IV

Latino Catholics and American Public Life

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Deacon Carlos Valdéz was angry. Gang member intimidation of seventh and eighth graders on the school playground of his parish, Ascension Catholic Church on the north side of Minneapolis, was so intense that the school principal had begun to patrol the schoolyard with a baseball bat. Frustrated by the lack of police response to the principal's pleas for help, in 1996 Valdéz enlisted the support of the Joint Ministry Project (JMP), a local faith-based community organization that addresses urban issues. Armed with JMP training in community organizing and public action, Valdéz and other parish leaders joined with JMP to gather 600 people and demand that the police chief and mayor increase patrols to deter gang recruitment. While at first city officials refused to negotiate, the media coverage that local organizers fostered soon shamed them into action. The following week "Safe Teams" comprised of civilians and police patrolled the schoolyard and adjacent neighborhood every afternoon. Gang members fled. Elated at their success, Valdéz and his fellow parishioners concluded that these events represented far more than just winning back their schoolyard. More importantly, they had learned that they could exercise collective power for the good of their community. As Deacon Valdéz summed up his own transformation after the victory, "I feel alive, and I'm being called by God to organize in my community, the Latino community." Subsequently Valdéz played a leading role in founding Sagrado Corazón parish; hundreds of Latino Catholics from this congregation have received leadership training in faith-based community organizing. Along with numerous other small victories stemming from this organizing effort, Latino leaders have created a Mercado Central business cooperative, raised $3 million for the cooperative's forty small businesses, and compelled the Immigration and Naturalization Service to process immigrant applications in a more timely and humane manner (Interfaith Funders, pp. 18-20).

The Latino Catholics of Minneapolis are part of the long-standing and growing Latino Catholic presence in the United States. Hispanic Catholics have been continuously present in what is now the United States for more than

Good Friday ritual of Jesus' passion and death concludes on the steps of San Fernando Cathedral in San Antonio. Courtesy Gene Martínez.

twice as long as the nation has existed. Subjects of the Spanish crown founded the first diocese in the "New World" at San Juan, Puerto Rico (1513) and the first permanent European settlement within the current borders of the fifty states at St. Augustine, Florida (1565). In 1598 at present-day El Paso, Texas, Spanish subjects established the permanent foundation of Catholicism in what is now the Southwest. Despite their long-standing presence, however, for much of U.S. history Hispanics have constituted a relatively small and frequently overlooked group within U.S. Catholicism. But in the last half-century their numbers and their influence have increased dramatically. An influx of newcomers from such diverse locales as Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Colombia, Peru, Ecuador, and Argentina, along with ongoing Mexican immigration, added to the ranks of an established Hispanic population comprised primarily of Mexican-descent Catholics. Hispanics are the largest group of U.S. Catholics as well as the largest group of recent Catholic arrivals; they will comprise the majority of U.S. Catholics during the first decades of the new century. This demographic shift has changed the face of numerous Catholic parishes and U.S. Catholicism generally and, as the efforts of Deacon Valdéz and his collaborators illustrate, the civic landscape of cities and towns across the nation. Latino Catholics in U.S. public life are particularly noteworthy in two ways: their extensive participation in faith-based community organizations like JMP and their vibrant public rituals that often spill out of churches into the streets, neighborhoods, and commercial areas of local communities.

Participation in faith-based community organizations like JMP is the most consistent and extensive form of Latino Catholic political activism. Sociologist Richard Wood contends that faith-based community organizations, that is, organizations whose membership is comprised primarily of local congregations, "arguably represent the most widespread movement for social justice in America." A recent study (Warren and Wood) reveals that there are 133 such organizations in the United States with an office and at least one fulltime staff person. Collectively, these organizations link 3,500 congregations plus 500 other institutions like public schools and labor union locals; congregations engaged in faith-based community organizations encompass between 1.5 and 2.5 million members and are in nearly all major urban areas and many secondary cities across the nation. Latinos comprise a majority in about 21 percent of the aforementioned 3,500 congregations. This figure represents a level of Latino involvement that nearly doubles their population ratio, currently about 12.6 percent of the national total. In cities and regions with large Latino populations like Los Angeles, New York, Miami, Chicago, San Antonio, El Paso, and the Rio Grande Valley, Latino participation and leadership is even more conspicuous. For example, in Texas half of the member congregations in faith-based community organizations are Hispanic Catholic parishes. Not surprisingly, the five states with the largest number of faith-based community

organizations are California, Texas, Illinois, New York, and Florida, the five states with the heaviest concentration of Hispanic population.

Most of the 133 organizations are associated with one of four major organizing networks. The most famous of these is the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which Saul Alinsky founded in 1940. Like the IAF, the Gamaliel Foundation is also based in Chicago, while the Pacific Institute for Community Organization (PICO) has its headquarters in Oakland and the Direct Action Research and Training Center (DART) is in Miami. The four networks contract with local organizations to provide professional organizers and leadership training. The Gamaliel Foundation, for example, supplied the organizer and training for Deacon Valdéz and others in Minneapolis. Although the local organizations remain autonomous, at times they work with other organizations on state and regional issues. Professional organizers often forge these collaborative links through their respective organizational networks. Latinos account for 16.3 percent of the professional organizers employed through the four networks and 21 percent of the board members in faith-based community organizations. Moreover, various Latinos are key leaders within the four organizational networks, such as Mary Gonzáles in the Gamaliel Foundation, Ernesto Cortés, Jr. in the IAF, and Denise Collazo and José Carrasco in PICO.

