus scholars argue that participation in a religious community can increase political participation and engagement (in the form of voting or other community action) among congregants (Alex-Assensoh and Assensoh 2001, Barnes 2005, Harris-Lacewell 2007, Mattis 2001, Pattillo-McCoy 1998). The function of churches in these capacities is also demonstrated by historical examples of collaboration between clergy and government actors to directly address issues such as violence in their communities (Braga et Al. 2008, Pattillo-McCoy 1998, Pegram et al. 2016).

Despite this research on the benefits of faith-based organizations in the political and advocacy arena, there exists a gap in the literature examining the relationship of faith-based organizations to community development and violence prevention, particularly through the lens of social programming. Most studies focus on faith-based organizations' impact on the political engagement of Black populations (Alex-Assensoh and Assensoh 2001, Barnes 2005, Harris-Lacewell 2007, Mattis 2001, McNeil 2011, Patillo-McCoy 1998) or on the impact of religious involvement on academic performance for Black youth (Dilulio 1999). But this research does not directly address what have become the central crises facing urban Black communities: joblessness, poverty, and violence. Studying how faith-based organizations respond to these challenge and examining the sociological frameworks which surround these institutions is key to not simply understanding the present situation but also to finding solutions that come through the community and its existing resources, rather than being imposed externally. Using interviews, I investigate the steps churches and other faith-based organizations take to address the issues of joblessness, poverty, and violence in their communities. I also seek to determine how these institutions may or may not be leveraged in organized policy efforts aimed at violence reduction and community development. This work can contribute to understandings of the landscape of violence in urban communities and the resources which are already present in the community.

This paper draws on sixteen interviews with clergy, nonprofit administrators, chaplains, scholars, and community members in Chicago, IL and the “Twin Cities” of Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN. These metro areas are similar in religious demographics, with 75% of adults in the Twin Cities claiming religious affiliation (70% being Christian) and 78% in Chicago claiming religious affiliation (71% being Christian) (Pew Research Center 2014). This paper finds that in both metro areas, faith-based organizations perform important functions in neighborhoods dealing with concentrated poverty, high rates of unemployment, and violence. In addition to the spiritual and emotional support which they offer their congregants, they are also often able (both individually and in partnership with other organizations) to establish formal programs to assist community members with finding housing, employment, or accessing other services. In fact, their position as faith-based, non-governmental organizations uniquely positions them to reach segments of the population who may be otherwise hesitant to reach out for support.

However, this paper also finds that faith-based organizations contend with several difficulties in implementing programming and achieving their visions for their community, and that several barriers exist to using them as potential partners in policies for community development and violence prevention. One of these difficulties is a shortage of resources. This shortage exists in part because of a decline in church attendance and religious affiliation, in combination with a heavy reliance on volunteer labor and donation-based funding structures. Both financial and staffing challenges can be eased through the development of partnerships with other faith-based and secular community organizations, as well as the government; however, this prospect presents additional challenges, such as the difficulty of collaboration in an environment of competition for parishioners, funding, and volunteers, and the complications which arise out of organizations' differing guiding philosophies, modes of operating, and organizing capabilities. Overall, this study contributes to the broader literature on community development, violence, and community organization by examining the actual and potential utility of faith-based organizations in two different metropolitan areas which have struggled with issues of violence and economic inequity.

Violence and inequality in Chicago and the Twin Cities

Violence in Chicago

Like many major cities, Chicago has experienced variations in the level and nature of violence occurring in the city. Homicides hit their peak in the 1970s and early 1990s, with comparatively lower levels in the 1980s, 2000s, and especially the early 2010s—when they hit their lowest point since the 1960s (Chicago Data Portal n.d.). In 2016, however, the city saw a huge spike in violence, with homicides jumping to their highest levels since the 1990s, and nonfatal shootings also increasing (Chicago Data Portal n.d., Fagan and Richman 2017). Most of this increase is attributable specifically to homicides involving firearms (University of Chicago Crime Lab 2017). In fact, the percentage of homicides committed with firearms in Chicago (ninety percent in 2016) is much greater than the percentage in other cities, such as New York and Los Angeles, in which fifty-eight percent and seventy-two percent of homicides are committed with firearms, respectively.

The 2016 spike in homicides and nonfatal shootings drew substantial media attention to the city as experts and amateurs alike tried to explain the sudden increase. A wide variety of explanations were offered, ranging from gang rivalries and poverty to distrust of police; however, since the spike happened suddenly, it would seem that these slower-moving social changes were unlikely to be the proximate cause of the spike (University of Chicago Crime Lab 2017). Ultimately, the cause of the spike remains unknown and homicide rates have yet to return to pre-2016 levels, though they have since declined from this peak (Chicago Data Portal, n.d.). Regardless, this recent spate of violence has catapulted the issue to the forefront of policymakers' and community members' minds.

Violence has been an issue in the city for a long time, but the nature of this violence has not always been the same. While much of Chicago's violence is attributed to "gang activity," the nature of what a gang is—and the question of whether that is a valid category—has shifted dramatically in recent decades. The traditional, hierarchical gangs for which Chicago was known prior to the 1990s have greatly diminished in importance and influence (Hagedorn et al. 2019). Following the prosecution of gang leaders, the demolition of public housing, and police crackdowns, the highly organized gangs of past decades have faded and have been largely replaced by neighborhood cliques which sprung up among young people in the vacuum left by traditional gangs (Hagedorn et al. 2019). These groups usually do not have any formal leadership system or hierarchy in the way that traditional gangs did—instead, they are loose associations based mainly on neighborhood geography; because of this, homicides tend to occur within concentrated social networks, especially affecting young men (Hagedorn et al. 2019, Papachristos et al. 2015). This violence has severe effects beyond the already-tragic loss of life inherent to homicide. Exposure to violence has been linked to a number of negative effects, such as increased risk for PTSD, anxiety, depression, and aggression, as well as worsened academic outcomes (Voisin et al. 2011). The complex history of violence in Chicago, as well as the severity of its effects, make it one of the most pressing issues facing the city today.

Socioeconomic Inequality in Chicago

Hand in hand with the problem of violence goes the problem of economic inequality. Chicago remains a city with deep disparities in income, poverty, and employment—and these divides run along neighborhood lines. Additionally, because Chicago is a highly segregated city, the neighborhood disparities result in large racial disparities. Concentrated poverty exists in over twenty-five percent of census tracts in Chicago and of those areas with concentrated poverty and unemployment, over ninety-five percent are racially mixed areas or areas where the population is majority people of color (Theodos et al. 2019). Over thirty percent of Black households in the city live below the poverty line, compared to fewer than ten percent of white families; white families on average outearn Black families by more than double (Henricks et al. 2017). This economic inequality also manifests itself in levels of investment and employment in neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with majority-Black populations receive over four times less market investment than majority-white neighborhoods (Theodos et al. 2019). Unemployment displays a similar inequality, as the unemployment rate for Black individuals is over four times the unemployment rate for whites (Henricks et al. 2017). These factors severely hinder economic development in these communities and create a situation in which social mobility becomes very difficult.

