


April 2020

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Recommended Citation

Spickard, James V., "Social capital, civic capital: local churches organize for popular democracy" (2020). *Working Papers*. 4.

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Social Capital, Civic Capital: Local Churches Organize for Popular Democracy*

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G.A. Persons and J. Jennings, eds:

In the Vineyard: Churches Engaged in Building Community.

* The author wishes to thank the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and the University of Redlands Farquhar Fund for grants supporting portions of this research. Direct all comments and queries to the author, care of the Fielding Institute, 2112 Santa Barbara Street, Santa Barbara, California, USA 93105

Social Capital, Civic Capital: Local Churches Organize for Popular Democracy

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The past decade has seen a renewed interest in the role of "social capital" in supporting democracy. Seen as the glue that holds society together, social capital refers to the resources embodied in dense social networks – a form of "capital" that provides advantages to those individuals and societies who possess it, just as monetary capital supplies the resources that enrich the upper class. Along with "cultural capital" (socially valued knowledge) and "civic capital" (public participation in the political process), social and monetary capital form a quartet that, for many sociologists, explains much of the ebb and flow of social life.¹

Social capital typically manifests itself as what sociologists call "intermediary institutions." Clubs, local political organizations, and, especially in the United States, churches are sites where people form bonds of friendship, neighborliness, and mutual interest. They learn to work together, squabble, and settle differences. Situated midway between individuals and the state, such institutions help people become mutually connected social beings. Alexis de Tocqueville famously noted America's multitude of such institutions, compared with his native France²; subsequent Tocquevillian observers have claimed their continuing importance to the American scene – and have worried about their decline.³

Research by Robert Putnam and others have shown the importance of such intermediary institutions in fostering democracy. Based on his twenty-year study of Italian local government,⁴ Putnam concluded that democracy works best where there are dense social networks; where those networks are thin, people lack the multi-dimensional ties that foster political cooperation. Putnam's subsequent (and famous) work on America's loss of social capital tracks the decline of intermediary institutions in the United States.⁵ His concern is that a decline in participation in such institutions presages a decline in democratic political culture. The loss of social capital produces a loss of civic capital, in his view, as people cease participating politically where social ties are few.

This is a particular worry in minority communities, especially poor ones. Decades of oppression have kept their residents from playing a full role in American democracy. Despite legal gains, various forces have continued to keep such neighborhoods from developing effective political participation. Though it is not the only factor, many observers have noted that these areas' social capital is also lacking, compared to locales dominated by upper-middle class Whites.⁶ Richer neighborhoods have far more avenues of social participation than do poorer ones, and rich White neighborhoods have the most of all. Whether it be the relative strength of the soccer leagues or the presence of the Junior League, poor minority communities simply have fewer organized social opportunities. Social-capital theorists argue that the relative lack of intermediary

¹ Pierre Bourdieu, Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984); James S. Coleman, The Foundations of Social Theory (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Francis Fukuyama, Trust: Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995).

² Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, translated by Henry Reeve, Unabridged, in two volumes (New York: Schocken Books, 1961, [1835, 1840]).

³ See, for example Hervé Varenne, Americans Together: Structured Diversity in a Midwestern Town (New York: Teacher's College Press, 1977); Robert

N. Bellah, et al., Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Robert N. Bellah, et al., The Good Society (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

⁴ Robert D. Putnam, Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁵ Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," Journal of Democracy January 1995: 65-78; Robert D. Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); Robert D. Putnam, ed, Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

⁶ William Julius Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

institutions in poor minority neighborhoods accentuates their political powerlessness.⁷

Churches are an important factor here. Among the few reliable institutions in many poor minority neighborhoods, churches are well-positioned to foster civic participation, both directly and indirectly – both by encouraging civic action and by creating strong community ties. They have not, however, uniformly done either. Several factors contribute to this. First, where middle-class African-American churches once formed the backbone of the Civil Rights Movement,⁸ growing residential class segregation among African-Americans has deprived African-American communities of civic-oriented church leadership.⁹ The same is true for other groups; poor Latinos, for example, have seldom been able to translate church activity into civic power.¹⁰ Second, middle-class churches have more resources than do poor churches, and can thus sponsor more programs in which they involve a larger number of parishioners. A storefront Iglesia Bautista may play a large role in its members' lives, for example, but it is not likely to provide the multidimensional outreach typical of a large suburban congregation: the parents' groups, the marriage encounters, the sports leagues, the singles club, and so on. Multidimensional programming reaches more people and it gives them varied connections. It is out of such materials that social capital is built.

The result is a classic "to all those who have, more will be given."¹¹ Church members with good social capital get more; churches that lack the resources to build social capital find themselves isolated. Civic capital follows social capital, as the well-connected participate more in public life. In fact, social, civic, cultural, and

monetary capital tend to go together, leaving poor church communities and poor neighborhoods farther and farther behind.

All is not bleak, however. This chapter presents two cases in which churches have used similar models to build minority civic participation in poor neighborhoods – both directly and by building social ties. In San Antonio, Texas, two church-based organizations have mobilized poor people of various ethnicities to have considerable influence on city policy. Over the last 30 years, Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) and Metro Alliance have developed an organizing style that builds social capital in poor neighborhoods and mobilizes that capital for civic purposes. They do so by developing leadership skills among lay church members rather than by focusing simply on clergy. Similarly, Dolores (Catholic) Mission in East Los Angeles has used the model of "base Christian communities" to empower its largely Latino lay members to confront – and then work with – police, immigration officials, and other authorities. Both efforts have met with some success, but with some failure. Their role in developing faith-based public participation, however, bodes well for American democracy.

1. San Antonio, Texas

Mark Warren describes COPS and Metro Alliance as "a group of committed people of faith striving to forge a new way to conduct politics."¹² Affiliated with Saul Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), which grew from his 1930s efforts to organize Chicago's working-class neighborhoods, COPS and Metro Alliance have modified Alinsky's organizing model to build a multi-class, multi-racial coalition to bring poor people into the political process.¹³

Before COPS' founding, San Antonio was long known for having one of America's most class- and race-based political systems.¹⁴ Its minority Anglo population was (and is) concentrated in the city's northern quarter – the site of both economic development

⁷ See Mark R. Warren, Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 15-30.

⁸ Taylor Branch, Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-1963 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988).

