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Small is Beautiful:
Ritual, Congregation-Based Community Organizing, and Just Social Change

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M.T.S., Candler School of Theology, Emory University, 2011

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Abstract

Small is Beautiful: Ritual, Congregation-Based Community Organizing, and Just Social Change
By Kristyn Sessions

In this dissertation, I argue that a commitment to Christian political action and structural justice demands analysis of *how* social change is pursued. While Christian teaching affirms the dignity and equality of all persons, the predominant norms and practices of political engagement often encourage participatory distortion, or the de facto marginalization of certain citizens from political decision-making. In order to better understand and respond to this deficit, I propose the framework of *ritual thinking*, which recognizes certain acts of political participation as rituals and discerns how they shape individual practitioners and the institutions with which they engage. In particular, I highlight the ways in which different political rituals form specific tastes, modes of perception, virtues, and skills in their practitioners. Through ritual thinking, it becomes possible to investigate various acts of political participation and evaluate each according to overarching normative commitments.

Much of the dissertation centers on my case study of congregation-based community organizing (CBCO), which seeks social change through alternative political rituals, such as 1-1s, research meetings, and actions. Through CBCO rituals, the relationship between the governed and the governing is reimagined so that all individuals might have decision-making power in the political process. Informed by my professional experience as a community organizer, I first demonstrate the potential of CBCO rituals to broaden political participation by cultivating justice-oriented citizens who seek collective leadership and democratized power. I then identify two obstacles to the justice-oriented formation intended by CBCO rituals gleaned from six months of research with an Atlanta-based CBCO group.

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Chapter 1

Introductions

On a Thursday evening in June 2009, the community gathered in St. Anthony Catholic Church to lament the gradual deterioration of their neighborhood. Parishioners and neighbors alike had raised concerns about the bad roads, chronically overflowing dumpsters, and graffiti along San Roberto Avenue in the 1-1s, or intentional conversations, conducted months prior by leaders of AFACT, a congregation-based community organizing (CBCO) group based in Anchorage, Alaska.[1] Instead of relying on individual complaints to Code Enforcement or Solid Waste Services, AFACT leaders held an "action" or hour-long public meeting to highlight the stories and priorities of the community and collectively to initiate neighborhood restoration.

At the front of the sanctuary and beside the altar, Fr. Fred Bugarin, pastor of St. Anthony's, opened the action with a prayer and words of welcome. To his left, three AFACT leaders sat behind a folding table facing those in the pews, mirroring the placement of five invited guests—various public officials and government employees—to his right. Through this meeting, Fr. Fred declared, the rebuilding of the neighborhood would begin.

An AFACT leader was the next to speak. With photos of water-filled potholes, overflowing dumpsters, and graffitied fences illuminated behind her, the leader spoke of the conversations that had prompted this action. Cumulatively, these community concerns had prompted AFACT leaders to meet with public officials and government employees to investigate why these problems persisted and discern what might be done in response. Having offered this report, the AFACT leader invited neighbors and parishioners to share their experiences, and they lined up to testify. One person remarked "Our neighborhood was just so nice at one time, it's just

[1] Anchorage Faith and Action — Congregations Together (AFACT).

sad to see."[2] Another shared "There have always been potholes to be repaired, but it seems to have gotten worse and worse within the last few years."[3] Each person was given an opportunity to speak and be heard.

Community members and leaders having illuminated the challenges and with hopes that their comments would lead to restoration of their neighborhood, AFACT leaders next addressed the invited public officials and government employees: As municipal representatives, would they register and respond to neighbors' complaints about graffiti and garbage? As elected officials, would they request state funds to address "the flooding and surface problems of San Roberto" as well as "introduce an ordinance to change city code to limit graffiti to five days or less once a complaint had been filed?"[4] After all, municipal and state resources were available: Could they be applied to address the needs of this forgotten neighborhood? Having won clear statements of support from those representatives and officials, those gathered celebrated.

This was one of the last actions in which I took part as a community organizer with AFACT and it exemplifies the best of congregation-based community organizing or CBCO. The issue was small: a single, rundown neighborhood; and mechanisms were in place to address the individual problems of potholes, dumpsters, and graffiti. Yet, in holding this action, AFACT leaders were able to weave isolated experiences and disparate issues into a single, larger narrative of lament and together demand a response by those officially tasked with serving the community. Practically, the action enabled a holistic response to the various neighborhood issues, such as an immediate remediation of "all the identified areas of graffiti and several chronically overflowing dumpsters" and applications for municipal and state funds for road

[2] "Shining a Light on Neighborhood Blight," (AFACT newsletter, Summer 2009).
[3] "Shining a Light.".
[4] "Shining a Light."

repairs.[5] More importantly, however, the action critiqued more common modes of political engagement as limiting meaningful participation of ordinary people and proffered an alternative and more inclusive means by which to discern and enact social justice. This event exemplified a key conviction of CBCO that *how* justice is sought has significance.

In the coming pages, it will become clear how deeply my three years as a community organizer have shaped my understanding of justice and political participation. My attentiveness to *how* justice issues are addressed is connected directly to the countless hours I spent practicing and teaching others to employ CBCO's alternative political activities. Because of this training, I remain alert to the issues of access and exclusion within acts of political participation and CBCO activities, which strive to enhance the participation and decision-making power of the entire community, and are often paradigmatic examples of just political participation. Though I have been trained as Christian ethicist in the years since, this project reflects and builds on my formation as a community organizer.

Yet, this project is written by a Christian ethicist for the benefit of her discipline, intended to enhance existing scholarly conversations around justice. Many contemporary ethicists share my convictions about justice—that it involves protecting human dignity and equality and dismantling structural injustice and the reality of underserved populations.. Rebecca Todd Peters and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty's aptly named edited volume, *To Do Justice: A Guide for Progressive Christians,* is one example. This text encourages Christians to advocate politically on social justice issues ranging from immigration to criminal justice reform. To support the political efforts of ordinary Christians, contributors offer nuanced and theologically rich accounts to illuminate pressing social problems and affirm that "Christian faithfulness

[5] "Shining a Light."

requires public action by churches and people of faith" and that it ought to attend to how "structures in society contribute to or worsen" social problems like poverty, racism, and crime.[6] Mennonite scholar Perry B. Yoder also echoes these convictions, affirming that biblical justice requires political action and involves "struggle against oppressors and oppressive structures, since until their power is broken, the needy and oppressed cannot go free and there can be no shalom."[7] The politics envisioned in the Bible are not limited to actions of political parties and formal electoral processes but encompass any action undertaken to affect public life, including engagement with the individuals and institutions responsible for public affairs.[8] These works exemplify a larger tradition that grounds in Christian norms the impetus to seek justice and address unjust structures .

Despite these shared convictions, Christian ethicists and theologians give little critical attention to *how* social justice should be sought.[9] For example, political theologian Reinhold Niebuhr is famous for emphasizing Christian responsibility to act politically while at the same time insisting that any given strategy to achieve justice falls short of Christian moral principles.[10] While he makes clear the dangers both of sanctifying political action and of denying any relation between religion and political activity, Niebuhr offers little guidance on *how* to assess the various strategies which fall somewhere between, making for an easy default to common

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[6] Rebecca Todd Peters and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty, "Introduction," in *To Do Justice: A Guide for Progressive Christians,* ed. Rebecca Todd Peters and Elizabeth Hinson-Hasty (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), xviii, xxi.

[7] Yoder suggests that biblical justice calls us to go further, to "erect more just structures and systems in which shalom can be experienced." Perry B. Yoder, *Shalom: The Bible's Word for Salvation, Justice, and Peace* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1987), 38.

[8] Aristotle understood politics even more broadly as activities related to acquiring and preserving the good for the city. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics,* 2nd edition, translated by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999), 2.

[9] The resources of faith language and theology have been skillfully applied to motivate the pursuit of particular just outcomes. It is surprising, then, that the same resources might not be used to reflect on and support the pursuit of justice through more radical political means.

[10] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Christian Faith and Political Controversy" in *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr,* ed. D.B. Robertson (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1957), 59-61.

political practices. Dennis McCann points out that Niebuhr focused on discerning a "a politically relevant Christian spirituality" rather than providing distinctively Christian strategies for social action.[11] Giving more attention to illuminating complex social issues, many Christian ethicists today default to widely accepted forms of political participation. For example, *To Do Justice* includes an appendix entitled "Advocacy Advice," which offers readers guidance on how to influence public policy through letters to lawmakers and constituent lobbying visits. These standard practices of US civic engagement are assumed as appropriate vehicles through which to "lift up the church's vision of a just and compassionate society."[12]

In this project, I argue that Christian ethicists who are committed to political action and dismantling structural injustice ought to attend to *how* justice is pursued. Informed by my community organizing experience, I am all too aware that many people are effectively excluded from the political decision-making process. Others have of course noted this too. Political philosopher Iris Marion Young, for example, argues that though injustice is most visible in individual actions and policies, we need to attend to pervasive and hidden reality of structural injustice. [13] We tend to think of structural injustice in terms of poor outcomes that disproportionately impact already vulnerable populations, such as underfunded public schools which "further marginalize[s] disadvantaged students."[14] Yet, as Young observes, structural injustice persists in "many policies…and the actions of thousands of individuals acting according

[11] Dennis McCann, *Christian Realism and Liberation Theology: Practical Theologies in Creative Conflict* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 10.
[12] Todd Peters and Hinson-Hasty, "Advocacy Advice" in *To Do Justice*, 128.
[13] I am indebted to Iris Marion Young and her discussion of structural injustice in *Responsibility for Justice*. Young uses the example of Sandy, and Sandy's increased vulnerability of homelessness as a result of a number of factors, including but not limited to zoning policies and lack of affordable housing, to demonstrate the complex and seemingly anonymous character of structural injustice. See Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
[14] Todd Peters and Hinson-Hasty, "Introduction," in *To Do Justice*, xxi.

to normal rules and accepted practices," which includes the political sphere.[15] Similarly, philosopher Nancy Fraser proposes that the marginalization of certain persons from decision-making is often written into the very rules that govern political representation. She notes how national borders or electoral systems "exclude some who are actually entitled to representation."[16] For example, "single-member district, winner-take-all, first-past-the-post systems" can "unjustly deny parity to numerical minorities."[17] Justice requires dismantling obstacles "that prevent some people from participation on a par with others, as full partners" or more simply "participatory parity."[18]

Whereas Fraser tends to approach the problem from democratic rules and procedures, political scientists Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady explore it through the lens of political engagement, concerned with "participatory distortion," or civic engagement which does not accurately reflect a country's demographics.[19] They observe that some prominent acts of political participation demand a specific set of skills – civic skills – which include competence and confidence in "planning...a meeting, writing a letter, making a speech or presentation."[20] Though these capacities can be learned through civic education programs, more often

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[15] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, xiv. In addition, I should note that those involved in anti-racism activities have long distinguished between the racism of individuals (e.g. internalized and interpersonal acts and attitudes of bias) and systemic racism, which include institutional racism (e.g. unjust politics and practices of particular institutions that routinely produce inequitable outcomes) and structural racism (e.g. patterns of bias among institutions and across society). For the purposes of this project, the terms systemic injustice, institutional injustice, and structural injustice will remain fairly interchangeable. See Dominique Apollon et al., "*Moving the Race Conversation Forward: How the Media Covers Racism, and other Barriers to Productive Racial Discourse, Part 1* (January 2014)." RaceForward.org. https://act.colorlines.com/acton/attachment/1069/f-0114/1/-/-/-/-/Racial_Discourse_Part_1.PDF (April 4, 2018).

[16] Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 18.

[17] Fraser, *Scales of Justice*, 19.

[18] Fraser, *Scales of Justice*, 60, 145.

[19] Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 15.

[20] Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 312.

> [t] he acquisition of these skills begins early in life in the family and in school and continues throughout adulthood in non-political domains – at work, in organizations, and in church. These civic skills are, thus, developed in the course of activities that have nothing to do with politics: making a presentation to a client, organizing a celebrity auction for a charity, or editing the church's monthly newsletter. Once honed, however, they are part of the arsenal of resources that can be devoted, if the individual wishes, to politics.[21]

However, such civic skills are not equally distributed throughout the US population. Instead, their presence or absence tends to equate with differences in employment and accompanying educational experience. For instance, "high-status" or white-collar jobs such as engineering or medicine provide regular opportunities for one to practice the communication and organizational skills so key to today's favored acts of political engagement. Conversely, those in "low-status" or blue-collar jobs, like a janitor or cashier, not only earn smaller wages but encounter the fewest opportunities to learn and practice civic skills. Thus, one's social location, particularly in regard to class, turn out to be critical for the cultivation of skills needed to easily employ many of the normal and accepted activities involved in political participation. In other words, accepted practices of political engagement might ensure just outcomes, such as the passage of particular legislation, while simultaneously replicating patterns of injustice through the *de facto* marginalization of certain persons from decision-making.

The problem of "participatory distortion" may be particularly complicated for Christian ethicists because, as womanist Katie Geneva Cannon observes, class analysis is underdeveloped within the field. Christian ethicists are often ill-equipped to "weigh the social consequences" of class and understand the experiences of numerous US citizens who hold "class identities" not their own.[22] While many Christian ethicists acknowledge white privilege and male privilege,

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[21] Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 330-31.
[22] Katie Geneva Cannon, "Unearthing Ethical Treasures: The Intrusive Markers of Social Class" in *Womanist Theological Ethics: A Reader,* eds. Katie Geneva Cannon, Emilie M. Townes, and Angela D. Sims (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 246.

"political privilege," which is part and parcel of the professional middle-class experience of many Christian ethicists, is more easily overlooked. As a result, a privileged person's simple and no doubt well-meaning advice to seek justice through greater participation in existing political processes often fails to appreciate the extent of the political disenfranchisement of many persons and leave unaddressed an important feature of structural injustice.

A better way to understand issues of "participatory distortion" and lack of "participatory parity" might be to extend the work of Verba et al., and investigate more deeply the relationship between social location and particular understandings of appropriate political participation or citizenship. How does class impact people's expectations about and interactions with political structures? Such analysis might highlight the diverse ways in which people seek social change and counter the presumption that greater participation in existing political processes is the only way to be civically engaged. I acknowledge the reality of diversity in Chapter three when I identify different understandings of citizenships prevalent today. However, my purpose in Chapter three is to contextualize CBCO's overall approach to political participation rather than to engage in theoretical analysis of the relationship between social location and civic activity.[23]

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[23] Scholarship on community organizing has grown tremendously in the last twenty years, and much of it focuses on citizenship questions. Growing concern over the health of American democracy has led a number of scholars to investigate community organizing/CBCO as a promising model of political engagement and citizenship. National networks such as IAF, PICO, or Gamaliel have been extensively profiled. While thorough descriptions of the community organizing process have been offered, they generally do not include a focus on ritual and formation, and attention remains on outcomes, such as resulting political victories, and the value of CBCO's ideal vision of citizenship. For good examples of such scholarship, see Luke Bretherton's *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life*, Michael Gecan's *Going Public*, Aaron Schutz and Marie G. Sandy's *Collective Action for Social Change: An Introduction to Community Organizing,* Jeffrey Stout's *Blessed are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America,* Kristina Smock's *Democracy in Action: Community Organizing and Urban Change,* Heidi J. Swarts's *Organizing Urban America: Secular and Faith-based Progressive Movements,* Mark R. Warren's *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy,* and Richard L. Wood's *Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America.*
Other works have focused more on the faith driving CBCO/community organizing efforts. For good examples of this approach, see Luke Bretherton's *Christianity & Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness,* Michael Gecan's *Effective Organizing for Congregational Renewal,* Dennis A. Jacobsen's *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing*, Jeffrey K. Krehbiel's *Reflecting with Scripture on Community Organizing,* and Robert Linthicum's *Transforming Power: Biblical Strategies for Making a Difference in Your Community.*

Through my study of CBCO, I highlight a version of citizenship that actively engages in political decision-making while steadily challenging existing political processes.

In addition, rather than engage in theoretical analysis of the relationship between social location and civic activity, I respond instead to the challenge of "participatory distortion" and lack of "participatory parity" by focusing on the discrete political activities, or rituals, through which our understandings of citizenship, social change, and justice are formed. Just as my appreciation for *how* justice is sought emerged from my community organizing experience, so too does my inclination towards this particular approach. As a community organizer, I witnessed the formation and transformation of various leaders over the years. Through their consistent and committed employment of CBCO rituals, for example, one AFACT participant discovered her political agency and became an active community leader while another, "enfranchised" participant began to reimagine her political engagement to encourage reform of existing political processes. It is because of these experiences that I am so keenly interested in the relationship between political rituals and formation.

Thus, in this project I propose that Christian ethicists employ *ritual thinking* to analyze and evaluate *how* justice is sought. Ritual thinking by recognizing as rituals certain acts of political engagement and seeks to discern how these acts shape individual practitioners and the institutions with which they engage.[24] Christian ethics often overlooks the formative aspect of political participation, as discussions around justice tend to focus on unpacking complex social issues to encourage positive outcomes.[25] Yet it is through specific rituals of political participation

[24] In Chapter two, I will flesh out my definition of ritual. As will become clear in Chapter three, I do not consider all political actions to be rituals. For instance, Saul Alinsky's "tactics" do not qualify as rituals according to my definition because they are strategic, adaptive actions solely intended to result in practical, political outcomes. They lack the formal, disciplined structure of rituals and rich formative potential.

[25] This focus on concrete issues and immediate ends reflects a larger societal trend observed by philosopher Max Horkheimer that, in the twentieth century, the essential work of reason is "to find means for the goals one adopts at any given time." His concern was the ways in which immediate ends have consumed our attention, at the cost of

that our convictions about justice, citizenship, and social change are cultivated and expressed.[26] By more thoroughly describing the structure and formative significance of discrete political rituals, it becomes possible to appreciate how our patterns of political engagement might hinder or encourage "participatory parity."

The work of Roger Friedland and Robert R. Alford and their observations about the complex and interactive relationship between citizens and governing institutions echoes this importance of attention to ritual and formation. Friedland and Alford note that our participation in governing bodies and state bureaucracies shapes our vision of the world for they dictate the methods or approaches by which desired ends ought to be sought.[27] These institutional preferences entail "symbolic and ideological constructions of more than instrumental consequence."[28] By rewarding certain types of engagement, governing bodies are not just identifying effective means by which they might be influenced, they are also suggesting that certain ways of acting are more valuable than others**.** For instance, by affirming the use of lobbying to influence political decision-making, governing bodies are indicating that the opinions of citizens with civic skills are more valuable than other citizens who do not currently hold such skills. Yet, institutional change is possible because individuals are able to contest or

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"understanding and assimilating the eternal ideas" or the overarching telos for our lives. This project tries to go beyond the immediate demands of justice, such as addressing a specific unjust policy, to address concrete ways that the telos of justice can be sought in the face of ways injustice manifests more broadly in our social and political structures. Max Horkheimer, *Critique of Instrumental Reason*, translated by Matthew J. O'Connell and others (New York: Continuum, 1974), vii.

[26] Greater analysis of discrete political acts and their formative potential will ideally encourage more investigation into citizenship orientations more broadly. Such theorization is needed; David C. Barker and Christopher Jan Carman note that the typical US citizen does not spend "time sitting around thinking about what style of representation he or she prefers, or why… people instinctively tend to sympathize more easily with either the conscience-led or constituent-led style of representation." David C. Barker and Christopher Jan Carman, "Yes WE Can or Yes HE Can? Citizen Preferences Regarding Styles of Representation and Presidential Voting Behavior," *Presidential Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (2010): 435.

[27] Roger Friedland and Robert R. Alford, "Bringing Society Back In: Symbols, Practices, and Institutional Contradictions," in *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, ed. Walter W. Powell and Paul J. DiMaggio (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 251.

[28] Friedland and Alford. "Bringing Society Back In," 250.

reinterpret the "meaning and relevance of symbols" embedded in acts of political engagement.[29] By understanding acts of political participation as rituals, it becomes possible and meaningful to reimagine the patterns of behavior expected by institutions and continued by individuals. As an analytical tool, ritual thinking enables Christian ethicists to make more fine-grained judgments about actions they adopt to pursue social justice.

For those working in Christian ethics, invoking concepts of ritual and formation in relation to politics may bring to mind Stanley Hauerwas's work. Christian rituals, that is, liturgical practices, and their formative potential, are central to Hauerwas's understanding of politics.[30] In "The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics," Hauerwas urges Christians to engage in the "politics of the kingdom," in which the church witnesses God's peace and justice to the world instead of working towards a "more nearly free and equitable social order."[31] To become and continue to be this witnessing community, Hauerwas argues that the church must engage in the "essential rituals of our politics," namely baptism and Eucharist.[32] For Hauerwas, these religious rituals powerfully counter the "illusion of omnipotence" and the "coercion and falsehood" that plagues much political activity.[33]

Yet for several reasons I have chosen not to engage Hauerwas while developing ritual thinking in this project. For one, Hauerwas brings to the fore a familiar but often simplistic debate within Protestant Christian ethics about whether the norms of faithfulness or effectiveness ought to govern Christian political activity. For some, like Hauerwas, Christians should engage

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[29] Friedland and Alford, "Bringing Society Back In," 254.
[30] It is so central that Michael Cartwright notes that for years Hauerwas taught an ethics course "structured around the pattern of the liturgy of worship." Michael G. Cartwright, "Afterword: Stanley Hauerwas's Essays in Theological Ethics: A Reader's Guide" in *The Hauerwas Reader,* ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 655.
[31] Stanley Hauerwas, "The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics (1983)" in *The Hauerwas Reader,* ed. John Berkman and Michael Cartwright (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 377, 374.
[32] Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 384.
[33] Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 381, 377.

the world as faithful disciples and let go of criterion such as efficacy. At its most radical, this position can reject the use of most, if not all, forms of "secular" political participation. For others, often in the lineage of Reinhold Niebuhr, Christians ought to be responsible pragmatists and recognize the untenability of absolute faithfulness. Pushed to the extreme, this position can endorse nearly every type of political activity in service to valued ends. By encouraging discussion of political action in zero sum terms, such a debate runs at cross purposes to ritual thinking and its intention to encourage more nuanced analysis and evaluation of various types of political participation.

Moreover, my understanding and use of ritual and formation differ in meaningful ways from Hauerwas's. Some of this can be attributed to Hauerwas's disinterest in investigating rituals per se. Rituals hold an auxiliary place in Hauerwas's thinking and primarily serve as the means "to shaping and preparing us to tell and hear" the story of Jesus.[34] As such, baptism and Eucharist are valuable in so far as they are useful in forming a community in the image of God and cultivating essential virtues, such as patience, to maintain it. More ordinary rituals and other formative aspects could be examined but go unnoted.[35] Additionally, Hauerwas's concern about the world's pernicious influence in defining justice and setting the social ethic agenda of the church seems to cement the need to maintain clear lines and encourages his exclusive focus on a limited number of "extraordinary" religious rituals.[36] My argument, however, depends on a more expansive account of ritual which allows for investigation into "a wide spectrum of formalized but not necessarily religious activities" and their formative potential.[37] The rituals of political

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[34] Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 383.
[35] Unlike Hauerwas, Mary McClintock Fulkerson supports the religious importance of ordinary rituals when she devotes a chapter in *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* to the "homemaking practices," which "maintain and sustain the community" of Good Samaritan Church. Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 127.
[36] Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 375.
[37] Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 39.

participation are relevant to the church's "own agenda" of peace and justice because they witness and enact its distinct understandings of these values.[38]

Additionally, Hauerwas's account of formation is deeply influenced by moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre and virtue ethics, a scholarly direction I chose not to pursue in depth.[39] This decision may be surprising; other scholars of Christian political activity have often embraced MacIntyre and his preferred term of "practice."[40] Though it is a less religiously laden term and helpful, as Courtney Bender observed, in pressing against the "notion that the world is divided into sacred and mundane spheres," I find "practice" less useful for the purposes of this project than "ritual."[41] For one, the term practice has been used to encompass a large variety of actions, everything from MacIntyre's famous example of chess to janitorial activities in Mary McClintock Fulkerson's *Places of Redemption*.[42] Moreover, practice theorists tend toward more holistic investigation into how certain human activities function as "creative strategies" rather than focus on its discrete elements or internal structure.[43] However, there is a formal and

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[38] Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 375.

[39] This influence is clearly seen in the strong association Hauerwas makes between ritual (which MacIntyre conceptualizes as practice) and the cultivation of virtues. In particular, MacIntyre emphasizes the fact that certain "practices" cultivate vital moral virtues, such as "justice, courage and honesty." Hauerwas also draws deeply on MacIntyre in his understanding of narrative. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory,* 3rd Edition (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 191.

[40] For example, Jennifer Ayres, in *Waiting for a Glacier to Move: Practicing Social Witness,* uses the language of social practice to describe and encourage Christian activists to reflect theologically on their work, to ground it more deeply in theologies of sin and hope. Ayres stays close to Alasdair MacIntyre's classic definition of practice, which is "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realize in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the goods and ends involved, are systematically extended." MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 189. Bretherton, in *Resurrecting Democracy,* also appeals to MacIntyre's notion of practice, originating in Aristotle, to describe the work of community organizing. He writes "organizing need to be understood first and foremost as a practice for making good political judgments." Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, 181. In contrast to Ayres, who uses practice to describe on specific activity, Bretherton uses practice to signal an apprenticeship in a repertoire of activities.

[41] Courtney Bender, *Heaven's Kitchen: Living Religion at God's Love We Deliver* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 8.

[42] Bell notes the expansive nature of the term practice, applied to variety of human activities "as formal as a religious ritual or as casual as a midday stroll." Bell, *Ritual*, 76.

[43] Bell, *Ritual*, 76.

formative character to the political activities I highlight that I fear might be glossed over if I use the more informal and strategic term of practice. The term ritual allows me to draw on the multifaceted field of ritual studies and produce a thicker description of the political activities themselves, necessary for the purposes of this project.

In addition, my interest in rituals' formative potential means that the language of virtue appears regularly. Yet, I am not engaging in formal virtue ethics. While I resonate with aspects of virtue ethics, especially its ability to appreciate that justice goes beyond the duties we have to "specific political and social issues" and its emphasis on formation to become "the sorts of people we are meant to be," it is not the focus here for two reasons:[44] First, virtue ethics largely narrows formation to the cultivation of virtue.[45] Virtue ethics is most concerned with the conscious pursuit of individual human flourishing and the good life.[46] It is less interested in our collective formation as a community and the amoral preferences that might accompany such formation. Yet, I hope to highlight the collective significance of ritual formation and its occurrence at and below the level of consciousness in this project.[47] For this, I require a different type of analysis than permitted by virtue ethics proper, specifically a more expansive

[44] Elizabeth Phillips, "Virtue Ethics and Social Justice" in *Christian Faith and Social Justice: Five Views*, ed. Vic McCracken (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 141.
[45] While MacIntyre focuses on the cultivation of virtue, he acknowledges skill as well, which may be required for and generated through a practice. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 193.
[46] For a great introduction to virtue ethics, see *Virtue Ethics,* ed. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[47] Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes the kind of shaping that occurs below the level of consciousness, "a practical *mimesis* (or mimeticism) which implies an overall relation of identification and has nothing in common with the *imitation* that would presuppose a conscious effort to reproduce a gesture, an utterance or an object explicitly constituted a as a model." Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 73. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, is keenly interested in the issue of formation via personal imitation as vibrant debates on the value of moral exemplars attest. For example, Susan Wolf's essay "Moral Saints," found in Crisp and Slote's *Virtue Ethics* and Robert Merrihew Adams response in *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology.* Robert Merrihew Adams, *The Virtue of Faith and Other Essays in Philosophical Theology,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 164-73.

understanding of formation, one that in addition to virtue and skill includes taste and mode of perception, or what Pierre Bourdieu might call "schemes of perception and appreciation."[48]

Second, virtue ethics does not fully engage with issues of power deeply relevant to this project, such as the diversity of values which exist in society and the way that they overlap with structures of oppression and privilege.[49] For instance, Hauerwas's virtue of patience in the face of injustice might be a vice as it permits continued complicity "with the social structures which cause oppression."[50] Recognizing and addressing such complexity is vital to this project but remains underdeveloped within virtue ethics.[51] In contrast, issues of power are foremost in ritual discussions as ritual is often closely associated with structures of authority. For these reasons, I have looked to other scholarly sources to help develop ritual and formation.

Much of this project builds upon a trajectory in ritual studies articulated by Catherine Bell. In her work, Bell names specific challenges that accompany the study of ritual in contemporary Western society and she provides a strategy by which to identify previously unrecognized rituals. Bell laments the tendency within modern Western society to think of rituals as "special activities inherently different from daily routine action and closely linked to…organized religion"[52] Universalist accounts of ritual encourage such a perspective and support the belief that ritual is mostly irrelevant to postindustrial life. At the same time, when ritual has not been ignored as superfluous, it has often been romanticized as something "basically good for you." For example, Bell critiques Tom Driver, author of *The Magic of Ritual*, for

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[48] Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice,* trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 160.
[49] For more this point, see Laura Stivers' "Virtue ethics: A feminist response" in *Christian Faith and Social Justice: Five Views*, ed. Vic McCracken (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 170-174.
[50] Miguel A. De La Torre, "Virtue ethics: A liberationist response" in *Christian Faith and Social Justice: Five Views*, ed. Vic McCracken (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 168.
[51] Lisa Tessman is one exception as she attempts to address the tension between virtues, human flourishing, and systems of oppression in her book *Burdened Virtues.* Lisa Tessman, *Burdened Virtues: Virtue Ethics for Liberatory Struggles*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[52] Bell, *Ritual*, 138.

extolling ritual "as essentially liberating and the means of salvation for the whole world."[53] This stands in stark contrast to earlier accounts of ritual, in which it stood "for the status quo and the authority of the dominant social institutions."[54] In both cases, the complex nature of ritual has been glossed over. [55]

To better appreciate the full diversity and extent of ritual within our modern, Western world, Bell insists that ritual ought to be "analyzed and understood in its real context…not as some a priori category of action."[56] In other words, Bell is critical of accounts of ritual which emerge from theoretical conjecture about what ritual should look like or do. Instead, Bell offers six characteristics of ritual-like activities by which we might discern the rituals around us.[57] Like Bell, I start by focusing on "what people do and how they do it" to guide my exploration of the rituals present in US political participation instead of relying on existing lists of political rites.[58] Such openness allows me to consider more broadly "the origins, purposes, and efficacy" of seemingly ordinary rituals of political participation.[59] It is through these activities that our instincts and understandings about citizenship develop.