Violence in the Twin Cities

Minneapolis and St. Paul, like other cities, have historically struggled with violence in many forms. For years, levels of violence in the Cities had fluctuated, with peaks in the 1990s and mid 2000s (Whitman 2008). Following spikes in violence in 2005 and 2006—particularly in youth-involved homicides and assaults—Minneapolis took action by launching the *Blueprint for Action*, which was aimed specifically at countering youth violence and drew upon lessons from the Boston’s Operation Ceasefire (Whitman 2008). The plan, which took a public-health approach to the problem of violence, was one which was deeply committed to community involvement and explicitly called for the inclusion of faith leaders in violence prevention efforts. Since that peak, both Minneapolis and St. Paul had been experiencing a fall in violent crime (Whitman 2008, City of St. Paul 2019) .

However, in 2019, there was a significant increase in homicides, especially in the city of St. Paul which saw a 100% increase in killings; this surge placed St. Paul's homicide rate above that of larger cities, such as New York and Los Angeles (Mannix 2019). Minneapolis has also experienced an increase in homicide, albeit not one as dramatic as St. Paul's. In Minneapolis, homicides increased 32% from 2018 to 2019 (Jany 2019). This increase, much like in Chicago, is attributable to homicides involving a gun. Homicides using a gun are now at their highest frequency in roughly thirty years, with nearly 90 percent of St. Paul's total murders in 2019 being committed with a gun (Williams and Zehn 2019). The factors driving this increase are still unknown, but like in Chicago, most of the shootings involve young people and are related to gangs—or rather, to use Minneapolis's preferred terminology, they are group-involved shootings (Jany 2019). Additionally, Minnesota has seen the same kinds of shifts as Chicago with its gang activity. Minneapolis and St. Paul's formerly large, structured, hierarchical gangs which ran on drug-sales have fractured. Beginning in the 1990s, amid growing violence, Twin Cities police used federal racketeering laws to successfully target and incarcerate gang leaders, but the result was a power vacuum which led to a split into much smaller, disorganized factions (Jany and Sawyer 2020). These shifts are consequential, as they have dramatically altered how gangs look and operate. Rather than membership being centered around making money, gangs have become more relationship-based and children become involved very young; according to a study done by the City of Minneapolis on several neighborhoods in North Minneapolis, kids typically become involved between fourth and seventh grade (Erdmann 2010). The city has responded to these troubling trends by forming an Office of Violence Prevention and implementing a Group Violence Initiative (GVI) in 2017, which they are seeking to expand in 2020 in light of recent spikes in violence (Lee 2019). While it's too early to know what the results of these efforts will be, or to fully understand the driving factors behind the 2019 spike or the true scope of the violence, the issue of youth violence is becoming an increasingly pressing issue in the Twin Cities.

Socioeconomic Inequality in the Twin Cities

In recent years, Minnesota—and especially the Twin Cities—has been praised for its high quality of life (Thompson 2015, Badger 2018, Mattesich 2015). "Minneapolisization" and "the Miracle of Minneapolis" were terms employed to describe the unique success of the Twin Cities with its affordability, high educational attainment, and high median income (Thompson 2015, Badger 2018). Such taglines obscure the unfortunate truth that this prosperity is not shared equally. Racial and economic inequality are major and, troublingly, worsening issues in the Twin Cities and in Minnesota more broadly, which has some of the country's largest racial gaps in wealth, education, incarceration and employment gaps. For example, Black Minnesotans are incarcerated at twenty to twenty-five times the rate of white Minnesotans, one of the worst disparities in the nation (Orfield and Stancil 2017). Furthermore, the disparity in the statewide poverty rate (7% for whites compared to 32% for Blacks) is the third largest in the country (Furst and Webster 2019). In employment as well, Minnesota has the fourth largest gap in the country, with unemployment rates up to three times higher for Black residents as compared to whites (Furst and Webster 2019, Orfield and Stancil 2017). Things are even worse within the Twin Cities, where the poverty rate is nearly five times higher for Blacks than for whites, and the average household income for Black residents is less than half that of whites (DEED 2018). This disparity is due in part to the fact that, while poverty in majority-white neighborhoods of the Cities has remained stable since 1980, it has increased dramatically in nonwhite areas (Orfield and Stancil 2017). Additionally, the Twin Cities is a relatively segregated metro area. Since the 1990s the percentage of minority residents living in majority-minority neighborhoods has continued to increase and is now over 40%, with most of these neighborhoods concentrated in North Minneapolis and St. Paul (Orfield and Stancil 2017). By 2010, there were seven times more schools in which over 90% of students were minorities than there were in the early 1990s, and the proportion of the population living in majority-minority areas of concentrated poverty had tripled (Orfield and Stancil 2017). The great racial and economic disparities in both Chicago and the Twin Cities highlight the need to examine what is going on in affected communities and work toward solutions for the community and economic development of these areas.

The Church in Communal and Political life

Faith-based organizations, which are often abundant in urban communities, are frequently incorporated into community improvement efforts (Barnes 2005, Dilulio 1999, Gilkes 1998, Harris-Lacewell 2007). These organizations are especially relevant in predominantly Black communities, where churches have long been regarded by sociologists as significant due to their unique culture and history, as well as the high level of religiosity in the Black community (Barnes 2005, McNeil 2011, Harris-Lacewell 2007, Mattis 2001, McKinney 1971, Patillo 1998, Pegram et al. 2016, Weissinger 2011). Black Americans are more likely than other ethnic groups in the United States to pray regularly, to indicate a strong belief in God, to regularly attend services, and to say that religion is an important part of their life (Pew Research Center 2014). These facts could signal that faith-based organizations may be good sources of community buy-in and can serve as a nexus of community organization and collective action. And, pursuant to this idea, much of the previous research centering on Black religious communities focuses on the role of the Church in politics and activism in Black communities, exploring how churches can help citizens build resources and organize (Barnes 2005, Dilulio 1999, Harris-Lacewell 2007, Mattis 2001, Alex-Assensoh and Assensoh 2001, Pattillo-McCoy 1998). Some of these studies look to historical examples of Church-based activism—especially during the Civil Rights Movement, when the Church was very influential in mobilizing the Black community—while others have looked at instances of partnerships between the Church and other actors to ameliorate community challenges (Braga et al. 2008, Harris-Lacewell 2007, McNeil 2011, Pattillo-McCoy 1998, Pegram et al. 2016). One such example is Operation Ceasefire in Boston, which involved a collaboration between Boston Police and a coalition of Black clergy aimed at reducing violence in the city in the 1990s (Braga et al. 2008, Pegram et al. 2016). The campaign saw initial success, however over the course of the next ten years, the program deteriorated and eventually violence resurged in the city (Braga et al. 2008). Despite the eventual breakdown of Operation Ceasefire, it can still teach us a great deal about the value of partnering with faith-based organizations and religious leaders as it represented an unprecedented partnership between government and local faith communities.