⁹ Wilson, Truly Disadvantaged, 30ff.

¹⁰ Ana Maria Diaz-Stevens, Oxcart Catholicism on Fifth Avenue: The Impact of the Puerto Rican Migration Upon the Archdiocese of New York (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1993); Ana Maria Diaz-Stevens and Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, Recognizing the Latino Resurgence in U.S. Religion: The Emmaus Paradigm (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998).

¹¹ Matthew 25: 29.

¹² Warren, Dry Bones Rattling, ix.

¹³ The following discussion is based largely on Mark Warren's study of the Southwestern IAF (nDry Bones Rattling) supplemented by personal observations made over several years of residence in San Antonio.

¹⁴ Rodolfo Rosales, The Illusion of Inclusion: The Untold Political Story of San Antonio (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000).

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and political power. The small Black population is concentrated just east of the downtown; the Latino majority is concentrated to the west and south. All of the latter are poor. Parts of the West Side, in particular, lacked sewers and running water until the 1960s. Flooding and bad roads are still common in these neighborhoods, even as city money is spent on improvements for the richer northsiders. A long-standing policy of attracting industry with low-wage labor maintained this class system. The Good Government League, which dominated city politics from the WWII to the late 70s, used non-partisan, at-large council elections to minimize lower-class political participation and to bury what organizing occurred with well-funded "reform" campaigns.¹⁵ Schools were a particular disgrace, as racially gerrymandered districts kept tax rates low for Anglos and high for minorities.¹⁶ Water was also a continuing scandal, both because San Antonio's periodic floods were channeled into poor neighborhoods and because the city subsidized development over the Edwards Aquifer – the city's only source of drinking water. (That aquifer is located on the city's North Side.)

IAF organizer Ernesto Cortes, Jr., set up Communities Organized for Public Service in early 1970s, with an eye toward changing San Antonio's exclusionary practices. Its acronym (COPS), was deliberate: its members were to be the public police that kept city leaders loyal to all of their constituents, not just to the rich ones. Cortes began with a tried-and-true Alinsky tactic: recruiting people through existing neighborhood organizations. Alinsky argued that people act out of self-interest. The role of a community organizer was to help local people identify their interests, especially ones that they are angry enough about to do something. The next task is to train local

leaders to channel that anger into political action. As Cortes described it, "the iron rule of organizing" was "Never do anything for anybody that they can do for themselves."¹⁷ The task of an organizer is neither to lead the charge nor to determine which way it should go; instead, organizers provide resources, knowledge, and training that local leaders use.

The Alinsky system worked in San Antonio – but it also didn't. Rather than a broad coalition of social clubs, PTAs, and neighborhood associations, Cortes found himself organizing a collection of churches – mostly Catholic ones. This was in part a result of West and South Side dynamics: Catholic churches were the dominant institutions in these predominantly Latino areas – and they were the most stable ones. It was also in part a result of the Catholic Church's mid-century turn to social activism, particularly among the religious orders (Jesuits, Franciscans) who staffed many West Side parishes, and among the growing numbers of Latino clergy. The San Antonio diocese had long supported liberal causes; the post-Vatican II emphasis on social justice meshed with its concern for the local poor. At various times, some 25 Catholic parishes have been COPS members, and the diocesan hierarchy has provided both support and funds.¹⁸

Subsequent outreach to the East Side African-American community and to liberal Anglos similarly found itself with a church-based clientele. Metro Alliance, which works in parallel with COPS, not independently, combines African-American churches with the Protestant mainline. For the most part, however, only the former join to alleviate problems in their own neighborhoods. Despite an effort to take the Alliance citywide, the center of organizing remains the city's poor neighborhoods.

Consequences of Church-Based Organizing

This heavily religious base has had several consequences for the IAF's organizing strategy. The most important of these involved the dynamic between interests and values. Alinsky's emphasis on personal anger did indeed motivate people; it did not, however,

¹⁷ Ernesto Cortes, quoted in Warren, Dry Bones Rattling, 40.

¹⁸ Various other organizations have been COPS members, notably schools supporting its Alliance Schools initiative. But the religious tenor of both West-Side based COPS and its East-Side based sister organization, Metro Alliance, is clear.

¹⁵ Rosales, Illusion of Inclusion, 45ff.

¹⁶ Texas's famous "Robin Hood" school funding law, which takes money from rich districts and gives it to poor ones, grew out of a lawsuit brought by parents in San Antonio's Edgewood School District. The judge found the then-dominant reliance on local property taxes to violate the Texas Constitution, which promises equal education for all. North side districts with a large tax base found it much easier to fund their schools than did south and west side districts, whose tax base was small. At this writing, the Republican-dominated Texas State Legislature is attempting to overturn "Robin Hood" by changing the constitutional requirement for equality.

encourage people to reach out to others when one's own interests were not at stake. It thus made it difficult to sustain coalitions – and IAF-trained groups in other cities often collapsed when the organizers left town.¹⁹

Churches, however, are motivated by values as well as by interests. Most religious traditions do not tell people just to look out for themselves but to put their neighbors first. Acting on behalf of others is a prime value, as is acting for social justice. Various church groups define this differently, but the value is there for all of them. A concrete, personal, and doable way to engage in such action is often all religious people need.²⁰

Over time, Cortes, in particular, and the IAF, generally, shifted its focus from purely secular, interest-based politics to a politics of values. Rather than simply motivating people by emphasizing their own troubles, they began to ask people about their responsibilities to the community at large. “What does the community need?” and “How are we called to respond?” did not entirely replace “What makes you angry?” as organizational tools. But Cortes and the San Antonio IAF were far more willing to engage with people theologically than Alinsky ever was.

One way to do this was to stimulate theological reflection. Among other programs, Cortes developed clergy meetings and retreats, which studied the social implications of various religious traditions. He also invited first-rate academics to teach about community development and about the economic implications of various city policies. The idea was to help members of various faith traditions see the community as a whole, not just the part in which they reside – and to draw on their religious traditions to guide their actions.