Religious leaders like the U.S. Catholic bishops have offered strong support for faith-based community organizations. In November 1969, Catholic bishops launched the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD, formerly the Campaign for Human Development) to address "the problems of poverty, racism and minority tensions" made painfully evident through the Civil Rights Movement and the rage and despair of poor urban Black Americans. In founding the CCHD, the bishops articulated two explicit goals: educating Catholics and other interested persons about contemporary social ills to promote "a greater spirit of solidarity" and funding support for "organized groups of white and minority poor to develop economic strength and political power." The latter goal has led CCHD to consistently support faith-based community organizations; in recent years about one third of all national CCHD funding has gone to such organizations (approximately $3 million in fiscal year 1999). Of three National Impact Projects that received major CCHD grants in 1999, two went to community organizing networks, the Gamaliel Foundation and the Industrial Areas Foundation (CCHD annual report). The aforementioned study of Warren and Wood reveals that the CCHD provides more funding for faith-based community organizations than all other religious givers combined; CCHD support totals nearly one-fifth of all income for faith-based community organizations nationwide.

The most renowned faith-based community organization that is overwhelmingly Latino is the Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) in San Antonio. IAF organizer Ernie Cortés worked with lay leaders and

priests like Edmundo Rodríguez, Albert Benavides, Charles Herzig, Patricio Flores, Hector Rodríguez, Bill Davis, and David García in the 1974 effort to found COPS among six Mexican Catholic parishes on San Antonio's west side. By the first organizational meeting that summer COPS had expanded to 27 churches, each of which agreed to provide leaders and annual dues to support the organization. Parish delegates at the inaugural meeting decided that the organization would initially focus on a single goal: improving the horrendous storm drainage on the west side. For decades the frequent flooding in west side neighborhoods had caused school closings, accidents, stalled cars, damaged homes, potholes, impassable roads, bridge collapses, a dearth of business establishments, even deaths. Amazingly, when COPS leaders researched past efforts to address flood problems they discovered that many drainage projects had actually been authorized in bond issues passed as far back as 1945. Outraged, they sought meetings with the city public works director and the city manager, but with no satisfactory results. Then, after a period of heavy flooding, COPS members filled city hall during a council meeting and related their horror stories of flooding catastrophes, as well as their findings on the city's failure to fulfill authorized drainage projects. Mayor Charles Becker, stunned by the crowd and the overwhelming evidence presented, ordered the city manager to devise a drainage project implementation plan. In November 1974, COPS took the lead in passing a $46.8 million bond issue for 15 west side drainage projects.

This initial major victory was only the beginning of COPS' long series of successful efforts at development and revitalization in neighborhoods on San Antonio's west and, subsequently, east and south sides. COPS has achieved more than $1 billion in infrastructure improvements for these primarily low-income and working-class neighborhoods. These improvements include new streets, sidewalks, libraries, parks, streetlights, clinics, affordable housing, and drainage systems, as well as significant advances in educational reform, job training, economic development, living wages, voter registration and active citizenship campaigns, after-school enrichment classes, college scholarships, and adult literacy. The organization's Project QUEST (Quality Employment through Skills Training) won the 1995 Innovation in American Government Award from Harvard University and the Ford Foundation. More importantly, COPS has transformed its members and the wider civil society of San Antonio. In the words of former San Antonio mayor and HUD secretary Henry Cisneros, "COPS has fundamentally altered the moral tone and the political and physical face of San Antonio. It has also confirmed . . .that one way to overcome poverty is to empower the poor to participate more fully in decisions that affect their lives." Grassroots COPS leaders agree, like parishioners from Our Lady of the Angels who attested on the occasion of COPS 25th anniversary that "many positive changes have come about in our community [because of COPS], but the most positive change has been in the attitude of our people.

Twenty-five years ago, we couldn't imagine that a city council member would attend our meetings, now we know that with the power of educated, organized people, anything is possible."

Beyond San Antonio, COPS set the tone for the establishment of other faith-based, multi-issue community organizations by transforming Saul Alinsky's model for organizing religious congregations. Under the innovative guidance of Ernie Cortés and COPS clerical and lay leaders, the organization adapted Alinsky's highly confrontational style of organizing to the cultural and religious sensibilities of Hispanic Catholics on San Antonio's west side. To be sure, COPS was necessarily confrontational, particularly in its early years, as an entrenched political and business establishment sought first to thwart and then to limit the organization's influence. But over time COPS leaders also worked collaboratively with elected officials and business executives, living out the dictum, common in faith-based organizing, to have "no permanent enemies and no permanent allies" but instead remain focused on the issue at hand. COPS also transcended the initial issue of drainage improvements to focus on a wider agenda, and ultimately on the primary agenda of creating a power organization that could address any number of issues and concerns that might arise. Moreover, like most faith-based organizing efforts, COPS' effectiveness and longevity are further enhanced by having an ongoing contractual relationship with one of the networks for leadership training and the services of professional organizers.

Scholars, reporters, and other observers often overlook yet another of the key innovations that Cortés and COPS leaders introduced into Alinsky-style organizing: the importance of integrating politics and faith. As sociologist Mark R. Warren has observed, "while Alinsky took a rather utilitarian view of churches as repositories of money and people to be mobilized, the modern IAF developed a close collaboration with people of faith, fusing religious traditions and power politics into a theology of organizing." Training sessions in faith-based organizing frequently include resources like the Bible, Catholic social encyclicals, and the pastoral letters of the U.S. Catholic bishops. For example, the figure of Moses, whom faith-based organizers often deem "the first organizer," is regularly engaged as a model for the vision, courage, relationship building, and public action of organizational leaders. Similar parallels are drawn with Jesus, Paul, and other significant biblical figures. Moreover, unlike efforts that IAF organizers initiated during the Alinsky era, the primary leaders in COPS are not activists committed to the cause, nor even clergy with social reform sympathies, but parishioners who perceive their activism as an extension of their commitment to family, church, and neighborhood. All but one of COPS' seven presidents has been an Hispanic woman, most of them middle-aged mothers with strong familial and parish ties. COPS leader Inez Ramírez summarizes the sentiments of many organizational members: "This is not merely politics we are engaged in, but correcting injustice, which is God's work

and the mission of the church. There is more to our spirituality than just going to Mass on Sundays. Our spirituality embodies a deep concern for the physical well-being of every individual" (Rogers, 124). The faith values of community leaders like Ramírez, along with their life commitments within their churches and neighborhoods, are a vital force for organizations like COPS that propose to exert a sustained influence on urban life.