Although most scholarly work has looked positively on churches and their effects on the community, there has been some criticism of this wholesale acceptance of churches as beneficial. McRoberts (2003) studied the landscape of Boston churches and pointed out that the assumption that churches are invested in the communities they occupy is often misguided. Many churches have little attachment to the communities they physically occupy and make very little effort at outreach for purposes other than evangelism, simply choosing to be located in low-income neighborhoods because of low rents. These churches, McRoberts posits, may even hinder the development of the neighborhood, since they take up valuable commercial space which might be better used for economic development. McRoberts makes a valuable contribution to the literature when he objects to considering churches as a single category, since churches have an incredibly wide range of missions, beliefs, and cultures. He categorized churches according to their attitude towards “the street” or the outside world more broadly, with some organizations avoiding contact with “the street” while others viewing it as ripe for evangelization or as a “point of contact with people at risk,” (McRoberts 2003). These categories are helpful in understanding the diversity of organizational, social, and theological attitudes which are present in modern churches. The only thing that can be definitively said of all of churches is that they are faith-based organizations—everything else about them can vary greatly.

Taken together, existing research has demonstrated the rich history of faith-based organizations and social activism in Black communities, while also pointing out the ways in which this history is complicated by the present realities of urban communities and the diversity of religious communities in these neighborhoods. However, this research has yet to explore the specific question of violence and community development, as well as the specific ways in which faith-based organizations partner with each other, with secular organizations, and with government actors to create change; moreover, the challenges they face in these partnerships remain overlooked in much of the literature. Given that violence, poverty, and joblessness stand as some of the most pressing issues in contemporary neighborhoods in many urban communities—including the Twin Cities and Chicago—it is crucial that existing community resources are explored in full so that when community members and policymakers look for solutions, they can come from the community. Through interviews with clergy, community members, and other actors, this paper seeks to answer these questions and further our understanding of the religious and cultural landscape of urban communities dealing with violence.

Social Capital, Disorganization Theory, and Violence

Sociologists have developed numerous social theories to explain why certain communities seem more at risk for violence and other problems. Most pertinent to the study of community development and violence is social disorganization theory, which refers to the idea that crime and other negative behaviors stem from environmental factors and neighborhood dynamics rather than being a product of the specific population that lives there (Shaw and McKay 1942, Drakulich 2014, Wilson 1996, Sampson and Wilson 1995). Social disorganization theory has its roots in the research of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942), who analyzed the geographic distribution of juveniles in Chicago courts and found that they were concentrated in certain areas of the city and that the crime rate in these areas remained stable even as the populations inhabiting the areas changed, suggesting that something was distinct about the high-crime neighborhoods themselves. Shaw and McKay theorized that what separated high-crime neighborhoods from low-crime neighborhoods were high rates of population turnover, poverty, and inadequate housing, among other factors. These factors resulted in the communities lacking the social control to respond to these challenges.

Subsequent research has stressed the importance of community ties, social capital, and collective efficacy in shaping the safety and cohesion of a neighborhood (Drakulich 2014, Wilson 1996, Shaw and McKay 1942, Sampson and Groves 1989, Bursik and Grasmick 1993). Drakulich defines social capital and collective efficacy: "*Social capital* refers to a resource potential facilitated by the structure of local networks, while *collective efficacy* is the ability of a group to draw on this resource to recognize common interests and achieve specific tasks related to local social control," (Drakulich 2014, p. 4891). Social capital and collective efficacy are related to formal and informal neighborhood structures, and instability—caused by job loss, economic decline, depopulation, and other factors—and can lead to the concentration of social disadvantage, which in turn gives rise to crime, which is exacerbated by the lack of resources for people to respond to crime (Drakulich 2014, Wilson 1996). Thus, social disorganization becomes cyclical. This is important because the amount of social capital and collective efficacy in an area thus determine the ability of community members to organize and respond to problems by activating local resource networks.

One issue that scholars face when studying social disorganization is what metrics to use to measure the level of social organization of a community and which outcomes to consider when evaluating the effects of social disorganization. Sampson and Groves (1989), who attempted to directly test Shaw and McKay's theory, chose to measure social organization using friendship networks, the prevalence of "street-corner teenage peer groups," and participation in clubs and organizations using survey data from the UK. Their findings support social disorganization theory, in that they found that communities with lower social organization also had higher crime rates. Another approach has been to look at the existing social institutions, or the lack thereof, in a neighborhood, and to evaluate the impact of the existence or absence of these organizations on crime, poverty, employment, and other metrics. Sharkey et al. (2017) analyzed the number of nonprofits in a community and estimated the resulting effect on levels of crime. Their findings showed that the presence of local nonprofit organizations can lead to significant decreases in many kinds of violence (including decreases in the homicide rate, violent crime rate, and the property crime rate). They also found that the greater the density of these organizations, the greater the effect, suggesting that formalized resource networks can improve neighborhood conditions, perhaps by connecting residents to larger external resource networks, as well as strengthening bonds between community members (Sharkey et al. 2017). Given the prevalence of faith-based organizations and previous research which has tied involvement in churches with greater political engagement and other positive outcomes in various areas such as education, it may be that churches and other faith-based organizations, which are usually nonprofits, achieve these effects through the building up of social capital and collective efficacy, the construction of community ties and resource networks, and increasing social organization (Dilulio 1999, Harris-Lacewell 2007, Mattis 2001 Pegram et al. 2016). Thus, it's worth exploring how faith-based organizations function in these communities and the difficulties they face in doing their work.

Data Sources and Methods

This project uses data collected from 16 interviews with clergy, nonprofit administrators, and community members affiliated with various organizations throughout Chicago and the Twin Cities. These interviews were conducted in December 2019 and January 2020. I chose to include multiple kinds of organizations in the data, and therefore did not focus exclusively on churches, but also sought out faith-based nonprofits and other organizations. I conducted ten interviews in person, and six interviews via phone when it was not possible to meet. The location of the interviews was determined by the interviewees, though usually they took place at the site of the organization respondents were affiliated with; interviews usually lasted around forty-five minutes, though differences in availability meant that some interviews were shorter and some were longer.

The interviews began with a general overview of the interviewee's background and organizational affiliation. Subsequently, the conversation would move towards the experience and expertise of the interviewee. Eight of the interviewees were affiliated with churches, and eight with nonprofits. Because of the diversity of organizations which the interviewees worked with, the pattern of questions diverged slightly depending on whether a particular organization was a church or a nonprofit and what their particular specialization or focus area was. In general, interviews focused on the anti-violence, community development, and advocacy work which the organization was engaged in, as well as the relationship between the organization and the local community. I structured the interviews as casual conversations, and often found that follow-up questions would lead to tangents and new topics. During the interview, I took notes of my observations about the environment and the interviewee. However, I did not attempt to take extensive notes of the conversation. Interviews were recorded with the interviewee's consent, which allowed me to more fully engage in the interviews and helped the interviews feel more conversational to both researcher and subject. This was intentional, as it was important to me to establish a rapport with the interviewee and allow them to highlight what they thought most important in their work.