Such activities allowed both outreach and coalition-building; by studying together, clergy learned to work together across the lines of race and class. Cortes realized early on that San Antonio's Latino

community would never have enough political power to overcome the northside elite.²¹ To influence city policy, it needed the support of others. This meant bridging racial barriers, including what once amounted to an almost complete social and institutional segregation. It also had to bridge issues, for example by marshaling Latino support for environmental preservation in exchange for Anglo support for job-training programs. Such “relational organizing”²² has not always been successful. It has, however, been a hallmark of the San Antonio IAF, and of the IAF affiliates elsewhere that its success has spawned.

Style

In the beginning, COPS was confrontational. It had to figure out how to get its foot in the door, how to get the city leaders to take it seriously. Pushing a city budget proposal to improve services to Mexican American neighborhoods in 1975, for example, COPS organized a “shop-in” at the city's largest department store. While hundreds of Latino grandmothers, housewives, and churchgoers tried on clothes downstairs – bringing sales to a halt with their numbers – Cortes and COPS leaders were in the owner's office asking him to use his influence with the City Council on their behalf. The next day the group descended on the local bank, changing pennies into dollars and back again until the bank president would meet with them. After months of such tactics and considerable publicity, the Council passed the first major city investment in the West Side, building drainage systems, parks, sidewalks, and so on.

COPS has not always needed such an in-your-face approach, though its power has certainly been enhanced by its reputation for it. Over the years, its focus on results and its willingness to negotiate has built a decent working relationship with some of the very business leaders with whom it had its early confrontations. The above-mentioned bank president, for example, later became a backer of COPS' “Better Jobs” program. City leaders now brag about the billion-plus dollars that has been spent on infrastructure in poor neighborhoods, the tens of millions spent to rehabilitate housing for the poor, the school bond issues for which COPS and Metro Alliance have mobilized voters, the nationally recognized “Project Quest” job

¹⁹ In some cases, the organizations survived but became exclusive and even racist. See Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 45ff, 58.

²⁰ See Stephen A. Kent and James V. Spickard, “The ‘Other’ Civil Religion and the Tradition of Radical Quaker Politics,” *Journal of Church and State* 36, no. 2 (1994): 373ff; Meredith B. McGuire and James V. Spickard, “Narratives of Commitment: Social Activism and Radical Catholic Identity,” *Temenos: Studies in Comparative Religion* (2003).

²¹ Rosales, *Illusion of Inclusion*.

²² Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 30ff, 120-21.

training program, and so on. Significant sectors of the city's power elite now recognize the value of an educated workforce for attracting business. San Antonio's low-wage image is not gone, but it has been modified.

North Side developers have been less cooperative, as the organizations' most recent struggle demonstrates. In the early 00s, the city was given an opportunity to attract a PGA golf course to the North Side. Proponents of the plan claimed that the course would "put San Antonio on the map", increasing tourism and business investment. Opponents pointed out that the course would be built on top of the city's water supply; runoff from pest- and herbicides could poison the drinking water for a million people. They also noted that the plan would require a 15-year tax giveaway (later reduced to 10), produce only minimum-wage jobs, and increase development on the one side of the city that had too much development already. Special interest legislation and backroom politicking at City Hall won the first round, however, as the plan won Council approval.

At this point, COPS and Metro Alliance entered the fray. The PGA plan violated the city's commitment not to approve tax abatements unless the resulting projects paid a living wage, not just the minimum. Together with a coalition of environmentalists, they collected signatures from over 10% of the city's voters, enough to call a referendum. This was quite a feat, considering that fewer than that had voted in the last council election. The council withdrew the plan and substituted another, which was turned down by the PGA. In the following months, two council members were indicted for corruption and voters turned a majority of the sitting council out of office.

This event is an important indicator of several aspects of the San Antonio IAF approach to organizing. The first is the organizations' willingness to seek coalition partners – to work with others, so long as its agenda is on the table. Its current agenda is good jobs with good wages, supported by public policy. The PGA plan threatened that agenda by threatening to siphon city resources to developers. The coalition with environmentalists won the day. A second factor is the organizations' ability to mobilize voters – to put its troops in the street, to use a favorite martial metaphor. COPS and Metro Alliance proved once again that they cannot be steamrollered. They are the only organizations in San Antonio capable of such

grassroots mobilization; any politician who cares about reelection has to take notice.

The third factor, however, relates to the San Antonio IAF's willingness to transcend its own interests and operate out of values. Seen purely instrumentally, COPS and Metro Alliance should probably not have opposed the PGA golf course, as it cost them no small part of the political capital they had amassed behind their Better Jobs Initiative. The city's business elite supported Better Jobs, but it also supported the PGA. Why jeopardize their support? Why not unite with them, rather than with liberal environmentalists?

The reason has to do with the IAF's democratic values. If religious faith teaches us to look out for our neighbors, and if that faith teaches us to seek justice for those less fortunate than ourselves, is it not important to oppose a blatant resource-grab? Is it not important to move beyond mere self-interest and think about what is good for the community as a whole? The San Antonio IAF has not become a religious organization. But as faith-language became more comfortable to its organizers, so too did the language of collective responsibility. Working for "the community" now means working for the whole community, not just for one's own people's share of the pie.

Simultaneously, of course, IAF-style organizing has infused the faith of its participants. As an early COPS President put it, her association with the organization:

gave more meaning to my faith. I could now relate scripture to my life. If you really care for your brother, compassion and courage become real. It's not anything you learn in school, church, or CCD [religious education]. So when we went to an action, we looked to the Bible for inspiration. That's the depth we want. We have a theology of housing!²³

And not just of housing. After an extensive study of the Southwestern IAF, the multi-city network of IAF affiliates that grew from Cortes's San Antonio success, Mark Warren concluded that Cortes's church-based strategy is, in effect, "a theology of organizing", whose central theme was "the need of people of faith to take public action to build

²³ Beatrice Cortez, quoted in Warren, Dry Bones Rattling, 58.

community.”²⁴ Working in the social capital tradition, Warren sees this to be a great hope for American democracy.

Further Consequences

A second consequence of church-based organizing involves the dynamic between clergy and laity. Alinsky had focused his organizing on institutional leaders, assuming that these leaders would bring followers with them. This is not how Cortes’s IAF operates. Rather than look just to established authorities, COPS and Metro Alliance recruit respected parishioners who may or may not have any institutional standing. The mark of a leader, one organizer told me, is that s/he has followers. This might be a well-connected housewife, a respected grandfather, or a single mother with lots of friends. Institutional power alone does not bring people to the accountability sessions, the legislative lobby days, or the precinct walks that make COPS and Metro Alliance so effective – at least not in today’s churches. Clergy can guide, but they cannot compel. The IAF finds ordinary parishioners more effective, precisely because of their ties to other church-goers. Working-class Latina women are especially valuable because other women can identify with them: not just “This is my problem, too” but “If she can do this, so can I!”