So strong is COPS interest in vital congregations that the organization has even taken on the role of parish development, a process that encompasses identifying and training new leaders, collective learning based on Scripture and church teachings, building congregational unity around common goals and needs, expanding church outreach and ministries, and even the enhancement of stewardship and church finances. Leaders at Sacred Heart parish reported during COPS 25th anniversary that "parish development has been key in our growth and success as a COPS parish." Significantly, so close is the collaborative effort between COPS and the San Antonio Archdiocese that the archdiocese hired former COPS president Carmen Badillo to head its parish development office. Many priests applaud COPS for revitalizing their theological vision and their effectiveness in pastoral ministry. Both priests and lay leaders report an increase in attendance, contributions, and congregational vibrancy as a result of COPS membership. Father Dan Hennessey, who served as an early COPS vice president as well as pastor of a member parish, challenged his fellow clergymen to get involved in COPS. "I told them, 'Guys, this is an insurance policy to keep our key leaders here in our parish.' They were all flying out to the north side – the ones who could afford it – and taking a good chunk of our collection with them. Joining COPS is good economics. And it's good religion" (Rogers, 176). With Catholic parishes closing in the core of many U.S. cities, IAF organizer Sister Mary Beth Larkin offered perhaps the most blunt praise for the role of COPS in congregational life: "Not one parish on the west side of San Antonio died after COPS started" (Rogers, 175).

The various alterations to previous IAF efforts enabled COPS to provide an organizing model that numerous other community organizations have emulated. IAF organizers in Texas, many of whom initially served an apprenticeship with COPS, helped establish organizations in locales like Houston, El Paso, the Rio Grande Valley, West Texas, Austin, Dallas, Fort Worth, the Gulf Coast region around Beaumont and Port Arthur, Fort Bend County south of Houston, and the Eagle Pass-Del Rio border region. At COPS tenth anniversary assembly in 1983, Ernie Cortés announced the formation of the Texas IAF Network, which he then served as its first director. That same year this statewide network of local community organizations won its first major victory on the issue of school finance equalization and reform. Subsequently, the network lobbied successfully to gain critical funding for indigent health care and infrastructure improvements in the *colonias*, poor, unincorporated communities along the Texas-Mexico border which, before the Texas IAF Network,

were completely bereft of potable water, sewage systems, and other basic amenities. The Network's Alliance Schools educational initiative, an effort to build strong schools in low-income neighborhoods through the mutual collaboration of parents, teachers, administrators, and community leaders, has received national acclaim from school reformers. In 1999, organization leaders pronounced COPS 25th anniversary assembly as an occasion to celebrate "25 Years of Organizing in the Southwest." Representatives from IAF-affiliated organizations across the Southwest had delegates present; these organizations now include groups from various locales in California, New Mexico, and Arizona. Cortés, who is now based in Los Angeles, heads this new effort to link IAF-affiliated organizations on a regional basis.

Significantly, faith-based community organizations like those affiliated with the Southwest IAF provide an alternative model for people of faith to engage in politics. As sociologist Warren has noted, the IAF and similar networks attempt to build local power organizations from the ground up, enabling working-class and other congregational members to participate more actively and effectively in our democratic society. Unlike most food banks, clothing drives, rental assistance programs, and other "charitable" social service efforts, faith-based community organizations do not focus on temporary assistance but on constructing a more just and vigorous democracy. Unlike the Christian coalition and any number of groups who in large part attempt to lobby policy decisions at the national level, faith-based community organizations focus on building mediating institutions that provide the "missing middle" in American politics. Rather than propose a fixed moral agenda that they promote in public policy debates, faith-based community organizations are efforts to build institutions that primarily address the need of reestablishing a more participatory democracy.

Not surprisingly, community organizers like Ernie Cortés frequently bemoan the widespread (and often unconscious) presupposition that voting is the sole means for ordinary U.S. citizens to participate in our democracy. While not diminishing the importance of voting, they stress that "what you do after the election" most clearly reveals how active you are as a citizen. Building strong community organizations is their way of enabling congregations and their members to engage meaningfully in public discourse and decision-making processes that affect their lives. This organizing model presumes people from diverse backgrounds and religious traditions engender values and perspectives that can enliven and enrich this public discourse and the decisions that flow from it. In other words, faith-based community organizing offers an inherent critique of a political culture with limited alternatives and thus represents a vital contribution to the revitalization of American democracy.

While accentuating the promise for rejuvenating democracy that faith-based community organizations offer, Mark R. Warren and others have noted several challenges and obstacles that still lie ahead for community organiza-

tions like those in the IAF network. One of these challenges is the difficult transition from organizations focused explicitly on local needs and concerns to regional and even national coalitions that are a force for a wider political transformation. This challenge and its potential for effecting policy decisions and social change will make the recent emergence of the Southwest IAF, as well as other statewide and regional organizing efforts like the PICO California Project, even more fascinating to observe over the coming months and years. Additionally, while organizations like COPS and the wider Texas IAF network have been highly successful at attracting member congregations among Catholic, historically African-American, and mainline Protestant churches, they have few Jewish, Islamic, or other non-Christian congregations and a similar dearth of evangelical or Pentecostal churches. In Texas IAF-affiliated organizations, for example, the lack of Anglo-American Southern Baptist congregations, the predominant denomination throughout the northern half of the state, poses a significant challenge for these organizations to achieve their objective of building within their ranks as broad a base of support as possible. Among Latinos, who abandon Catholicism for evangelical and Pentecostal congregations at an annual rate of some 60,000, these churches' lack of participation in community organizations drastically curtails the possibility that their Latino members will engage in organizing activities. The recent establishment of Christians Supporting Community Organizing (CSCO) in Boulder, Colorado is an attempt to address this concern; CSCO's initial project is to link evangelical and Pentecostal congregations to faith-based community organizations in Philadelphia, Boston, Rochester, Chicago, and Spokane. The success of this effort is another emerging story in the ongoing development of faith-based community organizing among Latinos and other groups in the United States.