NAME	**ORGANIZATION (TYPE)**	**DATE**	**METRO AREA**
Arnold Sojourner	Sunshine Gospel Ministries (Nonprofit)	11/19/19	Chicago
Saeed Richmond	Community Renewal Society (Nonprofit)	11/20/19	Chicago
Markyeta Boone	New Community Outreach (Nonprofit)	11/22/19	Chicago
Seth Patterson	Plymouth Congregational Church (Church)	12/16/19	Twin Cities
Sarah Peterka	Interfaith Action (Nonprofit)	12/18/19	Twin Cities
Fay Conners	TC Prison Ministry (Nonprofit)	1/10/20	Twin Cities
Julian DeShazier	University Church (Church)	1/13/20	Chicago
Sarah Lusche	Hyde Park Union Church	1/15/20	Chicago

	(Church)		
William Hall	St. James Community Church (Church)	1/16/20	Chicago
David Gagne	Community of St. Martin Ministries (Church)	1/17/20	Twin Cities
Kelly Chatman	Redeemer Lutheran (Church)	1/17/20	Twin Cities
Harry Burry	Twin Cities Nonviolent (Nonprofit)	1/18/20	Twin Cities
Jenn Hamrick	Friends for a Nonviolent World (Nonprofit)	1/23/20	Twin Cities
Tanya Watkins	SOUL (Nonprofit)	1/24/20	Chicago
Mary Martin	Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church (Church)	1/24/20	Twin Cities
David Watkins	Greater Bethesda Missionary Baptist (Church)	2/13/20	Chicago

Data Analysis

After completing an interview, I transcribed the audio and made note of key quotes, observations, and themes which emerged from the interview. I also looked over any notes I had made during the interview and incorporated these into my observations and takeaways. I compiled these key quotes, takeaways, and observations into a few short paragraphs that I saved alongside the transcription for future reference. Over the course of the project, I would periodically compare these notes between interviews in order to uncover common themes and patterns and make note of them for analysis. After all the interviews were complete, I created a separate document which organized and compiled data from all the interviews by theme, allowing me to more easily compare how different interviewees approached similar issues.

Researcher Positionality

The majority of communities in which the interviewees worked, both in Chicago and the Twin Cities, were communities of color. The interviewees came from a diversity of racial and ethnic backgrounds, which did not always exactly match the racial and ethnic makeup of the community they worked in. However, many of them were Black and served predominantly Black populations. Additionally, the majority of organizations with which the interviewees were affiliated were Christian (from a variety of denominations) and this religious identity was usually core to the organization's mission and values.

I am not a Christian and, as a mixed-race person who is often but not always perceived as white, it was not always possible to tell how the interviewees or others at the organizations perceived me or my presence. These factors may have affected what some of the interviewees were able or willing to say to me, though ultimately, this cannot be known. I did not discuss my personal background with the interviewees, beyond explaining my position as a student and how I came to be interested in the topic of the project. Another important factor was my affiliation with the University of Chicago. Some of the interviewees (especially those in Chicago, but also some in the Twin Cities) had some experience or even affiliation with the University, but most did not have a connection. The University has a long and complicated history in the South Side of Chicago, and certainly there were mixed sentiments expressed about the relationship between the university and local communities. My affiliation with the university, therefore, also may have affected what participants wished to say. However, I made it clear that while I was a student at the university, I was not a representative of the University in any way, and I believe the fact that participants were willing to express mixed and negative feelings about the university shows that they were not censoring themselves. Additionally, I am not from any of the neighborhoods in which the interviewees worked, which may also might have affected the way in which the interviewees related to me. All of these identities put me in the position of an outsider relative to the organizations and communities in which I was conducting research in the Twin Cities and Chicago, potentially limiting my ability to fully understand and access the complex social dynamics of these communities.

Findings

I begin by outlining the kinds of work in which the organizations participated, distinguishing three categories of work. I then move into the most common difficulties faced by these organizations and the steps which these organizations take to mitigate these challenges and the limitations of their work. These findings were for the most part consistent across both Chicago and the Twin Cities, which indicates they may be part of a larger pattern. However, there were some fine distinctions, which will be discussed.

Common Programming and Strategies for Community Action

All of the interviewees indicated that their organization participated in some way in efforts aimed at community development and/or violence prevention. However, their modes of engagement and strategies for program development, implementation, and impact measurement varied considerably. The organizations' programming and their strategies of engagement tended to fall into one or more of three categories. Firstly, there were those organizations which engaged in direct service, either by administering their own programs or partnering directly with another organization to provide direct access to goods and services for people in their local community. Common examples of this type of programs are food banks, job assistance, housing assistance, support groups, and prison ministries. Secondly, some organizations did not focus on direct service and instead chose to focus on advocacy and organizing on local, city, or state levels. Common examples of this type of work are prayer walks, demonstrations or protests, and engaging in direct dialogue with police departments, legislators, and other government agencies. Many organizations which participated in direct service also participated in advocacy and vice versa, but not all, hence the need for separate categories. Thirdly, there was one organization which chose not to engage at all in direct service or to participate directly in advocacy work, instead choosing to focus their efforts on raising financial capital from their membership and supporting other (both faith-based and secular) organizations.

Direct service is perhaps the category which is most traditionally associated with churches and indeed this was the largest group, as 12 out of the 16 interviewees reported that their organizations offered direct service programming. This programming varied in both issue area and form, with some congregations focusing on employment issues, others housing and food insecurity, still others on support for youth. However, they all involved providing some sort of good or service directly to a member of an affected community. The motivation for providing these services was twofold. Firstly, churches cited a theological basis for their call to serve, as Rev. William Hall of St. James Community church in Chicago said, “The good news is to bring resources and help to the poor. That was one of Jesus's first assignments when you know, ‘I come to give you good news, the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, to bring good news to the poor and set the captives free.’" In fact, it was this call to serve, some churches felt, that distinguished them from a “social club.” Secondly, many interviewees from both churches and nonprofits felt that participating in direct service is enriching for volunteers as well and contributes to the vitality of their congregations and organizations. Thus, they make it a goal to connect volunteers with opportunities to serve: “We want to provide transformative experiences for volunteers in the faith community…We watch how their lives transform when they're doing one-on-one tutoring with a kid or one-on-one ELL tutoring with an adult or helping them with their GED or job coaching them,” (Peterka). However, while these organizations place an emphasis on serving those in their community, not all of them also chose to take part in advocacy work. There were a number of reasons cited for this; Peterka and Sojourner, for example, pointed to concerns about risking funding, beliefs about the separation of church and state, and the desire to remain a neutral space.

Nevertheless, the great majority of organizations participating in this project were also engaged in some type of advocacy work. While some organizations had separate teams or projects dedicated to advocacy, others merged their advocacy work with direct service. An example of this is when St. James Community Church served 1,000 meals to community members “to make a statement around the poverty we’re facing in these communities” and to draw attention to the problem of food deserts. Reasons for becoming involved in advocacy were typically extensions of the reasoning for becoming involved in direct service in that church leaders felt there was a theological inconsistency in churches being involved in direct service without advocating for systemic change—and for this reason, many of the interviewees promoting involvement of advocacy were critical of churches which provided only direct service. Rev. DeShazier of University Church said of his experiences with such churches that it was like they were saying: “If you're hungry, Let's feed you, but let's not look at the cause of the suffering itself.” Similarly, Rev. Hall also criticized what he perceived to be the apathy of the church more broadly towards advocacy for systemic change:

> “I think that the question is do we serve and not challenge the policy that keeps people in those same predicaments?...We get off on the big "500,000 turkeys given away", but we don't do nothing about the policies that keep people in those lives…We must be challenging and there must be some tough questions around the policies that are keeping people in poverty and we're not doing that.”