This is not to say that clergy are unimportant to IAF organizing. Nuns, priests, and ministers have always been among the groups’ spokespersons, and have been key to articulating the groups’ religious values. COPS and Metro Alliance work through these clergy, but they do not stop with them. They ask clergy to get their parishioners involved – as leaders, not just as followers. (Most overworked clergy are more than happy to oblige.) They also look beyond the church presidents, overseers, and other institutional elites, seeking to develop leadership among those who have never seen themselves as leaders before.

Despite such democratic efforts, however, there is more than a hint of democratic centralism in the IAF organizations themselves. IAF ideology claims that the issues on which it works come from the people: from face-to-face neighborhood meetings in which ordinary people identify their concerns and decide what changes need to be made to sustain healthy community life. In the nearly two years that I

attended IAF meetings, I did not see such bottom-up decision-making. Instead, I saw the IAF organizers and group leaders inform others – including clergy – of the group’s stands on civic matters. The decision to oppose the PGA golf course, for example, was made at the center rather than after widespread consultation, even among the member churches.²⁵ There has also little effort to identify the needs of North Side neighborhoods, despite the obvious benefits that would have for Metro Alliance’s long-standing effort to expand its membership into that area.

More may be going on to stymie this effort, however. Middle-class and affluent neighborhoods may need services, but their residents often know how to get them and are seldom completely locked out of the political process. They do, however, respond to community values. IAF’s residual appeals to self-interest are likely to go over poorly in such neighborhoods, especially among the churches. As North Side Lutheran pastor Bill Bruggeman put it, “I have trouble with the self-interest concept. You should do things for others.”²⁶ Yet Bruggeman also thinks that Metro Alliance would be stronger among northsiders were it not so completely identified with inner city issues. The proper mix of values and self-interest is apparently still elusive.

A third consequence of church-based organizing involves the role of social capital – both in generating activism and in being generated by it. The first is obvious: Alinsky recognized that well-connected poor people make more effective activists than do those who are socially isolated. This is one reason that Latino women are so prominent in San Antonio’s IAF. Not only do they encourage other women to become active; they also mobilize their extensive kin networks. The shop-ins and bank-ins worked at least in part because Cortes organized grandmothers to bring the whole family to such actions.

At the same time – and more importantly for our purposes – COPS and Metro Alliance have generated social capital, not just exploited it. The groups’ core tactic, “relational organizing,” encourages people to develop social ties. COPS and Metro Alliance

²⁴ Warren, Dry Bones Rattling, 60.

²⁵ The principles on which it was based – especially the opposition to city tax breaks for low-wage employers – had long been part of COP/Metro’s platform.

²⁶ Quoted in Warren, Dry Bones Rattling, 206.

are themselves intermediary institutions, which bring together people from varied congregations. The most dramatic are what the groups call “accountability sessions”: public meetings with elected officials to which each member organization sends as many delegates as possible. The idea is to remind that official of her or his accountability to the voters, and to put that official on record as supporting or opposing IAF projects. Participants are elated by the presence of so many others; unlike a mass demonstration, however, these participants are identified by their church or organization. COPS and Metro encourage people to get to know activists from other groups. Participation in a session may lead to joint lobbying, to joint precinct walking, and ultimately to committee work. The old activist saying, “In solidarity there is strength,” thus creates webs of relationships, which make organizing more effective.

Probably the most significant aspect of this relational organizing is its transracial character. San Antonio’s governing elite was once able to divide Blacks from Latinos because they jointly participated in few organizations. From his earliest days in San Antonio, Ernesto Cortes worked to bridge that gap.²⁷ Though COPS was largely Latino, it made alliances with churches from other parts of the city. Some East Side African-American church leaders wanted their own organization, but allied with COPS and with Anglo North Side churches while waiting for one to form. By the mid-90s, changing East Side demographics ruled out going solo; by then, however, IAF member churches had enough positive experience to continue their collaboration through COPS’ sister-organization.

Mark Warren discusses the Texas IAF’s transracial efforts at length.²⁸ Beyond San Antonio, the Houston and Dallas/Fort Worth-area organizations have had the most experience bridging race divides. They have explicitly worked on issues of racism as well as of poverty, and have addressed issues of race within their organizations as well as in their communities. As Warren notes, their successes have been built on shared religious values. The founders of Allied Communities of Tarrant [County] (ACT), for example, met for five years before formally launching their organization. They explored their common values, turning them into trust and then cooperation; in the process,

they became one of the few IAF affiliates with significant African-American participation on launch.

As Warren points out, IAF’s organizational structure encourages a different kind of interracial cooperation than does the integrationism of the Civil Rights era.

The institutional organizing approach is meant to respect the traditions of each racial community, allowing these communities a degree of autonomy and initiative, while at the same time promoting common efforts. Institutions are the members of IAF organizations, not individuals. Individuals become involved through their institutions, rooted in particular histories and traditions. Participation in the IAF does not require African American participants to submerge their history and deny racial differences in favor of a homogenous whole. The purpose of building broad-based organizations is to bring communities with different traditions and interests together, not so they become the same, but so that they learn to support each other and to find a common ground for action.²⁹

Contradictions

No social activist effort is without its contradictions, and San Antonio’s IAF organizations have their share. Two deserve mention.

First, there is the previously noted conflict between Alinsky-style organizing for interests and Cortes-style organizing for values. Recognizing that these are starting-points rather than straightjackets, the fact remains that interests and values do not always coincide. Moreover, certain churches emphasize values at the expense of interests rather than balancing between the two. San Antonio’s Quaker Meeting, for example, has not joined Metro Alliance in part because the IAF’s residual emphasis on self-interest violates the Quaker principle of putting others before oneself. Nor do Quakers find personal anger an appropriate motive for social activism – no matter how much they share that activism’s goals.³⁰

²⁹ Warren, Dry Bones Rattling, 153.

