BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NO DATA PLAN: MEGACHURCH OUTREACH AND MORAL BOUNDARY WORK IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

By

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BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO HAVE NO DATA PLAN: MEGACHURCH

OUTREACH AND MORAL BOUNDARY WORK

IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Abstract

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A church is often the first place of refuge for those in need, and megachurches are no exception. Given their size and resources, megachurches are well-equipped to lend a hand. How are megachurches helping the poor? Are they demonstrating innovation in their approach to poverty outreach? Why do churches invest in the poor? I argue that along with fulfilling their expected duty to those in need, megachurch pastors create distinctions between their churches and neighboring congregations as well as the local government and nonprofit organizations. Pastors strive to demonstrate that their church knows how best to help the impoverished in their community and in the world, and this is a form of moral boundary work, which is the creation of invisible walls between individuals or groups, and these walls reproduce inequalities (Lamont 1992; Lamont and Fournier 2002; Sherman 2009). Through their poverty outreach, pastors are building symbolic boundaries between their congregations and other local churches that might not have outreach to the poor, or that have outreach techniques that are viewed as outdated. Building these boundaries may help congregants have a sense of belonging in their church community by creating an in-group to which church members belong and an out-

group to which they have no desire to belong.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

A church is often the first place of refuge for those in need, and megachurches are no exception. Benevolence outreach can include food and cash assistance, addiction recovery support, divorce care, financial counseling, and overseas missions. Given their size and resources, megachurches are well-equipped to lend a hand. How are megachurches helping the poor? Why do churches invest in the poor? Is it due to the Great Commission, or are there other reasons? I argue that along with fulfilling their expected duty, megachurch pastors create distinctions between their churches and neighboring congregations as well as secular poverty alleviation organizations. Pastors strive to demonstrate that their church knows how best to help the impoverished in their community and in the world, and this is a form of moral boundary work, which is the creation of invisible walls between individuals or groups as a tool to reproduce inequalities (Lamont 1992; Lamont and Fournier 2002; Sherman 2009). Through their poverty outreach, pastors are building symbolic boundaries between their congregations and other local churches that might not have outreach to the poor, or that have outreach techniques that are viewed as outdated. Building these boundaries may give a sense of belonging in their church community by creating an in-group to which church members belong and an out-group to which they have no desire to belong.

Although the pastors are judging the poor on their deservedness, the judgment is not necessarily the site of the boundary work. Rather, the judgment is

used as a proxy to demonstrate the pastor is an upstanding person with good integrity. In other words, the pastor does not judge the clients for personal reasons, but rather, in order to appease the sensibilities of his congregants.

Pastors also build boundaries between their churches and other organizations that help people in need. While secular organizations often help anyone in need, pastors must remain accountable to their congregants who give money to keep these programs afloat. The pastors must answer to these congregants and need to prove to them that the people who receive aid from the church are truly deserving of that money, which can mean that the recipient has a medical emergency or has a very short term problem and a willingness to fix that problem quickly and get back on solid economic footing.

I will present findings from interviews with pastors and church staff to illustrate the types of poverty outreach that megachurches perform. I will also attempt to explain the fine line megachurch pastors walk between helping the poor of the community and accommodating the congregants whose tithes pay the bills and fund the programs for the poor. Furthermore, I argue that overseas mission work is an example of outreach that is at once benevolence outreach and a tool for creating and maintaining moral boundaries.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINITIONS AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Megachurches

It is generally accepted that megachurches are broadly defined as Protestant churches that average 2,000 attendees per week (Association of Religion Data Archives N.d.; Guinness 1993; Pew Forum 2005; Thumma and Travis 2007). Church growth researcher and consultant John Vaughn first used the term to refer to churches with weekly attendance rates of 2000 or more (Stetzer 2008). He was also responsible for popularizing the defining characteristic of 2000 weekly attendants. The term gained popularity in 1991, with the publication of the book *Prepare Your Church for the Future* by Carl F. George and Warren Bird. In 1993, the term "megachurch" was used in a book title for the first time when Vaughn published the book, *Megachurches and America's Cities: How Churches Grow.* The churches have grown significantly in popularity, especially over the past 30 years and now play host to over 5 million attendees per week (Thumma, Travis, and Bird 2005). There are as many Americans attending megachurch every week as there are members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Episcopal Church combined (Vara 2004). Between 2000 and 2010, the 100 churches with the highest population grew significantly larger (Vaughn 2011). Many megachurches that had 4,000 people attending weekly in 2000 now have 8,000. During that same time Lakewood, the largest church in the U.S., grew from approximately 11,000 to over 44,000 attendees per week. Megachurches are vital, headed by dynamic leaders, and are increasingly

incorporating community service and outreach into their operating vision (Bird and Thumma 2011).

Megachurches have seen monumental growth throughout the United States since the 1980s (Thumma and Travis 2007). They tend to be fast growing, theologically conservative, evangelical, technologically innovative, located in the suburbs, and led by male pastors. There is not one cohesive definition of evangelicalism, as even Christians who might fall under the category of "evangelical" debate what the word means and who is evangelical (Woodberry and Smith 1998). However, scholars tend to agree that contemporary evangelicalism grew as a more moderate version of conservative Protestantism, which is usually associated with a strong adherence to biblical principles, a call to outreach for the purpose of spreading the Gospel in order to convert nonbelievers to Christianity, and a belief that a personal relationship with Jesus is the only way to salvation. Services are boisterous with heavy use of technology and are meant to appeal to a wide variety of people (Thumma and Travis 2007; Bird and Thumma 2011). Pastors encourage churchgoers to join small groups as a place to study Scripture (Thumma and Travis 2007). Megachurch congregations experienced an average membership growth of 57 percent between 2000 and 2005, from a weekly attendance mean of 2,279 people in 2000 to a weekly attendance mean of 3,585 people in 2005. In 1970, there were 50 megachurches in the U.S., 150 by 1980. By 1990, the number had more than doubled to 310. This pattern continued and in 2000 the U.S. had 600 megachurches. There were 1210 megachurches in 2005. In 2011, there were 1414

megachurches listed on the Hartford Institute for Religion Research Megachurch Database (Thumma N.d.). Churches must compete with each other for congregants.

Given the current economic climate, the growing number of megachurches may be quite helpful to overburdened non-profit and governmental agencies that assist people in poverty. Churches do work with other churches and secular non-profit organizations when helping the poor (Cnaan 2002; Elisha 2011), but they must also set their individual church apart in some way that gives congregants a reason to invest time, money, and a commitment. As the government has reduced funding for poverty-alleviating programs, church organizations have picked up the slack (Cnaan 2002; Pipes & Ebaugh 2002). Former President George W. Bush shown his appreciation of the work that faith-based organization perform by enacting the Faith-Based and Community Initiative as one of his first acts as president (Pipes & Ebaugh 2002; Bush 2002). This legislation has allowed churches and other religious organizations to use federal funds to combat non-religious societal ills, such as poverty. President Obama has extended the initiative under the moniker "Office of Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships" (The White House N.d.; Slack 2009). Although I did not ask specifically about federal funding during my interviews, if the subject came up, the consensus was that the churches either did not take federal funds or that their ministry was solely supported through their congregants and fund raisers.

Since its inception, Christian churches the Christian church have often tried to heed the call of the poor, providing a safety net of services (Wuthnow 1998). And

now many Americans are in desperate need of a net (Goodman 2010; Johnson, Oliff, and Williams 2011; Parkinson and Hartman 2011). In 2009 (Bishaw and Macartney 2010), 42.9 million Americans, or 14.3 percent, were living in poverty, which is 3.5 million more than in 2008. In 2010, one in seven Americans was living in poverty (Yen 2010). Megachurches are able to help those in need by providing much needed social services, due to their large pool of potential volunteers and their large operating budgets (Cnaan 2002).

Megachurches attract a young and high-income population compared to smaller churches (Thumma and Bird 2009). The average age of a megachurch attender is 40, compared to 53 years old for a typical U.S. congregation. In a typical American church, nearly half of attendees make less than $50,000 annually, just over 1/3 make $50,000 to $99,999 annually and 15% make over $100,000 a year. Megachurch attendees are wealthier. Only 39 percent make less than $50,000. While the amount of middle income congregants is nearly identical, over a quarter of megachurch attenders make over $100,000 a year. Given the wealth of the megachurch, as well as the sheer volume of congregants, they have a real opportunity to help the poor.