News reports on community organizations do not usually focus on the day-to-day work of building the organizations and training their leaders, but on the organizations' massive public assemblies like the 600 people Deacon Valdéz and JMP turned out to confront the Minneapolis mayor and police chief, or the 6,000-delegate assembly for COPS 25th anniversary. These public assemblies combine symbols and actions like religious icons, the U.S. flag, congregational banners, prayer, singing, the pledge of allegiance, an enthusiastic roll call of member congregations present, an organizational leader's focus statement of the meeting's purpose, applause and other responses from the delegate assembly, personal testimonies on concerns like gang violence and drainage problems that embody community issues the organization is addressing, and pointed requests that invited political and other community leaders make specific commitments to support the organization's agenda for community improvement and development. Carefully planned and enacted, but also frequently marked by spontaneous and unexpected responses from designated speakers and the organizational delegates in attendance, these high energy events are a public

face of faith-based organizing that provide poignant impressions and memories for many first-time observers as well as frequent participants.

Along with faith-based community organizing, the religious traditions of Latino Catholics are one of the primary ways that they are active in the public spaces of urban life. For many Latinos, the assemblies and actions of faith-based community organizations are a form of public ritual that reflect their tradition of communal faith expressions filled with color, pageantry, vibrant singing, vivid religious imagery, and enthusiastic participation. Indeed, perhaps the most overlooked dimension of the Latino public presence in the United States is their ritual and devotional traditions, faith expressions that often spill out into streets and plazas of U.S. cities and towns.

Nowhere is this public ritual more conspicuous than at San Antonio's San Fernando Cathedral, the oldest cathedral sanctuary in the country (and a member of COPS). Founded by Spanish subjects in 1731, San Fernando has remained a predominantly Hispanic faith community under the flags of Spain, Mexico, the Republic of Texas, the United States, the Confederate States of America, and then the United States again. The prominence of Mexican Catholic traditions is readily evident in the annual public rituals that the San Fernando congregation celebrates. *Las posadas* (literally the "dwellings" or "shelters") re-enact the pilgrimage of Mary and Joseph on the way to Bethlehem. During the nine days before Christmas, these festive processions are organized in various parishioners' homes and neighborhoods and one grand *posada* is enacted through the streets of downtown San Antonio, with the holy pilgrims denied entry at sites like the city hall and county courthouse before finally receiving shelter at the cathedral. For the vigil of Our Lady of Guadalupe's feast day (December 12), the San Fernando congregation celebrates a *serenata* of songs to their celestial mother, the patroness of the Mexican people. In recent years the *serenata* has been transmitted throughout the Americas via television. The proclamation of Jesus' passion and death on Good Friday begins in the public market, winds through the city's downtown streets, and ends with the crucifixion on the steps of the cathedral. Later that evening the *servicio del santo entierro* (entombment or wake service) includes a candlelight procession with the body of Jesus through the plaza and streets around the cathedral. Frequently, San Fernando's 8:00 bilingual Sunday Mass, which is televised internationally, also encompasses Mexican Catholic traditions. These traditions include practices such as an Epiphany entrance procession with parishioners dressed as the magi, the blessing of children on a Sunday near the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple (February 2), and the remembrance of the community's deceased heroes and leaders on a Sunday proximate to the feasts of All Saints and All Souls at the beginning of November (popularly known as *el Día de los Muertos*, the Day of the Dead).

While San Fernando has a long-standing tradition of public ritual, similar faith traditions are increasingly evident in the streets of numerous U.S.

towns and cities. Like European Catholic immigrants from previous generations, more recent arrivals from Latin America and the Caribbean bring treasured expressions of faith with them, such as the Puerto Rican devotion to their patron San Juan, the Cuban veneration of their patroness *Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre* (Our Lady of Charity), Guatemalan faith in *El Cristo Negro de Esquipulas* (the Black Christ), and El Salvadoran dedication to Oscar Romero, the slain archbishop of San Salvador who is popularly acclaimed as a martyr and saint. And, like their European co-religionists, Latino Catholics express their devotion to Christ, the Eucharist, Mary, and particular patron saints in massive public rituals. In New York, Miami, Los Angeles, Washington, D.C., and other locales with significant Latino populations across the nation, Latinos celebrate their feasts and religious traditions with processions through city streets, outdoor Masses and prayer services, televised worship, and other public manifestations of devotion that alter the sacred landscape of numerous U.S. communities.

One of the most widespread traditions among all Latino groups is the extensive devotion to the crucified Jesus and his suffering mother on Good Friday. As at San Fernando, in many Hispanic parishes this devotion encompasses a public re-enactment of Jesus' trial, way of the cross, and crucifixion or some other procession through the streets. Parishes like St. Bridget's on Manhattan's lower east side, St. Stephen's in South Bend, Indiana, St. Anthony's in Milwaukee, St. Clements in Santa Monica, California, and eight Catholic congregations along 18th Street in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood are just a few of the many predominantly Latino parishes that annually observe this public ritual tradition.

Practitioners of public devotions like those associated with Good Friday frequently contend that the celebration of their sacred traditions forms them as a people by keeping their religious and cultural heritage alive. Many immigrant participants in these devotions attest that the traditions enliven treasured memories of their childhood and native land; often they insist that the traditions be celebrated in the way they remember them from their homeland. U.S.-born Hispanics like journalist and San Fernando Cathedral parishioner Victor Landa also acclaim these sacred traditions as a source of collective memory, cultural rootedness, and ethnic identity and pride. As Landa wrote after a recent Good Friday procession in which thousands accompanied Jesus carrying his cross through San Antonio's downtown streets: "Every step down the *Via Dolorosa* is an affirmation of our past, an understanding of our present, and a courageous entrance into our future. Every year, as the procession winds its way from the Market Square to the cathedral, a community deepens its roots." Or, as his fellow parishioner Frank Paredes, Jr. put it, "The public rituals and fiestas at San Fernando strengthen us in our identity by allowing us to pridefully celebrate our culture and faith."