³⁰ Quakers are notoriously prone to emphasize means as well as ends – a chief contributor to their ardent pacifism. However, as a former Meeting observer to COPS/Metro, I should note that the real sticking point was the

²⁷ Warren, Dry Bones Rattling, 125.

²⁸ Warren, Dry Bones Rattling, 98-155.

The San Antonio IAF's shift to a language of values, however, made possible interdenominational conversations that would otherwise have been hard to pursue. From the beginning, Cortes sponsored seminars, speakers, and other opportunities for clergy to engage with member churches' social teachings. He emphasized the importance of dialogue, not just about the organization, its programs, and its tactics, but about the values that underlie it. He and subsequent IAF organizers kept returning to the questions, "What kind of community expresses our values?" and "How are we to develop this community in San Antonio?". Though organizational practice may at times showcase interests, these values are clearly central to the IAF's role.

Second, there is an apparent conflict between the IAF's democratic ethos and the role of an effective organizer. Despite a real commitment to participatory democracy, COPS and Metro Alliance leaders realize that opportunity often knocks once, and softly at that. The midst of a campaign gives leaders little time to consult their base. No one disputes that decisions must be made; the question is how people's wishes filter up during less strenuous times.

This is where the goal of political effectiveness can undercut the goal of widespread participation. Though the IAF organizers talk of community decision-making, in practice they seem to make most of the decisions, even in calm times. How can the two organizations best reconcile their values-talk with the need to make political progress?

These two issues are related, of course. Political effectiveness and interest-talk make a congenial pair, because both are a matter of outcomes: "We need this and you deliver it" is a perfectly logical proposition. Values like public participation, a democratic community, and caring for others are a bit harder to reconcile with central decision-making because they don't just concern outcomes. Instead, they describe both outcomes and the paths to those outcomes: means as well as ends, to use a classic formulation. As the San Antonio IAF has demonstrated, church-based activism can generate public political participation. But it must take care that its concrete victories do not generate an internal elitism that undercuts the participation that is its wider goal.

conflict between the IAF's ideology of community consultation and its actual centralism. Quakers do not like anyone to speak for them, nor do they like decisions to be made without consultation.

2. East Los Angeles

Dolores Mission is the poorest Catholic parish in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Located in the Pico-Aliso/Boyle Heights section of East Los Angeles, the parish is almost entirely Latino. It contains the largest concentration of public housing projects west of the Mississippi, home to at least eight youth gangs. Founded and run by Jesuits, the Mission does more than just celebrate mass. It reaches out to its community, helping members organize for jobs, better police protection, child safety, and for a different way of solving gang violence than the "get tough" policies of recent Los Angeles city governments.³¹

The extent of poverty in this part of East Los Angeles is appalling. Median household income in the parish is half of the figure for Los Angeles County as a whole. Approximately twice as many households live below the poverty level, compared to the County – a staggering 41%. Thirty percent of families receive welfare benefits. Gang violence is common, as is drug dealing. Gangs recruit boys as young as 12 or 13; some of these young die each year in drive-by shootings. Long a port of entry for poor immigrants, the parish is now home to many undocumented workers. Increasing anti-immigrant policies in California have made it harder for such workers to pull themselves out of poverty. New federal immigration and welfare laws make life especially different for the 50% of poor families headed by single Latinas from Mexico and El Salvador. By all measures, the residents of this parish find that their need is great and their resources are few.

Comunidades Eclesiales de Base

The prime mover behind the church's social involvement was Father Greg Boyle, pastor from 1986 to 1992. Before coming to Dolores Mission, Boyle worked in a Christian Base Community in Cochabamba, Bolivia – one of more than 50,000 such communities in Latin America.³² The Base Community movement, usually known by

³¹ The following discussion is based on this author's several-year study of Catholic social activists in the Los Angeles area, some of whom are part of the Dolores Mission parish.

³² For an overview of the CEB movement, especially in Brazil, see Madeleine Cousineau Adriance, Opting for the Poor: Brazilian Catholicism

its Spanish acronym, CEB (“Comunidades Eclesiales de Base”), sought to re-energize the Catholic Church from below. Groups of laity, with clergy support, met to study the Bible and Catholic teachings and to figure out how to apply them to their lives. They connected religion with everyday affairs, in the hopes that people would use Christian social teachings to solve their problems – and not turn to atheism, Communism, or Protestantism. Pope Pius IX had said that the Church had lost the European working classes; the Latin American Church did not want to lose either the rural classes or the urban poor as well.³³

Though often seen as a product of clerical liberalism, the Latin American CEB movement was also a response to a growing popular disaffection with a Catholic Church that poor people saw as their enemy, not their friend. By showing how the Church was not just a tool of the establishment, and that it could speak to their concrete situation, CEB proponents hoped to vitalize people’s faith and make the Church again a center of civic life. While the Catholic Church in the United States has seldom been seen as its people’s enemy, it has not been the bedrock of immigrant identity for poor Mexican-Americans that it was for poor Italian, Polish, Croatian, and other immigrants a hundred years ago.³⁴ The Church cannot simply presume their loyalty, or even their membership. The love that Dolores Mission’s parishioners express for “their church” is thus a

in Transition (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1986); Madeleine Cousineau Adriance, Promised Land: Base Christian Communities and the Struggle for the Amazon (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995); Thomas C. Bruneau, “Basic Christian Communities in Latin America: Their Nature and Significance (Especially in Brazil),” in Churches and Politics in Latin America, ed. David H. Levine (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980), 225-37. For an introduction to the theological context out of which they sprang, see Phillip Berryman, Liberation Theology (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

³³ See Adriance, Opting for the Poor, 41ff.

³⁴ This is partly because Mexican-Americans are not all immigrants – a fact that both U.S. and Catholic authorities have done much to suppress. The American Southwest is, in reality, occupied northern Mexico; Anglo-Americans are the immigrants. For the religious consequences of this, see Diaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo, Recognizing Latino Resurgence, 106ff.

result of sensitive pastoral work – and the fact that the Mission’s practical work is important to their lives.

On being assigned to the parish, Father Boyle set up study groups, mostly attended by parish women. He encouraged them to talk about their neighborhood’s needs and about how they might use Catholic teachings to change things for the better. Parishioners talked about poverty, of course, but they also talked about gang violence, their fears for their children, police non-cooperation, problems of illiteracy, and the dangers they face as “illegal aliens”, both from the authorities and from dishonest employers. And they talked about the proper Christian response to such matters.