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[53] Bell further asks how "ritual in general can be so liberating if it can support both [Mohandas Gandhi, the spiritual leader of the Indian independence movement, and Joseph Goebbels, the director of the Nazi's "final solution" for the Jews] vision of human aspirations." Bell, *Ritual*, 257-258.

[54] Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 257.

[55] Idealizing ritual can encourage the troubling practice of ritual appropriation. This is complicated because "purity of lineage" has never been important in ritual creation as "evocative symbols and familiar practices are readily revised for new purposes or reinterpreted for new communities." Yet, the drive to find authentic and healing rituals has led some to poach from other communities. Bell notes "The ubiquitous dynamics of ritual appropriation are historically complex and politically charged, especially when socially or politically dominant groups appear to be mining the cultural traditions of the less powerful, taking the images they want and, by placing them in very new contexts, altering their meanings in ways that may sever these images from their own people." Bell, *Ritual*, 257, 237, 240.

[56] Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 81.

[57] Bell's characteristics include formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, sacral symbolism, and performance. In the next chapter, I offer my own working definition of ritual, aspects of which resonate with these six characteristics. For more information, see Bell, *Ritual*, 138–70.

[58] Bell, *Ritual*, 82.

[59] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), xv. For more on Bell's approach, see "The Power of Ritualization" chapter in *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice.*

Additionally, Bell is helpful because of how she approaches the issue of formation, focusing on how ritual, formation, and structures of authority interact. This broader view contextualizes the significance of specific formative outcomes. On the one hand, Bell acknowledges that rituals involve "the socialization of the individual through an unconscious appropriation of common values and common categories of knowledge and experience."[60] In other words, we inherit certain ways of seeing and engaging the world as we participate in rituals. Rituals often function as vehicles for "the *expression* of authority" of dominant social institutions.[61] At the same time, Bell insists that rituals also reflect a "strategic way of acting" and function as "a vehicle for the *construction* of relationships of authority and submission."[62] Said otherwise, rituals can be the means through which we can transform ourselves and our relationships to structures of authority. Bell points to Kwanzaa, "the African-based new year ritual designed and promoted in 1966 by Maulana Karenga, a professor of black studies" as an example of a ritual which cultivates new forms of relatedness. The rituals involved in Kwanzaa promote and celebrate a particular vision of "African-American cultural traditions and social bonds" unexpressed previously.[63] Bell's insights inform how I describe and employ ritual thinking in the coming pages, in particular my emphasis on context and ritual's complicated relationship with structures of authority.

Having named some of my scholarly resources, let me explain how I go about describing ritual thinking and demonstrating its value for Christian ethics**.** In this project, I take a case study approach. Case study research is a "strategy of inquiry" that uses a "bounded case to illustrate"

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[60] Bell, *Ritual*, 59.
[61] Bell, *Ritual*, 82. Italics in original.
[62] Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual*, 7, and Bell, *Ritual*, 82. Italics in original.
[63] Bell, *Ritual*, 235.

and enrich a particular research question.[64] It appreciates that "accounts of real events, struggles, and dramas that took place over time and space" can yield valuable insights for more theoretical arguments.[65] As such, case studies usually necessitate some fieldwork, which allow for "in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports)."[66] Key to the success of a case study is a well-chosen case.

For this project, I chose congregation-based community organizing (CBCO), an example of which began this chapter, to illustrate ritual thinking and explore the relationship between political participation and structural injustice.[67] Congregation-based community organizing is valuable as a case because of the alternative rituals of political participation it employs to secure just outcomes, working with Christian-connected actors. These rituals illuminate *how* many Christians ordinarily understand and seek social change. Such CBCO has additional value as a case for two reasons: First, CBCO consciously attempts to address one of the primary concerns of Christian ethicists who counsel against political involvement. For example, Hauerwas urges extreme caution when it comes to believers' engagement in political activity, worried about Christian co-optation into the aims of secular authorities, which he believes can run counter to

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[64] John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches,* 2nd Edition (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, Inc., 2007), 73–74.
[65] Michael Burawoy, "The Extended Case Method," Sociological Theory, 16:1 (March 1998): 5.
[66] Italics in original. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*, 73.
[67] I prefer the descriptor of congregation-based over faith-based and broad-based for a number of reasons. First, it was the preferred term for the organization I worked at for nearly three years as a community organizer (AFACT) and has become second nature to me. Second, CBCO, even though it includes other faith groups, points to the reality that this type of organizing is grounded in institutional bodies. Churches, synagogues, and mosques become members of the organization and not individuals. They join CBCO collectively and the work is collectively undertaken. "Broad-based" is a more inclusive term that is meant to acknowledge the presence of some non-religious institutions (e.g. unions) in some organizations. However, it also strips away the religious nature of much of the work. Additionally, "faith-based" attempts to overcome the Christian bias inherent to "congregation" language but it also strips community organizing of its collective identity. Since there is no consensus on this matter, I keep the CBCO language.

Christian values and purposes.[68] By being vigilant about co-optation by established political structures and countering it by undertaking alternative rituals in pursuit of social justice, CBCO acknowledges this concern. Second, CBCO makes sense because of its ties to and implications for the Christian community. Already, CBCO groups live in today's congregations, leveraging Christian energy and theological resources. As such, congregations ought to reflect on and evaluate their work.

Promoted as a way to develop leaders rather than to specialize in particular issues, CBCO brings together individuals of various ideological commitments and focuses on training participants, or leaders, to pursue social justice through what I will explain as distinctive rituals of political engagement, namely 1-1 visits, research meetings, and public actions. Although these rituals can secure just, practical outcomes, it is the formative outcomes they cultivate that are especially valuable for the purposes of this project. Through these rituals, the relationship between the governed and the governing is reimagined so that all individuals might have decision-making power in the political process. As such, CBCO rituals express a vision of and enact participatory parity.

Within my overarching case study of CBCO, I highlighted the experience of ABLE, a CBCO group operating in Atlanta, Georgia, to demonstrate the barriers to ritual formation difficult to appreciate in the abstract. I conducted fieldwork with ABLE for a period of six months, from January to June of 2016. Intending to mirror the experience of an average participant, I took part in three public monthly meetings and attended a half-day training aimed at recruiting new members and fortifying existing leadership. In addition, I conducted seven

[68] For more on Hauerwas's vision of Christian politics, see Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2008).

hour-long interviews with various participants ("leaders"), primarily identified through snowball sampling.[69] These interviews focused on the individual's experience with, training in, and understanding of core rituals.[70] I concluded my investigation by exploring ABLE's public online presence and its coverage in scholarship.

The case study approach proved valuable in several respects. First, it allowed me to make a concrete contribution to conversations concerning political participation occurring at more theoretical levels. Political philosopher Carole Pateman, for example, shares many of my concerns about the current state of democracy and the disenfranchisement of citizens from meaningful decision-making. She writes "the capacities, skills, and characteristics of individuals are interrelated with forms of authority structures. Individuals learn to participate by participating….Thus, individuals need to interact within democratic authority structures that make participation possible."[71] Yet, often full access to participate in political decision-making is restricted. Pateman argues that "when actual budgets and policies are at stake, political elites rarely listen to citizens."[72] For her core example, Pateman gives an international instance of participatory budgeting to show how "reform of undemocratic authority structures" might begin.[73] However, participatory budgeting is rarely employed in North America. By investigating

[69] Snowball sampling is the process by which one identifies new interviewees by asking for recommendations from those currently being interviewed. During my time with ABLE, I identified my first interviewees by asking an actively involved pastor to name a few committed participants. These individuals then identified others.
[70] To review interview questions, see the Appendix.
[71] Carole Pateman, "APSA Presidential Address: Participatory Democracy Revisited," *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 2012): 10.
[72] Pateman, "APSA Presidential Address," 15. In addition, as I do, Pateman recognizes that the way democracy is understood and practiced currently may be contributing to this issue. She notes that deliberative democratic theories, which prioritize and see the prevalence of "deliberation, discussion, and debate" as indicative of robust democratic decision-making, may obscure the fact that public debate can also serve as a "useful legitimating device for an already-decided policy," fundamentally undermining the authority of popular will. In contrast, Pateman advocates for a participatory conception of democracy, not to be confused with a *participatory understanding of citizenship*, a concept that will appear regularly in the coming pages. Pateman, "APSA Presidential Address," 8, 9.
[73] Pateman, "APSA Presidential Address," 10.

"locally-grown" CBCO, I add a more familiar example through which needed structural reform might occur. [74]

Second, the case study highlights important complexities and challenges, which might not be seen if not for the close attention to one particular context.[75] While CBCO holds promise in respect to participatory parity, with rituals enabling more robust and representative political participation, it is not without its challenges.[76] For one, CBCO makes up only a small percentage of political participation in the US. Part of this may be due to its heavy demands on participants of time and training. Even the most committed leaders, in my experience, have periodically stepped away from such organizing due to family or work obligations. It may also relate to the fact that CBCO excels in and focuses on local issues, though not exclusively. For those who prioritize work on national issues, CBCO may prove unappealing. As a result, CBCO remains modest in size and by itself is unlikely to prompt the nation-wide systematic reform it seeks. In addition, CBCO's emphasis on democratized power has seemingly contradictory outcomes. On the one hand, it can encourage generative conflict with elected officials who resist greater

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[74] Luke Bretherton indicates that the CBCO approach to political engagement may resonate strongly with Pateman's participatory theory of democracy as it employs nonverbal forms of communication, such as embodied witness and symbolic action, and embraces conflict, both of which contrast with deliberative theory's emphasis on discussion and consensus. Luke Bretherton, *Christianity & Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 50–52.

[75] Bell also affirms the importance of paying close attention to context. She notes the importance of assessing "the assumptions that create and constrain the notion of ritual. Truly thick ethnographic descriptions of particular rites rarely succumb to the systematic division of human experience evidenced in theoretical studies." Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 4.

[76] Although I affirm CBCO rituals and their attentiveness to multifaceted nature of structural injustice, the possibility of participating in patterns of injustice is never absent. José Carrasco, in his poem "Estes" reflects on possible dangers.

"We came to Estes/Prepared to raise the battle cry…/'The poor! the poorer!! and the poorest!!!'/ Words flowing with sweet flavor…/ 'Empowerment and justice for those and them below!'/ Through microphones rainbow'd committees/ Espousing the dreams of isolates/Seem to fill their emptiness together/ Wanting power for the people…yet/Failing to consider Nietzsche's will./ Enamor'd by echoes phrases/ Near-sighted to the reality of presence/ Where poor became invisible…Observing knights proclaimed the needy colours/ Expounding upon 'their fate and future'…/ Yet, cast aside in the charity and / Humdrum of social ego/ Among Who's-who and who-Isn't…/ The poor, the poorer and the poorest…sit silently." José A. Carrasco, "Estes," in *Thoughts Wander Thru…and other verse to linger too* (Menlo Park: Markgraf Publications Group, 1989), 64.

accountability to their constituents. This potential has been documented in my account of research meetings and actions. On the other hand, democratized power means that a level of consensus is required from those involved. As such, certain vital social justice issues, even though raised by community members, may not be addressed because they are too fraught. For instance, issues directly or tangentially related to reproductive health and birth control may be too complicated for an ecumenical or interreligious organization to tackle. The limits of CBCOs in regard to political footprint and range of possible social justice issues ought not to be glossed over too quickly, despite its value in illuminating the importance of *how* social justice is pursued.

In addition, investigation of one particular CBCO group, ABLE (Atlantans Building Leadership for Empowerment), allowed me to see what was actually happening instead of what "ought" to be happening according to organizational and individual ideals. It was through close attention to ABLE that I began to appreciate possible barriers to formation intended by CBCO rituals. Rebecca Anne Allahyari's *Visions of Charity*, a study of soup kitchen volunteers who hoped their service to the homeless would also enhance their own moral selfhood, illustrates the importance of close attention. Over the course of her research, Allahyari discovered a deep disjunction between the commitment to provide "personalist hospitality" to its guests and the desire of the volunteers to stay a comfortable distance from the "emotionally wrenching" task of directly engaging with the homeless.[77] Seemingly mundane decisions about "working arrangements in the dining room" proved vitally important as they "relieved volunteers of the obligation to undertake the more difficult responsibilities of serving the guests."[78] The predominately middle-class, white volunteers had hoped to overcome an emotional and moral

[77] Rebecca Anne Allahyari, *Visions of Charity: Volunteer Workers and Moral Community*(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 37, 69.
[78] Allahyari, *Visions of Charity*, 67, 69.

separation from those they served but the physical distances they continued to maintain in their charitable work undermined these ideals. Like Allahyari, I found mundane decisions and the social location of participants essential in accounting for ABLE's experience with CBCO rituals.

I should note here that I primarily focus on marginalization due to social class in this project, although I am deeply aware of the intersectional nature of oppression.[79] Several factors drove this choice.. For one, class (and associated factors of poverty, education, and occupation) is forefront in the minds of several scholars influential in my work. In *Responsibility for Justice,* Young regularly highlighted the poor's vulnerability to injustice and observed how difficult it is to understand structural injustice if the poverty continues to be attributed to one's own lack of personal responsibility.[80] The observations about civic skills by Verba et al., clearly point to the importance of education and occupation, markers of one's class location, on political participation.[81] In addition, CBCO, particularly in its early history, saw itself in terms of class as a poor people's organization that strategically leveraged the experience of its poor participants for greater political inclusion. Finally, in my interviews, the class location of many ABLE participants proved to be deeply connected to the ways in which they understood and used CBCO rituals, although race often proved to be closely entwined too. Because of the aforementioned reasons, I have highlighted class more than race or gender in this project, although all three, and more, shape formation and structural injustice.

Finally, a case study of CBCO enabled me to draw on my previous professional experience and engage constructively with a Christian justice approach with which I was already

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[79] For more on how class is experienced differently, especially across racial lines, see Mary Pattillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences: Privilege and Peril among the Black Middle Class* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).
[80] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 3-4.
[81] Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 318.

familiar.[82] As the opening story indicated, from the beginning of 2007 to the end of 2009, I worked as a community organizer for a CBCO group in Anchorage, Alaska.[83] While this experience informed the overall framing of this project, it also taught me about CBCO culture, its rhetoric and rituals, and gave me an overall sense of its "standards of excellence," which would have taken many additional months in the field to begin to understand.[84] With little written on CBCO rituals specifically, in this dissertation my descriptions of these activities rely a great deal on my own training and experience. My preexisting knowledge of CBCO also enhanced my field research with ABLE as I was able to focus immediately on specific questions (i.e. CBCO rituals) and particular persons with whom to talk (i.e. leaders).[85] A case study approach enabled me to fully leverage those insights, and carry them with me into this project.

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[82] I have generally found that scholars using ethnographic methods are encouraged to "study of world of meaning and practice other than one's own…whether this is in another country or in another time" and move from "an initial experience of difference that may be deeply disorienting or even alienating toward understanding" (*Between Heaven and Earth*, 161). Underneath this is a recognition that some distance may be helpful in engaging in scholarly analysis. Yet, it may not be necessary to investigate a completely strange phenomenon to ensure this distance. Robert Orsi observed that having been "trained in disciplines that generally sought to conceptualize religious experience in categories other than those that practitioners used…I was asking outsider questions now, mostly" despite being a lifelong Catholic (*Between Heaven and Earth,* 149). In using the concept of ritual to describe CBCO activities and reflecting a great deal about formation, I was taking on an "outsider" position, a position from which I could valuably think through broader implications. Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

[83] There are several noteworthy differences between AFACT, the organization which employed me, and ABLE, the organization I studied. Broadly, Anchorage, Alaska is quite different culturally and geographically from Atlanta, Georgia. More specifically, ABLE (Atlantans Building Leadership for Empowerment) is currently affiliated with Gamaliel and formerly with IAF. AFACT (Anchorage Faith and Action Congregations Together) is currently unaffiliated but formerly affiliated with PICO. ABLE had been around since the 1990s and found early support with Black Protestant churches whereas AFACT had been around since 2003 and counted Catholic parishes among its early supporters.

Although I could have returned to study my previous place of employment, I chose instead to focus on local organization in Atlanta. This decision was driven by practical considerations, including family obligations. However, the decision to remain local had an unexpected benefit to the project as I could not "cherry pick" my fieldwork location. The tendency when looking elsewhere for a community or organization is to seek out the "best" or most successful example; ABLE is currently struggling as an organization and would not merit consideration under that criteria. Yet, its struggles proved tremendously instructive to this project, particularly valuable in illuminating barriers to ritual formation, and, I suspect, those struggles better reflect the average experience of most CBCO groups.

[84] Appreciating the "standards of excellence" embedded in practices is, for philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, essential to understanding the practice itself. By outlining what CBCO rituals are supposed to entail and how they should be done, I am explicitly naming normative standards which form these actions. See MacIntyre. *After Virtue*.

[85] It is because of my previous experience as a community organizer that I am able to understand the possible and much-needed contributions this research can make within existing CBCO literature, which, for the most part, do not

In this first introductory chapter, I have given an overview of the central argument and approach of this project. What remains is to offer a preview of the coming chapters in which the argument unfolds. This project aims to encourage deeper analysis into *how* justice is being pursued among Christian ethicists so that Christians collectively might more fully respond to the problem of structural injustice, particularly as woven into political participation in the US. As Young argues, justice demands that all people participate fully "in public discussion and processes of democratic decision-making."[86] To that end, I propose ritual thinking as an essential tool of analysis for Christian ethicists. Beginning with the recognition that acts of political engagement are rituals that are imbued with formative power, ritual thinking ultimately enables evaluation of all available acts of political participation. Such scholarly reflection could valuably inform the multifaceted efforts of Christians committed to social justice.

In Chapter two, I describe more fully what I mean by ritual thinking, both its descriptive and normative potential. I provide my own working definition of ritual, one well-suited to recognize acts of political engagement as rituals and highlight their formative potential. I also offer concrete examples of formative outcomes, such as taste, virtue, mode of perception, and skill, and discuss how ritual, formation, and structures of authority intersect. Because political rituals like voting are heavily associated with practical outcomes, such as influencing public policy, my emphasis on how they might shape practitioners brings to the forefront their ritual character. The chapter closes with consideration of how ritual thinking might enable us to

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focus on ritual nor highlight the experience of ordinary participants/leaders. I suspect that existing CBCO scholarship tends to highlight the experiences of professional staff and clergy instead of the ordinary leader because the aforementioned populations tend to be more articulate about the overall process. However, these populations (and I include myself prior to this fieldwork in which I really tried to appreciate the leader's perspective) tend to underestimate and subsequently downplay the risks and struggles involved.

[86] Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 91.

respond better to structural injustice, such as providing the means by which to evaluate more fully different approaches to social change.

Equipped with this fuller understanding of ritual thinking, Chapter three initiates my case study of CBCO. I begin by sketching three common models of citizenship, each of which holds a different understanding of political participation and of *how* justice might be achieved. Though my focus is on the discrete actions that make up political participation, adopting the citizenship framework illuminates the larger, formative consequences of those activities. By relying often on accepted political rituals, Christian ethicists signal a participatory vision of citizenship, which presses for greater civic engagement rather than for structural reform to achieve justice. In contrast, CBCO adopts a justice-oriented understanding of citizenship and employs alternative political rituals to transform existing democratic processes, which tend to exclude certain kinds of persons from political decision-making. I then use categories of ritual thinking to describe the structure and formative potential of CBCO rituals, 1-1s, research meetings, and actions. Such analysis demonstrates the potential of these rituals to broaden political participation by cultivating justice-oriented citizens who seek collective leadership and democratized power.

In Chapter four, I continue my case study of CBCO by introducing ABLE (Atlantans Building Leadership for Empowerment). Informed by ABLE's history and the experience of its leaders, I identify two obstacles to the justice-oriented formation intended by CBCO rituals. These promising alternative rituals of political participation require strong individual and organizational commitment for their formative potential to come to fruition. The organizational history of ABLE and the diverse citizenship orientations of its leaders complicated this process, shedding further light on the challenge of structural injustice.

In Chapter five, I reflect on the trajectory of this project by revisiting the main themes of previous chapters and highlighting what ritual thinking has illuminated in my case study of CBCO. I then consider ritual thinking's contribution to the broader field of Christian ethics, how it reframes familiar debates and enables essential discussions around *how* justice is pursued. I close by naming two valuable, future lines of inquiry, which will further propel critical reflection on the Christian political action and the challenge of structural injustice.

Chapter 2

Ritual Thinking

In my introductory chapter, I presented the core convictions, concerns, and conversation partners for this project. Along with many other Christian ethicists, I am committed to pursuing justice through political action. This is central to how I understand Christianity and its demands. Yet I am concerned by the limited attention Christian ethicists give to *how* justice is pursued. Though they reflect rigorously on what just outcomes should be sought and for what religious reasons, they gloss over the significance of the means by which this occurs. Such inattention encourages an uncritical adoption of accepted practices of political participation, as I began to argue in the introduction, which can contribute to the *de facto* exclusion of certain citizens from political decision-making.

Ritual thinking enables needed reflection on the acts of political participation, appreciating the formative potential of structured patterns and practices. Analysis of political activities as rituals allows for a more thorough description of what is involved in political participation as well as normative evaluation in light of deeply held convictions. As discussed in the previous chapter, Catherine Bell is my primary scholarly interlocutor for developing a framework for ritual analysis. Her contextual approach to ritual and sensitivity to the complex power dynamics involved with ritual formation inform my understanding of ritual thinking.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of ritual thinking and what it makes possible. This requires, first, an account of ritual whereby certain acts of political participation might be recognized as rituals, and, second, a description of formation highlighting possible formative outcomes. To elaborate these concepts, I draw on both religious and non-religious examples to

signal that though ritual is a distinctive type of activity, it is not simply a religious activity. In subsequent chapters, I will use ritual thinking to enable normative judgments about political rituals and their formative implications in light of Christian convictions. In preparation, this chapter closes by naming several insights that ritual thinking makes possible, including identifying obstacles that make ritual formation less likely to occur.

Ritual thinking draws on the multifaceted tradition of ritual studies and enables deliberation on the stand-alone significance of particular acts. Certain political activities, such as state funerals or the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance, are commonly acknowledged as rituals. However, acts of political participation, such as voting and lobbying, are not generally identified as rituals, perhaps because they have practical import.[87] Yet, it is important to recognize the ritual character of such acts, temporarily setting aside consideration of practical outcomes.

In this project, I offer my own working definition of ritual by which to illuminate the ritual character of the activities in question. In doing so, I am contributing to an ongoing scholarly discussion in which "there is no clear and widely shared explanation of what constitutes ritual or how to understand it."[88] For some, rituals are intimately related to our function or dysfunction as a society. On the one hand, rituals can create and maintain necessary social bonds. Emile Durkheim, for example, proposed that "rituals are designed to arouse a passionate intensity, feelings of 'effervescence,' in which individuals experience something larger than themselves," the collective community.[89] Through the repeated and concerted action

[87] Bell includes a section on political rites as part of her overview on the basic genres of ritual activities and includes "extraordinary" events such as state funerals and more mundane activities, like the pledge of allegiance in her list. She does not, however, include lobbying or voting. Bell, *Ritual*, 39.
[88] Bell, *Ritual*, x.
[89] Bell, *Ritual*, 24.

of ritual, individuals understand themselves as members of a society. On the other hand, rituals may model "the hierarchies, status systems, and power relations of society" and serve to mollify social conflict around these inequities.[90] Max Gluckman observed that even rituals which seem to rebel against societal norms serve as "a means to suspend or alleviate tensions within stratified social classes and relations."[91] In sum, rituals can function as a form of social control.

For others, rituals serve an interpretative and meaning-making function. Clifford Geertz suggested that, as symbolic activities, rituals enable generative tension between the realities of evil and suffering, and ideals about how the world should be, which act "as a template for reshaping or redirecting the social situation."[92] Along these lines, Victor Turner proposed that ritual allows "'the contents of group experiences [to be] replicated, dismembered, remembered, refashioned, and mutely or vocally made meaningful.'"[93] Rituals are a vehicle through which communities can wrestle with and respond to fundamental human problems, even to the point of transforming social structures.

Informed by these more universal descriptions and mindful of the multifaceted character of ritual, my account is crafted to elucidate how such rituals operate in our contemporary world, particularly in regard to political participation. As such, my definition of ritual tends to highlight ritual's function in society rather than its meaning-making potential. By ritual, I mean a distinct set of repeated actions, which are subject to rules, externally legitimized, and generative of formative outcomes. These are actions collectively recognized, although they may be individually undertaken depending on the ritual dictates, and often form part of a larger repertoire of activities. In offering this contextual definition, I am building on a trajectory that

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[90] Barry Stephenson, *Ritual: A Very Short Introduction,* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 43.
[91] Stephenson, *Ritual*, 48.
[92] Bell, *Ritual*, 66.
[93] Stephenson, *Ritual*, 50.

Bell initiated. She suggests that we keep the category of ritual porous to reflect lived experience and introduces six characteristics by which to identify ritual-like activities: formalism, traditionalism, invariance, rule-governance, sacral symbolism, and performance, several of which I discuss in the coming pages.[94]

Before I elaborate on how I understand ritual, I need to clarify two points. First, not all acts of political participation are rituals. Our ritual life is more densely populated than we often recognize but not all activity is or ought to be considered ritual. For rituals hold formative power to a degree that non-ritual actions do not.[95] I say more about this distinction in the next chapter when I discuss the points of divergence between contemporary CBCO and early community organizing. Second, because of my interest in the intersection of structural injustice and political participation, I have focused on ritual's potential to generate formative outcomes. However, rituals can also engender other kinds of outcomes. As I already mentioned, rituals can produce practical outcomes, as is the case with voting and its role in deciding public policy. In addition, rituals can bring about worship—the particular focus of liturgists. I want to acknowledge these and other types of ritual outcomes before I bracket them due to the nature of this project.

With these caveats in mind, I define ritual as follows: First, rituals are made up of actions, which are subject to rules. Although education in certain rituals often includes explanation as to the reasons why this motion is used over another, rituals and their constitutive rules direct bodily movement primarily and not emotional or intellectual states. In other words,

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[94] For more, see Bell, *Ritual*, 138–70.

[95] A helpful analogy for this point is a distinction Michel de Certeau makes between the different *types of operation* between strategies and tactics. He observes, "strategies are able to produce, tabulate, and impose….whereas tactics can only use, manipulate, and divert. In a similar fashion, rituals hold formative potential to *produce* a framework which shapes our interaction and understanding of the world. In contrast, non-ritual activities work within the existing framework. They may contest or *manipulate* aspects of that framework but do not produce a fully-formed alternative. Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, translated by Steven Rendall (Berkeley: The University of California Press, 1988), 30.

though internal aspects are impacted by a ritual's bodily movements, this is an indirect outcome and not the primary focus of rules. Additionally, rules are often but not necessarily articulated. Often one is verbally told what to do though appropriate behavior might also be signaled by the teacher, for example, in a wordless correction as to how one holds one's arm.[96] More than social norms or informal guidelines, rules set out the parameters for what makes a particular ritual identifiable as such. Yet, the extent of rule governance varies as "rules may define the outer limits of what is acceptable, or they may orchestrate every step."[97] In the example of Communion, there are rules about what kind of food can be used (e.g. wafers and wine or white loaf bread and grape juice), who can participate in the ritual (e.g. Catholics only or confessed Christians), the words required to initiate and close the ritual (e.g. denominationally-inflected liturgies based on Scripture), the physical actions to make during the ritual (e.g. collective physical movements that signal reverence, such as standing, kneeling, or bowing one's head), the appropriate setting (e.g. around the altar or anywhere believers congregate) and time (e.g. every worship service or quarterly). Though there is some flexibility depending on the religious tradition, the basic structure of the activity is identifiable across differing contexts.[98]

Like Communion, the ritual of voting is subject to quite a few rules. There are rules for participation (e.g. being a US citizen, over 18 years, and in some states, not a convicted felon),

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[96] In *Between Heaven and Earth,* Orsi has a wonderful chapter exploring how pre-Vatican II Catholic children learned the ritual of Mass. One available instructional resource was a series of published cartoon characters that exhibited specific improper behavior, such as Timmy the Termite who chewed through pews. In this case, explicit rules were taught through parody. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 98.

[97] Bell, *Ritual*, 155.

[98] While I begin my discussion of ritual by pointing to rules governance (which is fourth in Bell's list of attributes of ritual-like activities), Bell begins with formalism, "one of the most frequently cited characteristics of ritual." By formalism, Bell means "the use of a more limited and rigidly organized set of expressions and gestures, a "restricted code" of communication or behavior in contrast to a more open or 'elaborated code.'" I have chosen not to refer to formalism in my definition for two reasons: First, my aim is to expand the category of ritual to include activities that have not previously been recognized as such. The descriptor of "disciplined" does much of the same work as formalism, indicating that one's behavior is more limited or constrained that normal, without the implication that rituals can't include seemingly informal aspects. Second, rules governance already encompasses some of formalism in that formalism can come about through rules around permissible expressions and gestures. Bell, *Ritual*, 139.

rules for the setting (e.g. time, date, and appropriate location), rules about how to conduct yourself while voting and when those limitations end (e.g. no campaigning while standing in line to register and receive your voting token, and making a quick exit once you have voted). Moreover, couples may arrive at the polling place together but are not permitted to vote at the same machine and a privacy screen is used to ensure confidentiality and erect a physical boundary between voters. This level of rules governance goes beyond what is strictly needed for the practical purposing of registering popular will on political questions (e.g. separating individuals) since, for example, the lesser used ritual of caucusing enables similar outcomes while highlighting the communal character of political decision-making. The rules of voting are structured in such a way that the task of making political decisions is an individual responsibility. The ritual of voting is repeated again and again over the years; the rules endure although the candidates and policies to be decided on differ almost every time.