Along with commentary on the ethnoreligious origins and significance of

Good Friday and other public rituals, media coverage often focuses on messages of political protest against injustice and violence that these rituals embody. The opening line of an April 1998 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* report observed: "The symbolism was blinding as an actor playing Jesus Christ was handed over to be crucified during a Good Friday re-enactment on the same [St. Anthony] church steps where a teenage boy was shot to death last month." This report went on to state that the annual ritual's "prayers and readings drew a line from the suffering and death of Christ 2,000 years ago to the social ills that plague this poor neighborhood today." *Chicago Tribune* reports of the Good Friday Way of the Cross in the Pilsen neighborhood make similar links between the suffering of Jesus and the suffering of contemporary Latino communities (see, e.g., 3/26/91, 4/14/95). In fact, as *Tribune* reporters have noted, it was the suffering of the community that led Mexican Catholics and parish priests in Pilsen to initiate this annual public ritual. On Christmas eve in 1976, ten children and two mothers died in a fire that swept through an apartment building two blocks from St. Vitus parish. Because they did not understand Spanish, Chicago firefighters who responded to this emergency were unaware that these victims were trapped inside the burning building. In a public meeting following this tragedy, parishioners from St. Vitus and other Pilsen parishes argued that these deaths resulted from a lack of Spanish-speaking firefighters, as well as absentee landlords, overcrowded housing, and city neglect of public services. The following Good Friday they began their annual Way of the Cross as an expression of faith intended to draw the community together in a collective act of solidarity, remember their lost loved ones, and connect their deaths and the plight of the Pilsen neighborhood with the unjust crucifixion of Jesus. Subsequently, the annual procession links the Stations of the Cross (the events that comprise Jesus' painful walk on the road to Calvary) with "community problems such as housing, crowded schools, immigration and gang violence." In the words of Father James Colleran, pastor of St. Vitus the year of the first Pilsen Way of the Cross, "the important thing is to relate the stations to what is happening in the community" (*Chicago Tribune* 3/26/91).

At their core, however, these rituals are not only an expression of political protest, nor merely sources of cultural affirmation and retention, but practitioners' treasured means of encountering the sacred in their lives. In the words of Ernest Muniz, a San Fernando parishioner who was a Roman soldier in the annual passion proclamation for over a decade: "The experience becomes so real to me that I feel as if I'm right there with Jesus, a Roman soldier whipping him and kicking him." After participating in Jesus' crucifixion, Muniz attests that he sheds his costume and "I go into the church, where I pray a lot and ask forgiveness" for his part in the suffering of Jesus (*San Antonio Express News*, 4/15/95). Various San Fernando parishioners recall the occasion when a young boy broke free from his parents and spontaneously stepped forward to wipe the face of Jesus during the annual Good Friday procession. One parish leader

echoed the sentiments of many others in asking rhetorically about this boy: "Did he touch the face of an actor or the face of Jesus himself?" Similarly, speaking to the devotees who gathered in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood for the Living Way of the Cross, Cardinal Francis George of Chicago commented: "The people who are walking along are reliving those mysteries [of Christ's passion and death] in their hearts" (*Chicago Tribune*, 4/22/00).

Latino religious leaders like Father Virgilio Elizondo, who served as rector of San Fernando Cathedral from 1983-1995, contend that "the Latinos' love for public ritual is a contribution we make to American society. I think there is a hunger for it in American life. It lets you enter into the power of a collective experience" (*Los Angeles Times*, 3/28/97). In a society that focuses more and more on individual spiritual quests and frequently neglects the human need for collective ritual, Latino traditions and congregations offer a significant model of one way the church can fulfill its public role and provide a religious experience that transcends cultural and denominational boundaries. The comments of various participants in the annual passion proclamation confirm that the San Fernando congregation's public ritual has influence and meaning far beyond the limits of the cathedral's predominantly Mexican Catholic congregation. Local Baptist minister Buckner Fanning, a frequent participant, attests that "when I walked behind Jesus on the Way of the Cross I wondered what I would have done had I been there. The people of San Fernando drew me into the passion and put me right there with Jesus." Even a local rabbi, Samuel Stahl, has publicly acknowledged the rich religious traditions San Fernando offers the city of San Antonio and expressed his gratitude for the sensitivity to Jewish-Christian relations in the way the passion is enacted. Sociologist of religion Stephen Warner, who is from a Presbyterian background, opines that the power of San Fernando's Good Friday procession and similar public rituals is that, "in a society as drenched as ours in symbolic representations," the color and vibrancy of this religious pageantry "fill[s] the memories of onlookers with indelible religious images" and gives religious messages "a competitive edge."

Implicit in such comments is the contention that Latino public ritual provides a new model of inclusive pluralism for a society often torn by divisive barriers between peoples and religions. Frequently, ecumenical and interfaith worship services, as well as "multicultural" events in religious and civic life, tend to focus on the commonalties between diverse peoples and religious traditions and downplay or ignore their differences. Conversely, Latino public ritual is firmly rooted in a particular ethnic and religious tradition, yet open to the participation of all. As sociologist Warner commented after his first experience of the San Fernando passion proclamation, "Many of these rituals were foreign to me….Right in front of us we saw realistically reenacted the suffering and death of Jesus, the cruelty of his tormentors, and the grief of his mother. There was nothing metaphorical, nothing merely figurative, nothing generic about these

rites. Yet, as an Anglo, I did not feel excluded." Latino leaders' decisions to celebrate public rituals bilingually at places like San Fernando and Pilsen have helped facilitate the growing participation of non-Hispanics in these rituals. To be sure, the massive crowds at the rituals are still predominantly Latino Catholics. But the increasing presence of people from other religious and cultural backgrounds is a fascinating phenomenon that led one San Antonio newspaper columnist to deem contemporary San Fernando the "celestial center of San Antonio," a ritual center embraced by a vast array of city residents and visitors. The accounts of non-Hispanics who are attracted to these sacred traditions, along with the ways a collective experience of public ritual forges bonds between diverse peoples, are elements of this story about Latino religion in American public life that require much further exploration, insightful interviews, and analysis.