Others remarked that it was the duty of faith-based organizations to be “the moral and the ethical presence” or to be a “public theologian” which draws attention to the moral urgency of issues of public debate (Richmond, Lusche).

Just as some organizations which provided direct service chose not to participate in advocacy, there were also organizations which were committed to advocacy but which did not take part in or provide any form of direct service. This choice was an intentional one. Some organizations, such as the Community Renewal Society in Chicago and Twin Cities Nonviolent in Minneapolis, saw their function as being primarily to connect other organizations to each other, coordinate efforts, and concentrate resources to push for policy change, and left the work of direct service to their member organizations (Richmond, Burry). Others felt that it was not their place to provide direct service when there were other, often secular, community organizations doing so already, as Rev. DeShazier said: “We know there are organizations that do direct services, we offer funding to them, we offer space to them when necessary…We will do a direct service only if it is shown that the church is the ideal place for this to happen,” He further explained that he felt that the church providing direct service shifted the responsibility from the state, which ought to be providing for the welfare of its citizens:

> “A large part of churches doing direct services comes out of a philosophy of church—an ecclesiology—that says that churches *must* be the place that provides those services. But that goes back to the Middle Ages. That's what churches did—the State basically said, ‘You all feed them and we'll keep doing our thing,’ but we need to question that model because it puts an onus on the church that churches sometimes aren't prepared to do in a way that's responsible, or actually even helpful, to people…All we do is just pause and say, ‘We should do something about that, who's doing something already?’”

Rather than providing services themselves, then, DeShazier’s congregation does a lot of “rerouting” to other services, becoming a hub through which community members may be referred to other organizations or government agencies which provide service.

The third category of organizations—those who choose not to participate directly in service or advocacy work—was occupied by the Community of St. Martin, a church in Minneapolis. This is not to say that the Community of St. Martin’s members are not actively involved in acts of direct service or in advocacy, as many are. However, the church itself has made the decision to focus on financial support as its core form of action. The church made this decision not because of apathy towards the cause of violence prevention and community development, but rather due to a distinct conviction that the work would be done more efficiently and more effectively if they pooled their financial resources and invested them into a professional organization whose sole purpose is violence prevention as opposed to trying to craft their own programming with limited resources and volunteers.

Community of St. Martin took several steps to maximize the amount of money they could donate and the impact they would have. Firstly, they got rid of their separate church building and now rent space from another church, leaving them with a large sum from the sale and saving them money on overhead. Secondly, they reduced their staff to just two people, with the rest of the positions being filled on a volunteer basis. Having made these transitions, Community of St. Martin now chooses to provide grants for community organizations working on issues of violence prevention in the Twin Cities. As David Gagne, a staff member, explains, “Unlike most churches, we don’t have that albatross from around our necks of trying to pay for repairs to buildings… and we can raise $20,000-30,000 fairly quickly for anything.” This choice to focus exclusively on financial support for a cause rather than on direct participation, insomuch as it is aimed at maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of service, is thus an extension of the logic of those churches which choose not to provide direct service. Community of St. Martin chooses to use their capital to fund other organizations, whose most immediate need is often financial.

Regardless of the way in which these organizations chose to operate, what they all had in common was that they were deeply engaged in some type of advocacy or service work. Using McRoberts’s framework, this would put all of these churches/faith-based organizations in the category of those which view “the street” as a “point of contact with people at risk,” (McRoberts 2003). But this is of course not the only kind of faith-based organization. Many of the interviewees (in both cities) expressed frustration at the number of churches which did not take any interest in participating in community revitalization work, or which participated only in the interest of gaining converts, though without any comprehensive survey it's difficult to say approximately what proportion of churches and faith-based organizations choose not to engage in advocacy or service.

Challenges in the Work of Faith-Based Organizations

Funding

As faith-based nonprofits and churches all fall under the IRS umbrella of "charitable organizations," they are restricted in the ways in which they can earn and spend money. Additionally, since essentially all of the services offered by these organizations are free or heavily subsidized—and providing these services at no or little cost is something which is of value to these organizations—they have to rely on other ways of sustaining their organization. All of the churches which were included in this project reported relying primarily on donations from members and visitors to meet their financial needs as an organization. Frequently, the nonprofit organizations also relied on individual donors, but were also more likely to report that they relied significantly upon grant funding from both from government sources and from other nonprofits—or even that they received significant financial support from churches who chose to invest in their organization as a part of their philanthropic endeavors. Churches in particular face some difficulties with funding since there are some grants which they are not eligible for and, some interviewees noted, oftentimes private sector or corporate donors are not as willing to give to a church (Hall, Sojourner). Churches may avoid this by setting up a separate Community Development Corporation which is a nonprofit which “operates in the mission of the church,” while allowing them access to more grant money and corporate donations (Hall).

Being unable to provide for their own financial needs creates several problems for faith-based organizations, many of which are common to nonprofit organizations more generally. The first issue is that in order to generate sufficient funds, staff at these organizations must spend a significant portion of their time pursuing donations and grants, thus inhibiting them from working on programming. As Sarah Peterka of Interfaith Action of Greater St. Paul noted, “Out of each day, I probably spend 20 to 25% working on a grant report, writing a grant request, talking to folks about donations and money.” This lack of funding also limits the number of staff they are able to hire, often leading to understaffing. The amount of programming that these organizations are able to offer is also constrained by budget concerns. Peterka further stated, “If I can get some funding to hire a couple more people…I could free up half my time to go do engagement out in the community. That's what I want to do.”

Secondly, since many of these organizations rely so heavily on donors, it can be more difficult for them to take challenging positions on issues in their community for fear of losing support from within their congregations/membership base. As Tanya Watkins, a community organizer with SOUL (a coalition which coordinates organizing efforts between churches on the South Side of Chicago) put it, “Church is a business. And in order to keep your business thriving, you have to get as many people in the door as possible and there’s sometimes a hesitancy to rock the boat, to piss off the people that are in the room. You say the wrong thing, you don't just lose a member, you lose money.” Further complicating matters is that oftentimes the interests of church’s/organization’s donors differ from those of the population which the church/organization aims to serve with their programming. This is especially the case for “commuter” or “destination” churches, where most of the congregants do not live in the surrounding neighborhood. These mismatched interests create perverse incentives for church leaders who wish to speak out or take action on local issues, as those who most need the services offered by churches are also those who can least afford to contribute to the sustainability of the church. Watkins elaborated, “The people on the other side of town, who need this message and appreciate it, do they have the financial resources to give 20% of their salary to keep the doors of the church open every Sunday?” This conflict can leave organizations in the difficult position of having to compromise ideologically in order to protect their financial security. This may be seen in some ways as a betrayal of an organization’s mission, but if the alternative is losing the long-term sustainability of the organization and thus being unable to do any work at all, it is sometimes necessary.