Boyle did more than ask these women to identify their problems. He also asked them to identify solutions, and he asked them to learn how to make bring those solutions about. In short, he asked them to become leaders. Not all did, but enough gradually found their voices to make a difference. Mostly mothers, these women had to overcome a lack of training, a history of deference, and a culturally ingrained sense of inferiority to bring about the social changes they wanted for their children. They identified their need to protect their children from both gangs and from police sweeps and simultaneously identified their need to increase their own skills. One result was a well-publicized series of meetings with police officials to prevent police harassment. Another was a program of mutual support among mothers and grandmothers telling the gangs to stay away from their kids. A third was a self-help and training program to give these women the skills they knew they would need to reach their goals.

The results were creative. To give just one example: after a 10-year old was killed in a recent drive-by shooting, neighborhood mothers decided to slow down traffic on side streets where drugs were sold. Stonewalled by City Hall, they came into the streets with pillows and blankets, promising to form human speed bumps until asphalt ones were in place. The city backed down and also agreed to fence off alleys, where much drug dealing and killing had occurred in the past.³⁵

These activities have grown over the years; many have become ongoing programs. Now coordinated by *Proyecto Pastoral at Dolores Mission*, a non-profit, church-connected agency, they include an

³⁵ R.W. Dellinger, “Consuelo Valdez, Community Organizer,” The Tidings, May 30, 2003.

alternative school, a women's cooperative childcare center, a center for homeless men, and a yearly *Mujeres Unidas* (Women United) conference. At its center is the *Comunidad en Movimiento* program, which runs weekly leadership development workshops for area residents plus various special campaigns.

Residents are taught skills in public speaking, addressing media, building relationships with public officials and community to represent themselves and their views, and above all to continue and strengthen the relationship they have with their community. ... Participants have also developed an awareness of global issues and the interconnectedness of humanity through such activities as their work with earthquake victims in India and El Salvador.³⁶

Three recent projects are worth mentioning because of their contribution to civic participation. The "Safe Passage" program consists of a series of volunteers who help children get to and from school safely. It is designed to encourage residents to take responsibility for others' children as well as for their own. The "Dolores Mission Safety Pilot Project" works for collaboration between residents and local police, using a community-based policing model. Extensive preparatory work by community members makes this the only community-based policing program initiated by residents in the U.S. And community members regularly participate in the California Catholic Conference's Lobby Day with the state legislature. Traveling personally to the state capital – and sleeping in busses to save money – residents urge legislators to repeal the law requiring a Social Security card to get a driver's license, to provide aid to poor youth seeking education, and to make other concrete changes that will help poor people help themselves.

Such activities were once the privilege of middle-class Americans. Dolores Mission's community outreach has increased civic participation from people long kept the background of American public life.

Gangs

Dolores Mission has long had a major focus on preventing gang violence. Eight gangs operate in the Pico-Aliso housing projects; during his pastorship at the Mission, Father Boyle buried nearly 80 gang members. Having worked as a prison chaplain in both Mexico and the U.S., Boyle knew something of the life that gang members were creating for themselves. He also knew that the "get tough" approach didn't work. Putting gang members in prison might take them off the streets; but the violence of prison life gave them no useful skills when they came out again. It did nothing to address the despair and hopelessness that inner-city youth feel when they see themselves at the bottom of the social pyramid: no jobs, no future, no end to poverty. As Jay MacLeod discovered in his study of Boston youth gangs, gang life is attractive when all you can look forward to is being in prison or being dead.³⁷

As Pastor, Boyle made himself available to members of all the gangs. He helped them grieve the death of their "homeboys"; he tried to show them that they had more choices than just recycling violence. Above all, he tried to find them jobs. In 1988, he established Jobs for a Future (JFF) as an employment referral and training service. With the motto, "Nothing stops a bullet like a job," JFF works with employers to place nearly 300 people each year in entry-level positions. Gardening, light construction, and graffiti removal teams employ additional hundreds. The organization provides mentoring and support services, free tattoo removal, and a special release program for youth coming out of juvenile detention. This last program, run in cooperation with the Los Angeles County Probation Department, includes group therapy classes at the detention camps, assistance with school enrollment, drug counseling, and other services. It serves close to 400 clients per year.

In 1992, JFF set up Homeboy Industries. Directed by Boyle but run by local residents, this agency employs former gang members in several small businesses. Former enemies work side by side to bake bread, silk-screen and sell clothing, clean film sites, create and sell art

³⁶ From the Projecto Pastoral website, 6/27/2003: <http://projectopastoral.org/prog-CEM.htm>

³⁷ Jay MacLeod, *Ain't No Makin' It: Aspirations and Attainment in a Low-Income Neighborhood*, 2d ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).

objects, and landscape vacant properties.³⁸ A local hip-hop radio station, KPWR 106FM, provided the base funding.

Boyle says that the “get tough” approach to gang activity reflects “the misconception that [gang members] are something less than human.” In an opinion piece in the Los Angeles Times, he wrote:

The truest measure of ourselves as compassionate and civilized human beings is not how lavishly we honor our heroes, nor how tenderly we nurture our children, nor how politely we select our leaders. The real test comes in our treatment of the criminal. If the very thought of that makes us recoil, then we still have much work to do.³⁹

This is, at its heart, a very Christian message. It asks us to recognize the humanity of those who harm us, and to respond humanly to them. It does not ask us to condone what they do, nor to suffer it. But it asks us to remember that we are all children of God. As Boyle put it, “We all must change, as the Quakers say, to see ‘that of God’ in the other.” Only then do we have any hope of ending the war on our streets.

This is the message that the parishioners of Dolores Mission have embraced in their work to improve their neighborhood. Not only do they ask to be treated like human beings by the authorities, and to be given the same help given to residents of richer areas. They also ask the gangs to treat them as humans and to cease their warfare. And they ask that the authorities treat gang members as people, not monsters.

Above all, they have learned that the path to such humanity requires participating in civic life – and not allowing others to keep them out of it.