Table 1. Household Income[a]

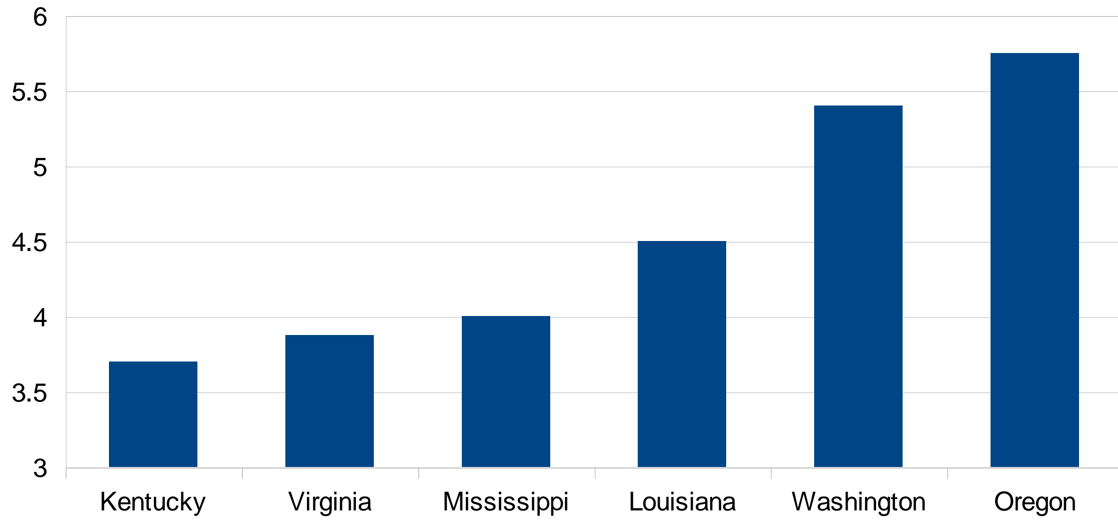
Income	Megachurch	All Churches
<$50,000	39%	49%
$50-99.000	35%	36%
$100,000 >	26%	15%

[a] (Thumma and Bird 2009)

Conventional wisdom may lead one to believe that there are not many megachurches in the Pacific Northwest (PNW), but this is not true. The PNW does indeed have the largest percentage of non-churchgoers in the United States, at 63 percent of Washington and Oregon residents professing no affiliated faith, according to 2004 data (Killen and Silk 2004; Wellman 2008), versus 41 percent nationally (Killen and Silk 2004). The PNW is the only region of the country that has fewer than half its residents attached to a religion. However, 34 percent of those who claim no religion still consider themselves "religious or somewhat religious" (Shibley 2004, Table 5.3: 143). It is important to note, though, that this does not mean they claim to be Christians. Many PNW'ers move here from elsewhere and reinvent themselves and their spiritual beliefs away from their families of origin. Not only that, but pastors are in competition with the ever-present great outdoors. While the call of the wild is one of many temptations that compete to drown out Sunday services across the United States, pastors in the PNW face unique struggles. The PNW boasts a temperate climate, vast amounts of public lands, and religious traditions do not have the strong foothold that they do in other parts of the country. Furthermore, many people intertwine religion and the outdoors, elevating nature to a sacred order. In order to survive, churches need to be innovative and not assume people will simply come to church because it is what is expected of them. Some churches have successfully navigated this path by reaching out to other faith communities for interfaith alliances, as well as focusing on the issues of importance to many PNW'ers, such as the environment or social justice (Shibley 2004).

While the perception may hold that the PNW is unchurched, megachurches are certainly not underrepresented here, especially in the cities. Using population data from the Census and megachurch numbers from the Megachurch Database, I found that the Pacific Northwest, like the South, averages between three and eight megachurches per million people (Thumma N.d.; US. Census N.d.). While that may seem like a large range, it is worth noting that the states with 4.5 churches or fewer per million people are the southern states of Virginia (3.875 per million), Kentucky (3.7), Louisiana (4.5), and Mississippi (4). Washington and Oregon have 5.4 and 5.75 megachurches per million, respectively. Georgia, Oklahoma, Texas, and Tennessee are on the high end of the spectrum, with over 7.5 megachurches per million, and that is significantly higher than the Pacific Northwest to be sure, but those states are also significantly higher than their southern neighbors. Oregon and Washington each have a higher concentration of megachurches than Florida, North Carolina, or South Carolina.

Table 2. Megachurches Per Million[b]



[b](Thumma N.d.; US. Census N.d.)

Furthermore, the need for assistance has been great throughout the Pacific Northwest during the economic crisis. The Oregon Department of Human Services saw a 14.6 percent increase in TANF (Sabatino 2011) applications between October 2010 and October 2011. Washington's unemployment rate is at 9 percent (BLS N.d.), and 14.7 percent of Washington households suffered from food insecurity between 2008 and 2010 (Nord and Coleman-Jensen N.d.). Meanwhile, these states continue to see budget shortfalls that are eroding the social safety net (McNichol, Oliff, and Johnson N.d.; Johnson, Oliff, and Williams 2011).

Megachurch Influence

Megachurches can be categorized as leaders in Christian church growth (Thumma and Travis 2007). Author and management consultant Peter Drucker stated, "The most significant sociological phenomenon of the second half of the 20th

century has been the development of the large pastoral church - of the mega-church. It is the only organization that is actually working in our society"[1] (Pew Forum 2005). While this may be an overstatement, it certainly points to the megachurch's ability to capture national attention. Many megachurch pastors attempt to position themselves at the forefront of Christianity, and they often succeed. Approximately one quarter of megachurches have a radio and/or television broadcast, usually on local or regional television (Hartford Institute for Religion Research 2008). Megachurches were also early adopters of new technology. For instance, megachurches set up websites much more quickly than smaller churches (Thumma 2002).

One of the most famous examples of a megachurch pastor enjoying enormous influence and success is Rick Warren. The pastor of the 20,000 member Saddleback Church hosted a presidential debate in 2008, and gave the inaugural invocation for President Obama. According to Warren's website, over 400,000 ministers and pastors have used his training materials and over 156,000 pastors subscribe to his weekly newsletter (Pastor Rick Warren N.d.). Churches all over the country have embraced his "40 Days of Purpose" campaign, which is based on his book *The Purpose Driven Life* (McMullen and Kilgore 2006), which is a Christian self-help book that purports to assist readers in discovering God's purpose in their lives. The church-level campaigns are opportunities to read the book in small groups. Group prayer and discussion solidify the concepts and goals found in the book. Eighty percent of the 142 Texas churches that were surveyed due to participation in "40

Days of Purpose" had added additional programs that were inspired by the teachings of the book. However, most of these programs were internal and designed to feed the existing congregation, not outreach to the surrounding community, and less than 10 percent of the churches used the "40 Days of Purpose" as a catalyst for poverty relieving programs. This points to Putnam's (2000) theory that evangelical churches excel at strengthening the existing social ties, i.e. bonding capital, but aren't as versed at creating ties between dissimilar groups, known as bridging capital. While the materials used by smaller churches may have fallen short of the goal of reaching the greater community, these examples do point to the levels of influence megachurches can have on smaller churches, both locally and throughout the United States. Megachurches can help shape church culture, and they can also guide researchers in understanding common themes that are emerging in the church community.

Charity as consumption

Elisha's (2005) ethnography of outreach in two megachurches in Knoxville, Tennessee reveals the difficulty megachurches can have balancing a desire to give congregants meaningful experiences while also being truly helpful to those in need. While he did have to seek it out, Elisha eventually found people working to solidify the social ministry programs to assist the poor. Marble Valley Presbyterian Church[1] was working in partnership with an inner city church, even hosting volunteers to

[1] Names of churches are pseudonyms.

live and work among the people they serve. However, both churches were struggling to find their balance. Marble Valley spent the majority of their outreach budget and resources on global and national missions and organizations, but had recently been turning the focus to the local Knoxville community. Meanwhile, some people at Eternal Vine's young adult ministry were trying to decide how shift some of the resource focus. They wanted to devote fewer resources to internal church groups and more resources to programs in the Knoxville area because they thought the church was becoming a social group that cared about building up their own members more so than reaching out to the poor in their area. The ministry was active in social outreach once a month, but some in the group felt that it should be more often. Elisha (2005) underscores the importance of long-term commitment over short-term projects. A theme that echoes throughout his book is the perceived need for Christian volunteers to build relationships with the people they are helping. According to Elisha, ministers believe that volunteers need to step out of their own worlds and experience the world of poverty (Elisha 2005). Doing so can build trust and strengthen the volunteers' accountability to the programs and the people they serve. The subject of relationship-building is a volatile one because in order to build a relationship, volunteers make a time commitment to a program. These churches found it easier to recruit for short-term poverty alleviating events because congregants were quite busy with work, family, and other obligations. Furthermore, Elisha (2005) notes that short-term commitments were less messy because the impoverished were regarded as lacking a good moral compass, which

left the volunteers unsatisfied when they tried to preach the Bible to those in need. If the volunteers had the opportunity simply to stock cans in a food bank for a few hours or dedicate an afternoon to home repairs for the elderly, they could come away from the project with positive feelings that they shone the light of God on this person or family. However, when they make a long term commitment to a person they will try to show that other person God. The volunteer may spend months helping the person get sober, get in school, leave an abusive relationship. When the person returns to their bad habits or turns down repeated invitations to church, it can leave the volunteer discouraged.

Volunteer satisfaction may seem trivial, but it has far-reaching implications. Religious outreach accounts for a large percentage of church budgets, and saves government agencies thousands of dollars per year (Cnaan 2002). A random sample survey administered to congregations of all sizes and denominations in several cities across the United States found that churches had an average of four programs per congregation. A large church averages the highest amount, $97,832 annually in social service outreach funds. This figure represents the amount the church allocates to a program, as well as any pastor or staff salaries when they are supervising or working with a program. For congregations of all sizes, the average amount of outreach funds is 22.6 percent of the operating budget, when the surveyor accounts for clergy and staff pay. If a secular or governmental agency had to replicate the programs provided by these churches, they could expect to pay an average of $3,826.68 per program per month. Churches provide a valuable

contribution to the nation as a whole and to the impoverished in their communities.