However, there are some advantages to operating on a donor-based system of funding. For those organizations/churches whose membership fully supports the mission of the organization, they can rely on a steadier stream of funding than grants. For example, New Community Outreach, an organization specializing in supporting youth and families in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago, grew out of New Community Covenant Church and is still heavily supported by the church. Since the church is congregational and important decisions are undertaken as a community, the decision to start the nonprofit and the commitment to support it were undertaken collectively by the membership. This has enabled New Community Outreach to draw funding and volunteers from both their specific congregation and from their denomination. Additionally, though relying on member donations can be limiting in some ways, as the organization depends upon public approval, it can also give them freedom in other ways, since often grants come with certain conditions and requirements. By not relying on grants or external funding, organizations (and by extension, the communities which support them) are able to have autonomy over program creation, implementation, and evaluation, allowing them to tailor their programming to their capabilities and the specific needs of their community.

Volunteer Pool

Since finances are such a large concern for many faith-based organizations, most of the organizations which participated in this project reported that they relied on volunteers to help staff their programming. Having sufficient staff and volunteers is a significant challenge for many nonprofit organizations—faith-based and secular—and was second only to funding in the frequency with which it was mentioned as a concern by interviewees. On the one hand, many faith-based organizations, unlike most secular organizations, have a “built-in” volunteer base in their congregations and/or denominational affiliations. Sarah Peterka of Interfaith Action of Greater St. Paul mentioned this as being one of the key reasons why her organization focuses on mobilizing faith communities, “We have found that there is a huge untapped labor force in faith communities. We all go to a faith community on the weekends or during the week, sit in a place that has heat, lights, where we're together in community, and we all ask the same question: how can make the community a better place?" Churches tend to have at least a subset of their congregations who believe that service is valuable to their faith and so in theory, they could be deployed in volunteer engagements throughout the community. However, other interviewees challenged this idea, citing an era of declining church attendance and an increase in commuter churches. Rev. Saeed Richmond of the Community Renewal Society commented,

> "I think we have been living in the space historically, that churches have had a lot of people and we come in, we activate, we engage all those people. And then we take all these people and then we amass them, and we move them to do great justice work. I think…the biggest problem we have is that churches don't have a whole lot of people to pull from nowadays."

This difference in perspective may also be due in part to differences in volunteerism between Minnesota and Illinois. The most frequently cited concern for organizations operating in the Twin Cities was volunteer availability, especially during daytime hours, whereas for organizations operating in Chicago the issue of volunteer recruitment was much more frequently discussed. This may be part of the larger regional context. Minnesota has the second-highest rate of volunteer participation in the country, with 35.43% of the population participating in volunteer work (Corporation for National & Community Service n.d.). Illinois is slightly below the national average, with a volunteer participation rate of 24.85%. Minnesota also has a slightly higher rate of church attendance, which may also help explain why faith-based organizations are affected by this discrepancy (Pew Research Center 2014).

However, one concern which was mentioned frequently in Minnesotan organizations specifically was the difficulty of having volunteers working in communities which they are not a part of. Many of the organizations working in Minneapolis/St. Paul and serving primarily working-class communities of color relied mainly on retirees and volunteers from suburban congregations (or from commuter churches in the city), both groups which skew heavily white and affluent. Interfaith Action of Greater St. Paul, whose programs cater primarily to Black, Native, and Hispanic populations, has a volunteer base which is 98.2% white. Peterka, a staff member of Interfaith Action said that they try to address this by training volunteers to understand their positionality and the boundaries of their role as volunteers:

> "We do education around things like implicit bias, what I consider the white savior mentality, those kind of issues…no matter what our [training] curriculum is for the year, the first one is more than likely about those boundaries…about really getting to the heart of why we're doing the work we're doing. It's not to come in and save this family or to save this kid who's not at the right reading level. Our job is to accompany this family. Our job is to accompany this young person on this journey."

Still, interviewees from many organizations in the Twin Cities expressed that they struggled with this issue, particularly in a religious setting where people derive spiritual meaning from acts of charity. As Seth Patterson of Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis said of training commuter volunteers to work successfully with local residents, "It takes a change in attitude from the old charity-based, 'Look how good we are because we're feeding those poor people,' and instead shifting to relationship, which is not always easy for people who get great meaning out of the giving of the charity."

Though this problem was certainly more prevalent in Minnesota, it was not entirely isolated to Minnesota. Commuter congregations in Chicago experienced similar issues. Rev. Hall of St. James Community Church in Chatham, which has a congregation of mostly commuters, said "At the end of the day, members of St. James, we saw historically gave towards a cause, but it would be a little difficult to get them to rally around the cause, because there's no community affiliation.” Though this alludes more to a difficulty in generating volunteers in the first place, as opposed to the difficulties in managing volunteers which was mentioned by Minnesotan interviewees, it presents another challenge for organizations whose volunteers come from a different community than the one they serve.

Navigating Relationships with Governmental and Non-Governmental Actors

Since the shortage of funding and manpower which affects so many faith-based organizations is partly attributable to their small size, partnerships can seem like a natural solution. By partnering with governmental actors or other churches and nonprofits, organizations can pool resources and enable their programs to run on a larger scale and at greater efficiency. The benefits seemed apparent enough that all of the interviewees reported that their organization participated to some degree in collaborations and partnerships (in fact, for three of the participating organizations, creating and managing partnerships between different churches was their primary means of achieving their mission). They gave numerous reasons for why partnerships were vital to their work. Beyond the efficiency and resource benefits, many organizations felt philosophically that partnerships were a good way to enhance their perspective and create richer and more robust programming. Interviewees stressed the importance of partnerships being genuinely collaborative, rather than simply one organization taking resources from another. Pastor Kelly Chatman of Redeemer Lutheran Church in North Minneapolis said, “We're not looking for a handout from congregations, we're inviting them into a partnership. And so, what's happening at Redeemer in North Minneapolis isn’t out of out of charity. It’s out of a partnering relationship and an opportunity.” Furthermore, Jenn Hamrick of Friends for a Nonviolent World, a Quaker anti-violence organization in the Twin Cities, stressed the importance of organizations being able to take feedback from partners and being adaptable:

> "It's about really focusing on building relationships, and not about what it is that we're trying to get out of the relationship, but finding ways of how is it that we can all work together when we have similar goals? What is it that we can do to help other organization or group, coalition a partnership, building in terms of making sure that there's really they give and take, and that it's not all about us and that we're willing to revise our programs, or our actions or anything it is that we're doing based off of the feedback that we're getting. So, we're not going into the community looking for affirmation that we're doing the right thing, but going into the community and asking the questions, and then showing that we listened to what people said by taking action."

Another benefit of partnerships is that they lessen the risk of duplicating existing work. As Pastor Sarah Lusche of Hyde Park Union Church put it, "We don't want to reinvent the wheel. There are so many organizations in Chicago doing really good work." This idea of not "reinventing the wheel" is important since program conception, creation, and implementation takes time and money—both of which are often in short supply in faith-based organizations—and partnering with another organization to strengthen or expand an already existing program can save resources.