Second, rituals are externally legitimized, often through the explicit or implicit support of a particular institution (e.g. Catholic Church; US federal government) and a tradition (e.g. Christianity; the Western democratic tradition). By engaging in a certain ritual, one is aligning oneself to, or being aligned with, a certain vision of the world (e.g. tradition) and a specific organizational embodiment of that vision (e.g. institution).[99] Institutions, which are organizations with leadership structures and policies directed toward certain purposes or ends, serve as the agents to construct and preserve specific rituals based on the tradition with which they align themselves. This connection between institutions and traditions accounts for why institutional rituals have symbolic and ideological weight in addition to practical implications.[100]

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[99] In *Waiting for a Glacier to Move*, Ayres succinctly supports a similar distinction between tradition and institution found in MacIntyre's work. She writes, "A particular tradition's concept of virtues becomes concrete in its institutions." Ayres, *Waiting for A Glacier to Move*, 27.

[100] For more on this, see Friedland and Alford. "Bringing Society Back In."

Each institution affirms and perpetuates the vision of the world promoted by that tradition, although the resulting expression of this vision, especially as embodied in ritual, may look very different, depending on the interpretation. It is important to note as well that traditions themselves are complex and invite diverse interpretations.

A few examples are again helpful. For all Christians, communion derives its general legitimacy from specific biblical stories and scriptural texts (e.g. Matthew 26:17–30). However, legitimacy for the specific shape of the Catholic ritual is grounded in a particular, authoritative Christian institutions. For example, the doctrine of transubstantiation, in which the bread and wine of communion are believed to become the Body and Blood of Jesus, is quintessential to the *Catholic* celebration of Eucharist.[101] This doctrine is grounded in a particular reading of the biblical story, initiated by the Fathers of the Church and perpetuated through "constant teaching of the Popes and Councils."[102] Outside this institutional structure, other Christian denominations nuance or reject this understanding of communion, which changes the ritual and its significance.

Western democratic tradition affirms (among other things) human equality and popular representation, which has come to be expressed in the regular ritual use of the adult voting process to make societal decisions. However, the rules of voting vary greatly, depending on how different democratic institutions have interpreted or realized different strands of democratic tradition. For example, democratic nations have different rules concerning qualifications for voting, locating and timing of voting and what system of representation votes generate (e.g. the two-party system of the US versus the multi-party system of Canada and much of Europe). In

[101] The doctrine of transubstantiation is so central to Catholic life that, amidst the institutional reforms of Vatican II, Pope Paul VI published an encyclical letter, *Mysterium Fidei* (1965), to reaffirm its importance.
[102] Paul VI, *Mysterium Fidei* [Encyclical of Pope Paul VI on the Holy Eucharist], Vatican Website, September 3, 1965, sec. 52, accessed June 19, 2018, https://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_03091965_mysterium.html.

general, traditions are carried forth through history by various institutions, yet traditions are never fully confined to any one institution and each institution has a different relationship with the complex tradition with which it aligns.

Because of the focus of this project, I tend to emphasize the role of institutions, or distinct authoritative bodies, in upholding particular rituals, rather than of traditions.[103] Bell helpfully nuances this point by observing legitimizing strategies that may be used by institutions or by ritual participants themselves. For example, Bell's ritual characteristic of "traditionalism" illuminates our deference to the past. In "traditionalism," rituals are legitimized through appeals to history, which involve "near-perfect repetition of activities from an earlier period" or the mere appearance of "older cultural precedents."[104] Bell refers to the Pledge of Allegiance to cement this point, observing that it "gives the impression of great age," though it is only just over one hundred years old, which, in turn, "forbids tampering with the words."[105] In addition, Bell's "sacral symbolism" points to our reverence toward the transcendent or sacred. Through "sacral symbolism," we legitimize the ordinary acts, objects, or places involved in rituals as extraordinary as they evoke and express "values and attitudes associated with larger, more abstract, and relatively transcendent ideas."[106] For example, the addition of "under God" language to the Pledge of Allegiance in the 1950s further legitimized and solemnized this fairly new ritual. By pointing out the power of appeals to history and the sacred, Bell observes additional levels on which ritual legitimization occurs.

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[103] See, for instance, my brief discussion on institutional preferences and accepted practices of political participation in the introduction.
[104] Bell, *Ritual*, 145.
[105] Bell, *Ritual*, 149.
[106] Bell, *Ritual*, 157.

My purpose in outlining the various ways in which legitimization can occur is not to cement ritual's socializing power to the point of determinism but to recognize its impact appropriately. When a ritual is grounded in something larger than any one participant or any particular moment (which is what occurs with external legitimization) its level of influence is formidable. This is what makes ritual formation a critical social feature. At the same time, troubling rituals and the formation which they generate remains open to reform or change. Ritual innovation, which requires a great deal of effort, becomes even more difficult if the contingent character of ritual, including the legitimization process, is obscured.

To point to the different possibilities of ritual change, let me offer a couple of examples. For instance, a communally-affirmed ritual may be reduced to an individual custom when the legitimizing institution no longer supports a particular practice. It is not uncommon these days to see a few individuals, usually elderly women, pray the rosary prior to or immediately after Catholic mass. Where it is now a very personal ritual of spirituality, Robert Orsi notes that prior to the 1960s, it was "common practice for people to say the rosary silently during mass instead of paying attention to the sacrifice on the altar."[107] However, the institutional reforms of Vatican II moved away from such rituals of Marian devotion, which had formerly been central to collective Catholic life. These acts of piety now only persist because of the efforts of individual practitioners.

In addition, practitioners can call into question the legitimacy of a particular interpretation of a tradition by making alterations to well-established ritual. For example, as I demonstrate in Chapter three, CBCO's research meetings alter the more common ritual of lobbying. Both rituals have the practical purpose of enabling popular will to influence public

[107] Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth*, 52.

policy, but the CBCO alternative reimagines the "rules" of lobbying for specific formative purposes. Structured as they are, research meetings affirm the legitimacy of the democratic tradition but question the way in which national, state, and local governments have set parameters around proper political participation as embodied in lobbying and other preferred rituals. Participants are afforded the opportunity to understand how decision-making works and what they might contribute, rather than having to advocate for specific solutions to a community problem without that preparation.

Finally, in addition to being subject to rules and externally legitimized, rituals tend to generate formative outcomes. The commonly used phrase "ritual efficacy" encapsulates some of what I mean here, suggesting that rituals do more than symbolize or convey meaning: rituals can make things happen.[108] To this point, Barry Stephenson offers examples of initiatory rituals which "change an individual's status," such as baptism in Christianity, which confers membership in a religious tradition.[109] The ritual of marriage holds similar efficacy in that two people become a legally recognized unit with certain privileges and obligations to each other, including the legal privilege of spousal immunity.[110] In addition, ritual efficacy is often

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[108] For more on this question of ritual efficacy and ritual failure, see Don Seeman "Ritual Efficacy, Hasidic Mysticism and 'Useless Suffering' in the Warsaw Ghetto," *Harvard Theological Review*, 101:3–4 (October 2008) and Don Seeman "Ritual Practice and Its Discontents" in *A Companion to Psychological Anthropology: Modernity and Psychocultural Change*, ed. Conerly Casey and Robert B. Edgerton (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005). "Failure" may seem like a strong term. However, it is common in ritual studies and suggests, in this case, only that what was intended to happen didn't and nothing more. Other outcomes may be possible and present instead.

[109] Stephenson, *Ritual*, 56.

[110] For more on this aspect, see J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975). Austin wonderfully explores the ritual efficacy of marriage vows and the various points where "failure" may occur. He notes that the marriage ritual might fail because of "misfires," that is the ritual might be voided because of misapplication (e.g. one party is already married to another) or because of abuses, such as one speaking the vows of marriage with no intention of keeping those promises. This second element is important in that ritual efficacy can be undermined by lack of belief in the ritual, but that is its only possible point of failure. Conversely, although faith in the efficacy of a ritual can encourage certain outcomes, personal belief in a ritual is not, by itself, enough to secure success. Other elements, such as those outlined in the ritual itself, must be present as well.

associated with healing.[111] For example, Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger outlines her interlocutor's careful use of the written word in the healing rituals she prescribes for patients suffering from various illnesses of the mind, body, and spirit in *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India*.[112] Slips of paper covered in written text, including the names of Allah and "numbers representing certain powerful verses from the Quran," become protective amulets (*taviz*) that her patients often wear around their neck or waist.[113] The efficacy of Amma's rituals draw a constant stream of both Muslim and Hindu patients. These examples of ritual efficacy are helpful because they demonstrate a fairly direct and intentionally pursued relationship between a particular ritual and a specific outcome.

Yet ritual efficacy in regard to formation is more complex. For one, unlike the previous examples, in which a single change to one's status or health is sought, formation is multivalent and progressive , shaping or reshaping of how we see and interact with the world by cultivating particular tastes, modes of perception, virtues, and skills. Because of these multiple aspects, formation is rarely the outcome of a single ritual performance but rather is the cumulative effect of numerous ritual performances. Formation through ritual involves a more complicated and circuitous process than the straightforward correlation at times implied by the concept of ritual efficacy.[114]

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[111] Stephenson discusses healing under his other category of ritual efficacy: magic. Magic involves "rites associated with hunting, exorcism, divination, fertility, spells, and healing." Stephenson, *Ritual*, 64.
[112] Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger, *In Amma's Healing Room: Gender and Vernacular Islam in South India,* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 65.
[113] Flueckiger, *In Amma's Healing Room*, 80.
[114] However, Stephenson points to a contemporary push to more critical reflection on ritual efficacy. Stephenson writes, "Transformation is a potent and spiritually positive sounding word; but transformation need not be necessarily praised, and ritual transformations may be highly politicized acts through which oppressive power is wielded and maintained." Ritual criticism asks for more in-depth description of rituals to "measure and ethically evaluate the kinds of changes taking place in and through ritual." Stephenson, *Ritual*, 64.

In addition, formation is complicated because it operates at and below the level of consciousness. For instance, some formative outcomes are intentionally pursued, like virtue or skill, while others are more often unconsciously adopted, such as taste and mode of perception. To unpack these two levels, Saba Mahmood's contrast of Aristotle and Pierre Bourdieu is helpful. According to Mahmood, both Aristotle and Bourdieu employ the concept of *habitus* to appreciate the connection between "external performative acts," such as rituals or practices, in the creation of "inward dispositions."[115] Yet Aristotle and Bourdieu differ greatly on pedagogy or the process by which these dispositions are learned. On the one hand, Aristotle emphasizes the role of conscious formation, in which a valued virtue becomes a "permanent feature of a person's character" through "human industry, assiduous practice, and discipline."[116] Virtue ethics draws deeply on Aristotle on this point, affirming the conscious pursuit of the good life via the cultivation of virtue. On the other hand, Bourdieu focuses on the largely unconscious process by which social norms or ways of being in the world are learned. Bourdieu emphasizes the formation that occurs below the level of consciousness, "a practical *mimesis* (or mimeticism) which implies an overall relation of identification and has nothing in common with an *imitation* that would presuppose a conscious effort to reproduce a gesture, an utterance or an object explicitly constituted as a model."[117] In other words, our dispositions largely result from embodied reproduction rather than conscious pursuit.[118] The formative outcomes I outline in the

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[115] Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 135.
[116] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 136.
[117] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 73.
[118] Bourdieu writes, "What is 'learned by body' is not something that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is." Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 73. Two of Bell's ritual characteristics pick up on this point, emphasizing non-intellectual aspects of ritual. "Invariance" reflects the "precise repetition and physical control" that constitutes much of ritual activity. "Performance" highlights the multisensory nature of ritual. Bell, *Ritual*, 73, 150, 160.

coming pages – tastes, modes of perception, virtues, and skills – attempt to acknowledge both aspects.

First, to return to the task of describing formative outcomes, rituals develop our tastes, or patterns of preferences, for certain ways of being or acting. Taste is essential to Bourdieu's thought and includes seemingly mundane elements such as "sporting activities and entertainments" which map onto class difference.[119] In *The Logic of Practice,* Bourdieu explains taste using the example of marriage.[120] He notes that people often seek out socially acceptable matches for themselves because they have learned to prefer those types of relationships. Only infrequently does parental authority have "to be openly asserted to repress individual feelings."[121] When what is socially preferred, among a range of possible options, is naturalized within individuals, "spontaneous" submission is likely.[122] However, taste is neither natural nor individual but part of a larger social history.[123] One's taste in marriage, for example, is inseparable from a "whole set of strategies for biological, cultural, and social reproduction that every group implements in order to transmit the inherited powers an privileges, maintained or enhanced, to the next generation."[124]

The widespread use of *Roberts Rules for Order* is a good example of how ritual cultivates taste. There is a variety of ways in which one might organize a meeting to arrive at commonly

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[119] Pierre Bourdieu, "Sport and Social Class," in *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, ed. Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 357.
[120] Bourdieu might combine taste and modes of perception as he, at one point, describes tastes as "schemes of perception and appreciation." Though taste and modes of perception are related, and often cultivated unconsciously, I find it is helpful to distinguish between ways of being or acting (taste) and ways of seeing or knowing (modes of perception), as my examples will demonstrate. Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 160.
[121] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 160.
[122] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 160.
[123] Pattillo-McCoy's *Black Picket Fences* provides a great example of how durable tastes can be and how complex. Black middle-class residents of Groveland uphold typical middle-class preferences and behaviors, despite the increased economic fragility they face in contrast to their white counterparts. These are people who "mow their lawns, go to church, marry, vote (they *really* vote), work, own property, and so on and so on." Pattillo-McCoy, *Black Picket Fences*, 15.
[124] Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 160–61.

agreed upon outcomes, including forms of consensus decision-making. However, *Roberts Rules,* which grounds decision-making in majority voting, has become so prevalent as a standard in community organizations and professional societies that it now serves as the default method for many gatherings where decisions have to be made collectively and operational norms have yet to be set. *Roberts Rules* is not just a common and convenient choice; it is appreciated as an excellent standard by which to conduct business. Through its continual employment, a taste for procedural fairness is cultivated as every participant is given a chance to persuade the assembly, even if their will is not reflected in the final decision-making.

Second, rituals encourage certain modes of perception, or attention to certain realities and the promotion of certain interpretations. Similar to taste, modes of perception can seem natural but are part of a larger social history. T.M. Luhrmann observes that while prayer enables a focus on and communication with the divine, different rituals of prayer incite different ways of perceiving the divine. For instance, traditional Catholic prayer encourages visions of God while modern evangelical prayer enables practitioners to hear God's voice.[125] Luhrmann credits the shared sensory attentiveness to God to the rich mental imagery encouraged by Ignatian prayer techniques.[126] However, the sensory feast of many Catholic churches, "impossibly dense and crowded" with images, encourages a more visual encounter while Protestant ambivalence with images, evidenced by "often unadorned" churches has prompted more "auditory imagination."[127]

David M. Mellott's *I was and I am dust* offers a good example of how integral rituals are to cultivating modes of perception. In this ethnographic study, Mellott investigates a voluntary fraternity of lay Catholics, the Penitente Brotherhood, whose members employ penitential

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[125] T.M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 184.
[126] Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 172.
[127] Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 174, 184.

practices in their spiritual life. Mellott's primary interlocutor, Larry Torres, describes how his Penitente rituals, which include flagellation, enable him to recognize the truth about humanity and let go of "other *ways of seeing* that prevent us from contributing to the world. Realizing that we are dust is what helps us transcend the mundane world of eating, sleeping, and working."[128] For Larry, this truthful mode of perception about human nature is "limited, if not impossible" for one who is not a participant."[129] Yet, this mode of perception is necessary to appreciate human vulnerability and a need for God, foundational to Christian faith.

Some of the rituals of political engagement that I will highlight in the next chapter are crafted to increase participants' awareness of unequal power dynamics in US democratic processes. Rituals supporting this awareness are distinctive, since current social processes are set up in ways that reproduce power through naturalizing domination between social groups "creating passivity and conformity to a given social order." [130] Existing rituals of public testimony at city council meetings, for instance, tend to obscure the power differentials between community members and elected officials. The ability of any community member to speak on issues in what is called a democratic forum is lauded, yet only city council members are given significant time to voice their opinions while ordinary citizens are limited to a few minutes after potentially waiting several hours to arrive at that point in the agenda.

Third, rituals enable esteemed virtues to become an integral part of one's character. [131] Unlike taste and modes of perception, virtue is a formative outcome that tends to be consciously

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[128] Italics are mine. David M. Mellott, *I Was and I Am Dust: Penitente Practices as a Way of Knowing* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 80.
[129] Mellott, *I Was and I Am Dust*, 86.
[130] Zander Navarro, "In Search of a Cultural Interpretation of Power: The Contribution of Pierre Bourdieu" *IDS Bulletin* 37:6 (November 2006), 19.
[131] For example, MacIntyre focuses heavily on cultivation of virtues, such as "justice, courage and honesty." For instance, to cheat in chess may allow one to win acclaim but ultimately undermines the primary goods of available in the practice of chess, such as recognizing and internalizing the virtue of honesty. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

pursued, as emphasized in Aristotle's account.[132] In her study of Egyptian Muslim women, Saba Mahmood notes how highly Islam values the virtue of female modesty and how a desire to cultivate this virtue in themselves drives some pious women to veil. While ritual veiling is often assumed to be a mark of existing modesty, for her interlocutors it is the means by which one tutors "oneself in the attribute of shyness" as an ongoing process.[133] Affirming ritual efficacy, one woman notes her transformation from being embarrassed to veil to feeling uncomfortable without it as she fully internalizes the virtue of modesty.[134] Mahmood emphasizes the agency of these women, who are using "socially prescribed performances" to realize their most pious, modest self.[135]

Mark Bovens demonstrates the importance of internalizing virtues in his discussion of political accountability. Bovens notes that accountability is a prized virtue within US academic and political discourse, a normative standard for "evaluation of the behavior of public actors."[136] Yet, this virtue is often missing as "political officials and public organisations sometimes free-ride on these evocative powers of accountability."[137] For example, between 2001 and 2006, a large percentage of proposed congressional bills included the term "accountability" in their title but rarely mentioned it within the text of the bill itself. Bovens argues that the term functioned as "an ideograph, as a rhetorical tool to convey an image of good governance and to rally supporters" rather than actually substantively shaping the content of the legislation.[138] Because

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[132] However, like other formative outcomes, virtues participate in a larger social history. For example, in *After Virtue,* MacIntyre compares the primary virtues of different times and places, including an account of Jane Austen and the virtue of constancy. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 242.
[133] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 158.
[134] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 157.
[135] Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, 31.
[136] Mark Bovens, "Two Concepts of Accountability: Accountability as a Virtue and as a Mechanism," *West European Politics*, 33:5 (2010): 947.
[137] Bovens, "Two Concepts of Accountability," 948.
[138] Bovens, "Two Concepts of Accountability," 949.

of this, Bovens urges reflection on the mechanisms by which accountability might be assured, primarily through various institutional arrangements, such as South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The CBCO rituals outlined in the next chapter take a different approach. They are crafted to develop the virtue of accountability in elected representatives through formative interactions with constituents. These rituals both communicate and cultivate specific virtues. Both approaches are necessary as "accountability mechanisms are meaningless without a sense of virtue and, vice versa, there is no virtue without mechanisms." [139]

Fourth, rituals develop skills or abilities to act competently in a specific manner. While often associated with its practical outcomes, skill also hold formative value. Being skilled enables personal confidence that empowers one to act in the first place.[140] In addition, mastery of a skill can "confer visibility and importance."[141] Luhrmann notes this aspect as her evangelical interlocutors seek to develop the ability to "hear" God speak to them directly through their rituals of prayer. The skill of hearing God in this way is meaningful in a particular context but not easily transferable to other aspects of life or in securing practical outcomes. Yet, the skills generated by ritual may have value beyond the ritual itself. For instance, the ritual of public testimony at city council meetings can cultivate broadly applicable and widely affirmed organizational and communication skills as well as potentially influence public policy. The disciplined and repetitive nature of rituals gives ample opportunity for mastery of a variety of skills.

In listing these four formative possibilities, the mutually reinforcing character of these outcomes becomes clear. At the same time, I do not want to overstate the certainty of achieving

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[139] Bovens, "Two Concepts of Accountability," 962.
[140] Our ability to participate fully and competently in a ritual may demand skills that are learned elsewhere, a fact that will prove vitally important in the next chapter's discussion on "civic skills." MacIntyre notes the complex relationship between skill and participation when he observes that "technical skills" are required to undertake certain practices, while at the same time these skills are transformed into something more as they serve the practice. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 193.
[141] Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back*, 155.

such outcomes.[142] It is inaccurate to suggest that ritual has absolute socializing influence, as I argued earlier.[143] As Bell observes, the shaping power of ritual appears "to depend on many factors, such as the degree of people's involvement in the rites, the amount of ritual repetition, and the degree to which the values espoused in the deep structure of the ritual are reinforced in other areas of social life."[144] In other words, a ritual's ability to cultivate certain formative outcomes remains vulnerable. Incorrect employment of a ritual, perhaps through ignoring or intentionally twisting an essential rule, can render the ritual unrecognizable and its formation incomplete. Insufficient training can contribute to this; we can be incompetent teachers or unwilling learners. Moreover, the legitimacy of the tradition or the institution sponsoring the ritual could be called into question or an expected outcome could even fail to occur simply by chance. Finally, rituals involve different persons who bring in a variety of experiences and needs. Rituals can prove deeply formative for participants, but the fact remains that no one comes to a ritual formless. Formation happens before, alongside, and after the rituals in which we consciously participate. Because of the continual possibility of "failure" and the variety of contributing factors, CBCO rituals are often followed by communal reflection.

Yet, the impact of ritual and its formative outcomes must be taken seriously. Ritual thinking enables appreciation of ritual's role in shaping of how we, as individuals, see and encounter the world. And since rituals interact with systems of authority, rituals' formative potential has implications for institutions as well. Institutions, of course, are not people and do

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[142] Bell cautions against the "danger of overestimating the power of ritual. The more enthusiastic have gone beyond affirming the ability of ritual to renew faith and create community; they declare that ritual is what makes and keeps us human; it can prevent the inhuman destruction of warfare and orchestrate a transformation of the unjust social order that rational political methods alone cannot bring about." Bell, *Ritual*, 221.

[143] Those who extol ritual's absolute socializing power seem to presume a monolithic community. This belies "the dynamics of real social groups," in which persons who peaceably participate in one religious ritual "are readily enemies in other social situations." Bell, *Ritual*, 26.

[144] Bell, *Ritual*, 252.

not have modes of perception, virtues, or skills. However, institutions do have preferences in that they respond to certain behaviors more or less favorably.[145] It is by "preferring" certain rituals of political participation that national, state, and local governments communicate their understanding of what the government ought to do and how citizens ought to engage with it. By recognizing the relationship between ritual and formation, it becomes possible to evaluate the formative consequences of conforming to the expectations set by the state and make normative judgments about political rituals in light of desires for the fullest possible form of civic participation.[146]

So far, this chapter has centered on showcasing the descriptive analysis that ritual thinking makes possible. Ritual thinking temporarily sets asides consideration of practical outcomes and enables deliberation on the character and formative significance of acts of political participation in and of themselves. What are the constitutive parts or rules governing this particular ritual? Of what relationships of power or legitimizing forces is this ritual part? What does this ritual do or make possible for those enacting it? What tastes, modes of perception, virtues, or skills are cultivated in employing this ritual? As Bell observes, "no ritual stands by itself. It is always embedded in a thick context of traditions, changes, tensions, and unquestioned assumptions and practices."[147] Such critical reflection allows us to appreciate the complexity of

[145] Consider the familiar justification: "This is the way we've always done it."
[146] For example, even though our elected officials ought to be accountable to those they represent during their entire tenure, our ability to access and challenge our officials is severely limited outside of the voting booth, and this makes ensuring accountability difficult. Staff reads and filters most constituent letters and appointments to meet directly with officials are confined to business hours. Direct access to our elected officials is heavily controlled and often benefits those with more time and power. Clearly, some of these parameters are valid, considering that there is one representative for untold number of constituents. However, some parameters are chosen based on existing custom and encourage unequal access, benefiting the salaried employee over the day-shift hourly employee, for example.
[147] Bell, *Ritual*, 252.

rituals of political participation. Chapter three will build on this descriptive work by outlining three visions of citizenship within the US and the rituals constitutive of each.

Howard Zehr provides a great example of ritual analysis of our criminal justice process in his book, *Changing Lanes: A New Focus for Crime and Justice*. Zehr observes that the contemporary criminal justice process, particularly in the ritual of the courtroom, "requires dependence upon proxy professionals who represent the offender and the state" and sidelines "individuals and the communities which are affected."[148] Such methods have encouraged a "taste" for professional involvement in community problems and a "perception" that crime be met with punishment rather than require restitution. By focusing on the methods and rituals by which justice is sought, Zehr illuminates the implications embedded within normal and accepted practices of the criminal justice system. The implicit ramifications, such as the secondary role of individuals and communities as well as the emphasis on retributive outcomes, are made clear through such close attention.

Ritual thinking also enables more normative work to occur. First, ritual thinking encourages well-informed normative judgments to be made about political participation in light of overarching convictions. By enabling fuller evaluation of the rituals of political participation, ritual thinking encourages consideration of other possibilities. Under the guiding norms of this project, what might "more just" rituals of political participation look like? Do completely new rituals have to be created or would reforms of existing rituals suffice? What traditions, histories, or sacred values might they draw on or contest? What tastes, modes of perception, virtues, or skills ought to be cultivated? In sum, what rituals might better redress structural injustice as woven into much of political participation within the US? Chapter three initiates this type of

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[148] Howard Zehr, *Changing Lens: A New Focus for Crime and Justice,* 3rd Edition (Scottdale: Herald Press, 2005), 80.

reflection by introducing CBCO and the alternative rituals it uses to pursue social change through political participation. As the next chapter will demonstrate, CBCO rituals reimagine political participation and pursue systematic reform of political decision-making processes through the formation of justice-oriented citizens.

Here, Zehr again offers a helpful example. Dissatisfied with the rituals of the criminal justice system, which sidelines the participation of victims and offenders, Zehr prefers the VORP (Victim Offender Reconciliation Program). Primary among VORP rituals are face-to-face, formal meetings, in which victim and offenders are able to engage directly with each other, guided by a third-party facilitator, who may or may not be a professional. As a result, "VORP provides opportunity for expressions of feelings, exchange of information, and recovering of losses while leaving victims with a sense of empowerment. Offenders receive an opportunity to put a real face to those they have harmed."[149] Such results are generally not valued or pursued within the more common courtroom rituals of trials and sentencing, but for Zehr, these outcomes are essential for justice and for the health of communities. Such VORP rituals are also necessary for systematic change as they act out and imagine an alternative way of seeking justice.

Second, ritual thinking equips us to reflect, in a new way, on the challenges that may await if we desire social change through alternative means. With ritual thinking, it becomes evident that acts of political participation are not interchangeable tools but, like other rituals, are woven into structures of authority and, as such, they may resist reform or replacement. As rituals, acts of political participation "do not need a lot of justification. They appear to address a very specific and obvious need or have a sufficiently long history that in itself justifies them. Indeed, it is more common in most communities to need a good reason not to participate in ritual

[149] Zehr, *Changing Lens*, 162.

activities."[150] Furthermore, as rituals, they tend to obscure the agency practitioners have in upholding or reforming them. Bell observes that

> people…see the chanting of a medieval Latin litany, the recitation of the story of Exodus around the Seder table at Passover, and the performance of a historical pageant celebrating the founding of their town. They do not usually see themselves selecting among practices…people tend to see themselves as responding or transmitting—not creating.[151]

In sum, rituals can be difficult to change because practitioners feel little control over or responsibility for them. Yet, as Bell indicates, people do have a measure of power over the rituals they enact. Part of the task of this project is to provide Christian ethicists with a tool to illuminate the ramifications of defaulting to accepted rituals of political participation and thus to empower their consideration of alternatives.

In addition, ritual thinking brings to the fore the complex issue of formation in regards to political participation. In Chapter four, I pick up on this issue when I identify potential obstacles to ritual formation illuminated by the experience of one CBCO group, ABLE. One's ability and willingness to enact alternative rituals, let alone be shaped by them, proves to be contingent on a number of factors, including organizational support and one's formation as a more privileged or more marginalized member of society. The experiences of ABLE around ritual formation shed further light on the challenge of structural injustice and political participation. They also reinforce the need for a tool like ritual thinking to help explore these complex issues.

To conclude: In this chapter, I outlined ritual thinking and the descriptive analysis it makes possible. Ritual thinking enables certain acts to be recognized as rituals and allows their formative potential to be appreciated. In the next chapter, I demonstrate how issues of structural injustice within political decision-making can be illuminated when a framework of ritual

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[150] Bell, *Ritual*, 167.
[151] Bell, *Ritual*, 167.

thinking is used to study the case of CBCO and its alternative rituals of political participation. Not only does ritual thinking offer new insight into CBCO and its purposes, it also supports a positive valuation of CBCO in light of this project's normative convictions about justice.

Chapter 3

Ritual Thinking and The Promise of CBCO

In the previous chapter, I introduced ritual thinking as an analytical tool, which serves to illuminate the ritual character and formative potential of certain acts of political participation. A fuller understanding of these discrete acts allows us to evaluate normatively various means by which social justice could be pursued politically. In this chapter, I apply ritual thinking to my case study of CBCO to accomplish two things. First and foremost, I demonstrate the value of ritual thinking by employing it to illuminate the alternative political rituals embodied in CBCO work. Ritual thinking, in particular, enables analysis of the structure and formative implications of CBCO rituals. Such analysis makes clear that CBCO rituals are not simply tactical protests but constructive, formative acts which reimagine political participation and pursue systemic reform of political processes. Through the lens of ritual, this key point of divergence between CBCO and the community organizing initiated by Saul Alinsky becomes evident. Second, I affirm CBCO as a valuable alternative to more conventional methods of political participation. Through ritual thinking, I highlight how CBCO rituals enhance human dignity and dismantle structural injustice, essential aspects of justice. By doing so, I hope to encourage Christian ethicists to consider alternative approaches, such as CBCO, through which to pursue justice.