Thumma (2001) found some common themes in megachurch giving when he conducted a survey of 153 megachurches. Ninety-five percent of megachurches polled offer counseling and support groups for various afflictions, 91 percent said they provide material assistance to families or individuals in need, and 91 percent have programs that minister to the imprisoned (Thumma 2001). Additionally, 85 percent had substance abuse programs, 78 percent had homeless facilities, and 78 percent ran a thrift shop or thrift shop donation drop. Given the large membership rolls, these churches have a large pool of volunteers to draw from, despite the fact that 45 percent of megachurch goers never volunteer (Thumma and Bird 2008). A survey of 406 megachurches found that those megachurches have an average of 284 volunteers working at least 5 hours a week (Thumma, Travis, and Bird 2005). The larger the church's operating budgets, the more volunteering opportunities and greater community outreach they will have. These churches also tend to have well-made and maintained websites where they could advertise available help with wide visibility.

Megachurches are often located in upper middle class educated suburban areas (Karnes et al. 2007), and thus, it might be tempting to extrapolate that megachurches are too far removed from concentrated poverty to make an impact. However, 27 percent of megachurches surveyed were located within a city and another 29 percent were in an older, close-in suburb.[2]

[2] According to a survey (Thumma, Bird, and Travis, 2005) of 406 megachurches in 2005.

Volunteering is sometimes used as a form of capital (Lamont 1992), in that it can be used as a marker for class distinctions. Upper middle class Americans are able to give back to their community, and are also able to gain respect from those they help, both the organization and the individuals. This helps further solidify their place in society, and provides another avenue for friendship building and networking and so volunteering is a desirable pastime for many megachurch congregants.

Volunteering can be seen as a form of symbolic capital when it is used in this way. Symbolic capital is the authority one is able to wield once they have received a certain level of prestige and are considered to have some influence (Bourdieu 1995). Such capital can be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu 2004), *and* usually such capital requires a certain economic investment. Volunteering can be traded for social capital because of the networks that are created. This in turn could possibly be turned into economic capital. For instance, when in need a job for themselves, a friend, or a family member, volunteers might turn to their network for leads. If their volunteering network is populated with hiring managers and small business owners, the opportunities for job placement are higher than if the network consists only of lower level employees. Furthermore, when the volunteer has made high profile connections, the volunteer's prestige can increase, as others will seek them out in order to tap into their networks. However, volunteering does require an investment of time and energy that cannot be spent elsewhere.

Moral Boundary Work-How We Create Distinctions

Sociologists have long been considering boundaries (Lamont and Fournier 1992). Durkheim and Mauss posited that humans are organized into groups and so we also organize people and things into groups. An excellent example of Durkheim's interpretation of symbolic boundaries is his concept of the sacred and profane. There are separate spheres for the sacred and the profane, and the sacred is used to impose boundaries on the profane, such as the decisions of whom and how people can marry. While the precise theories have been debated over the decades, the central premise remains salient for sociologists, that humans place people in socially constructed boxes and use labels to compare and contrast people. Boundary work spans micro- and macro- level analysis. On the micro side, labeling is seen through a social psychological lens, specifically symbolic interactionism, or how people use the social to create identity. At the macro-level, individuals belong to social classes and groups. The groups to which they belong have rules and beliefs for the purpose of social order. These rules and values create and maintain symbolic boundaries.

One important way that social groups create distinctions between themselves and others is through social norms embedded in group and national identities (Lamont 1992). People use boundaries to grasp and fully define identity and embrace a positive perspective about themselves, since boundary work often involves negative emotions towards the out-group, which serves as a positive reinforcement of the actions of the boundary-setter. Boundaries are largely based on

people's cultural references. Boundary work helps define who we are and helps maintain the order through the establishment of norms. Although national ideals are often the framework from which people draw their boundaries, social or religious organizations or professional groups can all be sites of boundary work. Race, class, or ethnicity can also carry markers of distinctions. Boundary work helps create and reinforce group solidarity. There are many different boundaries that people draw, including moral, socioeconomic, and cultural. In this thesis, I will be looking at moral boundaries. Lamont (1992) defines moral boundaries in this way: "[They] are drawn on the basis of moral character, they are centered around such qualities as honesty, work ethic, personal integrity, and consideration for others" (1992: 4). This definition of morality is different from the Christian definition of morality, which is based on the biblical frameworks such as those laid out in the Ten Commandments, Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and his Great Commission after resurrection. These tenets are interpreted differently by different denominations, but the interpretations are the guidelines that churches use to help congregants navigate their world.

Lamont illustrates symbolic boundary work through her findings from interviews of French and American upper-middle-class residents. In the U.S., symbolic boundaries are formed around the historical American ideals of "egalitarianism, individualism, and achievement" (Lamont 1992: 6) and they are also shaped by ubiquitous influences such as media and schools. Megachurch pastors may draw on traits associated with the American ideals in order to draw

their boundaries. For instance, meritocracy flows from individualism and achievement (Lamont 1992). Therefore, those who believe that the United States is meritocratic believe that poverty is caused by individual level decision or actions, not structural barriers to upward mobility (McNamee and Miller 2009). Churches compete with other churches, both past and present, to determine who is doctrinally correct (Bishop 2009), who preaches the right way to salvation, who is helping the poor in the best way possible.

According to the pastors I interviewed, they invite the impoverished clientele they assist to visit their church services, but the clients rarely attend. The poor may feel uncomfortable attending the church due to the power differential. Those in the position to help the poor sometimes draw boundaries before, during and after the help, as Hays (2003) witnessed among case workers. These results of the boundary work can lead to a loss of autonomy for the impoverished recipients. The poor are often seen as deficient in some way, and those deficiencies are the assumed cause of their poverty. This mindset allows those in power to apply individual level blame to structural level issues such as poverty and its symptoms. For instance, when people apply for welfare or unemployment, they are required to apply to a certain number of jobs per week, attend job training seminars, attend parenting classes, and endure consistent scrutiny of their financial habits. These programs are based on the assumption that poverty equates to bad parenting, low social skills, and unsound money management decisions.

In my interviews, I found that pastors employ the same strategies. Much like

the caseworkers, the pastors access the recipients' personal financial information, scold “bad” choices, and insist on classes and workshops in return for assistance, even while offering compassion, However, unlike the social workers who drew boundaries between themselves and the poor, megachurch pastors make these judgments through the lens of their church members as well as their own judgment. They must remain accountable to the lead pastor, the board of elders, and also the congregants. Each person’s request for help is sensitive, and their circumstances are often complex. The congregants do not learn of the nuances of the cases, but they do have expectations that the care pastor will use church tithes and offerings wisely, investing in those who truly need and deserve help.

The care pastor must provide compassion to those who ask for help, while also ascertaining character. Care pastors sometimes receive requests for assistance from people who truly do not need help and are simply milking the system, and churches have developed methods to combat this abuse. However, care pastors must also determine whether a person in need will be viewed as deserving by the congregation. Does this person embrace the American ideals of morality as observed by Lamont? Will the client demonstrate a good work ethic and fiscal responsibility with that gift from the church? The congregants do not want to feel that their investment was wasted on someone who will fritter it away.

The desire to help those in need, but only those who are truly in need, is neither new, nor can it only be found in churches. Rather, the roots of the phenomenon can be found in our puritanical, Calvinistic past (Bartkowski and

Regis 2003). Calvinism espoused compassionate charity for the poor, but also placed a premium on the intrinsic value of hard, meaningful work. The evangelical zealots of the eighteenth century Great Awakening were more concerned about benevolence. Calvinists believe that salvation is predestined, while evangelicals believe that salvation comes through faith. For evangelicals, poverty relief work came to be seen as a tool for conversion.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, benevolence became more institutionalized with the advent of scientific charity (Bartowski and Regis 2003; Katz 1986). Using the science of the time, volunteers attempted to differentiate worthy recipients from unworthy ones, and set out to reform the worthy recipients with the assumption that the worthy recipients were good people at their core, but they needed some moral guidance to get on the right track. One school of thought believed the charitable organizations should appoint someone to visit the homes of those who receive help in order to lovingly but firmly guide them in the dangers of debauchery and sloth, and the virtues of honest work and a clean home. These programs were run as businesses, and many Christian churches disapproved of the model, favoring pure benevolence instead. While there have been many permutations in the model of charitable giving since the nineteenth century, the belief remains that the poor must be given compassion juxtaposed with lessons on good work ethics and "middle class values."

For the pastors, the poor and the ways in which they are helped become part of a symbolic boundary between their church and other churches and agencies that

help the poor. Pastors need to demonstrate to their congregants and elders that they are responsible with their benevolence funds, only awarding funds to those in need who are worthy of help. Unlike a government or non-profit agency, the church has the right to turn people away, and the congregation has an expectation that the pastor will turn people away if they will exploit or abuse the church's help. The pastoral imperative to help those who are in need remains in tension with the congregants' plea that the church acts as a good steward of the tithes and offerings that are entrusted to the church. The care pastor must determine who the congregation will accept as the "deserving" poor. If the pastor mishandles funds, the congregants have the option of leaving and going to another church.

During my interviews, I noticed that pastors were drawing moral boundaries between their congregations and other churches. Moral boundaries are invisible walls that can be created around qualities that encompass perceived moral character such as veracity, loyalty, strong work habits and uprightness. Certain behaviors can stand as proxies for these qualities. For instance, in a community that has rapidly become impoverished due to the loss of its main industry, Sherman (2009) found that residents created their own moral hierarchy in regards to income attainment, with those who worked at typical paying jobs enjoying the most moral capital, while those who received welfare were seen as only a small step above those who earned their money through illegal gains. Another example of moral boundary work is described in a study of transnational domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997). The nannies judge the parenting skills of their higher income

employers, partially to reassure themselves that although they have left their children behind in another country to come to the United States for work, they are still the superior parent. In this way, the nannies are able to assuage their own guilt of leaving their children behind. At the churches I interviewed, pastors built moral boundaries between themselves and other churches and organizations to differentiate the way they help the poor and manage the congregants' offerings and expectations regarding benevolence outreach.