However, there are real challenges to partnerships. For churches especially, there can be a political side to working between congregations. Interviewees in both Chicago and the Twin Cities recounted both specific instances and general trends which reflected what one interviewee referred to as a "logic of competition." This arises from the fear that pastors have of losing members to other congregations. As Seth Patterson of Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis described:

> “Churches by and large, don't play well with each other…there's such an idea of scarcity, because all churches are shrinking, whether they're shrinking or not. The expectation of going to church is gone. The centerpiece of church in the life of the most people is gone…And in some ways it's easier to partner with a synagogue or a mosque than it is with a church that might be kind of similar.”

Additionally, for pastors, partnership may be difficult because it sometimes means taking on a more supportive role, rather than the leadership roles to which many are accustomed. As Rev. DeShazier of University Church in Chicago said:

> “What we are waiting for are partners who can come in in responsible ways, who can offer the best of their skills and gifts, who can know their lane, and who can work together well with others. And one reason that that's difficult is because inside of a lot of ecclesiologies, it’s the pastor who is the center of authority and has to have the center of power. And there's so much gravity on the position of the pastor that to do collaboration necessarily means you're not at the center of the table—sometimes they're having meetings without you and they're doing things without you and you have to be okay with it. And there are a lot of places that are still under a traditional structure where, ‘Wait a minute, we're part of this, but the pastor is not the center of it.’ They can't imagine that and I think that that failure to imagine is going to come at a great cost to people who need the services the most.”

Sarah Peterka of Interfaith Action recounted an incident which demonstrates these phenomena. Her organization had been working with a coalition of clergy to organize an event to address housing insecurity and promote access to housing services. However, when Interfaith Action revealed that the event was going to be held at the church of a well-known reverend in the city, many of the congregations backed out of the event because they were concerned that bringing their congregations to this bigger, better-known congregation would result in a loss of membership for them. Interfaith Action still expressed determination to bring these congregations back to the table and hold the event, saying, “We're going to find another neutral space to hold this event so they feel comfortable inviting their congregants to come, because most of their congregations are low income families of color that could use us.”

However, this type of conflict generates additional costs to partnerships such as the need to rent neutral space. Furthermore, this hits on another point, which is that even though faith-based organizations—and churches especially—can act as access-points to services, they can also be gatekeepers. Knowing that they are trusted by their congregants, who are likely to turn to them at moments of crisis, they have significant power in determining what services someone will access. And similarly, if pastors are unwilling to cooperate with outside organizations, it becomes much more difficult for these organizations to reach congregants who may be in need of their services. Thus, organizations like Interfaith Action and other non-church faith-based and secular organizations walk a line between needing to appease pastors to guarantee that congregants have access to their services while also wanting to act in efficient ways which allow them to reach the greatest number of people.

When it comes to partnering with government entities, such as police or city and state governments, there are challenges as well. On the one hand, faith-based organizations can sometimes get their communities access to public officials which they might not otherwise get, and several organizations—both churches and nonprofits—said that they had brought politicians or elected officials into their organizations before for purposes of dialogue (Hall, Watkins, Lusche, Richmond). However, many faith-based organizations serve communities whose relationship with government entities is strained and some organizations felt theologically called to challenge the government:

> “[Jesus] challenged the government for how it participated in those systematic systems of poverty and he died because of his unwillingness to settle for conditions, unwillingness to yield and bow down to the system of oppression that was set before by the government. So, I think that to say that ‘Hey, I'm going to follow after Jesus, means

> that I have to follow that teaching…and to fight against the system, even disagree, unapologetically, in the public square with the leaders that uphold the system," (Hall).

Another interviewee, Tanya Watkins of SOUL in Chicago, expressed a similar sentiment regarding meetings with public officials:

> "We don't go in there to smile and cut deals. It is a relationship based on agitation and accountability. If that elected official leaves and they feel very comfortable, and they're just like 'This went great,' I kind of think to myself, 'I don't know if we did what we came for.' People should not be comfortable," (Watkins).

For many organizations, the choice of whether or not to work with government actors is also one which will deeply affect their credibility in their home communities and so is heavily dependent on the amount of community support they are able to generate for such a relationship. Tanya Watkins described the reaction of some residents to the idea of being involved with government, saying "We talk to people about being civically engaged, and they're like, 'I don't wanna deal with politics. How can I be engaged in the system? It's always going to be corrupt.'" Still, many organizations like Watkins' see value in making community members' voices heard, even if it's not in the form of a collaborative partnership and Watkins further pointed out, "If we get folks to that point where they look dead into an elected official's eyes and say, 'I don't trust your ass, no way.' That's actually somewhat powerful… even if they don't trust the process, it's still important to engage in it and I think that puts the elected official on notice." Thus, by engaging in conversations, even hostile ones, with elected officials, these organizations can give community members a sense of power and agency which can both motivate further work and make a statement.

The Problem of Stigma

One problem which underlies all of the work which these organizations do and the conversations and partnerships they have with outside organizations and individuals is the problem of stigma. Interviewees repeatedly reported that they felt that the communities which they served were stigmatized by the broader community and by the government. Interviewees lamented that public focus seemed to be entirely on the struggles their community was facing and so they saw it as part of their mission to counter these narratives, as Pastor Kelly Chatman of Redeemer Lutheran Church in North Minneapolis said: “North Minneapolis is historically a stigmatized community that is labeled for its deficits. And so, at Redeemer, we’re building on the assets of the community and the assets of the people.”

This stigma affected how nonprofits and churches are able to access resources, funding, volunteers, and even how the communities viewed themselves. As Tanya Watkins of SOUL in Chicago said:

> “People are scared to go out, some people are scared to stay in the community. And I think that there's a tremendous stigma about what these communities are like, which adds to them being under resourced and underdeveloped. When you go places and you hear your city referred to as Chiraq, right? Who would want to be there? When these are just residents, you know, I go to Englewood all the time and it is not a war zone. These are people who are working families, who've been in the communities for years, and they want the same opportunities as folks have on the North Side and that's it.”

This stigma often manifests itself in a deep distrust and suspicion. When trying to build partnerships, this lack of trust between groups can be a challenge. As Arnold Sojourner of Sunshine Gospel Ministries in Chicago put it: “No one is trusting anyone. The police do not trust the community, the community don't trust the police and no one trusts the young people. And the young people definitely don't trust them because they feel like they're just being picked on." This distrust is thus something which inhibits its own solution—which is more collaboration and communication.

Organizations combat this stigma by investing economically and socially in their neighborhoods. For example, Sunshine Gospel Ministries, which has a program to employ youth and provide professional development opportunities as well as develop the neighborhood's economy:

> "We employ at least 20 Youth every year. We have a coffee shop, which is again, it's an anchoring way of having a social venture—a business that destigmatizes the neighborhood. Because where there are few businesses, we model having a social venture, so that it's a beacon in the neighborhood that young people can participate in. It demystifies the neighborhood, where people say you can't have a business there. And then also saving this restaurant in the neighborhood, again where people gathered."