I begin this chapter by sketching several citizenship models, each of which has a different understanding of political participation and vision of *how* justice might be achieved. Though ritual thinking is the main focus of this project, the larger, cumulative significance of individual political rituals is seen more clearly by employing a citizenship framework. It is through the practice of particular rituals that certain kinds of citizens are formed, citizens who might affirm

or resist existing political processes and accompanying issues of structural injustice. In addition, the citizenship framework is useful in quickly illuminating the fundamental difference between CBCO's approach to social justice and those who encourage advocacy, as many Christian ethicists currently do. Both groups affirm the importance of justice but they differ in their perceptions of existing political structures and processes, which has significance in light of participatory distortion.

To clarify CBCO's understanding of citizenship among other possible models, I turn to the work of Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne. Scholars of civic education, Westheimer and Kahne's research highlights the "spectrum of ideas about what good citizenship *is* and what good citizens *do*."[152] In "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," Westheimer and Kahne identify and label three common understandings of citizenship —as describing one who is personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented—embedded in various democratic education programs in the US, and note each one's distinctive understandings of *how* social change ought to be pursued.[153] A personally responsible citizen considers social transformation indirectly, focused instead on the positive impact of personal morality and interpersonal acts of goodness. In contrast, models of participatory and justice-oriented citizenship both demand direct engagement with the social structures responsible for community life, though personal morality may motivate and shape such efforts. However, despite this basic

[152] Italics in original. Joel Westheimer and Joseph Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen? The Politics of Educating for Democracy," *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Summer, 2004): 237.

[153] Citizenship here refers to conceptual not legal status. Residents of the US participate in citizenship activity that contributes positively to their community or advocates for policy decisions, even if they are undocumented or "illegal."
In addition, I should note that, applied to this project, the categories of "participatory" and "justice-oriented" can be confusing as the civic actors I am concerned with are all engaging in political participation with a commitment to justice.

overlap, the participatory and justice-oriented citizenship models differ in *how* social transformation can happen and the depth of reform required.

The first type of citizen in Westheimer and Kahne's typology is personally responsible, one who understands that "to solve social problems and improve society, citizens must have good character; they must be honest, responsible, and law-abiding members of the community."[154] Here "good" citizenship is grounded in the formation of good people rather than the work of direct political participation. Westheimer and Kahne note the regular use of volunteer activities within this model to cultivate the value of service and respond to injustice that persists at the interpersonal level.[155] One sees resonances with Hauerwas's approach to social justice in this model since he too prioritizes non-political rituals to cultivate virtues of patience and servanthood, although Hauerwas would resist the public/private divide implied.[156] Under this model of citizenship, broad policy decisions are predominately entrusted to responsible elected officials, who "take action on behalf of the commonwealth, based on a thoroughgoing consideration and deliberation of the issues" and who are voted for on the basis of shared values.[157] David C. Barker and Christopher Jan Carman identify this type of representation as the "trustee" model and contrast it with "delegate" model, in which elected officials act according to the priorities of constituents and citizens are more directly involved.[158] Westheimer and Kahne note that critics of the personally responsible citizen suggest that "the emphasis placed on individual character and behavior obscures the need for collective and public-sector initiatives…[and] that volunteerism and kindness are put forward as ways of

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[154] Westheimer and Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen?," 240.
[155] Westheimer and Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen?," 241.
[156] See Stanley Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 371–91.
[157] David C. Barker and Christopher Jan Carman, "Political Geography, Church Attendance, and Mass Preferences Regarding Democratic Representation," *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 19:2 (2009): 128.
[158] For more on different representational preferences, see Christopher Jan Carman's "Assessing Preferences for Political Representation in the US" or Barker and Carman' "Yes WE Can or Yes HE Can?"

avoiding politics and policy."[159] Hauerwas has faced similar criticism, such as leaving uncontested "social structural which cause oppression."[160] For those who couple justice with active political engagement, this vision of citizenship makes no sense because it leaves the discernment of justice and political decision-making to elected officials.

Westheimer and Kahne describe the second type of citizen as participatory. Participatory citizens are those who "actively participate and take leadership positions within established systems and community structures."[161] Under this model, "good" citizenship is understood as employing accepted political practices to pursue social change. Current political processes are perceived to be, or with minor changes could be, adequate and fair. As an example, Westheimer and Kahne point to the Madison Youth in Public Service program. In this program, involved students were taught how to conduct polls, interview officials, make presentations, and read legislation, all vital elements to lobbying, a prominent pathway by which to seek positive change.[162] Many of the citizenship activities promoted by Christian ethicists interested in social justice fall into this citizenship category, as evidenced by the appendix of *To Do Justice* which, among other things, offers lobbying and letter writing advice.[163] Unlike personally responsible citizens, participatory citizens believe that elected officials ought to serve as "delegates," and represent the priorities of constituents. Thus, activities like lobbying serve a critical communicative function and depend on representative participation to ensure public policy represents the needs of all.

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[159] Westheimer and Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen?," 243.
[160] De La Torre, "Virtue ethics," 168.
[161] Westheimer and Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen?," 240.
[162] Westheimer and Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen?," 260.
[163] *To Do Justice* offers a how-to guide on political advocacy, which includes advice on letter-writing, emailing, lobbying visits, and phone calls to elected officials as well as letters to the editor and op-eds. Todd Peters and Hinson-Hasty, *To Do Justice*.

However, Westheimer and Kahne observe that this model tends to leave unconsidered "broad social critiques and systemic reform."[164] The reality of "participatory distortion," or civic engagement that does not reflect US demographics, suggests the importance of such steps.[165] As I noted in the introduction, Verba et al., observe that prominent acts of political participation demand a specific set of skills – civic skills – which are not equally distributed throughout the US population. Certain populations are more likely than others to engage in accepted political rituals, such as lobbying, and to shape policies, because they possess prerequisite civic skills and accompanying political confidence.[166] In other words, although engaging in accepted political practices ought to be wide open to all, it turns out that the resources needed to participate fully map onto forms of social privilege, in particular access to "high-status" employment and higher educational opportunities.[167] For instance, lobbying places a large burden on constituents, who are expected to make "a clear, focused, and persuasive case" to elected officials well as provide "a brief summary document."[168]

Further, as scholar and activist Betsy Leondar-Wright reminds us, the world "looks different to people who are supervised at work than it does to the people who manage them."[169] The experience of being subject to continual supervision and policies decided by others in the

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[164] Westheimer and Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen?," 261.
[165] Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 15.
[166] "Those who possess civic skills, the set of specific competencies germane to citizen political activity, are more likely to feel confident about exercising those skills in politics and to be effective…when they do." Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 305.
[167] This is not to say that civic skills can't be learned by all, only that the process is more arduous for some. Verba et al., note the positive role of churches in providing opportunities for every member, regardless of background, to learn and practice civic skills. However, such opportunities are fewer than those offered in one's professional life. Such an observation suggests the important role churches can play as an alternative place where "disadvantages" of class might be overcome. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, *Voice and Equality*, 319.
[168] Congressional Management Foundation, *Face-to-Face with Congress: Before, During, and After Meetings with Legislators* (Washington: Congress Foundation, 2014), 10. http://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF_Pubs/cmf-face-to-face-with-congress.pdf
[169] Betsy Leondar-Wright, *Missing Class: Strengthening Social Movement Groups by Seeing Class Cultures* (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press, 2014), 32–33.

workplace might encourage disengagement from current forms of political participation, or civic apathy.[170] The requirements of political participation can appear more onerous if one lacks experience making workplace decisions, which adds an additional obstacle to the acquisition of needed civic skills. In light of this, systemic reform needs to be seriously considered. If not, elected officials will act only on behalf of constituents who have the organizational and communication skills currently required for political involvement, and just policies will depend completely on enfranchised citizens acting as political "trustees," or advocates, for the marginalized.

Finally, Westheimer and Kahne categorize the third type of citizen as justice-oriented. Justice-oriented citizens aim to "question, debate, and change established systems and structures that reproduce patterns of injustice over time."[171] Unlike the personally responsible and participatory citizens, justice-oriented citizens are skeptical about the adequacy of existing systems. Under this model, a "good" citizen is one who engages in critique of structures, including political systems. Westheimer and Kahne use the Bayside Students for Justice program as an example. In contrast to the Madison Youth in Public Service program, Bayside students investigated aspects of structural injustice, such as bias within SAT testing, by educating themselves in the complexities of such issues before educating the wider community via forums or pamphlets. Westheimer and Kahne also assign community organizing to this form of citizenship as it challenges "existing norms rather than reinforcing them."[172]

Justice-oriented citizenship is also vulnerable to criticism, such as that it overvalues critique and protest at the expense of contributing to the creation of better public policy or

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[170] Pateman observes that citizen apathy has often been seen as "functional for the democratic system," disincentivizing investigation into who doesn't participate and why. Pateman, "APSA Presidential Address," 7.
[171] Westheimer and Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen?," 240.
[172] Westheimer and Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen?," 262.

systemic reform. Bayside students, for instance, learned and practiced skills of social critique and critical thinking but did not grow in their competence to understand the "technical challenges and possibilities associated with particular policies and initiatives" like Madison students.[173] However, the means adopted to express this citizenship vary, some focusing more on critique and others more on reform, both of which are necessary in the face of injustice. For example, the Bayside program, involving predominately persons of color and low-income individuals, provided participants with the tools to unpack the complexity of social injustice, the consequences of which they had often experienced personally. These activities primarily operated as educational exercises, encouraging awareness before prompting specific acts of political critique and protest. As will become apparent in the coming pages, CBCO operates differently; it tries to cultivate justice-oriented citizens who are already actively engaged with existing political structures in an effort to reform norms around political participation.

Westheimer and Kahne's citizenship models enhance the framework of ritual thinking in two ways. First, whereas ritual thinking enhances our ability to pay attention to discrete political rituals, the broader, collective import of choosing one approach over another can be overlooked. By linking particular acts of political participation with various understandings of citizenship, the cumulative and structural impact of numerous individuals approaching civic engagement in one particular way becomes clear. For example, *participatory rituals* such as lobbying, if they are consistently and collectively employed, encourage a participatory model of citizenship which affirms the importance of established systems. Yet, this pattern of engagement can make other's experiences of systemic exclusion more difficult to understand and accept. Second, Westheimer and Kahne's categories provide helpful descriptors by which to identify and understand the

[173] Westheimer and Kahne, "What Kind of Citizen?," 256–7.

variety of citizenship orientations operating within the contemporary political landscape. Such language proves vital in Chapter four where I describe the formation of various participants involved with ABLE and its implications for the ritual formation intended by CBCO. In sum, the frame of citizenship makes more immediately evident the broader, structural consequences of employing discrete political rituals and provides language by which to distinguish between different understandings of citizenship held by members of CBCO groups and other social justice efforts.

As rituals need to be understood in their context, I initiate my discussion of CBCO and its rituals with a brief history. The CBCO method traces its origins to Saul Alinsky-style organizing, and to this day CBCO groups still employ much of the same rhetoric and convictions made famous by Alinsky himself.[174] A shared vision of citizenship accounts for the fact that CBCO insists, as Alinsky did, that people directly impacted by community issues, or those in relationship with those directly impacted, ought to address issues *themselves.* This might mean that they demand accountability from public officials to provide resources for locally identified problems or that they fight for decision-making power in the work that advocates and service providers undertake on the community's behalf.[175] Underneath this insistence is a conviction that participation in addressing a social problem is as vital as resolving the issue itself, borne from a skepticism about the adequacy of existing political decision-making processes. For Alinsky, "there can be no darker or more devastating tragedy than the death of man's faith in himself and

[174] For example, Dennis A. Jacobsen's *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing* (2001) not only uses Alinsky concepts such as "power" and "self-interest," but uses similar examples as Alinsky does in *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*, (1971).

[175] For example, a colleague at AFACT worked with a church concerned with the poor quality of after-school programs provided by a local non-profit, eventually securing better quality programming. The group was able to do that because of the non-profit's dependence on local, public government funding. The group had little direct leverage over the private policies of the non-profit but they could influence the elected officials in how much (or little) funding this organization continued to receive.

his power to direct his future" as a person and as a citizen.[176] Such an approach contrasts starkly with *how* social justice issues are usually resolved. Advocates, service providers, and politicians all remedy community issues *on behalf of* those they fight for, work for, or represent. Although effective in marshaling much-needed resources, such efforts often sideline affected individuals from any decision-making, reinforcing relationships of dependence and inequality.

To rectify the limitations of current political decision-making processes and to advance the interests of marginalized populations, Alinsky relied primarily on creative, disruptive tactics that surprised and disoriented those in power.[177] At times contesting and manipulating prevailing social and political norms, these activities were meant to leverage success on specific issues and include the disenfranchised in decision-making rather than reform or reimagine broader political processes through the cultivation of new justice-oriented citizens.[178] As Alinsky primarily worked alongside disenfranchised populations, cultivating a skepticism about the adequacy of political processes which might lead to their reform was often unnecessary. Instead, political processes would change as more of the disenfranchised population, being already justice-

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[176] Alinsky*, Rules for Radicals*, xxvi.

[177] In both *Rules for Radicals* and *Reveille for Radicals*, Alinsky devotes two chapters to the discussion of tactics. He writes that "accident, unpredictable reactions to your own actions, necessity, and improvisation dictate the direction and nature of tactics. Then, analytical logic is required to appraise where you are, what you can do next, the risks and hopes that you can look forward to." Alinsky*, Rules for Radicals*, 165.

[178] Alinsky's understanding of tactics resonate with Michel de Certeau's account. De Certeau describes tactics as "an art of the weak," an action which "operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of 'opportunities'….It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse." As an example, de Certeau pointed to industrial workers who resist the conditions of their employment by diverting time "from the factory for work that is free, creative, and precisely not directed towards profit." Tactics are ad hoc acts of protest and resistance, intended to undermine unjust systems through subversive agency, particularly among the powerless. De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 37, 25. In addition, De La Torre suggests Alinsky's tactics illustrate his own ethic of *jodiendo* (or the 'trickster). De La Torre writes: "To protest the establishment of the city of Rochester, [Alinsky] suggested purchasing one hundred tickets to a concert of the Rochester Symphony Orchestra. Prior to attending the event, the protesters would enjoy a preconcert dinner of nothing but baked beans. Once the concert began, they would let rip, bringing the concert to an end after the first movement. The establishment and police would be paralyzed to act, because there is no law against public flatulence. This praxis of *jodiendo* is designed to force the establishment to the negotiating table lest the dispossessed plan a repeat performance." Miguel A. De La Torre, *Latina/o Social Ethics: Moving Beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 134.

oriented, "gradually but *irrevocably* tak[e] their places as citizens of a democracy."[179] In contrast, as I will discuss below, Alinsky's successors crafted alternative political rituals intended to resolve discrete social issues as well as work towards systemic change of democratic structures through cultivation of a greater number of justice-oriented citizens, particularly representing enfranchised groups such as the middle class. A brief historical overview of community organizing and the factors which brought about CBCO is helpful in illuminating this shift.

Deeply shaped by the work of labor organizing, Alinsky initiated his community organizing work by founding the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council (BYNC) for the working-class community in southwest Chicago in 1939. Although BYNC was meant to support the existing labor organizing already happening, Alinsky's vision was broader: he wanted to organize and mobilize the Back of the Yards neighborhood around all the issues they faced, not just those related to their work. Mark R. Warren sums this up, writing "Alinsky was the first to attempt to mobilize industrial workers and their families into direct action where they lived, as opposed to where they worked."[180] Alinsky soon built on his model, founding Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) in 1940 as a way to organize other poor communities around neighborhood issues rather than employment concerns. Thus, relevant issues for community organizing extended beyond labor issues of working conditions and pay to include issues of sanitation, housing, public health, and police practice. Alinsky's community organizing initially engaged churches only as "repositories of money and people to be mobilized" without recognition of the

[179] Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, 203. This pragmatism about democracy and social change resonates with Reinhold Niebuhr, who was also committed to issues of labor and class struggle.
[180] Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 42.

power of religious traditions themselves.[181] Alinsky's focus was building the power of the poor to drive positive change in their own communities and he used any and all tools available to that end.

The working-class origin of community organizing is central to understanding Alinsky's work. Community organizing was birthed in poor neighborhoods, was focused on engaging and training poor residents, and often used militant techniques common to labor organizing (such as sit-ins, boycotts, picketing), which were already familiar to working class populations.[182] In *Organizing Urban America*, Heidi J. Swarts identifies the assets that working-class people bring to social change work: awareness of injustice, skepticism toward authorities, relational skills, and social networks.[183] Alinsky explicitly built upon the first two – awareness of injustice and skepticism toward authorities –heavily emphasizing conflict and polarization in early community organizing, aspects that have been considerably muted in much of contemporary CBCO. He commonly invoked the language of haves and have-nots, a familiar refrain in working-class struggles.[184] In addition, although Alinsky encouraged a sophisticated understanding of the community issues tackled, he drew clear battle lines, polarizing a grey issue into stark black and white to encourage bold action from the leaders. Community organizing built on the intimacy of its members with class injustice and used that as fuel to energize efforts to achieve just outcomes.

Alinsky was unvarnished in his allegiance to the poor and working class, and had a clear-eyed vision of those with whom he worked. His polemical language was meant to agitate and

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[181] Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 42.
[182] Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 42.
[183] Heidi J. Swarts, *Organizing Urban America: Secular and Faith-based Progressive Movements* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 53.
[184] Aaron Schutz and Marie G. Sandy, *Collective Action for Social Change: An Introduction to Community Organizing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 97.

incite those who might have been dissuaded to act by their lack of policy expertise. Swarts notes that feelings of powerlessness, difficultly envisioning, lack of confidence, lack of civic skills, and the tendency to defer to experts often challenge working-class activism.[185] Alinsky also built on existing capabilities of working-class leaders, which in the first instance demanded knowledge of those communities. Community organizing began with "understanding of the life of a community, not only in terms of the individual's experiences, habits, values, and objectives, but also from the point of view of the collective habits, experiences, customs, controls, and values of the whole group – the community traditions."[186] Alinsky insisted on using tactics that resonated with community culture. For example, in *Rules for Radicals,* Alinsky spends several pages outlining how to incorporate natural body functions, such as the smells and sounds of farting, into organizing work.[187] Not only were such strategies enjoyable to participants, they also challenged existing norms of appropriate behavior in and outside of political engagement.[188]

Despite being a poor person's organization, the early IAF did engage the middle class through its professional staff of mostly white, male organizers.[189] As outsiders to the community itself, organizers stood outside the social networks of the neighborhood. As a result, they could challenge existing dysfunction and push past old grievances more easily that insiders could, since they had no relational stake in the conflict. Aaron Schultz and Marie G. Sandy note that often "internal conflict and histories of mistrust generally keep a community from presenting a unified face to the outside world…By focusing leaders on the predations of their collective enemies, the

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[185] Swarts, *Organizing Urban America*, 53.
[186] Alinsky, *Reveille for Radicals*, 76.
[187] Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 139.
[188] Leondar-Wright affirms the appeal of such irreverent tactics today, finding that short-term pleasures, such as humor and food, are important for the continued involvement of working-class activists in her own work. Leondar-Wright, *Missing Class*, 102.
[189] Schutz and Sandy, *Collective Action for Social Change*, 103. Alinsky himself had a middle-class background and was highly educated.

organizer sought to overcome divisions, and allow the community to come together as an 'us' vs. an outside 'them.'"[190] In addition, as outsiders to the working-class background of leaders, middle-class organizers had less direct experience with pressing community issues and tended to be more confident about the possibility of change.[191] These organizers brought competence in civic skills and optimism about engaging existing democratic systems, which proved valuable for the working-class leaders, who would learn those skills through the work.

Nevertheless, the middle-class background of an organizer within a predominately working-class organization was not without cost. The unequal power dynamics between the middle class and working class were often replicated rather than overcome in the organizer-leader interaction. As Swarts notes, deference to experts is a significant challenge when engaging with the working class.[192] Likewise, deference to a professional organizer, the expert on community organizing methods, can be difficult to overcome. Early IAF organizing efforts have been critiqued as highly top down, with organizers often "leading" by deciding on the next issue on which to focus rather than focusing on the leaders themselves.[193] When the leaders were unable, because of skill or time, to do something themselves, Alinsky supported temporary leadership from the organizer, rather than maintaining the intended role of teacher and agitator.[194] In his view, forward momentum on the issue was of primary importance, not just because its achievement would broadly benefit the community but because Alinsky believed that leaders learn through activity, even if they only in a supporting role.

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[190] Schutz and Sandy, *Collective Action for Social Change*, 97.
[191] In *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace — Or War,* Mary B. Anderson offer a similar observation about the positive role an outsider/outside agency can offer for those consumed by local conflict. Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid can Support Peace – Or War* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999).
[192] Swarts, *Organizing Urban America*, 53.
[193] Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 51.
[194] Schutz and Sandy, *Collective Action for Social Change*, 105.

Understanding the class dynamics of early community organizing helps to contextualize Alinsky's approach. Alinsky's adaptive, resistive tactics were not intended as stable, formative activities to be reenacted across diverse situations or shape participants. In fact, Alinsky lamented that organizers would attempt to reproduce the tactics he described in *Reveille for Radicals* in their own work. He observed "there can be no prescription for particular situations because the same situation rarely recurs, any more than history repeats itself."[195] Tactics were meant to enable the Have-Nots to take their fair share of "power away from the Haves" in specific situations.[196] Because many of those involved already held justice-oriented convictions about citizenship, the formative work intended by later CBCO rituals was less important. Instead, Alinsky's primary concern was winning a place at the table for the poor, and through doing so, to reform political decision-making through their meaningful participation.

Until his death in 1972, Alinsky and IAF continued to expand into new communities. Ultimately, Alinsky realized that community organizing could not continue simply as a program of the poor for the poor. The relative prosperity of post-war America, at least for the white working class, meant that there were not enough persons to mobilize for change on a purely class basis.[197] Alinsky noted: "One thing I've come to realize…is that any positive action for radical social change will have to be focused on the white middle class, for the simple reason that this is where the real power lies."[198] Since a great number of Americans were, by the time of his death,

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[195] Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 138.
[196] Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 126. The Haves and Have-Nots rhetoric is a powerful rallying cry but can also obscure the complexity of oppression. "When it comes to social inequality, people's lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by the many axes that work together and influence each other." Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality: Key Concepts* (Boston: Polity, 2016), 2.
[197] Texts such as Jefferson R. Cowie's *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class*, suggest the influence of history on this decision. Jefferson R. Cowie, *Stayin' Alive: The 1970s and the Last Days of the Working Class* (New York: The New Press, 2012).
[198] Schutz and Sandy, *Collective Action for Social Change*, 68.

middle class, or at least thought of themselves this way, enlisting them in the work was necessary in creating broad popular support to secure the changes pursued by community organizing groups.[199] Alinsky saw it would be necessary to push the middle class— the "Have-a-little, Want Mores" —to recognize the full extent of their economic vulnerability and ally themselves with the Have-Nots against the Haves.[200] Yet Alinsky did not propose a shift in strategy but focused on how to adapt the existing approach to appeal to the middle class. For example, while tactics such as tying up O'Hare Airport's bathrooms would likely turn off the middle-class because of its "aversion to rudeness, vulgarity, and conflict," activities such as wholesale buying and returning of merchandise or the use of stock proxies would not.[201] Alinsky believed that direct engagement with those in power would radicalize the middle class and more transgressive tactics might end up recruiting new members by introducing "drama and adventure into the tedium of middle-class life."[202]

Though Alinsky recognized the need for community organizing to adapt, specifically through enfranchising the middle class, it was IAF's second generation that significantly changed the community organizing model and shaped CBCO as recognized today.[203] A shift

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[199] "When more than three-fourths of our people are from both the point of view of economics and of their self-identification are middle class, it is obvious that their action or inaction will determine the direction of change." Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 184.
[200] Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 19.
[201] Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 195. See pp. 142–44 for a full account of the O'Hare Airport tactic and pp. 146–48 for the organized shopping tactic. Both tactics were threatened but did not end up being employed – the threat was enough to secure the victory. The chapter "The Genesis of Tactic Proxy" gives an overview of the successful use of stock proxies against Kodak.
[202] Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 195.
[203] Although IAF, in its second generation, changed the way that community organizing is generally undertaken in this country by initiating the contemporary CBCO model, the earlier Alinsky model still exists. The now defunct, secular ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now) shared much with Alinsky's earlier community organizing efforts. It focused on mobilizing individuals within certain neighborhoods, rather than enlisting institutional membership, and tended to use more polarizing strategies in its efforts. In addition, the critique that Alinsky's early efforts were too top-down, too driven by the priorities of professional staff, has also been leveled at ACORN. Swarts' *Organizing Urban America* offers a thorough comparison between the secular community organizing and CBCO models. Moreover, there are three national networks, in addition to IAF, which work from a similar CBCO model. All three emerged after Alinsky's death: PICO National Network in 1972 (https://www.piconetwork.org/about/history), DART in 1982 (http://thedartcenter.org/about/about/), and the

towards middle-class participation changed how CBCO approached its work. Though specific tactics are used from time to time, CBCO primarily relies on its alternative political rituals to secure social change and focuses on systemic reform. Most significantly, CBCO emphasizes issues of formation and prioritizes the cultivation of new leaders in a way that Alinsky never did. Whereas Alinsky relied on already identified community leaders and justice-oriented formation of those involved, CBCO cultivates new leadership, which includes enlisting middle-class participants who might hold participatory instincts about political engagement. Before I describe the three rituals that make up the CBCO repertoire—1-1s, research meetings, and actions—I offer a broader look at the changes instituted after Alinsky.

Especially under the guidance of IAF executive director Edward T. Chambers and IAF organizer Ernesto Cortés, Jr., institutional structure and institutions, such as religious bodies, became more important in CBCO.[204] Institutional structures that supported local organizing work were strengthened as local groups formally affiliated with the national network. National networks enabled coordination between distinct local organizing groups, often necessary for state

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Gamaliel National Network in 1986 (http://gamaliel.org/about-us/). All four networks draw inspiration from one another. Part of my training as a community organizer at PICO included learning an oral history about its role in developing this new CBCO model. José Carrasco was credited as primarily responsible for PICO's shift from organizing around neighborhoods to organizing through religious bodies. Wood confirms the leadership of Carrasco and the generative interactions that occurred between national networks. He writes, " Dr. José Carrasco…remains a key intellectual strategist and visionary within PICO, previously had contract with the Industrial Areas Foundation, which has begun to elaborate on a model for closer collaboration with churches, based on the 1970s experience of COPS, its federation in San Antonio, Texas. Thus, some precedent existed for moving in this direction, and PICO learned from IAF's experience." Richard L. Wood, *Faith in Action: Religion, Race, and Democratic Organizing in America* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 292. Ernesto Cortés, Jr. founded Communities Organized for Public Service (COPS) in 1974.

[204] The shift in organizing approach might be partially attributed to the changing religious and racial demographics of leadership. Whereas Alinsky understood and presented himself as a "Jewish agnostic," Ed Chambers was an ex-seminarian. Moreover, Ernesto Cortés, Jr. was "drawn to the IAF out of the same sense of moral outrage that has inspired many Mexican-American activists." Nicholas Von Hoffman, *Radical: A Portrait of Saul Alinsky* (New York: Nation Books, 2010), 108; Benjamin Marquez, "Standing for the Whole: The Southwest Industrial Areas Foundation on Identity and Mexican-American Politics," *Social Service Review* (September 2000): 459.
In addition, these shifts might also reflect a response to larger societal changes. Wood, for example, notes that in the early 1980s, PICO began to work more closely with religious institutions because they were "the only institutions that still thrived at all, besides gangs." Wood, *Faith in Action*, 292–93.

level issues, and ensured consistent formal training for all leaders, regardless of local affiliation.[205] Still, emphasis stayed and still remains on local control and agency. While almost all CBCO groups today affiliate with one of the four national networks, they autonomously select and engage social issues in their organizing work.[206] Similarly, an organizer will work in and connect multiple congregations, providing necessary training to involved leaders so that they are able to undertake the organizing work themselves, and facilitating local collaboration between congregations if identified issues overlap.

At the time, promotion of strong institutional structure was vital for the creation and legitimization of the CBCO method, or what I've classified as CBCO's alternative rituals of political participation. Ernesto Cortés was particularly important in developing the CBCO approach to social change.[207] Focused on building an independent political organization of the poor, Alinsky and early organizers tended to rely heavily on those already recognized as leaders within each community to secure consistent victories on various issues. Much of the training focused on tactics and strategy, rather than systematic identification and cultivation of new leaders within the community. Although Alinsky aimed to interrupt dysfunctions within communities that prevented powerful collective action, the exclusion of women and certain

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[205] All four networks offer intensive national training opportunities. This is not required for all leaders but viewed as an opportunity to strengthen burgeoning leadership. Most of my interviewees had attended National Training with Gamaliel but not all. Early in my organizing career, I was sent to participate in PICO's Training. This is not an uncommon practice for new hires. According to a Gamaliel organizer (and what I can remember from my own experience almost a decade ago), trainings are pretty standard across organizations. Wood writes "A variety of training sessions serve to develop leaders' relational, analytic, political, and public speaking skills. Training occurs briefly during regular organizational meetings, more substantially during periodic half-day or daylong workshops, and very intensively during national leadership retreats. Many trainings are quite participative, employing pedagogical techniques pioneered by Paulo Freire in Brazil but now commonly used in adult education worldwide." Wood, *Faith in Action*, 169.

[206] This commitment to decentralized power has been challenged in recent years as national networks become more directive towards local organizations. Part of this is due to increased work on national issues and the need to coordinate between different groups. .