Another significant but frequently overlooked element of the story is the practitioners' notion that their rituals embody a religious experience that transcends time and space. Anthropologist Karen Mary Davalos' outstanding study of Pilsen's Way of the Cross encompassed numerous conversations with leaders in the Good Friday ritual like Patricia, who summed up the intersection of yesterday and today: "Christ suffered way back 2,000 years ago, but he's still suffering now. His people are suffering. We're lamenting and wailing. And also we are a joyful people at the same time. . .So this is not a story, this is not a fairy tale. It happened, and it's happening now." Another interviewee for Davalos' study put it even more succinctly, stating that in the Way of the Cross "we are reliving that moment which is actually happening now." For these and other participants in Latino public rituals like those of Good Friday, the power of the ritual is its capacity to mediate an encounter with God that transcends limiting distinctions like those between Pilsen and Calvary Hill, Chicago and Jerusalem, our "secular" age and the "sacred" time of Jesus. For these practitioners, their religious traditions are not mere pious reenactments but an opportunity to participate in sacred events that are integrated with their everyday world and its meaning. This integration enables them not only to endure present trials and hardships with the power of faith; it also animates many devotees to struggle for the transformation of their personal and collective lives. In the words of yet another interviewee in the Davalos study, a woman named Claudia who was one of the first coordinators for the Pilsen Way of the Cross, this public ritual is "the real way of praying" because it is "the opportunity to reflect and analyze how we are living and the things we have to [do] in order to have a better life."

The complete significance of such graphic and exuberant rituals in the public spaces of twenty-first century U.S. towns and cities is a story that scholars, pastors, and reporters have not yet fully understood, much less exhausted. What is it that makes these rituals so vital, so meaningful, and so important to people? What is it about them that they even spark the imagination of non-

Hispanics previously unfamiliar with the traditions of Latino Catholicism? Surely all of the aforementioned analysis is part of the answer. But as this dramatic chapter of religion in American public life unfolds before our eyes, no doubt there is much more to this story that still has not been brought to light.

Issues to Keep an Eye on

The influence of faith-based community organizations on the life of local congregations. Scholars and reporters alike have examined the influence of faith-based community organizations on local politics, civic life, and economic development. But they have given relatively little attention to how these organizations shape the spirituality, theology, and faith expressions and commitments of local congregations and their members. This is a ripe topic for further analysis and investigation about Latino (and other) congregations.

Collaborative efforts of local faith-based community organizations in statewide, regional and national networks. The predominantly-Latino COPS organization highlighted in this essay is just one example of numerous faith-based community organizations across the nation. These organizations have amply demonstrated their ability to enable working-class and other congregational members to build a base of power and engage in democratic decision-making processes on the local level. Several current and ongoing efforts are intended to expand the influence of local organizations, such as Isaiah (formerly the Minnesota Collaboration Project), which includes the JMP organization mentioned at the outset of this essay, and the aforementioned PICO California, Texas IAF, and now Southwest IAF Networks. The success of local organizations in their attempts to build wider collaborative links is a significant issue in the ongoing evolution of faith-based community organizations.

Efforts to engage a more diverse array of congregations in faith-based community organizations. Collectively, Catholic, historically African-American, and mainline Protestant congregations comprise the overwhelming majority of churches in faith-based community organizations. Conversely, the organizations have relatively few Jewish, Islamic, or other non-Christian congregations and a similar dearth of evangelical or Protestant churches. Community organizers and the leaders of local organizations are well aware that these other congregations are absent from their ranks and have attempted to foster more broad-based participation in their organizations. Systematic efforts of this type, such as the recent establishment of Christians Supporting Community Organizing as mentioned above, are a crucial development in the ongoing evolution of faith-based organizing among Latinos and other groups in the United States.

Faith-based community organizations offer an alternative model for people of faith to engage in politics. Unlike groups who primarily attempt to lobby policy decisions at the national level such as the Christian collation, faith-based community organizations like COPS attempt to build local power organizations from the ground up. Rather than focus on a fixed moral agenda

that they promote in public policy debates, community organizations enable working-class and other congregational members to participate more actively and effectively in our democratic society. Thus they implicitly (and at times explicitly) reveal that people of faith can engage in politics not just by setting moral agendas rooted in religious traditions, but also by seeking to ensure that religious values like the dignity of all human persons are respected in the very process of public discourse and decision-making. Their *primary* focus on building institutions that rejuvenate our democratic process, rather than influencing specific policy issues *per se*, comprises an alternative model for integrating faith and politics that warrants further examination and analysis.

The work of faith-based community organizations in critical contemporary issues like school reform, affordable housing, crime, and neighborhood development. News media and scholars have given much attention to the successful efforts of faith-based community organizations on a host of vital community issues. Observers have also noted how community organizations frequently collaborate with political, business, educational, and other civic leaders in their efforts. These successes continue to be an important part of the story, particularly how faith-based community organizations often broker partnerships and innovative approaches in response to community issues.

The presence and meaning of Latino public ritual in numerous U.S. towns and cities. One of the primary ways that Latino Catholics are active in the public spaces of urban life is through the celebration of their religious traditions. These multivalent religious traditions have social, cultural, and political meanings and, most importantly, are a form of enacted theology that address the human need for collective ritual, embodied prayer, and connectedness to the sacred. The practices and meanings of Latino public ritual in particular locales is a timely topic for further investigation.

The participation of non-Latinos in Latino public ritual. While the vast majority of participants in Latino public rituals are Latinos themselves, a growing number of non-Latinos are present and active in these celebrations. Strikingly, the celebrations remain firmly rooted in a particular ethnic and religious tradition, yet they mediate a religious experience that frequently transcends cultural and denominational boundaries. Accounts of non-Latinos' experiences during these public rituals, along with analysis of how collective ritual forges bonds between diverse peoples, provide fresh perspectives for this developing story about Latino religion in American public life.