Other organizations focus on building social capital and collective efficacy through personal relationships. Tanya Watkins said: "We really…build power, through one-on-one relationships. We sit down, we meet with folks, we talk to them and listen, more importantly, to what not just what they're experiencing, but who they are." The idea of focusing on who people and communities are rather than simply what they're going through connects back to Chatman's comments in Minneapolis about not allowing these neighborhoods to be defined solely by their struggles. Faith-based organizations are perhaps especially suited to doing this because they may allow people to place their lives within a broader meaning. Rev. Saeed Richmond of the Community Renewal Society pointed towards this when he said: "Coming in with a faith perspective…leans us into a tradition, it leans us into a set of narratives." These narratives can perhaps allow people to define their own stories and their communities by things other than violence and poverty. But beyond narratives, the problem of stigma, and many of the other challenges which trouble faith-based organizations, can also be approached from a policy perspective and addressed through policy changes and shifts in the relationship between the government and these communities.

Policy Recommendations

Having examined the many challenges which faith-based organizations face, we now turn to the question of where we go from here. Currently, churches and faith-based nonprofits struggle to meet the needs of their communities due to a lack of financial resources and staff. While these challenges can be mitigated with partnerships between faith-based organizations and secular nonprofits, ultimately the need for scalability means that the governments of these states and cities ought to do more to provide for these communities. In fact, that is a goal which many of these organizations are actively working towards. Though churches may provide social programs such as food and housing assistance, these cannot be substitutes for the state—especially since they lack the funding, authority, and organizational structures which the state has. However, this is not to say that the government should simply replace these community organizations. Rather, the government should work towards a more open and collaborative relationship with faith-based organizations, many of whom expressed that they felt that city and state leaders were inaccessible. Allowing faith-based organizations to engage in dialogue with elected and appointed government officials would allow greater collaboration and communication, which may lead to the development of more effective strategies of engagement.

Faith-based organizations can also make changes which would improve their ability to make an impact on their communities. Though the formation of partnerships and coalitions presents challenges, it allows for the more efficient and efficacious allocation of resources including financial capital and manpower. The current situation, in which a great many organizations even in the same neighborhood operate in silos is unsustainable—especially in light of declining church attendance which will likely continue to limit the scale of programming which individual organizations can offer and shrink the pool of volunteers which organizations will have direct access to. Many organizations are already finding it difficult to sustain programming on their own, and partnerships will become even more crucial as these trends continue. More organizations engaged in smaller-scale programs should also consider adopting a stance similar to University Church and Community of St. Martin, focusing on advocacy and financial support for other organizations rather than emphasizing direct service. Focusing on advocacy and financial backing would allow these small organizations to have an impact by amplifying the voices of their communities, while directing those in need of support to appropriate resources, thus saving money and staff within the organization itself. If organizations are intent on providing direct service, they should focus their efforts on developing a smaller number of well-resourced, well-developed programs rather than offering a wide array of limited, small programs.

However, the strategies of focusing solely on advocacy and financial support to the exclusion or diminishment of direct service--despite their efficiency—were not very popular among the organizations which participated in this project and the majority of organizations were focused mainly on direct service. This gets to the heart of one of the biggest issues with faith-based organizations as partners for policymakers, which is that faith-based organizations can tend to favor program models which prioritize the needs of volunteers over the needs of the individuals and communities receiving the program. Faith-based organizations, which rely so heavily on members and volunteers for financial support, can be incentivized to provide spiritually meaningful experiences, which often results in operations which are not as efficient or equitable as they could be. Real harm can come as a result of this, with several respondents' describing the issue of a "savior complex" and the sense that a "charity-based model" can entail a kind of talking-down to the communities being served. Of course, many of the respondents indicated that their organizations were cognizant of this and taking steps to mitigate any harms caused by this by reviewing their volunteer training programs as Interfaith Action is doing or revising the kinds of projects which their organization takes on as Plymouth Congregational Church is doing. But ultimately, it's part of the mission of some of these organizations to provide spiritually fulfilling experiences for their membership, so without a broader cultural shift in what constitutes a spiritually fulfilling experience and an increased awareness of the ways in which these interactions (particularly when there are differences of privilege and power involved, as is often the case especially with commuter churches) perpetuate social inequities, it may be difficult for these organizations to completely escape these pitfalls.

None of this is to say that these organizations should not continue to engage in advocacy, service, and community development. Nor is it meant to imply that faith-based organizations or their leadership should not be utilized in the crafting and implementation of policy solutions to the social and economic inequities which ail cities across the U.S. What is notable about the success of Boston's Operation Ceasefire and even the initial success of Minneapolis's *Blueprint* *for Action* is that both plans utilized faith-leaders and faith-based organizations as a way to support government policy, not necessarily as a means of implementing it (Braga et al. 2001, Whitman 2008). This is fitting since, after all, it is not their wealth of resources or efficiency of organization which faith-based organizations are particularly known for, but rather the social networks which often surround them. These networks taken together can be a tremendous source of social capital and community buy-in. Recognizing the value in consulting with and including faith-based organizations in dialogue pursuant to the models of Boston and Minneapolis allows us to strike a middle ground between an over-reliance on faith-based organizations and a complete exclusion of faith-based organizations which could be alienating to community members.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has examined key issues surrounding the role that faith-based organization have played in their communities. To explore this subject, I conducted interviews with clergy and nonprofit administrators to look at organizations in two midwestern metro areas: Chicago and the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul). Looking at these two distinct areas served both to confirm and challenge various findings from each location. This paper has found that many faith-based institutions in both cities are engaged in efforts to address key issues in their communities through direct service programs and advocacy work. Direct service efforts range from food shelves to housing and job assistance, while advocacy work encompassed efforts from government lobbying to organizing demonstrations. Despite these efforts, faith-based organizations in both cities face significant challenges, including funding, manpower, and navigating relationships with governmental actors.

The project has several limitations. Firstly, only clergy and nonprofit/church administrators were included in the sample. As leaders in their communities, their perspective is important but they are a biased sample since they are deeply invested in their own work and naturally attuned to their own efforts. Community members not directly involved in the work may not be similarly biased and may provide a more neutral evaluation of an organization's presence in a community. Secondly, the sample size was small, particularly since it was spread across two cities. To truly dig into the unique context of these cities, one would need to draw upon a much larger sample in each city. Furthermore, these cities are each unique and have their own context and history, so the findings here are not necessarily generalizable to other cities, or even to other areas of Chicago and the Twin Cities. Finally, because the project aimed to be more of a survey of the kind of work that was going on at various organizations, the project did not focus in on any one organization or program specifically. Thus, this research cannot speak to the effectiveness of any one particular model, program, or organization.

This project's findings confirm and add to the work of previous research on the effects of faith-based organizations on their communities and the role of faith-based organizations in community organizing. This previous research acknowledges the power of faith-based organizations as places which can help communities build collective efficacy and social capital by pooling resources and providing an infrastructure around which to organize (McNeil 2011, Patillo-McCoy 1998, Pegram et al. 2016). This project both affirms and complicates these findings as it examines the many barriers which still remain for faith-based organizations engaged in their communities and echoes the challenges of engaging faith-based organizations in broader-scale efforts at socioeconomic change (McRoberts 2003). Further research is needed to fully explore the specific impacts of faith-based organizations on community members—both those who are directly involved in these institutions as well as those who are not—and to explore whether or not the findings presented here also hold true for other cities and regions.

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