[207] The story is mixed here. In *Resurrecting Democracy*, Bretherton credits Ed Chambers with development of the "relational meeting." Regardless, the 1-1 was not a creation of Alinsky and emerged later in CBCO. Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, 122.

minority populations in leadership often persisted. In contrast, Cortés and CBCO organizers who followed intentionally focused on identifying and equipping new leaders, often exploring the lay leadership network within churches.[208] Cortés formalized this effort by initiating 1-1s—intentional one-on-one meetings between a leader and a community member—which has become the bedrock of CBCO and its relational strategy for recruiting and mobilizing new members. Warren writes that,

> Rather than mobilize people around an issue, Cortes engaged people's value commitments to their community. He got community leaders to talk with each other about community needs first, before identifying an issue around which to act…Relational organizing worked to bring community leaders together to find a common ground for action and to develop the capacity to act in the interests of the broader community[209]

Pragmatically, 1-1s built up relational networks which enabled new overlooked leaders to emerge, often women. The use of 1-1s also garnered more significant buy-in from middle-class members, who were often not directly impacted by identified issues. By broadening their relational network, these leaders felt personally invested in some issues because someone they worked alongside or had talked to was directly impacted. Whereas Alinsky had proposed that the transgressive appeal of tactics might serve as a recruiting strategy for the middle class, CBCO relied on relational networks.

The growing number of middle-class leaders enabled new possibilities and brought new challenges. On the one hand, middle-class leaders, less immediately impacted by the issues addressed by CBCO groups and energized by overarching ideals, tended to stay involved even when "their" issue wasn't being worked on. As Leondar-Wright notes, the middle-class are often

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[208] This is enshrined in the CBCO principle "Organizers teach leaders – leaders organize." "PICO * Principles for Community Organizing," accessed April 15, 2018. http://www.piapico.org/docs/PICO_Principles.pdf.
[209] Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 51.

drawn into social change efforts because of ideas.[210] Working-class leaders, who were directly impacted by and committed to specific issues, continued to cycle in and out of involvement. The combination of episodic and permanent participants provided CBCO with a level of stability needed to adopt a more systemic approach, in which small skirmishes around specific injustices became part of a larger campaign of systematic change in democratic decision-making. On the other hand, middle-class participants tended to be less skeptical about established political processes and a justice-oriented approach to political participation could not be presumed but had to be developed. Unlike the sudden conversion moment Alinsky imagined, in which direct, tactical engagement with those in power would radicalize the middle class, CBCO relied on its rituals to dethrone the participatory instincts of its participants more gradually. The formal nature of CBCO rituals, for instance, encouraged a less familiar and more critical stance towards those in power.

In addition, in contrast to Alinsky's approach of cultivating short-term strategic relationships with churches ("repositories" of money and people), second generation CBCO leaders pursued long-term partnerships. Practically, this enabled regular access to funds in the form of membership dues, important to maintaining a professional organizing staff and national training program. With increased emphasis on cultivating new leaders, churches also provided a venue through which to engage justice-seeking persons who had not taken on leadership roles thus far. Moreover, Chambers, an ex-seminarian, recognized that churches held additional resources, such as religious language and concepts, which could sustain the difficult work.[211] Theological visions of a restored and just community might encourage involvement of those not directly affected by some issues. Such visions could also propel those who had long endured a

[210] Leondar-Wright, *Missing Class*, 103.
[211] Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 47.

specific social issue to take action, buoyed by hope that God intended something different for them. Finally, religious traditions could be leveraged to legitimize the CBCO approach as an extension of religious devotion. Richard L. Wood specifically notes the robust influence of "Catholic social teaching, African American social ministry, white Protestant social gospel, and Hispanic popular religiosity" in CBCO work.[212] Clergy commonly invoked Liberation Theology when I organized, and it also provided a vision and rationale for the work.

Even now, CBCO still retains aspects of Alinsky organizing, such as a fundamental conviction about the agency and ability of all people to address social problems. Moreover, the written teachings of Alinsky live on as guiding principles for CBCO work.[213] Yet, CBCO employs fundamentally different types of actions to pursue social justice. Instead of tactics, CBCO is rooted in teaching and performing distinctive rituals: 1-1s, research meetings, and actions.[214] Like other rituals of political participation, CBCO rituals can ensure practical outcomes. Yet, the formative outcomes made possible through CBCO rituals, such as the cultivation of particular tastes, modes of perception, virtue, and skills, are fundamental for fully appreciating CBCO. Collectively, CBCO rituals not only enable success on specific community issues but form justice-oriented citizens who are prepared to pursue systematic change of democratic institutions.

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[212] Wood, *Faith in Action*, 178.

[213] For example, the contemporary CBCO principle of "Stay with the experience of your people," mirrors Alinsky's second rule of power tactics, "Never go outside the experience of your people" In addition, the CBCO principle of "Push a negative far enough and you get a positive" reiterates Alinsky's eleventh rule, "If you push a negative hard and deep enough it will break through into its counterside." Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 127, 129. "PICO * Principles for Community Organizing," accessed April 15, 2018. http://www.piapico.org/docs/PICO_Principles.pdf.

[214] Alinsky might credit this shift to the influence of the middle class, or "Have-a-Little, Want Mores," whose "conflicting interests and contradictions" are the "genesis of creativity." Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 19.

During national training, CBCO rituals are frequently presented as part of a continuous cycle. The 1-1s serve as the inaugural ritual, with leaders often encouraged to conduct ten 1-1s before moving forward to research meetings. Research meetings occur when a CBCO group has discerned a particularly pressing issue. Depending on the complexity of the problem and the level of bureaucracy involved, several research meetings might take place. Actions occur once a particular corrective action and responsible agent have been identified through research meetings. Following the resolution of a specific issue, CBCO participants return to 1-1s to identify new leaders and new problems. The sequencing of CBCO rituals can be altered, if, for instance, a community crisis occurs, in which case research meetings and an action might precede 1-1s. However, each ritual is meant to build on the previous one, and the ordering of the coming pages reflects this. To introduce each CBCO ritual, I first contrast it with a more familiar social or political practice and name its practical purpose. Then, mirroring the ritual analysis I demonstrated in the previous chapter, I identify each rituals' structuring rules, forms of external legitimization, and formative outcomes, which include taste, mode of perception, virtue, and skill.

The 1-1s[215]

To the uninitiated, a 1-1 can look like a short, ordinary visit between two friends.[216] It often takes place at a coffee shop or in someone's home. No pen and paper or voice recorder is used to document the meeting; food and drink are commonplace. However, a couple things mark this meeting as something different. First, 1-1s usually involve casual acquaintances or strangers who are part of the same congregation or neighborhood, rather than friends. The CBCO leader or

[215] Alternatively called one-on-ones, one-to-ones, 1-1 visits, 1-1 meetings.
[216] Depending on family circumstances, 1-1s may include the leader/organizer and a married couple or the leader/organizer and a whole extended family. The 1-1 ratio is often ideal for building a relationship but cultural and family norms determine the encounter.

organizer deliberately reaches out to an unknown or not-well-known individual with whom they share some connection in order to begin building a new relationship. Second, 1-1s involve little to no small talk, and dive almost directly into important topics such as family, community, and worries about the future. The CBCO leader or organizer does most of the listening, intent on understanding what community issues might matter most to this other person and offering opportunities to pursue that change. Often these concerns are deeply personal. In my first 1-1, for example, I sat down with a woman who had long financially supported AFACT but whom I had not met previously. Over chocolate cake and coffee, I learned that her family had been deeply affected by drug addiction and that the lack of adequate and that affordable drug treatment programs in the community was her primary concern. I knew then that should the CBCO ever tackle that issue, she would be actively involved in that effort.

These 1-1s are often described as intentional visits or structured conversations that identify and recruit new leaders as well as lift up pressing community issues on which people want to act. A handout passed out at an ABLE leadership training notes succinctly: "The goals of a One-to-One are to identify other leaders; to understand their hopes and concerns for themselves, their associations and the broader public areas; to estimate which of these they would be willing to act upon in concert with others."[217] These 1-1s are typically thirty minutes in length and involve the face-to-face interaction between the CBCO leader and a community member.[218] Practically, 1-1s enable CBCO groups to claim the power of "organized people," a vast network of individuals and families who support its work directly or indirectly. The more

[217] John Norton (Gamaliel), "One-to-One" (handout, ABLE Spring Leadership Training, Atlanta, GA, April 16, 2016).

[218] Organizers also do extensive 1-1s, possibly hundreds, depending on the size of the congregation. In addition to identifying possible new leaders and community concerns, organizers do 1-1s to understand the congregation culture, listening to the concerns of existing lay leadership (who often do not become involved but are influential enough to undermine organizing efforts), and keep an ear out for congregation issues to alert pastors/priests about possible areas of concern. Even with these additional tasks, organizers abide by the same 1-1 rules.

people that CBCO groups engage and represent, the more receptive decision-makers are likely to be to their demands for social change. Because of this, all leaders are expected to conduct 1-1s, particularly before starting to address a specific community issue.

Like other rituals of political participation, 1-1s involve a distinct set of repeated actions, which are subject to rules, are externally legitimized, and generate formative outcomes. Understanding the three rules which structure 1-1s is perhaps the easiest entry into understanding its ritual character. First, 1-1s start with a credential, a formal introduction briefly outlining who you are (e.g. who you represent – either your pastor or the organization) and what you want (e.g. 30 minutes to hear about community concerns). This credential enables individuals to sit down with complete strangers, who rightly want to know why they should give this person time, but also sets the tone for visits with those they may already know. This is a public visit, focused on discovering mutual interests, rather than a friendly get-to-know you or therapy session.[219]

Second, 1-1s involve open-ended, probing questions to enable deep, intentional listening. While the person conducting a 1-1 may share a little of themselves and their reasons for involvement, the focus is on the person visited: What concerns this person? What issues directly impact them and their loved ones? What might be so important as to get them to seek social change? A Gamaliel training handout suggests a number of places to begin: life story, family, occupation, avocation, faith, politics, associations, neighborhood, congregation, plans for

[219] By public, CBCO mean relationships that are based on mutual self-interest and reciprocal responsibilities. Most of our relationships function this way. In contrast, private relationships are those we reserve for close friends and immediate family. Affection and sometimes disproportionate giving mark these relationships. The distinction is important for CBCO work as it allows leaders to work alongside other individuals or enlist certain politicians who they may not like for the sake of a common goal. For a fuller account, see Luke Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy: Faith, Citizenship, and the Politics of a Common Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 145–46.

future, obstacles, personal gifts.[220] The issues of concern might be surprising, both to the person talking, who may never have been asked such questions, and the person listening.

Third, 1-1s end with an invitation, either to join the organization while it pursues a better community or to support the organization if and when it addresses one of the concerns mentioned by the one visited. This is key to ensuring that CBCO doesn't fall into advocacy. Those impacted are challenged to participate in some way to ensure the change they desire is enacted. For example, it was at least six months before my organization was able to hold a public meeting on expanding Denali KidCare, Alaska's Children's Health Insurance Program, the primary concern of a young Hispanic man I had visited. He was not involved in any of the steps leading up to the meeting, but he did show up with his wife and three young children to offer the most powerful testimony at the meeting. Without the 1-1 visit and follow up call, it would have been unlikely that he would have spoken publicly about his need for Denali KidCare. Finally, although leaders do personalize elements of the 1-1s, such as the wording of the credential or questions, inclusion of each of the aforementioned steps is necessary for the ritual to occur.

Like other rituals, 1-1s are externally legitimized in several ways. Practically, this legitimization is important because 1-1s are difficult to do in that they demand time and courage from both parties, and to some common visions of social change they may appear gratuitous. For instance, activists often prioritize building relationships with elected officials rather than other community members because it is more expedient. For those that do see the value of "organized people," 1-1s might seem unnecessary since they are generally not part of the labor organizing repertoire nor early Alinsky-style community organizing. Yet, 1-1s are continually and explicitly legitimated as foundational to the tradition of CBCO. In short, 1-1 instruction is a central

[220] John Norton (Gamaliel), "One-to-One" (handout, ABLE Spring Leadership Training, Atlanta, GA, April 16, 2016).

element in all introductory trainings, in which the distinctive form of the ritual is continually emphasized. One's authority as a leader is not grounded in generic "leadership skills," but rather in how well one knows the community and how deep that support runs (e.g. will people show up to a public event to support the work or the leader if asked). This understanding of leadership is explicitly stated in the CBCO principle "Leaders have followers."[221]

The legitimacy of 1-1s is also affirmed by appeals to religious traditions and language, or "sacral symbolism" to use Bell's concept, contributed by involved clergy or organizers. For instance, Dennis A. Jacobsen, a pastor heavily involved in the Gamaliel organization, invokes the writings of Martin Buber and Teilhard de Chardin as well as Scriptural stories of Jesus to signify the religious and spiritual character of building intentional relationships through the 1-1s.[222] These "sacred conversations," Jacobsen claims, are vital in enabling one to recognize the "image of God in the other."[223] Likewise, Lew Finfer, a community organizer affiliated with PICO, invokes the Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam* to suggest that 1-1s enact the work of repairing the world by "connecting the sparks of the Divine that are housed in two different people."[224] The invocation of sacral symbolism can be quite meaningful for practitioners and serve as a guiding norm for the aspects of the ritual not fully dictated, such as who they seek to engage or which questions they ask.

These 1-1s, structured by rules and legitimized by various traditions and sacral symbolism, are more than just useful in building the power of "organized people." Consistently employed, 1-1s enable certain formative outcomes in its participants, and alongside the rituals of

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[221] "PICO * Principles for Community Organizing" accessed April 15, 2018. http://www.piapico.org/docs/PICO_Principles.pdf.
[222] Jacobsen, *Doing Justice*, 63.
[223] Jacobsen, *Doing Justice*, 62.
[224] Lew Finfer, "Organizing in the Jewish Community," accessed March 31, 2018, www.mcan-oltc.org/docs/finfer_jewish_community.doc.

research meetings and actions they have formative consequences for the democratic institutions engaged.[225] Those formative outcomes of 1-1s center around cultivating a particular type of leadership. Often, we think of leaders as charismatic, persuasive, and most of all, autonomous.[226] Consider how Martin Luther King Jr. is typically abstracted from the larger leadership context of the Civil Rights Movement, which included Ella Baker and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Yet it is the 1-1s that first develop practitioners' *taste* for collective and collaborative leadership.[227] For a start, 1-1s counter the association of leadership with skilled speech by affirming the value of listening in the structure of the ritual itself. The ratio 30/70 for talking/listening is regularly mentioned in 1-1 trainings. Moreover, 1-1s conclude with an invitation that signals that change depends on collective effort and community relationships.

In addition, 1-1s challenge a *mode of perception* common to many social change efforts, one which focuses attention on the leadership of public officials and experts to identify community problems and offer solutions. By closely attending to the stories and experiences of community members, 1-1s redirect attention to the descriptions and priorities of ordinary people. Their knowledge and their leadership matter most. Moreover, 1-1s affirm the *virtue* of collaboration by opening the ritual with a credential and closing with an invitation. Not only are community members explicitly invited to participate in the social justice work, but the leader

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[225] Because of its formative potential, paying attention to constitutive parts that make up a 1-1 is essential. Luke Bretherton underestimates 1-1s when he reduces it to intentional listening and an act of "Christian hospitality." While listening is an important aspect to the ritual of 1-1s, it must be understood in the context of the entire ritual, which couples hospitality with accountability, evidenced by the credential and invitation aspects. Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 103.

[226] Our political leaders often portray themselves in this way as well. For example, to secure the 2008 Republican nomination, John McCain regularly presented himself as "a 'maverick' who offers 'straight talk' instead of pandering to his party or the public." Barker and Carman, "Yes WE Can or Yes HE Can?, 439.

[227] Although 1-1 rituals involve two parties, the CBCO leader and the community member visited, I will only consider the formative possibilities for the leader. Formation usually requires, at the very least, repetition to take hold. Leaders will conduct a number of 1-1s while those visited will likely only participate once. In addition, the person visited takes a relatively passive role in the ritual. That said, people can experience conversion after a single encounter.

presents herself as a representative of a larger group. Finally, 1-1s offer leaders disciplined practice in the *skill* of building relationships and social networks. Lack of competency in recruiting interested and invested people to community efforts is a common refrain within social change work. These 1-1 rituals offer a framework through which individuals can develop such social skills.

To appreciate the significance of cultivating collective and collaborative leadership, Betsy Leondar-Wright's work is helpful. She observes that working-class activists tend to associate leadership with robust relational networks while middle-class activists judge leadership by the quantity and quality of one's speech at meetings.[228] In other words, by promoting listening and community collaboration, 1-1s seek to cultivate leadership that better reflects working-class dispositions. P. K. Piff et al., suggest that the "prosocial" orientation of the "lower class citizens" is due to experiences of less personal control and dependence "on others to achieve desired outcomes."[229] In contrast, collective and collaborative leadership can be less appealing and more difficult to achieve among middle-class and upper-class individuals who value independence highly as their "economic independence, elevated personal control, and freedoms of personal choice" making them less sensitive to and less adept at behaving in ways "that increase social engagement and connection with others."[230] As the following chapter will demonstrate, these and other factors complicate CBCO formation. For some practitioners, the tastes, modes of perception, virtues, and skills affirmed by 1-1s and other CBCO rituals will resonate with and reaffirm the existing formation they bring into the work. For others, the tastes,

[228] Leondar-Wright, *Missing Class*, 150.
[229] P. K. Piff, M. W. Kraus, S. Côté, B. H. Cheng, & D. Keltner, "Having less, giving more: The influence of social class on prosocial behavior," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 99(5), (2010): 771.
[230] Piff et al., "Having less, giving more," 772.

modes of perception, virtues, and skills privileged by this and other rituals will contrast with their current formation.

Research Meetings[231]

At first glance, a research meeting—the second of CBCO's rituals— resembles lobbying or a constituent meeting. It usually takes place at government offices with a government employee or elected official. Carrying pencil and paper, a small group of leaders discuss an area of concern with a person who aids in the government operations or has decision-making power. Unlike lobbying, research meetings generally center on questions of policy and process, rather than presenting and advocating for specific solutions to a community problem. The CBCO leaders use research meetings to understand how government currently works, what possible alternatives are available to address a particular issue, and to gain insight into the interests of the government employee or elected official. For example, I once accompanied leaders on a meeting with a mid-level employee in city waste management. At the time, the leaders were concerned with the overflowing dumpsters that lined several of the streets around the church. Armed with carefully considered questions, we came out of that meeting with a good sense of the city's methods and responsibilities for trash pickup as well as an ally in waste management. It took several more months for us to determine the appropriate action we would take to address this problem.

Practically, research meetings are vital in crafting a strategy to address a community concern. Wood writes "the goal here is to learn more about the issue, possible ways to address it, obstacles to doing so, and ultimately to 'cut the issue' by generating a concrete proposal and identifying who holds the authority to put this proposal into practice."[232] Community issues are

[231] Sometimes termed Research Actions.
[232] Wood, *Faith in Action*, 41.

often complex and research meetings provide leaders with a greater sense of what the issue is, how it can be remedied, and by whom. In addition, the face-to-face meeting with experts or decision-makers enable leaders to initiate relationships of partnership or accountability that might be leveraged later to solve the issue.

Like 1-1s, research meetings are scheduled in advance, are never undertaken alone but involve at least a few representatives of the organization, and observe three rules. First, research meeting are chaired by a leader, who initiates the meeting by stating a credential (e.g. who we are, what we hope to learn) and to whom the rest of the leaders defer over the course of the meeting. This role is sometimes asserted non-verbally as the leader serving as chair will attempt to secure a place of authority around the table or within the meeting room. By chairing, the meeting addresses the concerns of the CBCO group rather than the person visited, although the hope is that the laudatory professional goals of the person visited will coincide with the priorities of the CBCO group. Invoking the credential supports this aim by reminding all present that the CBCO group represents and is responsible to many community members.

Second, the meeting is heavily scripted, filled with pre-planned questions. Each leader is given a role to play, which is determined by their current ability and aimed at encouraging growth. The focus is on discovering how things already work around a particular issue as well as imagining alternatives. The expertise of the person visited is acknowledged but so too are the limitations that sometimes accompany being part of a bureaucracy. Like 1-1s, open-ended questions are encouraged, though more focused questions are used as needed. All questions also aid to demystify how political decisions are made.

Third, the person visited is issued an invitation, usually to attend a future CBCO action around the issue discussed. Though leaders in attendance may have a good sense of what needs

to be done to address the community issue and whether the expert or decision-maker would support such an action, official commitments are not generally sought. An invitation to a future event allows leaders time to reflect independently and consult with those CBCO members who did not attend the research meeting. The best course of action is decided internally, and public officials are invited to partner in making the necessary changes only after such discussions have taken place.

Research meetings are legitimized in several ways, primarily calling on ideals of the Western democratic tradition and early community organizing.[233] Like the more traditional forms of engagement, such as lobbying, research meetings are affirmed as valid because citizens have the right to contact their elected officials. A "government by the people, for the people" ought to be receptive to multiple forms of engagement pursued by its citizenry. Additionally, CBCO appeals to the larger community organizing tradition. Though Alinsky employed tactics rather than rituals in his own work, his engagement with decision-makers always privileged the needs of ordinary people over those in power.[234] Research meetings continue this legacy as they require little or no preexisting knowledge and enable leaders to learn about democratic processes as they participate.[235] In contrast, the onus of knowledge and persuasion is often placed on constituents when lobbying.

Research meetings are also legitimized by appeals to religious tradition, though to a lesser extent than 1-1s. For instance, Jacobsen draws analogies between the story of twelve spies

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[233] Both Alinsky's *Reveille for Radicals* and *Rules for Radicals* regularly invoke democratic ideals and the work of founding fathers to justify the ideology and methodology of community organizing.

[234] For example, Alinsky's second rule of power tactics, "Never go outside the experience of your people" was followed by, "Whenever possible go outside the experience of the enemy." Alinsky*, Rules for Radicals*, 127.

[235] It not uncommon for leaders to meet their elected officials for the first time through research meetings. As such, sometimes the social norms expected for such encounters may need to be explicitly laid out. Bretherton notes that the organizers he shadowed mentioned appropriate dress code to leaders as part of their prep for a research meeting. Pre-planning the agenda together also helps develops the organizational and communication skills expected by citizens when they engage with public officials. Bretherton, *Resurrecting Democracy*, 115.

in Numbers 13 and research meetings. Like these spies, CBCO leaders are sent to explore a "foreign land" to see how a better life might be won for the community and subsequently report back to the entire group for next steps. This biblical story contains a cautionary tale, for ten of the twelve spies mythologize the resources of the foreigners and denigrate their own abilities.[236] This timidity initiated forty years of desert wandering instead of immediate entry into the Promised Land. Research meetings are thus framed as enabling CBCO groups to pursue without delay the justice God intends.

Research meetings also generate formative outcomes.[237] While 1-1 formation cultivates collective and collaborative leadership, research meetings express and enact a specific vision of power. Following Alinsky, power has been defined as the ability to act within CBCO in contrast to its close association "with corruption and immorality" in the US.[238] Implicit within this notion of power is that one's ability—and right—to act exceeds the role normally assigned.[239] Within the CBCO context, power insists that political decision-making ought to include a more equitable relationship between the governed and governing bodies, and engage citizens more extensively. A *taste* for this democratized power develops through the enactment of research meeting, in which public officials are engaged as equal partners on community issues rather than as patrons

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[236] Jacobsen, *Doing Justice*, 74.

[237] Although research meetings involve more than CBCO leaders, I will focus on the formative possibilities for elected officials or experts. Again, formation usually requires, at the very least, repetition to take hold. One limitation to addressing various community issues is that CBCO groups will interact with many different people instead of dealing with a select number responsible for a single issue, public education for instance. However, the consistent use of CBCO rituals broadly with government agents and institutions will have formative impact.

[238] Alinsky*, Rules for Radicals*, 50-51. Also, CBCO principle: "Power is the ability to act." "PICO * Principles for Community Organizing," accessed April 15, 2018. http://www.piapico.org/docs/PICO_Principles.pdf.

[239] Alice Walker's description of womanist captures this understanding of power. "From *womanish*…Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being gown up….Responsible. In charge. *Serious."* Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens,* Reprint edition (Wilmington: Mariner Books, 2003), xi.

whose favor needs to be won. Each element of the research meeting ritual (e.g. chairing a meeting, asking for information, inviting partnership) asserts this authority.

In addition, the ritual of research meetings develops a *mode of perception* which illuminates and demystifies power, not only how it might be embodied by leaders but also how it is asserted by those in public office and the political-decision making process more generally. For instance, ABLE leaders sensitive to power dynamics noted how public officials took advantage of seating arrangements and used staffers to limit direct access to maintain authority in specific encounters. Moreover, Swarts observes that working class activists often "see the technical or policy aspects of governance as bewildering and experts as the only people qualified to advocate specific solutions."[240] Through research meetings and direct engagement with experts on policy matters, leaders perceive how decision-making works and what they might contribute. This close attention can also illuminate the limits of expert insight and the possibilities of alternative action, obscure from afar.

The rituals of research meetings cultivate a collective *virtue* of accountability or a sense of responsibility "to act in a transparent, fair, and equitable way" in public affairs,[241] this in contrast to what Bovens notes about the frequency with which the virtue of accountability is invoked within US political discourse without actually being carried out. He consequently emphasizes the importance of various institutional arrangements that encourage greater accountability, such as public account giving processes like truth commissions.[242] Although CBCO groups may seek institutional accountability mechanisms as part of their issue work,

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[240] Swarts, *Organizing Urban America*, 50.
[241] Bovens "Two Concepts of Accountability," 949.
[242] Bovens observes, "accountability as a mechanism is in fact instrumental in achieving accountable governance. Accountability arrangements assure that public officials or public organizations remain on the virtuous path." Bovens, "Two Concepts of Accountability," 954.

CBCO rituals focus on internalizing this virtue in the process of political engagement, evidence of democratized power. Internalizing this virtue, leaders take on a more active, responsible role in political decision-making, gathering information and inviting partnership from elected officials. Over time, research meetings also cultivate greater accountability from those in positions of authority by expecting a high level of responsiveness and equity in the encounter. [243]

Political scientist Christopher Jan Carman offers insight into why cultivating accountability through research meetings might be so important, a necessary complement to institutional changes. He observes that though many citizens and scholars treat "as if it were axiomatic" that elected officials act in strict accordance with constituent will, or the "mandate model of representation," multiple preferences about political representation abound.[244] However, due to the variety of preferences that citizens hold, elected official receive mixed messages about whether they ought to be led by their own conscience or be guided by the will of constituents.[245] Research meetings clearly signal the importance of constituent-based representation and seek to make that the norm.

Finally, since pursuit of democratized power can involve conflict or tension, the ritual of research meetings cultivates the auxiliary *virtue* of courage on the part of leaders.[246] Research meetings also develop civic *skills,* such as the competence and confidence to chair a meeting, without which one risks further marginalization in current decision-making processes.

Actions[247]

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[243] "Power respects power." "PICO * Principles for Community Organizing," accessed April 15, 2018. http://www.piapico.org/docs/PICO_Principles.pdf.
[244] Carman, "Assessing Preferences for Political Representation in the US," 3.
[245] For more on how preferences about representation map onto demographics, see Carman's "Assessing Preferences for Political Representation in the US" and Barker and Carman' "Yes WE Can or Yes HE Can?"
[246] The CBCO principle is: "Power is taken, not given." "PICO * Principles for Community Organizing," accessed April 15, 2018. http://www.piapico.org/docs/PICO_Principles.pdf.
[247] Sometimes called accountability sessions.

Actions, the third form of CBCO ritual, are large, hour-long public meetings which are sponsored, organized, and moderated by CBCO leaders, and commonly held in church sanctuaries outside of worship times. An analog might be a candidates' forum, in which those running for office are seated at the front of the sanctuary, facing the people in the pews, and are given an opportunity to speak to those gathered about how they will address a range of issues.[248] Like the previous two rituals, actions differ from more familiar forms of political engagement. First, actions are oriented around securing commitments on specific issues from already elected public officials or government employees instead of seeking general election promises from candidates. Candidates at a forum are often asked to speak on a variety of topics, some preselected by the sponsoring organization and others emerging from the audience. In actions, the meeting focuses on a particular community issue, introduced at the beginning of the meeting, which shapes all other meeting aspects, from public testimony to responses from public officials. Second, candidates' forums generally allot the majority of speaking time to the candidates themselves. This makes sense as the purpose is for the community to glean as much information about the candidates as possible before voting. By contrast, in actions public officials are given very little time to speak. Most of the time is reserved for the leaders to describe the community problem and possible solutions, and for those gathered to testify about how their lives have been impacted by the relevant issue. The purpose here is to provide the public official with an opportunity to listen and respond to the community needs. Third, the use of the church sanctuary in the action is intentional, rather than a matter of convenience. Churches are often used for

[248] Such CBCO groups sometimes do sponsor Candidates Forums. While CBCO groups are willing and able to engage any elected official on any topic, electing a candidate already supportive of community needs can make the work easier. However, CBCO groups are intentionally nonpartisan and do not throw their support behind any one person. Candidates' forums are undertaken as an act of service to CBCO congregations and communities as they provide members with access to future public officials.

candidates' forums because they easily accommodate a large number of people and are available many hours during the week. For actions, the church sanctuary sets the tone for the religious nature of the meeting. Prayer, Scripture readings, and religious music are prominently used throughout and reinforce this sense.

Practically, actions have two primary goals. First, ideally, the invited public official will commit to and subsequently enact the solution proposed by CBCO leaders. The community issue, which was raised in 1-1s and researched by leaders, will be addressed by the appropriate agent. Second, when an elected official follows through on commitments made at the action, the reputation of the organization will grow and enable the next effort. Often, CBCO groups gain easier access to public officials and government employees following a successful action, making work on more complex issues possible. Yet failure to achieve practical goals is more likely for actions than for 1-1s or research meetings. Probably this is because 1-1s and research meetings are relatively private rituals, involving only a handful of people at a time, and quite flexible about the persons they engage. Communities are dense with those impacted by social issues and various people study or implement government services, any of whom might provide expert insight. Actions, in contrast, are very public, with media outlets often in attendance, and they engage only the particular decision-maker(s) who can directly address the issue at hand. Because of their central role in securing practical policy changes, actions are especially important to consider in light of their formative aspects, which can occur even if the ritual seemingly fails.