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Appendix: List of Faith-Based Community Organizations

The state-by-state listing that follows is based on a national study of faith-based community organizations conducted by Interfaith Funders, whom I gratefully acknowledge.

Abbreviations for Organizing Networks

DART	Direct Action Research and Training Center
GAM	Gamaliel Foundation
IAF	Industrial Areas Foundation
IND	Independent (i.e., not affiliated with a network)
IVP	Inter-Valley Project
OLTC	Organizing, Leadership, and Training Center
PICO	Pacific Institute for Community Organization
RCNO	Regional Council of Neighborhood Organizations

IAF	Valley Interfaith Project-Phoenix	AZ, Phoenix
IAF	East Valley Interfaith Sponsoring Committee	AZ, Tempe
IAF	Pima County Interfaith Council	AZ, Tucson
PICO	Orange County Congregation Community Organization	CA, Anaheim
PICO	Fresno Interfaith Sponsoring Committee	CA, Fresno
RCNO	Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches	CA, Los Angeles
IAF	Metropolitan Los Angeles Organization	CA, Los Angeles
Unknown	South Central Organizing Committee	CA, Los Angeles
IAF	United Neighborhood Organization	CA, Los Angeles
IAF	East Valley Organization	CA, Monrovia
PICO	Oakland Community Organization	CA, Oakland
GAM	Oakland Coalition of Congregations	CA, Oakland
Unknown	Southern California Organizing Project	CA, Pasadena
PICO	Contra Costa Interfaith Sponsoring Committee	CA, Richmond
IAF	Sacramento Valley Organizing Community (SVOC)	CA, Sacramento
PICO	Sacramento Area Congregations Together	CA, Sacramento
PICO	Inland Congregations United for Change (ICUC)	CA, San Bernardino
PICO	San Mateo County Organizing Project	CA, San Carlos
RCNO	United African-American Ministerial Action Council	CA, San Diego
PICO	San Diego Organizing Project	CA, San Diego
IAF	Valley Organized in Community Efforts	CA, San Fernando
IAF	Bay Area Organizing Project	CA, San Francisco
Unknown	West Coast Industrial Areas Foundation	CA, San Francisco
PICO	San Francisco Organizing Project	CA, San Francisco
PICO	People Acting in Community Together	CA, San Jose
PICO	Peninsula Interfaith Action	CA, San Mateo
Unknown	Orange County Sponsoring Committee	CA, Santa Ana
IAF	Sonoma-Napa Action Project (SNAP)	CA, Santa Rosa
Unknown	Sonoma County Faith Based Community	CA, Sebastopol
PICO	PACT for Stockton (was San Joaquin Interfaith Federation)	CA, Stockton

Unknown	South Stockton Community Concerns	CA, Stockton
IAF	Monterey Bay Organizing Project	CA, Watsonville
PICO	Metropolitan Organizations for People	CO, Denver
PICO	Congregations Building Community	CO, Windsor
OLTC	Greater Bridgeport Interfaith Action	CT, Bridgeport
IND	Elm City Congregations Organized	CT, New Haven
IVP	Naugatuck Valley Project	CT, Waterbury
IAF	Washington Interfaith Network	DC, Washington
IAF	Wilmington Interfaith Network	DE, Wilmington
DART	Volusia Interfaith Sponsoring Committee	FL, Daytona Beach
DART	Justice for All in Broward	FL, Fort Lauderdale
Unknown	Collier United for Rights and Equality	FL, Golden Gate
DART	Interchurch Coalition for Action, Reconcil & Empowerment (ICARE)	FL, Jacksonville
DART	People Acting in Community Together	FL, Miami
PICO	Orlando Interfaith Sponsoring Committee	FL, Orlando
PICO	Greater Pensacola Community Organization	FL, Pensacola
DART	Sarasotans United for Responsibility and Equity	FL, Sarasota
PICO	Congregations United for Community Action	FL, St Petersburg
DART	Hillsborough Organization for Progress and Equality (HOPE)	FL, Tampa
DART	People Engaged in Active Community Efforts (PEACE)	FL, West Palm Beach
IAF	Atlantans Building Leadership for Empowerment	GA, Atlanta
IND	Faith Action for Community Equity (FACE)	HI, Honolulu
GAM	Quad Cities Interfaith Sponsoring Committee	IA, Davenport
IAF	Des Moines Area Sponsoring Committee	IA, Des Moines
Unknown	Dominican Sisters-IL	IL, Aurora
RCNO	Central Illinois Organizing Project	IL, Bloomington
GAM	Alliance of Congregations Transforming the Southside	IL, Chicago
IND	Community Action Group	IL, Chicago
GAM	Interfaith Southsiders Allied In Action and Hope (ISAIAH)	IL, Chicago
GAM	Pilsen Neighbors Community Council	IL, Chicago
GAM	Metropolitan Alliance of Congregations	IL, Chicago
GAM	The Hyde Park and Kenwood Interfaith Council	IL, Chicago
IAF	United Power for Action and Justice	IL, Chicago & Cook C
GAM	South Suburban Action Council (SSAC)	IL, Hazel Crest
GAM	Joliet Area Church-Based Organizing Body (JACOB)	IL, Joliet
IND	Center for New Community	IL, Oak Park
GAM	Northwest Indiana Federation of Interfaith Organizations	IN, Gary
PICO	Wyandotte County Interfaith Sponsoring Council (WISC)	KS, Kansas City
DART	CLOUT	KY, Louisville
PICO	Louisiana Interfaith Together (LIFT)	LA, Baton Rouge
PICO	Working Interfaith Together (WIN)	LA, Baton Rouge
PICO	Greater Baton Rouge Congregational Based Organization	LA, Baton Rouge
PICO	Bayou Interfaith Sponsoring Committee (BISCO)	LA, Houma/Thibodaux
PICO	COPE	LA, Lafayette/New Ib
PICO	East Carroll Interfaith Sponsoring Committee	LA, Lake Providence