Moral boundary work in the Pacific Northwest

Mainstream churches in the Pacific Northwest have a mission geared towards social justice and poverty outreach (Killen and Silk 2004). Megachurches tend to be evangelical (Thumma and Travis 2007), and people who attend evangelical churches tend to believe in an individualistic responsibility to succeed on one's own merit (Wellman 2008), so one may suspect that megachurches do not help the poor. However, there is evidence to the contrary. Evangelical churches in the Pacific Northwest churches do offer services to the poor (Killen and Silk 2004; Wellman 2008). Granted, the findings about outreach were concerned with all evangelical churches, not megachurches specifically, but the majority of megachurches are evangelical (Thumma and Travis 2007; Thumma and Bird 2008; Bird and Thumma 2011), and so the results are relevant to megachurches. The liberal mainstream churches in the region are outspoken in their desire to help those in need (Killen and Silk 2004), so perhaps in the spirit of competition, the megachurches are jumping into the arena. Evangelical churches like all other

institutions are not immune to the culture surrounding them (Wellman 2008). Churches do seem to bend to competition. For instance, churches in regions with more religious diversity have higher levels of volunteering (Bennett 2012). This increase is believed to be tied to competition (Stark and Finke 2000). Furthermore, volunteerism can be a marker of morality (Lamont 1992). Although the link was not as strong as other indicators, Lamont did find that some Americans used volunteerism as a proxy for moral character. Voluntary associations give more financially secure Americans an opportunity to gain respect and feel good about themselves as well as help others. Many of the megachurch pastors I interviewed actively encouraged their congregants to volunteer, either individually or as a small group. Their volunteer opportunities were often innovative and helped build community in the church as well as with the larger community.

If one of the reasons the churches help the poor is due to a desire for moral superiority on the part of their middle class congregants, the missions field may offer the ultimate experience of boundary work. Congregants set themselves apart from many of their middle class neighbors by helping the poorest of the poor, but they only have to interact with those poor in the most controlled of circumstances, and without long term commitment. Churchgoers erect boundaries between themselves and their neighbors but also maintain the boundaries that stand between themselves and the poor. There is little chance that their outreach recipients will stumble into Sunday service if those on the receiving end live in a faraway land with few resources.

Megachurches help the poor. Some have staff members and pastors whose only job is to oversee poverty outreach programs. Megachurches have resources such as large operating budgets, many congregants, and dynamic leaders (Bird and Thumma 2011). These resources enable them to have programs that are not possible on a smaller scale. In the PNW, churches have a tradition of outreach and innovation (Killen and Silk 2004; Wellman 2008; Shibley 2004). However, they believe that outreach to the poor must be balanced with discernment. Congregants expect people engaged in outreach to be both compassionate and accountable (Elisha 2011).

I will use data from interviews to illustrate the kinds of outreach that Pacific Northwest megachurches perform. I will demonstrate how pastors navigate the tightrope between compassion and accountability. Pastors protect their churches from those who try to scam the programs and raid church coffers. Furthermore, pastors must also guard against the appearance of impropriety by helping people that congregants would deem worthy, while also appearing compassionate to all who ask for help.

CHAPTER THREE

STUDY DESIGN

This study examines megachurch outreach to determine what types of poverty outreach megachurches are performing and whether moral boundaries are drawn by the pastors, distinguishing their congregations from other congregations through the type of outreach work that they perform. Pastors must demonstrate that they can discern between the deserving and the undeserving poor when administering assistance. They must differentiate the services at their church from services offered by social service agencies or secular nonprofit organizations, which will help the poor even if those who ask for help are not always "wise" with their money. In order to illustrate how churches are helping the poor, I explored the types of programs they are instituting and how they engage their congregants to get involved with outreach. I posit that churches are trying to set themselves apart from other churches by advertising their poverty outreach and missions work as a way their church is morally superior. In other words, I ask whether moral boundary work happens on the corporate level?

My sampling frame is all of the megachurches in Washington State and the Portland, Oregon metropolitan area that are listed in the Megachurch Database. While the database is not exhaustive, it is the most complete and accurate list available. According to the website, the database "contains information on all the megachurches we have been able to locate in the United States. We continually make changes this list and welcome suggestions and additions" (Thumma

N.d."Database of Megachurches in the U.S."). Further evidence of the site's upkeep can be found in the history, "We began keeping this list in 1992 (it continues to be updated regularly) using numerous sources including denominational reports, a database provided by Thomas Zook, the insights of numerous web visitors, researchers such as John Vaughan and Elmer Towns and reporters around the U.S., the Leadership Network and my own visits to and research of these large congregations" (Thumma N.d."Database of Megachurches in the U.S.").

Using the Megachurch Database as my sampling frame, I contacted all of the megachurches in the greater Portland area, as well as all churches in Washington to request interviews. Although the researchers strive to keep the list updated, there are errors on it. Some of the churches I encountered did not reach the population levels needed for the official megachurch designation. Perhaps their numbers had been misrepresented, or they had experienced a significant decrease in membership. I did interview churches that were listed on the database, even if they had fallen below the threshold for size. I interviewed pastors in Portland, Seattle, and Spokane metropolitan areas in person. Due to time and travel constraints, I conducted the remainder of my interviews by telephone. Those interviews were in Washington, including the Seattle metropolitan area. My response rate was 42 percent. I sent follow up emails, but many churches did not reply to my request, perhaps due to an overwhelming number of emails, or due to uncertainty or apprehension about my study. Although I could have tried to increase my response rate through follow up phone calls, the scope of my project was to interview between 15 and 20 churches,

and I was able to achieve this threshold through email contact alone.

The pastors I interviewed preached at a wide variety of megachurches. Two of the churches were located in rural or small towns. Two churches would be classified as urban and the remainder were located in suburban areas. The denominational breakdown is as follows: two of the churches were Calvary Chapels, three were Foursquare, one was Presbyterian, and the rest were non-denominational or independent Christian churches. I interviewed head pastors, pastors in charge of benevolence, communications pastors or directors, assistant pastors, and a youth pastor. For two churches, I conducted separate interviews for the communications specialist and the benevolence directors, bringing my interview total to 19, spread over 17 churches. To preserve anonymity, I have given the churches pseudonyms and refer to the interviewees as pastor, care pastor, youth pastor, or communications director depending on their position. Since many churches have quite specific titles for various positions, using exact titles may reveal the identity of a church. In every interview I conducted, the lead pastor was male. I spoke with 7 women, who all had titles relating to community, caring, ministry, and communications. Five churches reported to be growing, one was growing after a significant member loss, three were plateauing, three were shrinking, and three did not specify growth patterns. Eight of the churches were founded before 1970 and grew into larger churches over the years.

My interviews lasted between 15 minutes and 90 minutes. When I began this project, my main interest was in understanding how megachurches are using

technology in their poverty outreach, and whether technology is an effective method of reaching the poor. I thought that websites might be useful for the downwardly mobile who are comfortable with computers but also may feel shame at asking for financial help. Alternately, website outreach might be ineffective because the poor do not use the Internet to research such information. I asked questions to try to determine whether the impoverished are using the web to access services, and what drawbacks might exist in web-based help and how well the services advertised reflect the services offered in the churches. I found that poverty outreach was not a focus on megachurch websites. Most people who were coming in for help learned about services through word of mouth or social service agencies. I interviewed people who are in charge of technology for some of the megachurches, and the focus was mainly on whether the website should be targeting current members as an information tool, or the community as an instrument to reach non-members. Listing poverty outreach programs on the website was seen as largely ineffective.

Another story emerged during the interviews, and that was one of outreach and the symbolic boundaries churches draw around themselves and others. I asked questions about what types of benevolence programs they have, and if pastors preach about helping the poor. The pastors discussed the outreach that churches are doing. I found that poverty alleviation programs were sites of moral boundary work, which is the creation and maintenance of ideological divisions that allow people to perceive others as members of morally inferior out-groups in contrast to their own superior status (Lamont 1992). The care ministers distinguished themselves from

other churches through moral boundary work surrounding their outreach to the poor in their communities. Churches also seemed to use the mission field to create moral boundaries between churches.

Study Limitations

The low response rate is a limitation of this study. My recruitment method of cold calling likely contributed to the low response rates seen in this study. Without any mode of introduction or referrals, the interviewees had to trust me blindly. The need for trust may have been a deterrent for some pastors. Perhaps the non-responses represented megachurches that do not provide very much outreach, or it could be that the pastors I heard from had a greater need to demonstrate their superiority to the outside world. However, it may be that the non-respondents were simply too busy to participate.

I did not factor in fluctuation in "megachurch" status. Some of the churches I interviewed were below the 2000 person threshold, creating potential measurement error. I discovered this after the interviews began, and I chose to include them in my data. Although these churches had been megachurches at one time, and had experienced a decline in enrollment following a leadership change, there may be something fundamentally different about them compared to megachurches that have remained steady or are growing in population. As a new researcher, I relied on the Megachurch Database and trusted in it veracity and robustness. Church attendance changes, and the database is not automatically updated. In future research, I would verify the weekly attendance, and also determine whether the

pastor considered the church to be a megachurch before I conducted interviews to ensure that my sample is consistent.