Like other CBCO rituals, actions are highly structured, and observe three rules.[249] First, actions begin with a credential, given by the leader who is chairing the meeting. The authority of this role is often signaled by the leader's prime location, seated in the chair typically occupied by the pastor at the front of the sanctuary. The chairing leader is flanked by the leaders who have roles to play later in the event on the one side and by the invited decision-maker(s) on the other.[250] The credentialing process is usually two-fold. The chair first invites an involved clergy person to open the gathering in prayer, and only subsequently welcomes those gathered, informing them of the CBCO group's overall work and the purpose of the meeting. This credentialing process grounds the gathering as both a religious and community effort, one worthy of respect.

Second, actions establish facts about the lived reality of the community issue. Beginning with public testimony, actions encourage ordinary people to testify to their experience with the specific issue. For example, my first action as an organizer was focused on addressing chronic homelessness, a particular challenge for the downtown congregation. Homeless people were invited to testify first and did, followed by congregation members and finally service providers. Those most directly and personally impacted by an issue are given space to share their stories, albeit in a time-bound manner. Public testimony is put into context by the presentation of a research report put together by the CBCO group. In plain language, the research report educates those gathered about the nature of the problem and its possible solutions. Much of this information is gleaned from experts in research meetings but CBCO members present it. In

[249] The following three rules encapsulate the key features of actions as described by Wood. He writes that most actions involve an opening prayer, chair introduction, public testimony, research report, formal proposal, ask, closing summary and prayer. Wood, *Faith in Action*, 43.

[250] To this day, the invited decision-maker or public official is referred to as a target. The target language is both a holdover from Alinsky's more polarizing organizing style as well as a reminder to leaders, who may personally know and like the invited guest, that their allegiance is to needs of community members first.

presenting the relevant information themselves, leaders establish themselves as competent authorities on their community and community issues.

Third, actions invite public commitments from invited decision-makers. A formal proposal, outlining the nature of the commitment sought is offered by one of the leaders, to which the public official(s) is given a limited amount of time to respond. Often public officials will use this time to affirm the seriousness of the problem or contextualize why they are unable to act on this matter. Following this broad invitation to partner on this issue, the public official will be asked for specific concrete commitments by leaders. Leaders push for "Yes" and "No" answers from those officials because they aid in follow up and are easy to understand by those gathered. The commitments made are then summarized by the chair of the meeting and blessed by a closing prayer. This invitation is an exercise in accountability, at its best giving public officials the opportunity to pursue laudable action helped by community support. Public officials occasionally refuse to commit, but by doing so they have to face the immediate consequences of that choice, often a frustrated and angry gathering.[251]

Actions are legitimized much like research meetings, appealing to both Western democratic tradition and early community organizing. Again, the validity of more familiar political activities, such as candidates forms and town hall meetings, is appropriated for actions. Public servants ought to relish the opportunity to engage and work with involved citizenry. Again, like Alinsky's tactics, the distinctive structure of actions are justified as prioritizing the needs and contributions of the ordinary citizens, even if at the cost of public officials' comfort.

[251] I should note that invited guests are always fully informed well before the meeting of the commitments they will be asked to make. Because of this transparency on the part of CBCO groups, public officials have opted not to attend instead of publicly saying "no." Most CBCO groups prepare for this possibility and will dramatize their absence by keeping an empty chair in front of the gathering.

Moreover, religious language and concepts legitimize actions, particularly important as these rituals usually take place in holy spaces, unlike 1-1s and research meetings. The clergy I worked with regularly framed the public testimony at actions by referring to the prophet Nehemiah and the role lament played in rebuilding the post-exilic community.[252]Likewise, in "A New Covenant of Virtue: Islam and Community Organising," organizers appeal to the example of the Prophet and early Muslims, who "engaged in crafting their own agenda and taking pro-active action towards improving the conditions of the broader society" rather than "reacting to the agendas of others, responding to the government, the police or the local council."[253] Thus, actions put on full display the agenda and agency of CBCO groups rather than them simply participating in existing political forums, such as public testimony at a community council meeting.

Actions share similar formative outcomes to research meetings, which center on a particular understanding of power.[254] Swarts' account of actions describes several. She writes that "actions with authorities democratize power by mobilizing large numbers and by overturning deferential norms of interaction, insisting that authorities meet them on their turf, and by strictly controlling the agenda and how many minutes an official is allowed to speak."[255] With regular employment, action rituals can develop not only leaders' but regular participants' *taste* for democratized power and *modes of perception* to see power, recognizing and questioning

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[252] Womanist Emilie M. Townes affirms the value of communal lament in her own work, drawing on the book of Joel instead of Nehemiah. Emilie M. Townes, *Breaking the Fine Rain of Death: African American Health Issues and a Womanist Ethic of Care* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998).

[253] Ruhana Ali, Lina Jamoul, and Yusufi Vali, *A New Covenant of Virtue: Islam and Community Organising* (London: Citizens UK, 2012), 19. http://contendingmodernities.nd.edu/assets/Islam-and-Community-Organising-V3-singles.pdf.

[254] Because of the public nature of actions, I expand my formative discussion to include, at times, both CBCO leaders and community members who regularly attend these rituals. Like research meetings, actions have formative impact, particularly around cultivating the virtue of accountability in government agents and institutions through consistent use.

[255] Swarts, *Organizing Urban America*, 21.

the deferential norms of interaction expected by authorities as efforts to uphold unequal power dynamics.

In addition, actions cultivate a collective *virtue* of accountability, both in community members who testify on their own behalf about their experience with social issues and in leaders who are responsible for various roles in the action itself. They also cultivate courage, for public speaking can be daunting as can pressing for clear commitments from public officials. Actions also provide space for leaders to practice civic *skills* (public speaking, presenting information, chairing a meeting) and critical thinking *skills* in rendering complex issues understandable for those gathered. These are necessary skills for the robust, justice-oriented citizenship imagined and pursued in CBCO rituals.

Having investigated each of the three CBCO rituals individually, a few things become clear when considered collectively. First, each of the rituals alter existing social or political activities, in so doing suggesting an implicit critique. In 1-1s, the intimate, personal character of intentional listening is made public and political. The 1-1s suggest that citizens too often engage politically as autonomous individuals and undervalue resources that come from being part of communities.[256] Research meetings reimagine lobbying in a way that emphasizes the needs, contributions, and priorities of constituents, as do actions, which replace the more familiar town

[256] Political Scientist Robert Putnam has suggested something similar, noting that contemporary Americans have diminished social capital, which, in turn, has had negative impacts on our democratic structures. See Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). Moreover, Leondar-Wright has observed the benefit of an intentionally mixed-class social justice effort, as middle-class individuals might energize the social justice group with their "heightened sense of efficacy" while working-class individuals may demonstrate the power of subordinating "individual agendas to a greater solidarity." Leondar-Wright, *Missing Class*, 231.
Finally, William T. Cavanaugh has pointed out that atomized persons are easier to control, drawing on examples from his time in Chile under the rule of Pinochet. In response, Cavanaugh affirms the Church not just as a prophetic voice but also as a "body capable of gathering people in public spaces in a way that challenge[s] the atomization of social space." William T. Cavanaugh, "The Church in the Streets: Eucharist and Politics," *Modern Theology* 30:2 (April 2014): 390.

hall meeting. As such, research meetings and actions indicate that citizens can overvalue the role that political professionals (e.g. elected officials) have to play in addressing social issues and in turn strengthen a hierarchy between the governing and the governed, which diminishes accountability on everyone's part.[257] In each ritual, elements that contribute to injustice and flourish within established systems and structures are identified and strategically changed.

Second, the guiding rules of each ritual are quite similar and suggest a coherent approach to social change. For example, each CBCO ritual begins with a credential, which establishes the authority of this person or this group to engage in the work and ends with an invitation for collaboration. The consistent presence of invitation suggests that a common thread among the rituals is partnership. Partnership is one of those fraught concepts, particularly in the face of the power differentials which currently exist between ordinary citizens and their representatives, and it more often represents patronage, an unequal relationship dependent on the goodwill of the more powerful party. However, CBCO rituals collectively insist that partnership requires a level of accountability possible in relatively equal relationships and that, when it comes to political decision-making, the invitation ought to be extended to every person, even other ordinary citizens. The structural redundancy of these rituals points to shared formative intentions and seeks to ensure success.

Third, the formative outcomes differ slightly according to the primary interlocutor, recognizing that systemic change requires a two-fold approach. On the one hand, 1-1s engage community members and formation centers on relational leadership. A more just political process requires the cultivation of a certain type of leadership which sets certain expectations for

[257] Howard Zehr makes a similar observation, noting that the Western criminal justice system depends too heavily on professional attorneys and judges to secure justice and sidelines those directly affected, such as individuals and communities from the process. Zehr, *Changing Lens*, 80.

good citizenship. On the other hand, research meeting and actions involve government representatives and concentrate on democratizing power. These interactions demonstrate what good governance requires, both from elected officials and constituents. In this way, the patterns of behavior currently expected by governing institutions and continued by individuals are reimagined in a way that emphasizes participatory parity.

It is through the use of ritual thinking that the promising potential of CBCO is fully illuminated. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, CBCO's ritual repertoire of 1-1s, research meetings, and actions enable greater political participation by all citizens. Civic skills are not presumed but practiced and other expertise, such as building collaborative relationships, are affirmed. At the same time, CBCO rituals also critique and reconfigure participatory rituals and established processes that can contribute to participatory distortion. Enfranchisement of all citizens is prioritized in the pursuit of just public policy. Through CBCO, new justice-oriented citizens are developed, who reimagine the norms that govern political participation. By enabling such insights, ritual thinking makes visible the value of CBCO alternative rituals of political participation, which extend the mantle of enfranchised citizen to more people. By cultivating particular tastes, modes of perception, virtues, and skills, these discrete political rituals hold formative and structural promise.

In the next chapter, I continue my case study of CBCO by highlighting the experiences of one group: ABLE. Whereas a more theoretical investigation of CBCO's rituals illuminate their promising formative potential, a more contextual look into the real events and experiences of ABLE offer other valuable insights. Again, weaving in the language of citizenship and class, I use ritual thinking to highlight particular obstacles to justice-oriented formation promised in CBCO rituals. The lived experience of ABLE and its leaders illuminates the contingencies of

ritual formation and the challenges which have to be recognized and addressed. These learnings are vitally important for Christian ethicists if we are to craft a better response to structural injustice and the lack of participatory parity in our political decision-making process.

Chapter 4

Ritual Thinking and Challenges to CBCO Formation

In the previous chapter, I used ritual thinking to describe more fully the three CBCO rituals and illuminate their value in responding to the structural justice that persists in political participation. Such analysis made visible that these rituals do more than enable socially just outcomes: they also form justice-oriented citizens who exercise collective leadership and seek to democratize power. Consistently enacted, CBCO rituals critique injustice within established political structures and practices and encourage systemic reform, reimagining the relationship between the governed and governing. This is needed and valuable as participatory rituals of political participation can contribute to the *de facto* exclusion of certain populations from political decision-making and exacerbate participatory distortion.

In this chapter, I use the lens of ritual to identify possible obstacles to the promising justice-oriented formation intended through CBCO rituals. Though my case study is of CBCO more broadly, the particular experiences of one group, ABLE, prove illuminating on this question. As this chapter will demonstrate, ABLE was challenged by its complicated organizational history and the diverse citizenship orientations of those involved. These elements made the consistent use of CBCO rituals more difficult and consequently hindered the justice-oriented formation of participants. Thus ABLE's experience provides useful insights for Christian ethicists concerned with injustice and its persistence within forms of political participation.

Before delving into the central arguments of this chapter, I first need to offer some contextual background on ABLE. Having learned of ABLE early in 2015, I conducted

exploratory conversations with two involved clergy and a volunteer staff person in the fall of that year. Through these interactions, I was able to pull together a basic history of the organization, which I subsequently added to as I explored ABLE's public presence online and its coverage in scholarship. The heart of my research took place from January to June 2016 when I took part in ABLE's monthly leadership meetings and conducted hour-long interviews with various participants.

Two commitments guided how I approached my interaction with ABLE. First, having been a community organizer for several years, I wanted to learn about and highlight the experience of the average leader. Organizers are teachers, albeit ones who challenge and agitate, and benefit from deep engagement with their subject matter. This experience was vital in my analysis of CBCO rituals and their formative potential. Yet, this level of analysis did not allow me to understand and participate in the risks and struggles of leaders who learn the rituals incrementally and without the benefit of an organizer's broad experience and intensive professional training. For this reason, I limited my interviewee participants to leaders to appreciate and learn from that perspective. Second, my observations of leadership meetings and interviews with leaders centered around CBCO rituals, and more broadly, the mechanics of *how* social justice was pursued. During leadership meetings, I focused on how the meeting was organized, who took leadership roles, and what discussions, if any, took place around CBCO rituals. In my interviews, I prioritized the individual's understanding of CBCO rituals rather than exploring in depth their motivations for becoming involved with the work. To that end, I inquired not only about their training in and use of CBCO rituals but what skills or experiences they believed helped them in learning and performing these actions. [258]

[258] To read interview questions, see the Appendix.

An introduction to the object of my investigation, ABLE, is also important. Despite its establishment over twenty years ago, ABLE's history has been challenging to piece together. For one, ABLE has enjoyed little outside attention, is absent from most CBCO scholarship, and is rarely mentioned in local media. Thus far I have found only two monographs that reference ABLE in the text, rather than simply list it as one of the affiliates of this or that national network.[259] In addition, ABLE has changed affiliation with national CBCO networks and endured significant staff turnover through the years. Since outside attention and internal stability are both important for documenting and preserving organizational history, their absence makes offering a comprehensive account difficult.

Atlantans Building Leadership for Empowerment began in 1994 as a "interfaith, biracial organization," composed of seventy religious congregations, and the Atlanta affiliate of IAF (Industrial Areas Foundation).[260] Stephanie Block, in *Change Agents: Alinskyian Organizing Among Religious Bodies,* notes that there was great optimism surrounding ABLE in its early days, and that it was seen as a desirable model "for taking seriously the potential of faith communities to unite across race, religion and class" and address community issues.[261] Nevertheless, "ABLE took longer to get going than its supporters anticipated," hampered, in part, by negative regional attitudes to federal or national intervention. For example, ABLE's

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[259] These monographs are *Change Agents: Alinskyian Organizing Among Religious Bodies, Volume 2: Systemic Reform* and *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education*.

[260] Jeffrey R. Henig, Richard C. Hula, Marion Orr and Desiree S. Pedescleaux. *The Color of School Reform: Race, Politics, and the Challenge of Urban Education* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 142.
In a featured article, leader James Marble affirmed 1993/4 as ABLE's start date. "Meet James Marble," Gamaliel National Network, accessed June 13, 2017, http://www.gamaliel.org/LeaderSpotlight/tabid/326/PostID/478/Meet-James-Marble.aspx.
It remains unclear to me whether ABLE sought affiliation with IAF once a group of committed individuals become interested in community organizing or whether IAF was interested in establishing a presence in Georgia and encouraged the formation of ABLE from the beginning.

[261] Stephanie Block, *Change Agents: Alinskyian Organizing Among Religious Bodies, Volume 2: Systemic Reform.* (Madison: Spero Publishing, 2012), 206.

work towards educational reform overlapped with the passage of GOALS 2000: Education America Act in 1994, which had the support of various IAF affiliates and set new national standards for education.[262] et Georgia was one of six states that chose not to apply for GOALS 2000: Education America Act grants as Linda C. Shrenko, state school superintendent at the time, emphasized the importance of " 'a 100 percent Georgia' " school improvement plan.[263] Perhaps ABLE's work on educational reform was complicated by its affiliation with IAF, which nationally voiced support for greater federal involvement in schooling, since Georgia privileged state control at the time.

According to Block, around 2002 ABLE severed its relationship with IAF.[264] Long-term leader Ken challenges this account, suggesting that IAF may have hastened this termination by withdrawing institutional support for ABLE following a failed campaign. He noted that ABLE had started to decline as an organization in 2000 when its efforts to replicate a successful New York IAF project, the Nehemiah Housing Project, were "sandbagged and stonewalled and stalled" by Atlanta politicians.[265] Yet, IAF's distinct approach to CBCO might have contributed to the parting as well. One ABLE pastor suggested that IAF was too aggressive and many Atlanta congregations were leery of offering support as ABLE organizers moved ahead of the pastors and most laity, thus undermining local leadership. However, another ABLE pastor contested this version of events, instead affirming IAF's emphasis on the recruitment of Black churches, leadership accountability, and concrete local victories, all of which contributed to early

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[262] Block, *Change Agents*, 208.
[263] Block, *Change Agents*, 208.
[264] Block, *Change Agents*, 209. Block bases this claim on the organizational history offered on a now defunct ABLE website (able.gamaliel.org). However, ABLE was listed as an IAF affiliate on the IAF website as late as October 2008. It is possible that the website was not updated regularly, but the discrepancy is worth noting. "IAF Affiliates," IAF, accessed June, 7, 2017, http://web.archive.org/web/20081009103952/http://www.industrialareasfoundation.org:80/iafaffiliates/iafaffiliatesso.htm.
[265] Ken in interview with author, February 23, 2016.

CBCO success. Regardless of the specific circumstances, the termination of the network affiliation contributed to ABLE's decline, and was furthered by the loss of staff organizers and key leaders around the same time. Though ABLE never officially disbanded, it was largely inactive for some years, existing as an independent CBCO group.

Around 2005, the Gamaliel National Network, the third largest community organizing network in the US, initiated a relationship with ABLE to help revive the organization.[266] Renewed affiliation offered concrete advantages for the struggling ABLE, such as access to Gamaliel national training and experienced organizers to fill in staffing gaps temporarily. Block credits ABLE's eventual success on the issue of immigration in 2009 to its affiliation with Gamaliel.[267] Although Gamaliel employs the same basic organizing model and CBCO rituals as IAF, the network switch did initiate change within ABLE. According to one pastor, once affiliated with Gamaliel, ABLE encouraged greater involvement from predominately white churches, a more regional focus for issues, and stronger emphasis on biblical and theological

[266] Long-term leaders noted that the Gamaliel affiliation began in the mid to late 2000s. One participant suggested that Gamaliel pursued ABLE because it hoped to gain a Southern presence to support national issue work. The Gamaliel website began including ABLE as an affiliate as early as December 2005. "Gamaliel A-Z." Gamaliel National Network, accessed June 5, 2017, http://web.archive.org/web/20051216203258/http://www.gamaliel.org:80/04SiteMap.htm. Neither the current ABLE website (http://ablega.org/) nor the ABLE Facebook page include an organization history.
[267] Block, *Change Agents*, 209.

reflection.[268] At the time, ABLE had thirty-two institutional members, half the number it had started with fifteen years earlier.[269]

Unlike many other CBCO groups, which affiliate with only one network throughout their history, ABLE has belonged to two of the four major CBCO networks in the last twenty-plus years as well as spending several years unaffiliated and independent. A steady association with one particular network enables certain organizational stabilities. For one, single affiliation encourages a continuous organizational identity, important for groups that regularly move from work on one community issue to another and likely experience turnover in a good portion of their leadership. Moreover, steady affiliation makes the presence of a trained staff organizer more likely, as networks provide training for organizers as well as leaders. When I began my research with ABLE in late 2015, the group had not had a trained organizer on staff in some time. A Gamaliel organizer, based in Virginia, began to work part-time with ABLE in early

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[268] Swarts notes some of the same things, observing that Gamaliel emphasizes "metaphors of deliberation and discussion" in its work, and its focus on education can at times "become an end in itself, in lieu of politics." She critiques the work of one Gamaliel affiliate – Metropolitan Congregations United (MCU) in St. Louis – as "understanding its campaign against urban sprawl too exclusively in terms of conversion, education, and relationships" which "overshadowed a much-needed analysis of the power and self-interest of its opponents." Swarts, *Organizing Urban America*,115–17. IAF has been well covered in scholarship, primarily because Saul Alinsky initiated modern community organizing through its creation. For a more contemporary account of IAF, see Warrren's *Dry Bones Rattling*, Jeffery Stout's *Blessed are the Organized,* or Michael Gecan's *Going Public: An Organizer's Guide to Citizen Action*. Gamaliel has received less attention. Jacobsen's *Doing Justice* is one of the better known book focusing solely on Gamaliel work, although Swarts' *Organizing Urban America* profiles both PICO and Gamaliel affiliates.

[269] In January 2009, ABLE had thirty-two member congregations and organizations: Atlanta North Georgia Labor Council (AFL-CIO); Ebenezer Baptist Church; Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta; First Afrikan Presbyterian Church; First Baptist Church of Stewardship; First Iconium Baptist Church; Georgia Stand-Up; Greater Bethany Baptist Church; Greater Turner Chapel AME; Holy Innocents Episcopal Church; Hosley Temple CME Church; Howell Station First Baptist Church; Liberty Baptist Church; Lindsay Street Baptist Church; New Bethesda Christian Ministries COGIC; New Life Christian Church International; Oakhurst Baptist Church; Omega Holiness Church; Organization of Dekalb Educators; Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church; Providence Missionary Baptist Church; Sacred Heart Catholic Church; Saint Dunstan's Episcopal Church; Saint Jude the Apostle Catholic Church; Saint Peter Missionary Baptist Church; Saint Timothy Episcopal Church; Springfield Baptist Church; The True Light Baptist Church; Transfiguration Catholic Church; Trinity Tabernacle Baptist Church; Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Atlanta; Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Gwinnett. "Who We Are," ABLE, accessed June 7, 2017, http://web.archive.org/web/20090106153507/http://www.gamaliel.org/ABLE/ABLEWhoWeAre.htm.

2016. While affiliation with a network is not sufficient to ensure the guidance of a professional organizer nor organizational stability, it certainly makes these features more possible.

To this day, ABLE remains a Gamaliel affiliate and is currently the only CBCO group operating in Atlanta.[270] The language describing the organization and its work has remained consistent over the past ten years.[271]

> Atlantans Building Leadership for Empowerment (ABLE) is a multi-racial, interfaith regional coalition of congregations, unions and grassroots organizations that develops and empowers ordinary people to become leaders who effect change in their communities for the common good of all.[272]
>
> ABLE works to bring people together across the lines that divide the region: race, class, language, political boundaries, and ideologies.
> ABLE is a vehicle where people find common ground to express common values and work for the common good of all.
> ABLE exists to identify leaders, then nurture, train and develop those leaders so that together their voices can be heard. Member organizations contribute their time talent and resources to support the work of ABLE.[273]

Key CBCO concepts are present in the ABLE's mission statement, namely a focus on leadership development and an intention to work across social divides for common solutions.

Moreover, while ABLE's membership has now shrunk to nine members, down from seventy members initially in 1994 and thirty-two in 2009, the cross-racial, cross-denominational, and cross-institutional character of ABLE's membership remains today.[274] Since 2009, many of

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[270] As of May 2018, ABLE is the only CBCO group affiliated with one of the four national networks previously mentioned as operating in Georgia.
[271] There are small changes between the 2006 and 2017 mission statements, such as the substitution of "interfaith" and "regional" for the older "faith based" and "metropolitan-wide" language. In addition, the 2017 mission statement places a little more emphasis on leadership development, adding that ABLE "develops and empowers ordinary people to become leaders who effect change in their communities for the common good of all." The most notable change is that previously ABLE identified itself as ABLE/Gamaliel, emphasizing its nationwide affiliation. This older language has disappeared but can be accessed at "About Us," ABLE, accessed June 5, 2017, http://web.archive.org/web/20061004092713/http://www.gamaliel.org/ABLE/ABLEaboutUs.htm.
[272] "ABLE: Atlantans Building Leadership for Empowerment," ABLE, accessed June 9, 2017, http://ablega.org/.
[273] "Who We Are," ABLE, accessed June 9, 2017. http://ablega.org/about-us-2/.
[274] In 2017, ABLE claimed nine organizational members: First Afrikan Presbyterian Church; North Decatur Presbyterian Church; Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church; Sankofa United Church of Christ; Oakhurst Baptist Church; Turner Memorial [AME Church]; Peace Lutheran; Atlanta-North Georgia Labor council, AFL-CIO;

the predominately black Baptist congregations and predominately white Episcopal and Catholic churches have ceased involvement. Yet, predominately black First Afrikan Presbyterian Church and Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church and predominately white Oakhurst Baptist Church have remained involved. Though an affiliation with Gamaliel may have encouraged ABLE to seek greater involvement from predominately white churches, more than half of member congregations are predominately black.[275] This may be due to the fact that the CBCO approach often resonates with those who have experienced social marginalization of some kind and are already skeptical about established processes, including those around political decision-making.

Having offered some contextual background, I now return to the central focus of this chapter. Employing the lens of ritual, two primary obstacles to the formation intended by CBCO rituals became apparent though my time with ABLE. First, as an organization, ABLE was mixed in its commitment to CBCO rituals, often relying on more conventional methods to address issues. Yet, the formative power of CBCO rituals is dependent on their consistent use. Various factors contributed to a culture of *organizational ambivalence* to CBCO rituals, including the absence of a staff organizer for significant periods of time to teach and advocate for the employment of these activities. As a result of ABLE's ambivalence, CBCO rituals did not serve as the operational norm, and thus their use and subsequent formative influence on participants was limited.

Second, ABLE leaders held *diverse understandings of citizenship*, and this resulted in their diverse instincts about CBCO rituals. For a number of ABLE leaders, their preexisting

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International Union of Painters & Allied Trades District Council 77. "Members," ABLE, accessed June 5, 2017, http://ablega.org/committee/. Generally, member organizations are those congregations or groups that pay dues to belong to ABLE. Some ABLE leaders may belong to congregations that are not yet or were previously members.

[275] Though ABLE aspires to be interfaith, according to its 2017 mission statement, its institutional members remain Christian congregations and non-religious unions.

participatory orientation led them to support more conventional approaches to social change. Such choices, in turn, firmed up their participatory instincts. When CBCO rituals were employed by these leaders, they tended to mirror more closely the structure and formative significance of participatory rituals. For instance, for some leaders, CBCO research meetings came to resemble lobbying quite closely. While these leaders expressed authentic interest in and appreciation for CBCO, their default understandings of *how* social change should occur limited the use of or reinterpreted CBCO rituals in ways that inhibited intended justice-oriented formation. At the same time, other leaders, due to personal or professional experiences and social location, more immediately resonated with the justice-oriented objectives of CBCO and appreciated the systemic reform they sought. With their preexisting justice-orientation, these leaders came into CBCO with a sense that established political systems and practices were insufficient.[276] The solid training and experience with CBCO rituals reinforced their justice-oriented understanding. While all leaders required a level of training and experience with CBCO rituals, participatory leaders faced an additional obstacle, a deeply held but often unarticulated participatory worldview, which challenged justice-oriented formation. Though the diverse citizenship understandings of ABLE participants reinforced ABLE's organizational ambivalence to CBCO rituals, investigating these obstacles separately is necessary if they are to be effectively redressed.

I have found that a strong organizational commitment to CBCO rituals is both essential and possible. Making this commitment can be challenging, however, as CBCO groups attempt to model the democratized power they seek by making decisions collectively. Such an approach

[276] As one interviewee put it: "If you can't represent me there is a way we can do this, you either represent the people who vote for you or you step aside, and let somebody who can do it do it, because we have the right to say." Tina in interview with author, April 1, 2016.

allows each CBCO group to be responsive to the particular needs and priorities of its unique and ever-changing participants.[277] At the same time, this type of decision-making makes consistency more difficult. A conversation I once had with a veteran community organizer exemplifies this tension. I asked him what he would do if the leaders with whom he worked decided to go forward in a direction he thought unwise. He told me that it is ultimately these leaders who lead and that his job is primarily to help them work through the possible implications of their choices. This would apply not just to the type of community issue pursued but also to the means employed to secure change. For this organizer, the overarching *telos* of CBCO—the cultivation of leaders and transformation of existing political systems—necessitated this risk.

While CBCO rituals are intended to be normative, CBCO groups do at times decide to opt out of using 1-1s, research meetings, and actions when addressing community issues. Ideally, this decision-making process will reflect an advanced level of training in and formation by CBCO rituals and involve a discussion in which the impact of employing alternative means (e.g. accepted political practices) is weighed in light of practical (e.g. advancing or delaying progress on a community issue) and formative consequences (e.g. aiding or undermining the cultivation of collaborative leadership and democratized power). For example, when I worked as an organizer, AFACT (Anchorage Faith and Action – Congregations Together) received several invitations to sit on community boards, each followed by a discussion about whether or not to accept. In 2006, AFACT did accept an invitation to send a representative to work with a municipal policy team addressing youth violence, in part because it was an area of concern for several member

[277] Under a more hierarchical institutional arrangement, the range of permissive rituals can be reduced to a choice between enacting a prescribed ritual or abstaining. For instance, one could either participate in or forgo Communion as offered during a Christian service. There would be no other forms available to choose from to do the same ritual work. However, within CBCO groups, decisions about which ritual of political participation ought to be employed is more open.

congregations.[278] However, AFACT declined other invitations due to concerns about straying too far from its primary purpose and overextending its leaders. In organizations like ABLE, the formation required to make informed decisions can be underdeveloped. Most participants may not yet have internalized the tastes, modes of perception, virtues, and skills prized in CBCO rituals. As a result, an opt-out discussion is better characterized as a debate between various rituals of political participation, which might be posited as equally valid and valuable approaches.