PICO	All Congregations Together	LA, New Orleans
IAF	The Jeremiah Group Northshore Development Project	LA, New Orleans
OLTC/IAF	Greater Boston Interfaith Organization	MA, Boston
OLTC/IAF	Brockton Interfaith Community Organizing and Leadership	MA, Brockton
OLTC	United Interfaith Action	MA, Fall River
IVP	Merrimack Valley Project	MA, Lawrence
OLTC	Essex County Community Organization	MA, Lynn
IVP/OLTC	Pioneer Valley Project	MA, Springfield
OLTC/IAF	Worcester Interfaith	MA, Worcester
IAF	Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development (BUILD)	MD, Baltimore
IAF	Action in Montgomery Count	MD, Montgomery
IAF	Interfaith Action Communities	MD, Prince George's
GAM	Moses (includes Jeremiah Project, Noah, WDIFCO-Ruth)	MI, Detroit
GAM	West Detroit Interfaith Sponsoring Committee	MI, Detroit
GAM	Northeast Organization Allied for Hope	MI, Detroit
GAM	Jeremiah Project	MI, Detroit
DART	Michigan Organizing Project	MI, Muskegon Heights
GAM	EZEKIEL	MI, Saginaw
Unknown	United Now in Serving Our Neighborhoods	MI, Ypsilanti
GAM	Interfaith Action Organization	MN, Minneapolis
IND	Jewish Community Action	MN, Minneapolis
GAM	Minnesota Collaboration Project (= GRIP)	MN, St. Cloud
GAM	St. Paul Ecumenical Alliance of Cong. (SPEAC) / E Metro Isaiah	MN, St. Paul
Unknown	Minnesota Rural Organizing Project	MN, St. Paul
PICO	Kansas City Organizing Project	MO, Kansas City
GAM	Churches Committed to Community Concerns (CCCC)	MO, St. Louis
GAM	Churches Allied for Community Improvement	MO, St. Louis
GAM	Churches United for Community Action	MO, St. Louis
IAF	Amos Network	MS, Jackson
IAF	Helping Empower Local People (HELP)	NC, Charlotte
IAF	Omaha Temporary Organizing Committee	NE, Omaha
IAF	Community Organizing in Nebraska	NE, Winnebago
PICO	Camden Churches Organizing Project (CCOP)	NJ, Camden
IAF	Interfaith Community Organizing Project	NJ, Jersey City
IAF	Albuquerque Interfaith	NM, Albuquerque
IAF	South Bronx Churches	NY, Bronx
PICO	Community Action Project	NY, Brooklyn
IAF	East Brooklyn Congregations	NY, Brooklyn
Unknown	Brooklyn Interfaith for Action	NY, Brooklyn
PICO	Central Brooklyn Churches	NY, Brooklyn
GAM	Voice—Buffalo	NY, Buffalo
IAF	West Siders Together	NY, New York
IAF	East Harlem Partnership for Change	NY, New York
IAF	Lower Manhattan Together	NY, New York
IAF	Queens Citizens Organizations/Queens Citizens	NY, Rego Park

PICO	Interfaith Action	NY, Rochester
IAF	Long Island CAN	NY, Valley Stream
GAM	Amos Project	OH, Cincinnati
Unknown	United Churches Active in Neighborhoods	OH, Cincinnati
NTIC	WIN Action Organizing Project	OH, Cinncinati
GAM	Westside Eastside Congregations Acting Now (We-Can)	OH, Cleveland
GAM	Broadfaith Organization for Lorain's Development (BOLD)	OH, Cleveland
Unknown	Churches Acting Together for Change and Hope	OH, Cleveland
DART	BREAD Organization	OH, Columbus
DART	Leaders for Equality and Action in Dayton (LEAD)	OH, Dayton
IND	Interfaith Suburban Action Coalition	OH, Euclid
DART	Toledoans USA	OH, Toledo
GAM	ACTION	OH, Youngstown
IAF	Portland Organizing Project	OR, Portland
PICO	Congregations United for Neighborhood Action	PA, Allentown
RCNO	United Congregations of Chester County	PA, Coatsville
GAM	Congregational Action to Lift by Love	PA, Erie
Unknown	Religious Committee for Community Justice	PA, Norristown
PICO	Eastern Philadelphia Organizing Project	PA, Philadelphia
IAF	Philadelphia Interfaith Action	PA, Philadelphia
GAM	Shenango Valley Initiative	PA, Sharon
IVP	Rhode Island Organizing Project	RI, Providence
Unknown	Alliance For a Better Tomorrow	TN, Knoxville
IAF	Knoxville Interfaith Network	TN, Knoxville
IAF	Shelby County Interfaith Sponsoring Committee	TN, Memphis
IAF	Tying Nashville Together	TN, Nashville
IAF	Austin Interfaith Sponsoring Committee	TX, Austin
IAF	Triangle Interfaith Project	TX, Beaumont - Port
IAF	Dallas Area Interfaith	TX, Dallas
Unknown	The Border Organization	TX, Eagle Pass
IAF	El Paso Interreligious Sponsoring Organization (EPISO)	TX, El Paso
IAF	Allied Communities of Tarrant	TX, Fr. Worth
IAF	The Metropolitan Organization	TX, Houston
IAF	West Texas Organizing Strategy	TX, Lubbock
IAF	Valley Interfaith	TX, Mercedes
IAF	Metro Alliance	TX, San Antonio
IAF	COPS	TX, San Antonio
IAF	Fort Bend Interfaith Council	TX, Sugarland
IAF	Puget Sound Org. Project	WA, Seattle
IAF	Parent Organizing Project / Spokane Interfaith and Educ Alliance	WA, Spokane
GAM	Milwaukee Innercity Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH)	WI, Milwaukee
GAM	Racine Interfaith Coalition	WI, Racine
GAM	Hope Offered through Shared Ecumenical Action (HOSEA)	WI, West Allis