CHAPTER FOUR

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Megachurches and the Poor

Overwhelmingly, the churches do help the poor. Megachurches in the Pacific Northwest are reaching out to a variety of churches of all different faiths as well as community organizations in order to help the poor. Churches are forming networks with doctors and dentists in order to provide free and low cost health care. Churches open their spaces for aerobics, library story time, concerts, and preschool. These services are a life raft for many impoverished families and individuals. Given the fiscal strain governmental programs are feeling, megachurch assistance is a welcome relief (Johnson, Oliff, and Williams 2011; McNichol, Oliff, and Johnson N.d.).Megachurches use their programs to form moral boundaries, but that does not negate the important role the programs play in their communities.

Some of the programs are quite innovative. Blessed Hope Church "…make(s) available every month these bags…. If you meet a homeless person or a needy person on the street, you just hand them this bag. It's full of little goodies, water and sometimes a coupon from McDonalds and different things that they would need." The church has a program to provide firewood for those with fireplaces or wood stoves but no funds to stoke their fires. Finally, this same church sets aside one day per year where they offer everything from free food to free dental care, and many services in between. One of the churches is partnering with Head Start to

provide a space to hold classes while also launching more than two dozen preschools in poverty-stricken areas of the Philippines. That church has so many local poverty outreach opportunities that they have a booklet listing them all.

Relationship building seems to be a driving force for many programs. Some leaders take relationship building into every aspect of their lives. While in New York for a Christian leadership conference, the Foothills church compassion minister found inspiration in a t-shirt:

> As I was leaving and you know you go to New York and everything is I Heart New York I Heart New York I Heart New York on mugs and keychains and sweatshirts and all the rest. So we're walking by this, you know, store front in Manhattan and in the window is a black Tshirt and it just said "Go Heart Your Own City" and I thought, you know, that's exactly what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna go home and heart my own city. So I saw that I thought well, I guess that's my commission.

He is also trying to get his congregation to think about who the charity is for, while also empowering the receiver. The pastor is hoping to get away from the model of having churchgoers bring in canned goods for the poor and stack them in the church lobby. While it makes the congregants feel good to have a visual token of their generosity, the food may not be meeting the needs of the recipients. Instead he wants to build relationships between the giver and receiver by creating some autonomy for the receiver by giving the receiver some say over their food choices. According to the pastor, "… one of the deepest problems of poverty is the lack of the

ability to control your own circumstances. We're saying how do we give these families choice in a way that doesn't overwhelm us logistically."

In order to protect the staff from being overwhelmed, the pastor has opted to outsource the tasks from the church as a body into the small groups. "So what we're doing is saying is essentially, 'Thank you for bringing the groceries all these years. Uh, please stop. What we'd rather have you do is get together with your small group or with your family and for $75 we'll give you the list, the blueprint for what kind of groceries we usually purchase.'" The small group would then call the family in need and go through the list with that family, noting what types of food the family prefers. Finally, the small group would go shopping and personally deliver the food to the recipient. The members of the small group build some kind of relationship over a couple of weeks of phone calls about food choices. The recipient is empowered to receive food they want and will actually use, and the small group members have a voice and personality attached to their charity. It is a win all around, including for the church, "…now we don't have to set up grocery shelves, we don't have to spend, um umpteen hours sorting and resorting cans of corn and peas on our shelves so it all fits right."

However, not everyone is convinced of the change in policy:

> And some people give us flack, "Oh, we're not going to be able to see the groceries any more" and then we have a conversation and say "okay, stop and think. Is this about you being blessed by seeing these groceries and potentially absolving you of the guilt of having to do something more about it

> because you see that your church is doing it for you, um or is this about meeting the needs of the family?" …So uh we're trying to get people to go down and build relationships with those guys. …And you know, that's what we want to help people start doing is get to a place where, um, it is about the relationship.

The pastor is using the food program as an opportunity to tear down the walls between the congregation and the poor they serve by giving them an opportunity to foster a relationship. If the relationships form the way the pastor envisions them, the church may experience a breakdown of moral boundaries between the congregants and the impoverished in their community. While working with the poor does not necessarily result in a greater understanding of the structural issues relating to poverty (Hays 2003), the pastor is attempting to build relationships.

Renewal Church expands the relationship to include the whole community:

> … we're trying to reach out into the community more and become more acceptable in the community so now it's been like, hey would you like to join a team to help get graffiti off the walls downtown? …. I think that's something that the economy has um brought about you know? It's not hey, the federal and state government might not take care of us anymore so how can we as a community survive? I think it's great.

Making church comfortable, making churchgoers care

One of the key tensions in benevolence and churches is the strain between caring for those in need who do not belong to the church while still creating a

desirable atmosphere for those who are attending. While the churches do invite the destitute into worship, many do not take the offer and the churches I studied were largely middle class. Those attending the church are not typically the same as those who are using the poverty services. To a certain extent, congregations are called upon to contribute to the needs of others, as evidenced in the preceding quote from the care director of Renewal Church. The churches I spoke with have sought out ways to alleviate the apathy that Elisha (2005) found in his study of outreach in megachurches, although some of actions can directed towards short term or even one time giving . For example, at Renewal Church:

> We had never done anything like that before, and we did a, a 3 minute DVD over a weekend it was a Thanksgiving weekend and asked people to um give towards a Christmas fund and we were pretty shocked at the amount of money came in…

This method has been very beneficial for their outreach program. The first year the video was shown, they raised $22,000. That was a significant increase compared to the $8400 maximum they received with their usual Christmas fundraiser. The church continued showing videos and have continued to increase fundraising revenue: $32,000 the following year and $82,000 the year before the interview was conducted. The amount raised more than covered the operating costs of the caring ministries, and the church started giving away some of the funds to other nonprofit organizations in the communities. While Renewal's success has been in monetary donations, other churches focus on mobilizing the volunteer base by showing videos

or inviting speakers from local or church organizations. Some will spend several weeks of sermon time on the subject. Fountain of Faith sought an innovative approach to congregation involvement:

> I preached and we had ah, after that we followed it up with a thing we called…[program name] and we probably had 25 agencies, here all around our campus, right? And we let, I let people out, like 15 minutes early, from the church service, and they just went out en masse, walking around at the various tables, and uh, and we'd instructed every agency, had a common way of putting on a piece of paper, exactly what the volunteer opportunities were. You know, so it wasn't like, everybody was different. We forced everybody to come up with this half page deal. So the small groups and, well, the individuals, and the individuals that represent our small groups um walked around picked up the sheets of paper, and it ranged from, you know, mentoring ministries[…] just kind of a just a ton of local agencies you know.

Mount Zion resorts to simple communication to get their members involved:

> And um we've had, for a while we had a consistent relationship with Union Gospel Mission in fact I think we won an award for how many hours we logged that year. But the majority of that stuff is, because we're so small on the top and so volunteer oriented, is as people have the desire to so those things, we support them uh, let the rest of the church know about it and they kind of rise and fall with that.

The care pastor at Foothills Church tells a story of one volunteer who was hesitant

at first but now has a long term commitment towards the homeless in downtown Seattle. The pastor used the volunteer's middle class framework and experiences to help him overcome fear of the streets. The volunteer had signed up to go into an urban homeless camp to hand out blankets and hot chocolate and give words of encouragement to people living on the streets. The volunteer sent the pastor a text to convey his fear. The pastor tapped into the volunteer's lived experiences to reframe the event.

> … But I also said, "By the way, if we were climbing Mount Rainier tonight you would have gotten the same text message from me." Um so we lead with grace because we understand that everyone has their own gifting and it doesn't scare me to go downtown Seattle and talk to homeless people, but jumping out of an airplane would really scare me, or climbing a mountain would really scare me.

The pep talked worked, and the volunteer has become active in that ministry.

Megachurches place a high priority on their missions and missionaries. International missions help a great many impoverished people and villages around the world. Missions also connect suburban congregations with people and experiences from foreign and mysterious places. Churchgoers have an opportunity to practice benevolence in places that are outside their comfort zone, but still relatively safe and structured, thanks to experienced missions teams leaders, itineraries, and good relationships with the host sites. For those who are unwilling or unable to travel themselves, most of the megachurches I spoke with sponsor

missionaries who allow the folks back home to participate in "armchair missions work" through the missionaries' web sites, emails, videos, pictures, and regular church visits.

In some communities, a person's character becomes a currency that can be used for tangible gains, like employment (Sherman 2009). Although it has been noted in impoverished communities that are lacking economic currency and so need a proxy, perhaps it also occurs in churches that are steeped in the trade of morality. When people know their church is supporting a cause they feel deeply about, this may give them a perceived moral advantage over someone who isn't involved in the church or its missions. This advantage would allow them to build a boundary between congregants and non-congregants, which could translate into capital as the congregants support their church financially. Further research is needed to test this theory. One would need to interview the congregants to ascertain their motives and perceptions of the importance of missionary support. However, I did find evidence that churches keep missionaries and congregants in touch with each other. One church has a potluck approximately once every three weeks to host a missionary or have a presentation about mission work. Other churches host blog sites for missionaries and maintain contact information on the church website that gives easy access to a missionary's Facebook page, Twitter feed, or other medium. While this gives the missionaries a platform, it seems that it also keeps the congregants engaged in the process, saving souls without having to do the footwork. Furthermore, these exercises give the church the opportunity to draw boundaries

between themselves and those who do not attend missions-oriented churches (Lamont 1992).