The culture of ambivalence in ABLE around CBCO rituals became apparent as I sat in on its monthly leadership meeting. Leadership meetings are the heart of CBCO organizational life, the occasion on which community issues and next steps are identified and leaders receive training on CBCO rituals. Though 1-1s, research meetings, and actions are not performed during this time, participants do plan for, practice, and reflect on them during such meetings. Though they are regularly enacted and formal in nature, I do not consider leadership meetings to be rituals. For one, unlike 1-1s, which are fairly consistently described in CBCO literature, leadership meetings are discussed and described very little, and so it is difficult to tell if there is a standard format across CBCO rituals. In addition, the agenda of such gatherings can differ depending on where the CBCO group is in the process of addressing a community issue. Nonetheless, leadership meetings are essential for us to consider as they exemplify organizational culture and illuminate the value given to CBCO rituals.

The meetings I observed all included the following agenda items: [279]

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[278] "AFACT Represents Faith Community on Anti-Gang and Youth Violence Policy Team" (Anchorage Faith and Action Congregations Together (AFACT) newsletter, Spring 2007).

[279] These meetings are open to the public, although I do not believe I encountered anyone at them that was not associated with a member congregation or had not specifically been invited by an existing leader.
Although participants who attended the three monthly leadership meetings I observed tended to be middle aged (45-65), black and white men and women were fairly equably represented.

1. Prayer/Welcome/Introductions
2. Review of Past Events / Announcement of Future Events
3. Breakout Groups (Attendees divide into Task Force Groups)
4. Report Back (Task Force Groups report back on discussion)
5. Closing Remarks / Prayer

Alone, this fairly standard agenda does not suggest much. However, the absence of several elements is also instructive. First, there was no time allotted to report back or commit to 1-1s, although such reporting encourages leader accountability to the ritual of 1-1s and reminds those present that collaborative leadership is at the core of CBCO work. It is also vital when discerning next steps to tackle community problems. At times I experienced this element being omitted due to time constraints, such as when a group was busy preparing for a research meeting or action. However, during my time with ABLE, since only preliminary conversations about an Opportunity School District (OSD) forum were taking place, and the agenda was therefore not particularly full, the omission of 1-1s from the agenda seemed to signal that this ritual was unimportant to this particular group.

Second, except for the May meeting, there was no time allotted to training in CBCO rituals or guiding principles. Without this training, task force group discussions tended to stall, with leaders reflecting on the enormity of the problem or on what other organizations were doing instead of depending on CBCO rituals to inform next steps. Natalie observed "I listen[ed] to the immigration group's report, this last meeting and I'm thinking, they didn't do anything new. They just rehashed this laundry list of stuff that they want to do. Well, you can't do a laundry list of

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February 16, 2016: 7 black women, 3 black men, 3 black youth (part of a family group), 2 white men, 5 white women, white male pastor, black female organizer.
March 15, 2016: 3 black women, 2 black men, 7 white women, 5 white men, white male pastor, black female organizer.
April 2016: Meeting was canceled and ½ Day Saturday Training attended instead.
May 17, 2016: 5 black women, 4 black men, 5 white women, 5 white men, white male pastor, 2 black female organizers.

stuff."[280] To be fair, ABLE's new staff organizer, hired in January 2016, did attempt to address this practice and its demoralizing effect at the May leadership meeting when she led Task Force Groups to identify priorities by creating a "singular narrative" about their work.[281] This training may have aimed to lay the groundwork to plan and conduct a research meeting around a single concern, but that intention was not made clear.

Third, the same people tended to chair the meetings and each of the four Task Force Groups instead of rotating that responsibility among a wider group. As a result, only a select number of participants could act as leaders and practice skills such as chairing a meeting, skills that could be applied later in a research meeting with a public official. Rather than an opportunity for growth, chairing seemed to have become a burden for the few leaders tasked with doing it. Without time to report on 1-1s, receive training, or extend leadership, these monthly leadership meetings did not engage with CBCO rituals and did little to cultivate what was supposed to be prized collaborative leadership. As a result, Ken felt that participants were "talking in circles" and "we're just meeting because it was on the calendar to meet."[282]

This mixed commitment to CBCO rituals was evident also in the public events that occurred around the time of my involvement with ABLE and were either referenced in leadership meetings I observed or reflected on in interviews I conducted. In 2016, the

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[280] Natalie in interview with author, May 24, 2016. Michael suggested that some "listing" was necessary as "not the same people come each month…We might be ready to talk about moving on some issue and it's a different group. They'll say, "Well, what's this all about?" You're spending the whole time talking about where you are and what it's all about, instead of getting people who are ready to do something because they already know what it's all about." Michael in interview with author, February 5, 2016.

[281] A primary responsibility of an organizer is to teach, which is why I found it so striking that ABLE organizer did not offer a training in the February and March leadership meetings, though in attendance. CBCO principle "Organizers teach leaders – leaders organize." "PICO * Principles for Community Organizing," accessed April 15, 2018, http://www.piapico.org/docs/PICO_Principles.pdf.
An organizer also ensures accountability. Kate observed that ABLE had struggled for this reason. "One challenge for us is not having a full-time organizer to keep everything moving. To make that phone call to harass you into doing what you said you were going to do." Kate in interview with author, June 2, 2016.

[282] Ken in interview with author, February 23, 2016.

organization was focusing its efforts, and had been for some time, in four areas: Education, Immigration, Safe Criminal Justice, and Safe Neighborhoods.[283] Education and Immigration have been priorities since ABLE began.[284] This is evident in the language ABLE uses on its website to describe its recent work on Education:

> In 2016, we launched and implemented an education series to educate communities and congregations across Fulton and DeKalb counties on the reality of the proposed Georgia referendum known as the Opportunity School District (Amendment 1). We are proud of the work we [did] that helped voters understand the constitutional change as they went to the polls and overwhelmingly defeated it. ABLE is currently in discernment around the next phase of our education work. Leaders of the ABLE Education task force are exploring ways to connect with communities around education issues. [285]

According to one interviewee, the education task force was generally concerned with the condition of public schools in the metro area, an issue raised in 1-1s and by involved leaders, and had started to investigate inequity of resources between schools.[286]

This research process was put on hold when Amendment 1: Opportunity School District (OSD) was proposed.[287] Leaders felt that the proposed legislation would not only harm already failing schools, but that it had been deceptively advertised to ensure easy passage by voters. In response, ABLE took on an educational role, first educating its own leaders and then the community at large. On November 19, 2015, ABLE invited Remonia Toombs, Executive VP of the Georgia Federation of Teachers, to speak to leaders about the implications of Amendment 1

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[283] ABLE has dropped healthcare, a primary issue back in the late 2000s, perhaps in response to the passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in March 2010.

[284] ABLE uses the language of "task force" to talk about issue areas to denote standing working groups that are aiming to "cut an issue" from a larger social problem. For instance, the Education task force is generally devoted to addressing the many problems related to public education. These are subgroups that developed as community concerns were lifted up in 1-1s and areas of concern were identified.

[285] "Our Work," ABLE, accessed June 13, 2017, http://ablega.org/issues/.

[286] Natalie in interview with author, May 24, 2016.

[287] For more information on Opportunity School District (OSD), which has since been defeated by voters, see "7 Things to Know about Gov. Nathan Deal's Opportunity School District."
Ty Tagami, "7 Things to Know about Gov. Nathan Deal's Opportunity School District," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), November 9, 2016, accessed June 14, 2017, http://www.ajc.com/news/local-education/things-know-about-gov-nathan-deal-opportunity-school-district/fEaW4ERqPVkIe2NMyKD2tO/.

as part of one of its monthly leadership meetings.[288] In early 2016, planning discussions for a community-wide assembly began to take place. On October 24, 2016, ABLE hosted Opportunity School District Forum to educate the larger community about the proposed legislation.[289] In the end, OSD was defeated in November 2016.[290]

This decision to address OSD, even though it did not directly emerge from their own 1-1s, is atypical but not unheard of among CBCO groups. At times, CBCO groups may respond to rather than initiate corrective action on a community issue, particularly if it is related to an existing priority and is thought fertile for leadership development. In this case, OSD seemed to be an additional obstacle to ensuring quality public education for all, an ABLE priority. Moreover, the character of this problem —an amendment had been proposed rather than passed —made a community forum, rather than an action with an elected official, a sensible response. Yet if OSD had passed and ABLE leaders had continued to work on this issue, an action with public officials charged with implementing the amendment likely would have been ABLE's next step. In other words, garnering specific commitments to ameliorate the more damaging aspects of OSD would have made sense at that point. As OSD did not pass, that step did not prove necessary. However, undertaking too many activities like forums can drain leader energy and dilute organizational commitment to CBCO rituals.

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[288] Depending on the agenda and role of leaders, this event may qualify as a research meeting as outlined in the previous chapter. It is hard to say conclusively since no such language was used on ABLE's Facebook Event page.
"Issue Night: Opportunity School District Presentation," ABLE, accessed June 13, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/events/1915462252012539/.

[289] As mentioned in a previous chapter, CBCO groups do hold forums from time to time to educate the community on pressing matters, particularly those dependent on popular vote, including candidates' forums.
"Opportunity School District Forum," ABLE, accessed June 13, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/events/1074500415937130/.

[290] Ty Tagami, "Voters say "no" to Opportunity School District," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), November 9, 2016, accessed June 13, 2017, http://www.myajc.com/news/local-education/voters-say-opportunity-school-district/QFf8J42kfmPGx8gVFhrVVL/.

The ABLE website also noted that it

> continues to work hard for favorable immigration reform, that keeps families together, and that reflects what we truly value for all. We reject the use of local law enforcement resources being used to assist in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids and racial profiling of immigrants.[291]

Unlike earlier language around immigration, which had named more concrete steps that ABLE intended to take, such as ending 287g agreements with local law enforcement, this paragraph includes general support of "favorable immigration reform."[292] While not problematic per se, the lack of focus made this task force group particularly vulnerable to adopting an advocacy approach in which they would act on behalf of immigrants rather than alongside that population. Without something specific to work on but eager to keep this issue alive, those involved in this task force encouraged ABLE leaders to support the efforts of other advocacy organizations.[293] For example, participants were invited to join a Georgia Detention Watch protest against the Ft. Steward Detention Center in March 2016.[294] Whereas ABLE had once taken a leadership role in the community to address immigration, it was now primarily aiding the work of others on this

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[291] "Our Work," ABLE, accessed June 13, 2017, http://ablega.org/issues/.

[292] The following language from December 2008 describes ABLE's work on immigration:
"In the absence of a national immigration law that makes sense, Georgia has recently passed a great deal of anti-immigrant legislation. These laws have ignored the dignity we recognize in every human being, betrayed the Gospel acclamation of abundance and love of neighbor, and created a daily life of fear and hopelessness for immigrants. ABLE has engaged in the struggle for civil rights of immigrants on several fronts:
1) to create a community of faith presence in the courts, in order to hold the judges accountable and stop their practice of deporting indiscriminately
2) to meet with sheriffs, police chiefs and commissioners of counties involved with 287g agreements in order to stop racial profiling
3) to get CNN to cover the mistreatment of immigrants and the positive contribution they make to Georgia
4) to confront the agencies and businesses, like Medicaid offices, residence companies and workplaces, that take advantage of immigrants."
"Issues," ABLE, accessed June 5, 2017.
http://web.archive.org/web/20081204132548/http://www.gamaliel.org/ABLE/ABLEissues.htm.

[293] Block credits immigration as giving ABLE much needed momentum in the late 2000s. Block, *Change Agents*, 209.

[294] "Shut down Ft. Stewart Detention Center," ABLE, accessed June 13, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/AtlantansBuildingLeadership4Empowerment/.

particular issue without expectation of reciprocity.[295] Although the problems associated with the current immigration system may be remedied by such collaborations, relying on such events to keep forward movement on this issue appeared to deplete ABLE energy. Moreover, promoting unequal partnerships seemed to contradict the formative outcomes intended though CBCO rituals, such as cultivating a taste for equal and accountable relationships. For one interviewee, such an approach cemented her belief that ABLE was just another advocacy organization among many, one that involved a pastor she admired and who happened to be working on an issue about which she was passionate.[296]

Criminal Justice and Safe Neighborhoods are fairly new areas of focus for ABLE, both problems related to the criminal justice system. The organization's Criminal Justice efforts centered on aiding the formally incarcerated. The description on the website read:

> After significant victories in expanding employment opportunities for people with criminal backgrounds by "Banning the Box" for public sector employment in cities and counties across the metro Atlanta area, Governor Deal signed an executive order "Banning the Box" on most State agency employment applications. Further positive changes include removal of certain open misdemeanor and felony arrests, removal of the food stamp ban, changes to driver license bans, requiring employers to give notice if people are denied employment based on a criminal background and more have all helped people with criminal records. Our task force is currently exploring the various elements of criminal justice such as for-profit probation and parole system, length of probation and excessive fines. [297]

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[295] For example, ABLE held an "Immigration Action," on December 16, 2008 outside of the Gwinnett County Sheriff's office to oppose 287g, which ensured "training in identifying illegal immigrants to local law enforcement and…the authority to enforce certain laws in cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security." As part of this action, leaders delivered "a decorated Christmas tree, a gift basket and 1,500 signed Christmas cards to the Sheriff of Gwinnett County," who had refused to meet with them. While they were unable to secure a meeting with the Sheriff, much less a commitment, ABLE publicly and dramatically disputed the Sherriff's claim that there was strong community support for 287g.
"Immigration." Accessed June 5, 2017.
http://web.archive.org/web/20090105190156/http://www.gamaliel.org/ABLE/ABLEImmigrationpage.htm.

[296] Natalie in interview with author, May 24, 2016.
Natalie's experience points to the importance of national training, which she opted not to attend, as one of its primary objectives is to distinguish CBCO from advocacy. It also suggests the necessity for a strong organizational commitment, not just to the rhetoric of CBCO but also to its rituals. Without those rituals, CBCO may seem rather commonplace.

[297] "Our Work," ABLE, accessed June 13, 2017, http://ablega.org/issues/.

Although the "Ban the Box" campaign was initiated in 2004 by the California-based "All of Us or None" organization, ABLE leaders felt tremendous ownership of their efforts to advance this cause and regularly cited it as their best recent work.[298]

On June 2, 2014, ABLE hosted an "Eliminating Barriers for the Formerly Incarcerated Roundtable" to advance its efforts on "Ban the Box" in Georgia. Involved pastor, Reverend David Lewicki of North Decatur Presbyterian Church (NDPC), described the effort as an action and highlights the ritual elements I previously mentioned:[299]

> Last fall, 250 people filled the NDPC Sanctuary for an "action." This action had been planned to the very last detail by ABLE's members. We gathered to support a movement called "Ban the Box," which sought to remove the felony conviction question on job applications. This question has been an enormous barrier facing people as they have tried to return to a normal life after serving their sentence.
>
> That night, we invited key leaders of local counties and municipalities—people who have direct influence over hiring or human resources policies—to attend the meeting, and when they arrived, we seated them "on stage."…The issue was plainly presented and a gentleman named Anthony gave testimony about his own soul-crushing experience trying to get a job after his release from prison.
>
> At the end of the evening, we asked the leaders if they were willing to make a public statement saying that they would do everything in their power to ban the box in their jurisdiction. Each one agreed—they almost fought each other over who could get it done the fastest. ABLE followed up on their commitments and today, all but one of those jurisdictions have changed their hiring practices to ban the box. Justice achieved.[300]

Although "Ban the Box" was supported by a number of organizations in Georgia, including the Georgia Justice Project and 9to5 Atlanta, ABLE took the opportunity to develop leadership and

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[298] Despite the ownership felt by ABLE leaders, ABLE is not listed as one of the organizations supporting this effort. For now, 9to5 Georgia remains the sole Georgia organization acknowledged for its Ban the Box work on this website. "Endorsers," All of Us or None, accessed June 15, 2017, http://bantheboxcampaign.org/endorsers-2/#.WULJ6RPyufV.

[299] Actions, as noted in the previous chapter, involve three elements: 1) Credentialing of CBCO group; 2) Establishing the lived reality of the issue; 3) Commitments from public officials. Items 2 and 3 are clearly noted in David Lewicki's description of the event; item 1 is implicit but affirmed by the fact that ABLE leaders planned and hosted the entire event.

[300] David Lewicki, "Making News From the Pews: Congregations and Community Organizing," Columbia Connections, November 5, 2015, accessed June 13, 2017, http://www.ctsnet.edu/congregations-and-community-organizing/.

build power by holding the 2014 action.[301] A prayer vigil, held on October 14, 2014, built on this effort, during which ABLE leaders "deliver[ed] thousands of postcards to Governor Deal asking him to keep his word and Ban the Box on most state employment applications."[302] Governor Deal signed the Ban the Box executive order in February 2015.[303] The 2014 action, in which local decision-makers publicly committed to "ban the box in their jurisdiction," represents the clearest ABLE commitment to CBCO rituals in recent years.

Safe Neighborhoods also focused on criminal justice, attending primarily to the community's experience with law enforcement. The ABLE website offered the following language to describe efforts around Safe Neighborhoods:

> Hard work paid off in our 2015/2016 victory passing 13 improvements strengthening and expanding to the power of the Atlanta Citizens Review Board (ACRB). The board provides a method where citizens can file complaints against police and have those complaints heard by an independent board of citizens. Currently the City of Atlanta is the only municipality in the region to have an independent review process for the public. We are *(sic)* want other municipalities to establish boards as well.[304]

Unlike the Education paragraph, which clearly outlined ABLE's role in ensuring OSD did not pass ("we launched and implemented an education series"), Safe Neighborhoods described a

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[301] "Georgia Governor Signs "Ban the Box" Executive Order," National Employment Law Project (NELP), February 24, 2015, accessed June 13, 2017, http://www.nelp.org/content/uploads/2015/03/PR-Georgia-Ban-the-Box-Executive-Order.pdf.

[302] "Prayer Vigil for Ban the Box," ABLE, accessed June 13, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/events/1519147181636100/.
This vigil may not conform to the standard action format but mirrors earlier ABLE efforts. For example, on November 5, 2009, ABLE leaders hosted a "Healthcare Reform Prayer Rally" in which participants were urged to "bring your prescription drug bottles and copies of your medical bills to submit to Legislators." A week later, on November 12, 2009, a video recording of the prayer rally and collected prescription bottles are delivered to Senator Johnny Isakson's office as a "Healthcare Reform Action." "Healthcare," ABLE, accessed June 5, 2017, http://web.archive.org/web/20100214211335/http://www.gamaliel.org:80/ABLE/Healthcare.htm.
In addition,

[303] Greg Bluestein, "Nathan Deal signs 'ban the box' hiring policy," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* (Atlanta, GA), February 24, 2015, accessed June, 13, 2017, http://politics.blog.ajc.com/2015/02/24/nathan-deal-signs-new-hiring-policy-to-ban-the-box/. This AJC story suggests that Governor Deal was prompted to action because of the recommendations of his Criminal Justice Reform Council in January 2014. No mention is made of ABLE or other groups who worked to make this happen.

[304] "Our Work," ABLE, accessed June 13, 2017, http://ablega.org/issues/.

victory without noting ABLE's part in accomplishing it. To contribute to this success, ABLE had undertaken a couple of activities, evidenced in its public events calendar. First, ABLE invited ACRB Executive Director Samuel Lee Reid to outline "several of the fifteen reforms the Board originally made public in February 2015" on May 19, 2015.[305] In providing a forum in which Reid could speak, this event may have functioned as a research meeting, allowing leaders to learn more about ACRB's work and proposed changes, but I cannot be certain, as this preceded my time with ABLE.[306]

Second, when the Public Safety Committee welcomed public testimony in early 2016, ABLE leaders testified in support of the ACRB proposed changes. Providing such support proved challenging, as at the last minute the Public Safety Committee rescheduled the midday meeting from February 23, 2016 to March 10, 2016, demonstrating the logistical obstacles that can accompany more traditional forms of political engagement.[307] Like ABLE's decision to partner with other groups on immigration, its support of ACRB no doubt helped the reforms advance. Yet it benefitted ABLE as an organization very little, particularly since the ARCB did

[305] Depending on the agenda and role of leaders, this event may qualify as a research meeting as outlined in the previous chapter. Again, it is hard to say conclusively since no such language was used on ABLE's Facebook Event page. "ABLE Issue Meeting and Training," ABLE, accessed June 13, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/events/770832116369146/.

[306] Media coverage of the event suggests that at least several participants were not satisfied with the reforms proposed by ACRB. For example, ABLE member Rev. Mark Lomax, of First Afrikan Presbyterian Church, is quoted as saying "We would seek more citizen control. Too many politicians and public administrators have their hands on [ACRB]." Anna Simonton, "Dekalb Residents Consider Citizen Review Board as ACRB Proposes Reforms" *Atlanta Progressive News*, May 25, 2015, accessed June 13, 2017, http://atlantaprogressivenews.com/2015/05/25/dekalb-residents-consider-citizen-review-board-as-acrb-proposes-reforms/.

[307] "Public Safety Committee Meeting," ABLE, accessed June 13, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/pg/AtlantansBuildingLeadership4Empowerment/events/?ref=page_internal. "ABLE has been working to support Lee Reid (director of the ACRB) as he presents to the City of Atlanta 13 changes for the Atlanta Citizen Review Board which investigates citizen complaints about police behavior and offers ways to resolve the problems. These 13 changes were accepted by the Public Service Committee. Now they go to the City of Atlanta on March 21 [2016] at 1:00 pm in the auditorium on the 2nd floor of City Hall." ABLE Facebook Page, accessed June 13, 2017, https://www.facebook.com/AtlantansBuildingLeadership4Empowerment/.

not publicly recognize its contribution, and the work overextended its few active leaders and provided little opportunity to engage or develop the leadership of new participants.[308]

From this overview, ABLE's mixed organizational commitment to CBCO rituals in recent years is evident. In particular, though "Ban the Box" may have been adopted from another group as a solution to the problems facing the formerly incarcerated, ABLE's decision to hold an action, featuring testimony and calling for commitments from public officials, reflects a commitment to CBCO rituals and provided a forum through which formation might occur. The reason why work on this community issue continues to resonate so deeply with leaders may be because they were enacting a distinctive CBCO ritual to achieve justice. In addition, though ABLE's use of an education series to demystify the proposed OSD is somewhat of a departure from CBCO's rituals, it did allow for collaborative leadership development and made sense given that OSD remained within the power of voters, rather than public officials, to defeat. However, ABLE's inclination towards unequal partnerships and accommodation to established political practices used to advance immigration and law enforcement reform, positioned CBCO rituals as one option among many and did not encourage justice-oriented formation. Moreover, these partnerships, though probably intended to cultivate forward momentum within ABLE, seemed to do the opposite by redirecting limited leader energy to enhancing the efforts of other organizations.[309]

Attention to ritual illuminated a second obstacle to the justice-oriented formation promised through CBCO involvement: the diverse citizenship orientations of leaders. Though all leaders affirmed the ideals of CBCO present in ABLE's mission statement, their instincts about

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[308] Austin Stewart, "Atlanta Public Safety Committee Approves New CRB Powers," March 2016, accessed May 9, 2018, http://atlantaprogressivenews.com/2016/03/16/atlanta-public-safety-committee-approves-new-crb-powers/.

[309] Investigation into ABLE's public events, between 2007 and 2010, when at least one professional organizer was on staff for much of the time, suggests that ABLE has not always been so ambivalent in its use of CBCO rituals.

how best to pursue social change differed, and this hindered the normative use of CBCO rituals and subsequently inhibited intended formation.

To explore this obstacle further, I share aspects of my interviews with ABLE leaders, which I have organized around the topics of 1-1s, research meetings, and actions. I take such an approach because the citizenship orientations of various leaders became most clear as they spoke about CBCO rituals. Over the course of six months, I conducted hour-long interviews with seven individuals identified as those most involved.[310] These individuals were older (e.g. 45–65), at the later stage of their careers or retired, and most held or had held white collar employment, although several came from working-class backgrounds or had lived in that income bracket for a significant portion of life.[311] The interviewees reflected the demographic diversity of ABLE membership. Interviewees included two white men, three white women, one black man, and one South American woman. All interviewees belonged to one of three Christian denominations: Catholic, Presbyterian, and Baptist. Although I did not ask interviewees about their political orientation, the leanings of most individuals quickly became pretty clear, aided by the fact that 2016 was an election year. In their front yards, a couple of interviewees had signs supporting Bernie Sanders, who was attempting to secure the democratic presidential nomination at the time, and they mentioned their efforts campaigning for a democratic in a local election. Another interviewee mentioned his fervent support of John Kasich, who was seeking the republican

[310] As I noted in my Introduction, I employed snowball sampling to identify most interviewees. I found my first interlocutors by asking an actively involved pastor to name a few committed participants. These individuals then identified others. I also interviewed at least one individual as a result of observing their regular, active presence at leadership meetings.

[311] Computer programmer, social worker, scientist, and teacher were among the white collar professions represented. No one I interviewed participated in ABLE as a pastor, although one interviewee had previously worked as a pastor and another had recently earned a seminary degree. In addition, no one worked as an organizer, though one interviewee had worked on staff as a fundraiser with another CBCO group.

presidential nomination. Importantly, CBCO groups like ABLE pride themselves on enabling people with different political leaning to work together.

The leaders with whom I talked fell consistently into one of two groups. Michael, Frank, Natalie, and often Dawn demonstrated perspectives that suggested a *participatory orientation* to social change. True to the participatory model of citizenship I described in the previous chapter, these leaders were inclined to affirm established political systems and participatory rituals. Their white middle-class upbringing and subsequent white-collar employment made certain aspects of CBCO work easy, particularly tasks dependent on civic skills, such as chairing a meeting or speaking with public officials. Yet, their understandings of CBCO rituals tended to be incomplete and at times ambivalent. This ultimately undermined the justice-oriented formation intended by CBCO rituals.

In contrast, Ken, Tina, and Kate showed a *justice-oriented approach* to social change. Characteristic of justice-oriented citizenship, these leaders tended to be skeptical of established political systems and to seek political activities with a critical edge. In addition, each had a good grasp of CBCO rituals as well as intended formative outcomes. On the one hand, their marginalized backgrounds and experiences had already made them skeptical of participatory political engagement and more open to CBCO's alternative rituals, even if they now held professional middle-class jobs. On the other hand, their existing instincts and skills had been greatly strengthened and developed by solid training in the CBCO model, either by participation with a vibrant CBCO group (e.g. with ABLE in the past or with a different organization) or experience with labor organizing.[312] While certain backgrounds could encourage more

[312] I should also note that one ABLE congregation had adopted certain CBCO rituals in its congregational life and thus gave leaders from that congregation substantial and regular practice in 1-1s. The structure of these 1-1s was very similar to CBCO 1-1s from what I could gather.

immediate resonance with CBCO, consistent training and experience with CBCO rituals proved necessary as well.[313] In the coming pages, I use CBCO rituals to enable fruitful comparison between the two groups of leaders and show how preexisting citizenship orientations inflect one's formative encounter with CBCO.

The 1-1s

As the signature ritual of CBCO, it is no surprise that my interlocuters reflected on 1-1 visits more than on research meetings and actions combined. National Leadership Training involves thorough 1-1 training and participants are often required to conduct several 1-1s over the course of the week. Training for 1-1s is also consistently part of events hoping to recruit new members, such as ABLE's Spring Leadership Training offered in April 2016. Training for research meetings and actions occurs much later in the process, usually after a large number of 1-1s have been conducted and a primary community issue has been identified. In the previous chapter, I outlined the three "rules" that constitute a 1-1: a credential, open-ended questions, and an invitation. Not one of my interviewees mentioned a credential as part of their 1-1s, though I do believe they included some credentialing language as part of their practice.[314] All interviewees did, however, talk about the purpose of the 1-1 visit, and I suspect that this language was often used in their 1-1 credential.

Those with participatory orientation primarily cast 1-1s as listening exercises, a way to get to know another person better and gather information. In many ways, this aligns well with the familiar paradigm of an interview but represents a reinterpretation of 1-1s, as will become apparent. Michael affirmed the listening aspect of 1-1s, saying "it was a good experience in

[313] To this point, both Tina and Ken shared what I would call "conversion experiences," in which their understanding of and commitment to CBCO deepened significantly.
[314] This aspect was not highlighted at ABLE's Spring Leadership Training, although I know it to be part of most national trainings.

doing [1-1s] and we got to know the people better who we're talking to, find out more of their perspective."[315] Michael felt that 1-1s gave him important insight into the people he already worshipped alongside at church. Frank noted that, by encouraging listening, 1-1s helped transform strangers into familiars, aiding his ability to love them. He observed, "It's a lot easier to love somebody if you know them. Instead of that guy might be a foreigner."[316] Most noted that 1-1s were vital in tearing down some of the walls that existed between people despite sharing common spaces, such as belonging to the same congregation or neighborhood, or sharing common aims like participating in ABLE. The default reality of barriers and tension was highlighted when Natalie noted that 1-1s allowed people to "slow down. It makes people listen to each other and within the context of ABLE, we have large diverse group of people. It can eliminate some of that hostility and some of that baggage that people walk in [with]."[317] Dawn observed, "When you can see somebody relaxed and really feel like they're being heard, that's when you know you really touched it, in my opinion."[318] For each of these leaders, 1-1s were helpful in diminishing the isolation so deeply felt today by refocusing attention on an element so often missing – interest in another person.

This theme of overcoming estrangement through intentional listening led these leaders to focus primarily on the types of questions most helpful for gaining insight into the other person and their priorities. Michael explained:

> We're told, and it's a good objective, to find out what motivates the other person. What kind of things are they involved in? What kind would they like to be involved in? Would they get more involved if certain things were right for them? Just to find out what all those are. It's really interesting to talk to each one and find out, both what in the life of the church they think needs to be done, what's important to them, have they ever been

[315] Michael in interview with author, February 5, 2016.
[316] Frank in interview with author, March 4, 2016.
[317] Natalie in interview with author, May 24, 2016.
[318] Dawn in interview with author, March 15, 2016.