Pastoral Agents

As should be obvious, the various pastors who have served at Dolores Mission over the last 15 years have played a great role in such matters. Both Boyle and his successor, Michael Kennedy, are revered in the parish for the work they have done on behalf of their people. They have been, to use the term used by Latin American liberation

theologians, “pastoral agents of conscientization”.⁴⁰ That is, they have helped their parishioners become conscious of the situation in which they find themselves and have helped them mobilize their consciences to work to change that situation.

The Italian political theorist Antonio Gramsci pointed out that people in poverty are seldom able to change society. This happens not only because poor people lack institutional power. As important is the fact that poor people have usually been raised to doubt their own abilities, even their own rights. With little faith in themselves, they leave civic life to others. They thus have little or no voice in the decisions that affect their lives.⁴¹

Latin American liberation theology teaches that Christianity requires clergy to become agents for social change. It does not suggest that the Church simply act on behalf of the poor; instead, it asks the Church to help poor people learn to help themselves. An “agent of conscientization” does not identify people’s problems for them; she or he helps people learn to identify their own problems. Poor people lack education, lack experience with the authorities, and lack access to the political process. Middle-class pastoral agents bring skills in just these areas. But they are not to substitute their skills for others’; they are to teach and encourage those they serve.

It is precisely this emphasis on facilitation that has helped build community involvement at Dolores Mission. The Jesuits have brought people together, have helped them learn to express their needs, and have helped them organize themselves to better their lives. They have not done things for people; they have instead helped them learn how to solve problems collectively. Rather than concentrating leadership, they have dispersed it, encouraging many to fill the leadership roles that any organization needs. Above all, they have encouraged a sense

⁴⁰ The term “conscientization” comes from Paolo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, translated by Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970b).

⁴¹ Gramsci claimed that “organic intellectuals” could help poor people become aware of their strengths and revolutionary potential. However, he contrasted his approach with the Leninist preference for intellectuals carrying out revolution on behalf of the working class. He correctly saw the latter’s dictatorial potential.

³⁸ See <http://www.homeboy-industries.org>

³⁹ Gregory J. Boyle, S.J., “We Have Met the Monster and It is Us,” Los Angeles Times, March 10, 2000.

that a community depends on every member. The solution to poverty is not so much individual attainment as it is collective responsibility.

This stance fits the long tradition of Catholic social teaching.⁴² Unlike more individualist religions, Catholicism emphasizes mutual responsibility, both for betterment in this life and for spiritual salvation. Rather than teaching individuals to pull themselves out of poverty by leaving their community, the leaders of Dolores Mission have urged individuals to better themselves and the community at the same time. The result is a richer community life than might otherwise have developed.

Despite the important role that pastoral agents have played in the Dolores Mission community, the fact remains that the community now runs its own programs. Neither the Jesuits nor the Church imposed self-help programs on the Pico-Aliso/Boyle Heights neighborhoods. Nor did they by themselves create the sense of community active there. The experience of Dolores Mission well illustrates Gramsci's prediction that middle-class organizers can facilitate, but cannot create, community self-determination. Civic democracy is stronger for their efforts, and for their realization that it cannot be imposed from above.

Institutional Ambivalence

The Dolores Mission, and particularly Fathers Boyle and Kennedy, have received a great deal of praise in the Los Angeles Archdiocese for their work. That work is rightly held up as a model of engaged Catholicism. At the same time, however, the Archdiocese has chosen to balance its budget by cutting funds for social justice ministries, for prison chaplains, and for the kinds of community outreach that Dolores Mission exemplifies. The local Catholic hierarchy has clearly not chosen the "preferential option for the poor" that liberation theology recommends: the notion that Christ came for everyone, but especially for poor people.

There are undoubtedly many reasons for this, even conflicting ones. But one structural factor is almost certainly in play. Writing about Brazil, Thomas Bruneau noted the threat that Base Communities can pose to the Church hierarchy itself.

⁴² John A. Coleman, S.J., ed., One Hundred Years of Catholics Social Thought: Celebration and Challenge (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

These CEBS tend to reverse the matter of ecclesiastical authority and structure; and by bringing the Church into close contact with the reality of the vast majority of its members, [they] force a redefinition of religious goals and attitudes.⁴³

In the CEB model, Church goals are not just generated from the top; instead, they also arise from the concrete needs – and skills – of average parishioners.

The American Catholic hierarchy has long had to adjust to White professional-class parishioners, who are culturally less prone to follow their church leaders without question. No longer are clergy uniformly more educated than the laity; no longer are professional-class laity willing to sit back and let their clergy run things. At least some of the conflict between the American Church and the Vatican stems from such class issues – a conflict highlighted by the recent outcry over the Church hierarchy's handling of clergy sexual abuse.⁴⁴

The use of the CEB model to mobilize poor people is thus a double-edged sword for church leaders. On the one hand, it increases Catholic strength in poor Latino communities and brings in contributions from richer Catholics who support the Catholic social justice tradition. On the other hand, it creates a new and separate lay constituency, one potentially as immune to hierarchical control as are the professional classes with whom the Church has long had to contend. If Catholic professionals don't like what the hierarchy is doing, they lower their contributions.⁴⁵ If poor Latino Catholics aren't satisfied with what the Church is doing for them, they leave or become Protestants.⁴⁶ Unfortunately for the hierarchy, poor and rich Catholics don't always want the same things. One of the difficulties the American Catholic Church faces is how to balance the religious and social needs of poor minority communities with the religious and social needs of its largely middle-class White base – and with the needs of the institutional Church itself.

⁴³ Bruneau, "Basic Christian Communities," 234.

⁴⁴ See Andrew M. Greeley, The Catholic Myth: The Behavior and Beliefs of American Catholics (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1990).

⁴⁵ Greeley, Catholic Myth, 126-43.

⁴⁶ See Diaz-Stevens and Stevens-Arroyo, Recognizing Latino Resurgence, 216ff.

This is, however, more a problem for the hierarchy than for the individual parish. American residential segregation ensures that each parish can focus on class-appropriate needs. The crunch comes when diocesan funding fails to provide enough support for the poorer parishes, which lack the resources to support themselves. Such acts jeopardize the progress that Dolores Mission has made.