Moral Boundaries Between Givers and Receivers

The missionaries and the care ministers have something in common: accountability to a large audience. Care ministers feel they must judge the merit of each benevolence request because they are answering to their congregation. Larger financial decisions may be made under the advisement of the elder board, and the board will make judgments about the worthiness of financial requests. These judgments are similar to those that Hays (2003) witnessed when the TANF case workers would decide the fate of each client's eligibility. The care pastors were compassionate in their decisions, but they had to balance compassion with the accountability that was expected by the elder board and congregants in general. Except in very unusual circumstances, the care pastors attend the church where they work. Therefore, the donors are not nameless, faceless money sources; they are friends that the care pastors share worship with on a regular basis. While a care pastor's job is to help the poor, their other duty is to answer to their church family. The care pastor for Renewal Church explains the gravity of day to day decisions.

> …we try to be sensitive because we know that for most people to walk through the door of a church like this and fill out an application, it's demeaning, so we are, we do try to be sensitive, but we do feel like we have to speak the truth because we're giving away money that people who are hardworking um citizens have given. So we feel like, "OK, if I told Joe Smith

> in my church that I helped this person with $500 would he be happy about that?" you know, so we're very, we walk, we walk a very fine line and sometimes it can be stressful because we're making judgment calls.

Churches encounter the free-rider problem (D. R. Hoge 1994; Iannaccone 1997) that is also known as the 80-20 rule. Twenty percent of the congregants provide 80 percent of the resources. Free riders usually attend the church, enjoying the benefits of a faith community without investing in the system. Some members of the church may see the charity recipients as the worst kind of free-rider: gaining advantages not even given to many in the church without even attending the church. The church leaders may feel the need to step lightly in order to appease the sensibilities of those 20 percent that do prop up the church programs, lest they become free-riders, or seek spiritual guidance elsewhere. Losing congregants is a valid concern for pastors. According to a Pew Research poll, 44 percent of Americans of all faith backgrounds now belong to a faith different than the one in which they were raised (Lugo 2010). This figure covers Christians and non-Christians alike, but does not consider those who have changed affiliations within a broader denomination, nor does it enumerate multiple changes of denominations throughout adulthood. Finally, it does not speak to churchgoers who change churches but remain in the same denomination. The church front is a highly competitive one.

Given the layers of accountability, a care minister may feel a duty to place moral boundaries around those who come in asking for help. While they may read about Jesus healing the sick and feeding the hungry with no exception, he did not

appear to have an elder board to answer to. Care pastors are accountable to the congregants. A similar phenomenon has been documented in the Catholic Church (Davidson and D. Hoge 2007). In 2005, 89 percent of Catholic parishioners polled felt that they should have a say in how church dollars were spent. Catholics are increasingly embracing the “servant leader” model, the idea that each person has unique gifts to bring to a parish, and the priest is accountable to his church. This notion is novel, parishioners of the 1950s felt that decisions about the church should rest with leadership (Zaleski and Zech 1995; Davidson and D. Hoge 2007).

The care ministers' moral integrity is at stake, and they must be vigilant to avoid the appearance of impropriety with church funds and also ensure that they are not assisting people who abuse the system. Integrity is one of the values the determine character (Lamont 1992), so if a care minister's integrity is seen as lacking, his or her own values could come into question. Abuse is defined differently by different individuals and churches. If clients that came in asking for help had a data package or cable television, their judgment was suspect. Sometimes the abuse of the system is seen to be unconscious. According to the care minister at Abundant Grace:

> I will say when we give money outside, people feel don’t feel any affiliation to even though they’re taking the money to seeing how they can be helped beyond getting that check for that met need. And the reason is because people are, um, “I want to fill the void. I want to fix the problem.” And they

> don't think long term. They're not strategic, they're not thinking through, "How am I gonna make this work in the long run?" It is very, if you want to say, more like an addict is. You know, give me my fix. Give me my fix, make me happy now, and they're only thinking that way and that's the way they think about in the financial aspects (Abundant Grace).

While the care pastor must appear to clients as compassionate and sensitive, she must also be a shrewd businesswoman, guarding her resources and reserving the bulk of them for the impoverished that are not swindling the church and that her congregants will consider to be deserving of help. Churches need to help the poor because it is part of the biblical mandate, but the pastor must also practice discernment regarding who is funded so that the pastor's integrity is not questioned.

The care minister seems to tie bad financial choices to the recipients' outsider status. Christianity, good work ethic, and ability to manage money seemed inextricably woven for other pastors as well:

> So now the hotels and the uh restaurants are coming to her and are saying, when's your next group coming out? Because these are well trained individuals. She says it's hospitality training or its discipleship in the sheep's clothing or the wolf's clothing of uh a hospitality. So she's really disciplining these people, leading them to Christ and then giving them these employable skills to go out and then have sustainable incomes. (Foothills Church

Interview)

When asked why she thought people continue to make what could be perceived as bad economic choices, the care pastor at Renewal Church posited:

> Hm, temptation. I think they're being told everywhere they look that if you don't have a cell phone with a data package, who are you? I mean, if you don't drive a nice car, what does that say about you? I think people are just, they're confused …I think people are putting their hope in their possessions, their car, their phone, their clothes, their shoes. They think that's gonna buy them peace. And when it come back to bite them, they don't know what to do or where they went wrong (Renewal Church).

The care minister of Church on the Hill demonstrated traits that were similar to TANF caseworkers (Hays 2003) in that she displayed a mixture of unacknowledged moral judgment about the clients' motivations and a maternal desire to help. She feels that her age and maternal disposition are assets when holding clients accountable for making good financial choices:

> […]they needed that lesson, and being a little older, I can, you know, I think I can, for some of them, I am like their mother, and I think that's okay, I don't care. Whatever works, you know to help them trust and I think that they know that I like them and I don't judge you know (Church on the Hill).

This attitude was echoed at Renewal. When the pastor encounters people in their mid-twenties who are calling her for help, she thinks of her own son who is in

this age group. She knows she tried to teach him money management. If he got into financial straits due to poor planning, and a church helped him, she would be upset because that help would keep him from learning a hard life lesson.

The care pastor at Church on the Hill is seeing people who have been recently laid off and now are struggling to learn how to live in poverty. She counsels them and explains that although the expensive apartment made sense when they were working, now that they are unemployed, they will need to find a place to live that is within their budget. She will pay for their rent for a month, which will give them time to find a new place. While she meets with some resistance, other clients will see the logic in her advice and will realize they can move into a smaller place. The pastor expressed sympathy at their dilemma.

> I mean I get it, you know, you want those things. But sometimes you just can't have them. So, you know, we really try to help people and then others it's just, it strictly is a onetime deal (Church on the Hill).

While some might see anyone living in a high-rise and asking for charity as someone who is abusing the system, this care pastor has worked in her affluent area long enough to have an understanding of the job market and the realities of the economy. She does understand that $500 is not going to cover a mortgage in a high-cost-of-living area. A pastor has to navigate the fine line to discern whether or not the person asking for help is truly in need or not, and whether that need can be justified to the congregation. Although she has an office specifically for helping those in need, she is under pressure to fit that help into a mold that is acceptable to

the congregants who are donating the money to keep the program, as well as the entire church, afloat. When seeing a line of clients, the pastor must decide which of those in need will fit the criteria for “deserving” according to the congregation. Therefore, while she is trying to be compassionate to each person who comes through her door, she is not always willing or able to consider the client's individual circumstances. If clients have a lease, they may face fines and a negative credit review for early termination. Moreover, they may continue to be charged rent until a new renter is found. Finally, it may be difficult to find a new apartment with no job. Therefore, simply moving to a cheaper apartment may not be such an obvious choice.

While the care pastor does try to determine the veracity of her clients' stories, some cases are blatant enough that there is no question. According to the care pastor at Renewal Church, she received a call from a man who said his power was turned off and so he needed money to get it turned back on. The pastor called the electric company and was assured that the address in question did indeed have power and was currently using kilowatt hours. She called the man back and told him that she had spoken with the electric company and the power was not off. The man made a show of having his son test the light, and expressed shock that the power was indeed on. The care pastor believes the man was playing her for a fool, assuming that she would take him on his word and give him cash for his situation, with no verification. These kind of calls validate the pastor’s need for discernment, even if it sometimes leads her to unfair judgments against her clients, because her

first priority is remaining morally upright in the eyes of the congregation and leadership.

Some of the judgments may seem harsh. The care pastor at Renewal Church uses greater caution with clients if the client gives financial support to an adult in their home, has a gym membership, or is paying for their kids to participate in a sport. She hasn't always been this judgmental, but client expectations have changed in recent years. She uses forms as a way to demonstrate to the clients that she will hold them accountable, and this serves as a deterrent for a certain percentage of potential clients. She expressed relief when she is able to weed those who she sees as only wanting a hand out without any accountability. When that happens, she is able to send them away and turn her time and attention to the 70% of people who come to see her and have a legitimate need, specifically a medical crisis. She feels that people with medical crises are truly in need of help, and that the church can adequately provide for. However, when people have expenses such as expensive car payments, big mortgages, kids enrolled in sports, and data plans on the phones; the pastor feels that her hands are tied regarding how much financial help she can provide. She will provide limited assistance to get them out of an immediate crunch, but she insists that they should attend a financial counseling program.

> So those kind of people we can't help and um, people are very dogged about their expenses, like, "I'm not giving up the data on my cell phone, I'm not giving up my internet, even though I'm only 6 blocks from the library and I could go use their internet. (Renewal Church Interview).

Pastors express a desire to help and be compassionate, but they must also judge the people who come through their doors. The reason for this dichotomy is twofold. First, there are people who target churches because they see churches as easy places to make some quick cash, and the pastors need to preserve the available money for those people who are in need. Second, the pastors are accountable to the congregants who fund their programs, and it is important to help the people who meet the criteria for "deserving poor" according to the congregation.

There may be extenuating circumstances that account for people needing help while also bleeding funds. Nearly all of the pastors interviewed expressed an increase in need requests during the recession, and higher unemployment levels was a common theme when asked the reason for the increase. The parent may feel it necessary to keep a child's life as consistent as possible in the wake of a job loss and chooses to continue sports. There may be cancellation fees with cell phones, internet, and gym memberships that the client feels would be wasteful. Instead, the client may decide to keep the service active until the contract expires. If the client is job hunting, having internet access in the home can be an efficient tool. Libraries are not open 24 hours, and many have time limits on computer use. However, churchgoers do not always see these decisions as valid, and so the care pastor must weigh the benefits of helping the individual against the risk of offending the congregants' perception of need.

Some churches are solving the dilemma by moving away from temporary relief work altogether.

> They [the destitute] become dependent on relief. And um, so you know, in the international setting and even in the United States when people are homeless or totally, you know, without anything, they need some relief. You know, they need to be fed or need to be sheltered if you will, but you don't want to create a dependence on that (New Hope).

Others have taken a more tempered approach, but still do need to judge the recipients' motives. According to the care pastor at Renewal Church, "…that's why after all these years we have four pages of forms! It's really kind of sad but, there are people out there willing to lie and milk the system and then we won't have money left for the legitimate crises that we want to help people." Methods for keeping abusers and alleged abusers at bay include a cap on how much money a person will be given in a year, how many times a person will be helped, requests for extensive information about current living situations and financial habits, asking people to ask friends or family for help first, requiring attendance at church before a person will be given assistance, different levels of giving depending on a person's commitment to the church, only offering assistance to those who are in a church's database, paying bills directly, giving gifts cards instead of cash. Only one church had an attendance clause, and that was that in order to get help, people needed to get a tear off card that was given out during church services. Many churches also network together, as evidenced at Brookline:

> Somebody comes in we'll send the name out to see if somebody's heard of 'em. If there's somebody that's been in the area that we know are trying to scam

the churches, which we do get a lot. We deny a lot of people (Brookline).

Boundary work appears to be a salient part of the job of the care pastor. Although they do come across as wishing to help those in need, it often seems to happen on the church's terms, which does not necessarily fit the needs of the clients. While there is not a clear hierarchical scale of morality (Sherman 2009), there is definite judgment surrounding the choices and lifestyles of the poor who come in seeking assistance. There is an expectation that the client is poor due to bad money management or frivolity. These assumptions fail to take into account the structural barriers of poverty and the current economic situation that has put many formerly middle class households into a much more precarious financial position (Goodman 2010).

This attitude of judgment seems to stand in contrast with the programs this church does. When telling me about their food pantry, the care pastor told me they have a hospitality room where the recipients wait their turn. Volunteers offer tea, coffee and cookies, and they pray with the recipients while they wait. While there are specific categories and amounts that each family is eligible for, the recipient has the autonomy to choose their own foods from within those guidelines. The pastor puts thought into the food offerings. "The produce that we give is really nice stuff. When we set up the food bank we wanted it to be done with excellence. So we don't give out any out-dated food." (Brookline)

The contrast illustrates the tension that a care pastor must navigate between compassionate care for the poor in the community and rigid accountability to the

church body. Unlike a governmental or secular agency that parcels out resources based on need alone, the church must be mindful of whether the person who receives will be viewed by the congregation as someone who deserves the funds and will use it in accordance to the moral boundaries set forth by the congregation. The pastor must demonstrate their own commitment to passing along the church's values to those that they help.

Boundary work between churches

While churches may be setting up moral boundaries between themselves and other churches, sometimes it is beneficial to work with people of other religious persuasions. The networks do not necessarily have to include only churches in the same denomination or faith background. In the PNW, churches seem to be comfortable setting aside religious differences to work together, and the moral boundaries may relax to some degree. A charismatic church formed an alliance with the Catholic Church next door. The Catholic Church was already set up to have a food pantry, so instead of duplicating their service, the charismatic church decided to partner with them. The Catholic Church provides the space for storage and operations, and the charismatic church helps by providing funds, volunteers, and food. The charismatic pastor acknowledges this relationship would not have always been so easy:

> Yeah, and just think, 400 years ago we were burning each other at the stake. (laughs) That's progress.

Churches in the Pacific Northwest do work together. However, churches are

also competing with one another, and one way pastors set their churches apart is to judge their own programs as superior to other programs. Just as corporations must market their products as faster, more advanced, or better looking, a church must market itself as more morally correct or innovative. In this way, they draw moral boundaries between themselves and other churches.

Many churches are embracing a new business model when it comes to missions work. Missionary work has historically been tied to imperialism, and modern churches are trying to distance themselves from that model. Instead, many churches are trying to work with organizations that are in the field and understand the culture of the people who need help.

> […]we also support ministry work in other places around the world, in countries like Spain, in Greece, in Chile, South America we're very active there with regards to a partnership with ministry organization there. Indigenous really to the country, not Americans coming into those countries saying, "Hey we're gonna come save ya" (River of Love interview).

The care minister at Fountain of Faith summed it up succinctly. He explained to me that his missions teams return to the same site year after year, building relationships with the residents. He drew a boundary between the partnership work that his church engages in now and the more top-down model of previous generation.

> I think my generation we were all about, you know, telling people to have a relationship with Christ and not doing enough to feed 'em and train 'em and

teach ‘em and respect ‘em and that sort of thing, you know (Fountain of Faith).

Church on the Hill has distanced itself from the more overt conversion methods, preferring more subtle ways. When speaking of the church’s house building missions, the care director explained to me that expecting a profession of faith before offering assistance is the hallmark of very conservative churches. Instead, Church on the Hill takes care of people with no coercion or expectation of conversion, although many people will profess their faith as a side effect or outcome of the outreach.

Megachurches have embraced mission sites as learning opportunities for young churchgoers. Although there are children living in the most devastating circumstances, and who are the victims of trafficking, poverty, and the drug trade; a church feels an obligation to keep its own children safe from such circumstances. While the adults may assist in the harshest climates, they tend to send junior missionaries into more safe areas. The church leaders and parents want the children of the church to witness the conditions of the world's impoverished, and they want the children to feel they can help at some level, but they must balance that with a need for safety and a desire to make the missions experience fun and somewhat pleasant. In this way, missions' work has become quite regulated and commodified. River of Love starts sending children into the mission fields when they are in junior high school. Although they have adult missionaries going to Bangkok or Thailand, the type of work they do there is considered too dangerous for

children. Instead, junior high students go to South America where they can work with schools or communities.

> It's um, no mission work is ever easy but it is, it is, uh, more age appropriate, for junior high, high school context, yeah (River of Love interview).

Brookline has a very systematic approach to missionary work for their young churchgoers. They take elementary students on mission trips to agricultural areas of the state. The students will help with the preschool vacation bible school program and also do community cleanup projects. Middle school students have the opportunity to work with orphanages in Mexico, and high school students go to Mexico in order to help build houses or school rooms.

Meanwhile, Mount Zion waits until high school. It appears to be a highly organized, methodical process. They have an annual house building ministry, which involves taking 50-75 students down to Mexico. The group builds 3 houses while they are down there. The youth group also goes to Europe every other year to visit churches that they have sponsored in Germany and France.

In one interview, the care minister distinguished her church from other churches by asserting that her church's way of assisting the poor is superior than what the majority of churches do in regard to overseas missions. This is her attempt to build a moral identity for her church by distinguishing their charity work as more responsible than the older models. The pastor's church is the in-group and churches that practice other forms of outreach are an out-group. They do some relief work, but limit it to orphans and widows, those that they deem truly unable to help

themselves.

> Like in Ethiopia we assist with a food program that um feeds widows, disabled men, and orphans, so they're selected by their churches as being the poorest of the poor and we also support work that's being done in orphanages there so, um, it's not that we're not doing relief work. It's just that we in our partnerships are very committed to the long-term, and building relationships with people and consistently visiting with those people and making sure we are in touch with them (New Hope).

Putting children in the missions' field may be another way to distinguish the church as morally superior to other churches. Lamont posits that churches, schools and media are sites of boundary creation (1992). These churches are not only helping children establish the children's own moral boundaries, but are also using children to create and maintain institutional boundaries.

Tokenism

Sometimes boundaries are maintained through token success stories. The care minister at Foothills has welcomed the destitute, and is trying to break down the barriers between the congregation and "Michael," a homeless man, so that Michael can be seen as a person. However, this story also serves the church's larger narrative about the deserving poor while allowing the pastor and congregants to be the heroes, embarking upon "a rocky, turbulent process sometimes, bringing somebody back to life from a place where they know nobody to a place where they're a somebody." The pastor has formed a relationship with Michael who has spent the

past 20 years living on the streets. He came to this church a few years ago, and while he is still homeless, he has become a member of the church. Michael is active in the church's homeless outreach ministry. The pastor is helping him improve his typing skills.

> "Michael" needs to know that he matters as a human being. Because poverty is, you know at the deepest levels, when people have given up hope and the belief that they can do anything to help themselves… (Foothills Church).

The pastor stated that the problem with welfare is that it simply gives money in order to send the poor away instead of learning what they need. He prefers to take people to lunch and get to know them as people, learning names and life stories instead of just handing out money.

"Michael" helps the newly arrived homeless people get set up, telling them about the city's shelters, giving them a list of resources, listening to the stories, and being a friend to those in need.