Still, the CEB model has brought people into the church while simultaneously revitalizing public life in the Pico-Aliso/Boyle Heights community. Here is how Consuelo Valdez describes her experience:

I was estranged from the church when I came here. I used to act out of anger about social injustices. But from the Jesuits here and the model of Christian Base Communities, I learned about compassion, being present and putting faith into action. That's what Dolores Mission is all about – the poor using their faith to reflect and act for social change. You can feel it. You can breathe it.⁴⁷

3. Civic Participation and American Democracy

America's political life underwent a major transformation in the late 20th century. Previously sustained by local political parties, which mobilized voters while simultaneously connecting them to the political process, Americans have increasingly treated politics as a spectator sport. This is more than a decline in voting, though there has been a steady decline in the percentage of Americans who vote in all regions of the country except the South.⁴⁸ Poll data show a nationwide drop in almost all forms of political engagement – from the percentage who serve as a club or organization officer to the percentage who attend political speeches or rallies, who write to Congress or even sign a petition.⁴⁹ Minority political participation, which was never high, continues to lag that of the White middle- and upper-middle classes.

⁴⁷ Dellinger, "Consuelo Valdez."

⁴⁸ Putnam, Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival, 32. Voter participation in the South stayed low from the introduction of Jim Crow laws to the Civil Rights Movement, when it rose dramatically. It has remained steady – and somewhat below Northern participation levels – since the late 1960s.

⁴⁹ Putnam, Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival, 45. Twenty-five percent fewer people engaged in at least one of twelve different such activities in 1993-4 than was the case twenty years earlier.

Simultaneously, there has been a massive growth of professional political organizations, those with budgets and paid staff. Campaign contributions have skyrocketed while fewer and fewer volunteers work on political campaigns. Money has replaced people in American politics – and popular alienation has risen as it has done so. Where in the 1960s, three in four Americans agreed that one could "trust the government in Washington to do what is right all or most of the time," by the mid-1990s three in four disagreed with this sentiment.⁵⁰ This shift is seismic.

A similar change has occurred in social participation, especially in the non-profit sector. Though there are now many more non-profit organizations than there were forty years ago, fewer of them actually have active members. Groups like the National Rifle Association and the National Wildlife Association have lots of members. These are, however, mostly just donors and their "membership" amounts to sending a yearly check; they are not actually involved with the organization's affairs. Real membership organizations – Rotarians, Knights of Columbus, B'nai B'rith, and so on – are much weaker than they once were. Membership in Parent Teacher Associations as a percentage of parents, for example, has dropped by half since 1960. So has the percentage of Americans who have taken any leadership role in any local organization.⁵¹

Fortunately, the picture is not uniformly bleak. The average American volunteered only six times per year in the 1970s, but eight times per year in the 1990s and the fraction who say that they are "involved in ... charity or social service activities" nearly doubled between 1977 and 1991. Most of these volunteers, however, turn out to be senior citizens, who volunteer at a rate several times higher than the rest of the population. Volunteer commitments from those between 25 and 60 are unchanged. And most of this volunteering is now oriented toward needy individuals, not toward communities. Participation in local community projects, from staffing volunteer fire departments to building community playgrounds, has dropped considerably among all age groups.⁵²

⁵⁰ Putnam, Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival, 36, 47.

⁵¹ Putnam, Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival, 49-60.

⁵² Putnam, Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival, 127-31.

All of this heralds a decline in America's civic capital – and in its social capital, as well. Fewer citizens participate in politics, and fewer citizens participate in any type of community life. As Mark Warren notes, “Historically, the United States has relied upon a rich tradition of civic life to support democracy”.⁵³ Are we, as a country, faced with a loss of our democratic traditions because our intermediary institutions are no longer strong enough to carry them?

The examples of San Antonio and East Los Angeles tell us “No”. Both COPS/Metro Alliance and Dolores Mission have found ways to revitalize democracy in precisely those communities where civic participation is traditionally the lowest: areas dominated by poor minorities in cities with a tradition of class-based (and largely White) rule. By organizing church members to identify the needs of their communities, and by training them to act for social change, they have helped build both social and civic capital. Several patterns typify both efforts.

The first of these is the emphasis on churches and on the development of a church-based ethic of outreach. Rather than a traditional politics of interest, San Antonio's IAF and East Los Angeles's Dolores Mission build their organizing on values. Both stress the religious importance of a healthy community. Both stress the importance of building a social life that sees every person as having ultimate worth. Both look to self-reliance to sustain that worth – in both cases by setting up resident-run job-training programs, after school programs, and the like. And both seek support from city authorities – for funding and infrastructure in San Antonio, for humane police cooperation in East L.A. Despite some confrontations, they also emphasize working with those authorities for common betterment.

The second commonality is the importance of pastoral agents. Though the IAF staff members are not clergy, they play the same role that Fathers Boyle, Kennedy, and Smolich have done at Dolores Mission. They identify leaders, train them, and empower them. They connect these leaders to others with whom they can make common cause. They help those leaders find ways to make a difference in their communities, and they back them up with the authorities where needed – without the “doing-for” that undercuts their sense of accomplishment.

The third pattern is an effort to unite people across the lines of race and class – an effort more actualized in San Antonio's multiracial environment than in largely Latino East L.A. That Latino population, however, is not uniform – neither as to country of origin nor immigrant status. Dolores Mission's “No person is illegal” program, which gave sanctuary to undocumented workers, typifies its wish to erase the boundaries between people. Furthermore, Dolores parishioners work with other Catholics to lobby the city officials, state legislators, and others for programs that benefit everyone, not just themselves. Like the IAF's transracial organizing, such outreach grows from a sense that the human community includes everyone – and that every voice needs to be heard.

There are, of course, the various contradictions mentioned above, especially those surrounding the role of the organizer or pastoral agent, which are seen more clearly in the case of COPS/Metro Alliance than at Mission Dolores. These may be inherent in the organizing process; they may be lessened by Cortes' iron rule of organizing, never to do for people what they can do for themselves; they may also be lessened by a religious commitment to humility, to the faith that God works through the people as a whole, not through any one person.

Whatever the case, and whatever the flaws, church-based organizing in both San Antonio and East Los Angeles has brought poor people into the political process. It has shifted the balance of both social and civic capital in these cities as well. Poor people have gained skills and have applied those skills as they work with others for common ends. They, and the churches that nurtured them, have enriched their communities.

⁵³ Warren, Dry Bones Rattling, 17.