> …now he has purpose. And a reason to get out of bed in the morning. So, yeah, it's a it's a pretty neat thing. So we're just trying to gracefully and gradually introduce our church to this concept, and it's scary (Foothills Church).

Michael's story can be seen as an example of a success story that the church can hold up as proof that their methods are effective. The pastor was able to discern that this man was worthy of the church's help. Michael is also proof of the church's compassion. Here is a man who was accepted as a member of the church, even

though he is poor, and was given a certain level of authority. There is a narrative in his example, "with enough individual effort and a small amount of propping from an outside source, a person can enjoy success." This continues to deny the structural barriers that may keep Michael towards the bottom rungs of the ladder (Hays 2003) and it glosses over the reality that so many more people will not be able to escape poverty, often through little or no fault of their own.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Megachurch pastors do seem to participate in boundary work, creating symbolic moral boundaries between their churches and other churches and traditions through the way they provide care for the poor. This study adds to moral boundary literature by looking at moral boundary work as a way to maintain high membership rates. Moral boundary work is usually applied to individual level analysis (Lamont 1992; Hays 2003; Sherman 2009), there have not been many that bring moral boundaries to a corporate level. Furthermore, this is the first study to look at the judgments made of the poor as the commodity, with the moral boundary work having little to do with the people in poverty.

Megachurches have a foothold in the PNW, and many of them are growing. As Wellman (2008) and Shilbey (2004) point out, PNW religion differs from other regions and often embraces interfaith dialogue, social justice outreach, and an ecumenical spirit. While not every pastor I interviewed spoke of interfaith alliances, some did have an amicable relationship with one or more local churches. Further study could look at this phenomenon in other regions of the country to see if this is a widespread trend or something that is only happening in the PNW. Churches in the PNW do have programs for the poor. Many hold a policy that no one will leave empty-handed. This might mean a bag of groceries, bus pass, gas or grocery card, or a list of resources. However, the pastor is also accountable to the church congregants, and so must use discernment to determine whether a client is truly in

need or is taking undue advantage of the church's generosity. The pastor must also decide whether the client would be deemed worthy of help by the congregation. Furthermore, the pastor must navigate the line between compassion and judgment, offering the clients advice and a shoulder to cry on while also administering "tough love" as he or she sees fit.

In this way, pastors are demonstrating moral boundaries, not necessarily between themselves and their clientele whom they do express compassion for. Rather, the moral boundaries are drawn by pastors between their own church and other churches and organizations that help the poor. With the boundaries, pastors can designate their church as an in-group and other churches and organization are placed in comparison groups to determine whether they have similar morals and are also members of the in-group or if they have dissimilar morals and so belong to an out-group. Furthermore, the pastor is able to showcase their moral boundaries to their congregants in order to prove the pastor has strong personal integrity.

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Appendix A: Megachurches in Washington and Oregon[3]

Church Name	City	State	Average	Denom
Beaverton Foursquare Church	Beaverton	OR	6000	4SQ
Beaverton Christian Church	Beaverton	OR	2500	CHRIST
Westside Church	Bend	OR	2040	4SQ
Good Shepherd Community Church	Boring	OR	3500	ND
`Table Rock Fellowship Church	Central Point	OR	2100	ND
Eugene Faith Center	Eugene	OR	3000	4SQ
First Baptist Church	Eugene	OR	3000	BAPT
East Hill Church	Gresham	OR	5000	4SQ
Abundant Life Church	Happy Valley	OR	2500	CHRIST
Evergreen Christian Center	Hillsboro	OR	2200	4SQ
Applegate Christian Fellowship	Jacksonville	OR	3000	CAL
Sunset Presbyterian Church	Portland	OR	2175	PCUSA
New Beginnings Christian Center	Portland	OR	2500	ND
City Bible Church	Portland	OR	3000	ND
Cedar Mill Bible Church	Portland	OR	1900	ND
New Hope Community Church	Portland	OR	2200	ND
People's Church	Salem	OR	3678	AG
Salem First Church of the Nazarene	Salem	OR	1800	NAZ
Salem Alliance Church	Salem	OR	2585	CMA
Morning Star Community Church	Salem	OR	3000	CAL
Village Baptist Church	Tigard	OR	2000	BAPT
Rolling Hills Community Church	Tualatin	OR	3300	ND
SouthLake Foursquare Church	West Linn	OR	2000	4SQ
Grace Community Church	Auburn	WA	2000	ND
First Presbyterian Church	Bellevue	WA	1800	PCUSA
Westminster Chapel	Bellevue	WA	2500	ND
Cornwall Church	Bellingham	WA	2700	COGA
Christ The King Community Church	Bellingham	WA	3500	ND

3 List courtesy of Megachurch Database, Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

Cedar Park Assembly of God Church	Bothell	WA	1900	AG
Eastside Foursquare Church	Bothell	WA	3000	4SQ
Canyon Hills Community Church	Bothell	WA	1800	NL
Northshore Baptist Church	Bothell	WA	2200	BAPT
Westgate Chapel	Edmonds	WA	2000	FCA
New Life Center	Everett	WA	2000	4SQ
Northwest Church	Federal Way	WA	2000	4SQ
The City Church	Kirkland	WA	7155	ND
Cascade Community Church	Monroe	WA	2000	ND
Christ The King Community Church - Anacortes Community Church	Mount Vernon	WA	3190	NL
Church of Living Water	Olympia	WA	2400	4SQ
Christ Memorial Church	Poulsbo	WA	2000	AG
Overlake Christian Church	Redmond	WA	3500	CHRIST
Antioch Bible Church	Redmond	WA	2000	ND
Highlands Community Church	Renton	WA	1800	ND
Bethel Church	Richland	WA	3600	NL
Christian Faith Center	Seattle	WA	5909	ND
Mt. Zion Baptist Church	Seattle	WA	2500	BAPT
Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church	Seattle	WA	1800	BAPT
Calvary Chapel	Seattle	WA	2000	CAL
Mars Hill Fellowship	Seattle	WA	7343	ND
University Presbyterian Church	Seattle	WA	3200	PCUSA
Calvary Chapel	Spokane	WA	2000	CAL
Life Center	Spokane	WA	3200	4SQ
Calvary Community Church	Sumner	WA	3300	NL
Life Center	Tacoma	WA	5000	AG
Champions Centre	Tacoma	WA	6500	ND
Living Hope Church	Vancouver	WA	5300	ND
Crossroads Community Church	Vancouver	WA	6000	CAL
New Heights Church	Vancouver	WA	4000	NL
Walla Walla City Seventh-day Adventist Church	Walla Walla	WA	1800	SDA

Appendix B: Sample Interview Questions

For the pastor/staff member

When was your church founded?

What is the average weekly attendance?

Do you recruit members and if so, how?

What is your primary recruiting strategy?

Tell me about your congregation.

How long have you had a website?

Who maintains your website?

Do you know how many web visitors you have per week?

If yes: how many?

If no: is there anyone who keeps track of that? Would I be able to get that information?

Do you know what the most visited page is?

Do you have specific goals you would like to achieve through your website? If so, what are they?

Questions on volunteering

Approximately how many members of your congregation volunteer?

What are your most popular volunteering positions?

How long is an average volunteering assignment?

How many people do you have involved in short term or one time volunteering events versus long-term volunteering assignments?

Do you have other volunteer opportunities besides those listed on your website?

Please tell me about the volunteer opportunities you encourage your congregants to get involved with.

How do you encourage congregants to volunteer?

Do you preach on the importance of volunteering? If so, how often?

How do you keep your volunteer staff motivated?

What resources do they have available if they are dissatisfied?

What is the turnover rate for volunteers? What is the most common reason given for quitting?

For those churches that have social services outreach on their website:

Why did you decide to include services for people in poverty on your website?

Tell me about your web outreach. Do you think it has been an effective means of advertising these programs and why?

What can you tell me about people who find your outreach programs through the website (demographics, employment status, church membership status, etc)?

What can you tell me about the people who use your outreach programs in general?

Do you think the website advertisement of these programs is instrumental in bringing people in to use the programs?

(If yes) How many people do you think are reached that would not know about the programs otherwise?

Do you have additional programs that are not listed on the website?

What are your expectations of non-members who access your programs?

For those people who do not find the services through the Web, how do they access them?

Have you found any disadvantages to advertising outreach programs on the internet?

What is the most typical way a person finds out about your outreach programs?

For those churches that don't have social services outreach programs listed on their website:

Does your church have outreach programs for the poor? (If not, why not?)

If yes:

How do you advertise your outreach programs?

What outreach programs do you have?

How many people use your programs?

Has the number changed in the past five years?

Do you receive requests for the information to be listed on the website?

What can you tell me about people who find your outreach programs (demographics, employment status, church membership status, etc)?

What are your expectations of non-members who access your programs?

What is the most typical way a person finds out about your outreach programs?

What other ways do people find out about your outreach programs?

Appendix C: Church Pseudonyms

Interview 1 Grace Fellowship

Interview 2 Trinity

Interview 3 First Gospel

Interview 4 Savior and Redeemer

Interview 5 Mount Pleasant

Interview 6 New Hope

Interview 7 Mount Olive

Interview 8 Church on the Hill

Interview 9 Mount Zion

Interview 10 Renewal Church

Interview 11 Foothills Church

Interview 12 Brookline

Interview 13 Brookline

Interview 14 Foothills Church

Interview 15 Fountain of Faith

Interview 16 Blessed Hope

Interview 17 River of Love

Interview 18 Abundant Grace