> involved in social justice work, and if so, what kind? It's good to know about those things from other people in the church.[319]

Similarly, Dawn shared that another leader had taught her to

> use the acronym FORM…it was family, origins and education I think, religious experiences was R, and…what are you moving towards, what's your passion? So that you kind of got a background touched on, to childhood and educational things. The most helpful question I think in a 1-1 is how did that shape you.[320]

Such questions and areas of inquiry reflect well the examples offered in the previous chapter. Natalie observed that her background in qualitative research had greatly helped her in 1-1s as they were "all research, all you got to do is do an interview and that's 1-1 conversation, that's all it is. They were blown away at how good I was at 1-1s."[321]

Although most leaders used relational language and imagery to explain the purpose of 1-1s, Natalie's comment about 1-1s being essentially research helpfully presses the issue. By listening, were these leaders building new relationships to collaboratively enact social change or rather gathering personal concerns and alleviating social tensions? Did the 1-1s, as understood and undertaken by these leaders, contribute to building the robust relational networks imagined by CBCO? Natalie's observation about 1-1s being essentially interviews suggests not. If 1-1s remain within the interviewing paradigm they are unlikely to provide an opportunity for reciprocity, necessary for cultivating collaborative leadership. The third element of a 1-1, the invitation, makes this possible.

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[319] Michael in interview with author, February 5, 2016.
[320] Dawn in interview with author, March 15, 2016.
[321] Natalie did note that although the technique of 1-1s was very similar to qualitative research, the intention was different: "you genuinely want to know the other person as a person so there's this faith based reason for getting to know the other person as a person." Natalie in interview with author, May 24, 2016.

These leaders' reinterpretation of CBCO rituals became apparent in their discussion of the invitation or "recruitment" aspect of 1-1s. Natalie, so closely identifying 1-1's with research and having little CBCO training, never mentioned this part of 1-1s. Michael, Frank, and Dawn were aware of this aspect although they demonstrated ambivalence about it. Michael, who believed his introversion allowed him to listen well to the person he visited, suggested that extroverts tended towards recruitment in their conversations and because of this, might be less skilled in 1-1s. He said, "In my experience over the years, people who are really extroverted, don't seem to really be able to connect that well with people. Like they don't really care that much about who I am or who someone else is. They have an agenda and they want to do this or that with me."[322] To Michael, there was a tension between listening well and going in with an agenda, like recruitment to ABLE. Frank echoed this idea more directly, indicating that the recruitment aspect of CBCO work ought to be divorced from the 1-1, at least initially. He asserted, "It's really listening to what the person's interests are and their passions and not trying to get them to commit. Try to get them later."[323] Dawn was less ambivalent about recruiting people in general, noting that you first consider if "their self-interest is in alignment" with ABLE's aims, but did observe that making a proposition involves "a lot of manipulation."[324] Like Frank, Dawn separated this aspect from the 1-1 itself, suggesting that inviting a person to "maybe to head a [ABLE] task force" was a "next step beyond the 1-1."[325]

While each of these leaders resonated with the relational imagery or language often used to describe 1-1s, their understanding of this ritual remained very close to an interview model already familiar to most. Interviews create ad hoc connections, based on information exchange,

[322] Michael in interview with author, February 5, 2016.
[323] Frank in interview with author, March 4, 2016.
[324] Dawn in interview with author, March 15, 2016.
[325] Dawn in interview with author, March 15, 2016.

which end with the conclusion of the conversation or the overarching research project. Beyond candor, little is expected from the one interviewed, and responsibility for the success of the project, for which the interview was undertaken, remains almost entirely that of the interviewer.

Under such a paradigm, to ask for a more active role from the one interviewed can be easily understood as overstepping or violating the character of such a relationship. This might account for some of the negative framing of the invitational aspect of the 1-1 as a preexisting "agenda" or "manipulation." As a result of such a framing, Michael observed that, "I can say that not much came from those one hundred 1-1s in terms of movement toward ABLE. I can't think of anybody who joined ABLE because of them."[326] Natalie echoed this point, noting that although 1-1s were a useful to have, "to listen to people and to try to understand their point of view…I don't see [1-1s] as a tool that's going to move what [ABLE's] doing forward."[327] More regular, rigorous training would have emphasized the invitation part of 1-1s and encouraged the shift in thinking from the interview research to relationship paradigm. Lacking an organizer for so much time, ABLE provided limited guidance to its participants, who fell back on more familiar modes of perception. As a result, 1-1s did little beyond gleaning information and were fairly unsuccessful in cultivating collaborative leadership within these participants.

In contrast, justice-oriented leaders Ken, Tina, and Kate approached 1-1s quite differently. Ken affirmed the role of getting to know someone in 1-1s but only so far as "once you identify that common interest, you have the ability to collaborate and work on something together."[328] To him, the aim of 1-1s was to build a collaborative relationship based on shared interests in which both parties had responsibilities beyond the initial conversation. This

[326] Michael in interview with author, February 5, 2016.
[327] Natalie in interview with author, May 24, 2016.
[328] Ken in interview with author, February 23, 2016.

understanding became clearer when these leaders talked about the questioning and inviting aspects of 1-1s. Whereas leaders with a participatory orientation demonstrated great eagerness to learn as much about the other person as possible, Ken and Tina distinguished between appropriate and inappropriate questioning. Careless questioning could undermine one's ability to build the types of relationships necessary for the work. Ken noted that 1-1s are "not trying to profile and get personal information. Being courageous enough to really talk and try and figure out what you like and dislike, those are the types of things, but getting personal and building a cache of personal information that you could possibly hold over someone's head. No. Never. Never."[329] While it took courage to be interested enough to understand a person sufficiently to find areas of mutual interest, Ken was deeply concerned about haphazard probing as he wasn't a "psychologist." Tina made a similar point when she noted the confusion that many folks have towards 1-1s, including leaders and those they visited. She commented, "They think that they're personal; you want to know their business. I don't want to know your business, because I don't want to be frustrated and depressed."[330] While Ken was aware of the possible harm to and exploitation of the person visited, particularly if reduced to a research subject or therapy patient, Tina was concerned for her own mental health.[331] Many of the issues she had worked on over the years with another Gamaliel affiliate had directly affected her and her family. As such, she justifiably felt unable indiscriminately to take on the pain of all those with whom she did 1-1s. In both cases, Ken and Tina expressed far more ambivalence about asking certain types of

[329] Ken in interview with author, February 23, 2016.
[330] Tina in interview with author, April 1, 2016.
[331] The catharsis of "feeling heard," mentioned by Dawn, could easily veer into the territory of therapy if one was not careful.

questions in a 1-1 than issuing an invitation for others to join the work, the primary point of contention for participatory leaders.[332]

By resisting the interview paradigm and focusing on building collaborative relationships, the invitational aspect of the 1-1 became central for these leaders. It was not necessary to catalogue all the other person's concerns but rather to discover and invite partnership over a few key issues. Ken, Tina, and Kate were all clear on this because they understood the difference between public and private relationships, a key part of national leadership training. Indeed, CBCO's 1-1s are intended to cultivate public, rather than private, relationships. Private relationships, such as one maintains with family and close friends, demand exhaustive knowledge of the other person. Public relationships, in contrast, rely more on shared investment in common concerns. Tina epitomized this point when she noted that in 1-1's, "I just want to know what you can offer to this community and what this community can offer you. If you know something that we don't know and [know] how to do it, [then…] teach us how to do it so that we can survive in this community."[333] Tina reflects well Leondar-Wright's point that working-class activists already personally rely on and thus subsequently seek out robust social networks in social change efforts.[334] It is not enough to understand the problems of a community; one must have partners who contribute their knowledge and skill to addressing it. In such partnerships, leadership is inherently collaborative.

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[332] This desire to protect personal privacy reminds me of when I lived in Ghana, West Africa. In addition to not understanding why I required so much physical space and private space to do things alone, my neighbors were perplexed at how freely I shared personal stories and opinions. To keep one's thoughts to oneself was about the only privacy one could maintain when families shared close quarters. As such, it seemed nonsensical to relinquish that part of oneself so easily and, in such a small village, give over thoughts and opinions for judgment by the community.

[333] Tina in interview with author, April 1, 2016.

[334] Leondar-Wright, *Missing Class*, 102.

Framed in this way, issuing an invitation to work together for the survival of the community wasn't an external "agenda" to or "manipulation" within a 1-1, but the primary point. To deny someone the opportunity to contribute to the community would be far more harmful for all involved. Kate affirmed this point when she noted the link between getting to know a person and recruitment.

> You really try to get the person in touch with their own stuff. The other thing is that you need to gather data about what they care about so that you can have a more successful potential recruiting experience…Recruit them to bring them into the circle. To get them more engaged. To make them a participant in the organization. Find out what connections they have with other people, what issues they care about, what are they working on? What's their life experience?[335]

Unlike Michael, Frank, and Dawn, who attempted to divorce the appeal to get involved from the 1-1 visit itself, Kate observed that learning about the other person was a necessary part of recruiting those who could offer the community something, to paraphrase Tina. Ken, Tina, and Kate's emphasis on inviting others into the work recognizes the collaborative leadership intended by 1-1s.

Research Meetings & Actions

As I noted in the previous chapter, the rules guiding research meetings and actions strongly correspond to the three aspects of 1-1s, thus strengthening the ritual formation possible. Like 1-1s, both research meetings and actions begin with a credential, offered by one of the leaders in attendance, which articulates the purpose of the encounter. And like 1-1s, research meetings and actions end with an invitation for the public official, rather than private individual, to commit to some next step. While research meetings mirror 1-1s in asking open-ended

[335] Kate in interview with author, June 2, 2016.

questions, actions showcase information, either presented by the leadership team or highlighted by the community through public testimony.

Although there is much overlap in their ritual aspects, there are two noteworthy differences between 1-1s on the one hand and research meetings and actions on the other. First, research meetings and actions involve a team of ABLE leaders rather than an individual. As a result, leaders may have a narrower understanding of the whole ritual as it may take several times for them to rotate through the several available roles. For example, in an action, a leader may serve as a chair, presenter of research report, or as the "pinner" responsible for soliciting a commitment from the invited guest. Second, research meetings and actions direct their attention to those holding certain positions, such as elected officials or government employees. By contrast, 1-1s seek out individuals by virtue of their belonging to certain communities, most often a shared neighborhood or congregation. Though ABLE leaders had, in general, less experience with and training on research meetings and actions, most leaders were able to recount and reflect on at least one of these rituals. Again, differences emerged between participatory and justice-oriented leaders.[336] These differences centered on varying levels of sensitivity to unequal power dynamics and subsequent strategies to remedy the inequality.

Leaders with a participatory orientation tended to emphasize their intimacy and peer relationship with public officials, often citing personal access to their representatives. Frank, for example, remarked on his connection to local officials, sharing, "I sit next to our representative at Leadership Sandy Springs, using my influence there to kind of talk about stuff."[337] Natalie

[336] Neither Natalie nor Kate had much to say about research meetings and actions, though likely for different reasons. I suspect, for Natalie, it was her lack of experience with either ritual. In Kate's case, her professional background as a labor organizer encouraged her to approach our conversation marking the distinctions between CBCO and labor organizing. Thus, she focused her attention on what she felt were the two primary points of divergence between the two organizing models – CBCO's 1-1s and faith-based focus.
[337] Frank in interview with author, March 4, 2016.

noted her existing capacity for lobbying, garnered through her profession and routine access to decision-makers: "I've been to the legislature, I've talked at committee meetings, I've talked to individual legislators."[338] While Frank and Natalie expressed frustration when their elected representatives did not support their priorities, they didn't doubt their own ability to exercise influence generally. Instead, Frank attributed the lack of support for ABLE's comprehensive immigration reform to party politics, which limited officials' ability to "think for themselves."[339] Although this explanation is accurate to some extent, it tends to mystify influence and sidestep power analysis. Demystifying power and understanding the self-interest of public officials is essential to the CBCO approach and written into the rituals of research meetings and actions.

Similarly, these leaders affirmed intimacy and equality with decision-makers by emphasizing the pleasantness of events (i.e. research meetings and actions) conducted under the ABLE banner.[340] While research meetings can be pleasant, their success, according to CBCO, is marked by establishing a relationship of accountability, initiated by an invitation to work with the organization on this issue and possibly attend a future event. Michael demonstrated his participatory orientation when he reflected on his research meeting with the county commissioner. Michael remarked "She was so easy to talk to. It was just a good session. We enjoyed it, both of us. I saw her recently and she remembered me, and we talked a bit."[341] Michael's incomplete understanding of the 1-1, conceived primarily as a "getting to know you" visit, carried over into his framing of research meetings. There was little trace of the invitation

[338] Natalie in interview with author, May 24, 2016.
[339] Frank in interview with author, March 4, 2016.
[340] "Who do you love?" This CBCO principle points out that the interests of government officials and those they govern can be at odds. When that is the case, organizers press leaders to choose a side, as it were, between the governing and the governed – the priority is always given to the governed. By affirming intimacy with public officials, participatory leaders are signaling a different allegiance. "PICO * Principles for Community Organizing," accessed April 15, 2018, http://www.piapico.org/docs/PICO_Principles.pdf..
[341] Michael in interview with author, February 5, 2016.

element in Michael's accounts of either 1-1s or research meetings, which is often the point of tension as both individuals and public officials can and do say no.

Michael did, however, highlight the invitational aspect of CBCO rituals when recounting a recent ABLE action to "Ban the Box." He shared:

> We've invited them to our meetings and they were to speak and address the issue as they see it, and then hear our feedback, and all. I'm thinking right now of a time in our public assembly of ABLE on its regular monthly meetings we had about four or five county people. We asked them questions and stated our point of view. At the conclusion they all were saying, 'Well we hear you and we're sympathetic with what you're saying, and we want to pursue this.' We followed up later with the people, and it slowly moved toward a very good position.[342]

In this succinct account, Michael points towards all three of the elements involved in the action ritual. He credentials the meeting as an event appropriately hosted by ABLE for a particular purpose. He alludes to ABLE's research on the issue ("stated our point of view") though he doesn't mention any of public testimony which did, in fact, occur. And finally, he notes the county people's affirmative response to ABLE's invitation to support this issue ("we asked them questions…they were all saying, 'well we hear you….'"). On this issue, ABLE was fortunate to find easy support from decision-makers, though this is not always the case. Michael's expectation of respectful congeniality from public officials might have been challenged had there been a more contentious action.

Dawn, on the other hand, was deeply dissatisfied with a related action, which aimed to secure Governor Deal's public support on "Ban the Box."[343] After collecting a couple of

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[342] Michael in interview with author, February 5, 2016.

[343] Dawn does not fit easily into either category, though I find her more participatory than justice-oriented as I will explain in later pages. Still, I do not want to push past the challenge she represents. Anthropologist Don Seeman observed the difficulty and importance of respecting things that don't quite fit. He writes, "Yet ethnography is close to worthless, in my view, if it does not also contain something else: a portrayal of the hard edges of things that resist all our interpretive and theoretical interventions; a commitment to honestly confront the ways in which contours of other lives push back against our most cherished moral visions, no matter what these may be." Don Seeman, "Ethnography of the Hard Edge." *Practical Matters*, Spring 2013, Issue 6: 1-6, accessed May 10, 2018, http://practicalmattersjournal.org/2013/03/01/hard-edge/.

thousand signed cards from ABLE congregation members affirming support of "Banning the Box," Dawn explained that

> We put them in boxes, similar to when you get petitions signed, stuff like that. We took them to the state capital, and we had a press conference, and they had a gentleman speak who was a returning citizen that was having a hard time finding a job, and his story and he was very eloquent. There were other people on the panel and all that was done, now we're going to take them to Governor Deal, and we never saw Governor Deal. All we saw was his little henchman or whatever.[344]

The three elements of an action are less clear in this account, though Dawn does highlight public testimony, a central aspect. However, her frustration over the lack of interaction with Governor Deal is important. Though Governor Deal supported "Ban the Box," Dawn felt alienated from the governor, frustrated at being pawned off to a staffer.[345] ABLE's good work, she observed, apparently did not warrant a moment of the governor's time. So although ABLE may have "won" the issue by getting the box banned on applications for state jobs in 2015, no relationship of accountability was created between ABLE and the governor. Unlike other participatory leaders, Dawn regularly lifted up examples of unequal relational dynamics and lack of accountability, both between ABLE leaders and public officials, and within ABLE itself. For example, she was troubled by the preferential treatment she perceived towards ABLE pastors.[346] Yet, Dawn felt uncomfortable with how readily CBCO rituals seemed to seek conflict to redress these imbalances.

In contrast, justice-oriented leaders, such as Tina and Ken, tended to emphasize tension in their encounters with public officials and note strategies to change unequal power dynamics. As I

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[344] Dawn in interview with author, March 15, 2016.
[345] Tina was similarly frustrated with this event: "We didn't get our point across [for Ban the Box] because we were ready for [the governor], but he didn't show up." Tina in interview with author, April 1, 2016.
[346] Dawn: "I thought well…[the organizer's] going to let [an ABLE pastor] have it because part of the accountability factor is if somebody screws up, why did you do that? You're in their face. We handled him with kid gloves." Dawn in interview with author, March 15, 2016.

argued earlier, research meetings and actions are structured in such a way as to encourage such attentiveness and democratize power. Tina, who had participated in many research meetings and actions when associated with another CBCO, was sensitive to privileges assumed by public officials, privileges rarely granted to constituents. She observed that public officials often find the invitation element of an action the most difficult aspect because they are used to speaking at length and making vague promises. Fortunately, CBCO actions thwart such expectations as they limit the speaking time for every person attending and seek clear commitments from decision-makers. For some, this constraint may appear unfair and counterproductive to building a relationship with elected officials. Tina was clear that neither was the case. She explained that public officials were never unfairly ambushed at actions as "they get all that we are going to ask them and everything, so they know what we are going to ask."[347] In addition, she observed that actions were meant to build relationships of mutual accountability, not just solicit favors from representatives.

Thus, Tina expressed frustration when elected officials didn't respectfully prepare for the meeting and

> when they didn't read [the overview of the commitments sought] and they go up there, they didn't have answers, and then they got their feelings hurt. Then they want to speak. This is my meeting, you cannot speak. You can say yes or no. [You can] say at a later date we will come to talk with you, but you will not take over our meeting.[348]

Although success on the issue is important (i.e. winning a "yes" commitment from public officials), Tina focused more on how the public official prepared for and conducted him/herself in the meeting. Preparation and a willingness to abide by the rules of the meeting ("you can say yes or no") signaled an equitable relationship and democratized power; falling back on old

[347] Tina in interview with author, April 1, 2016.
[348] Tina in interview with author, April 1, 2016.

habits, such as speaking at length over constituents, indicated the opposite. Although Tina had worked closely with a number of public officials through her CBCO involvement, her recollections consistently attested to her pursuit of respectful exchanges rather than intimate familiarity.

Ken also focused on power dynamics as he reflected on research meetings and actions. Ken's recollection of ABLE's efforts to ensure sidewalks in new neighborhood developments is a great example. According to Ken, ABLE leaders had already had several unsuccessful meetings with the appropriate decision-maker. The power dynamics were decidedly unequal and the decision-maker was intent on keeping them that way. Ken observed that "She was crafty, she was smooth, extremely organized…. she had a seating structure in her board room where she made you feel like the little guy."[349] Consequently, ABLE leaders were unable to get her to follow through on commitments she had previously made.

According to Ken, things changed during their third or fourth meeting. At that meeting, Ken said,

> We took these three seats right here [where the decision-maker and her staff usually sat]. Then, we had someone standing at the other end of the room, not seated. Standing. It made her totally uncomfortable. Her guys are having to look beyond our people right here to even make eye contact to get their little winks or whatever they need to say or do stuff. Totally shut them down.[350]

By altering the seating arrangement, Ken observed that the power dynamic between ABLE leaders and the decision maker changed. Near the end of this meeting, the decision maker acquiesced and recommitted to building sidewalks in new developments.[351] Like Tina, while

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[349] Ken in interview with author, February 23, 2016.
[350] Ken in interview with author, February 23, 2016.
[351] Ken outlined the commitments ABLE leaders sought: "[W]e just want you to actually deliver on what you promised….Within a square mile, there should be sidewalks, we want those sidewalks built, but we don't want the county to have to pay for them. We want impact fees on every developer in the county who's cutting down stuff, just

winning sidewalks was important, for Ken the change in dynamics between ABLE and this decision maker was even more important. How Ken described and interpreted this experience demonstrates a strong understanding of the formative potential of research meetings and actions – developing a taste for democratized power by enacting more equitable, accountable relationships with public officials. In sum, justice-oriented leaders Ken and Tina were attentive to power dynamics and aware of CBCO strategies to adjust those dynamics. In contrast, leaders with a participatory orientation, like Michael and Frank, generally neither remarked on the unequal power dynamics that often existed between elected officials and constituents nor sought to address them.

So far, I have focused on how participatory or justice orientation shaped leaders' understanding and enactment of CBCO rituals. The same personal and professional experiences which gave life to these orientations also informed their perception of CBCO more generally. For Frank and Michael, justice was not their primary motivation for getting involved with ABLE, though justice is, in fact, woven into every aspect of CBCO. They were mainly attracted to ABLE for other reasons, which colored their vision of the work and limited the impact of subsequent training. Frank felt that ABLE allowed him to live out the Bible's primary message to love one's neighbor, a biblical interpretation he had become convicted about in the last ten or so years. This duty to love had compelled him to become involved with ABLE when ESL students at his church were being targeted by local police. Michael, by contrast, suggested that he had simply been ready to participate for the first time in his life when other church members had urged involvement in ABLE. For him, ABLE was appealing because it encouraged individuals to work together, which Michael felt was essential. He noted that, unlike other social justice

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throwing up subdivisions left and right. They should pay for deceleration lanes and for sidewalks. We want impact fees on everything that they're doing." Ken in interview with author, February 23, 2016.

organizations, "in ABLE, you can link up with others who are doing something, so it becomes easy if you're together doing it."[352] While love and camaraderie are elements of CBCO, it centers on justice, expressed through democratized power and collaborative leadership, concepts which did not resonate deeply with either men.

Natalie and Dawn, in contrast, were motivated to get involved with ABLE because of their commitment to social justice, grounded in personal and professional experiences. One had seen how unjust the criminal justice system could be in regard to drug sentencing because of a family member's addiction. As a teacher, the other had witnessed the significant disparity in public education resources. Both women were attracted to ABLE because, as Natalie expressed, it was about "fundamental justice and fundamental justice is not about being equal. It's about taking care of what's needed, as it is needed, which does not mean that everybody gets the same."[353] Natalie's commitment to equity found resonance in ABLE's mission. However, Natalie assumed that CBCO was primarily pursuing justice through participatory means, something at which she felt comfortable and competent. As such, she reimagined and conducted 1-1s and research meetings, respectively, as qualitative interviews and lobbying instead of appreciating them as alternative rituals. This participatory interpretation hindered her openness to more training and obscured recognition of CBCO as justice-oriented and inherently critical of established political processes.[354]

Unlike Natalie, Dawn had a clearer understanding of CBCO and resonated with its attention to unequal power dynamics. Yet, in addition to the hypocritical hierarchy she perceived within ABLE, Dawn felt ill at ease with the confrontational character of CBCO rituals and more

[352] Michael in interview with author, February 5, 2016.
[353] Natalie in interview with author, May 24, 2016.
[354] Tina made an apt observation, which is well-suited to this point: "[T]hey don't know [but] because they are so educated down in Georgia, you can't tell them anything." Tina in interview with author, April 1, 2016.

generally with the justice-oriented approach to social change. She felt that CBCO advocated a very masculine, overly aggressive approach, with "everyone want[ing] to be in charge. Men do that and women don't."[355] Dawn observed that women accessed their power differently, with a greater focus on cooperation. Thus, Dawn perceived that CBCO rituals were inherently at odds with the empowerment she valued most and this made her ambivalent about further training, which might have resolved some of those concerns. Dawn's participatory orientation seemed to persist in part because the justice-oriented alternative was even less tenable. While Natalie and Dawn were more likely than Frank or Michael to be receptive to CBCO's justice-oriented formation because of their explicit desire for justice, the depth of their respective attachment to professional middle-class formation (e.g. participatory leadership skills) and competing ideological commitments (e.g. masculine vs. feminine power) had thus far hindered this.

Like Natalie and Dawn, Ken, Tina, and Kate were drawn to ABLE because of their commitment to justice. They recognized that justice was the primary aim of ABLE. In addition, Ken, Tina, and Kate all had backgrounds that resonated with CBCO's justice-oriented approach to political engagement, something that Natalie and Dawn missed or felt uncomfortable with. Each justice-oriented leader, a social outsider in terms of race, nationality, and class, was skeptical of a participatory approach to social justice and established political processes from the outset. Their intimacy with injustice, instead, had prepared them to anticipate a difficult road to justice and systemic reform, likely involving conflict and requiring partners. Though they might have been overwhelmed at the task facing them, each of these leaders also demonstrated an abiding hope in fairness, most often rooted in their faith, which gave them courage to act and

[355] Dawn in interview with author, March 15, 2016. This charge of chauvinism within the CBCO is not unheard of. See Swarts, *Organizing Urban America*.

demand more from those in their community and those who represented them. In sum, CBCO's justice-oriented model resonated deeply with the life experiences of these leaders.

For his part, Ken lamented the passivity he felt was prevalent in the US church. Christians, according to the tenets of their faith, ought to take the lead in seeking justice in the community. To explain his involvement with ABLE in particular, Ken reflected on his instinct to stand up to bullies, even as a black child in a newly integrated school. He remarked,

> I think all of us have situations…in our lives when we're younger where we say we have a choice, if you will, to take an action or be a bystander in seeing injustice occur. I recall 4th, 5th grade or something like that. I was always a bigger kid, the tall kid, the athlete kind of a thing. It would really, frankly, piss me off when people pick on small kids. I do not like bullies. Never have. Never have. I found myself, one of my best friends was just a small kid. I remember standing up for him on multiple occasions. Of course, the other side to that is my coming out of 3rd grade, segregation to integration, coming out of 3rd grade, we could start to attend integrated schools.[356]

Ken felt a deep responsibility to protect the weak, whether harmed by a school bully or poorly represented by an elected official. In some ways, Ken approached his work with ABLE as an advocate, a bigger kid protecting the smaller kids, having secured a comfortable life for himself. Yet Ken also knew what it was to be undeservedly vulnerable in his experience of segregation and the transition to integration. This dual perspective gave him the desire and courage to demand accountability from public officials and seek democratized power, elements which CBCO rituals sought to cultivate in participants as they pursued social justice.

Tina's commitment to social justice was also grounded in experiences of vulnerability and strength. Tina had, early on in her involvement with another CBCO group, offered public testimony at an action on immigration. As an immigrant from South America, Tina knew intimately the vulnerability that comes with being a foreigner in a new country. Despite this, Tina felt empowered to seek accountability from the powerful on matters of social justice, for

[356] Ken in interview with author, February 23, 2016.

she hadn't "grow[n] up to be scared of men. I was brought up to be scared of God and Jesus."[357] Tina found strengthen in her faith and its message about the equality of all people. To illustrate this point, Tina talked about her lack of fear when she decided to require all invited public officials to pay for their tables at a CBCO fundraising event. Commissioners and senators, she noted, were typically not asked to pay, a way to ensure their attendance at such events, but Tina did because "I don't give freebies."[358] For Tina, justice required making the same demands on all people, most especially the powerful. The CBCO rituals, which centered on democratizing power, resonated with these convictions.

Kate lifted up similar understandings about justice as fairness, drawing on her experiences of economic vulnerability as part of a working-class family. She was aware that other people had more and yet,

> my dad would tell us when we were growing up that death didn't care whether you were white and rich, because all the white rich people didn't wake up in the morning. Some of them didn't wake up. My whole life, those were themes for me. The whole notion around fairness, everybody being the same, the rich guy isn't any better than you are. All of that. That was all there.[359]

Her father's words had driven Kate's pursuit of a world that better reflected the equality of all people. This lesson was reinforced with her Catholic upbringing, which emphasized the health of the community over the success of the individual. She observed that "the whole crux of Catholicism is [that] it's not about you….It's really not about you. That and a big family, it's not about you. My whole life it's been, 'It's really not about you.' It's about like, 'How's everybody else in the circle? Does everybody have their beach towel? Who didn't eat dinner?'"[360] For Kate,

[357] Tina in interview with author, April 1, 2016.
[358] Tina in interview with author, April 1, 2016.
[359] Kate in interview with author, June 2, 2016.
[360] Kate in interview with author, June 2, 2016.

her Catholic faith gave her a different perspective on what it meant to be a community, which in turn enabled her to ask more of those who were tasked with leading the community. The CBCO rituals and their formative outcomes of collaborative leadership and democratized power felt natural to Kate because of her background.

For each of the justice-oriented leaders, their personal experiences with social vulnerability and a faith-inspired courage drove them to persist with ABLE and CBCO rituals. Ken, Tina, and Kate had good reason to question participatory political rituals. This critical stance towards established political systems and practices made their individual adoption of CBCO rituals relatively uncomplicated. These rituals resonated with and reinforced their existing political tastes, modes of perception, virtues, and skills. At the same time, their commitment to CBCO rituals was buoyed by solid training in the CBCO model and experiences with a strong organization (e.g. early ABLE, another CBCO group, or labor organizing), which kept them committed to the rituals even when ABLE's loyalty lagged. In contrast, leaders Frank, Michael, Dawn, and Natalie remained oriented towards participatory politics, despite their sincere interest in CBCO and social change. They felt comfortable with conventional approaches to social change and didn't have or weren't given a good enough reason to commit individually to CBCO's rituals. Absent robust training in and use of the CBCO model, these leaders' existing political tastes, modes of perception, virtues, and skills remained, complicating their justice-oriented formation.[361] Their inclusion in and inclination toward established political processes proved to be an additional obstacle to overcome.

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[361] This project centers on formation, the incremental process by which one is shaped or reshaped, specifically through the employment of particular rituals. Yet, William James' discussion around conversion or the forms of "regenerative change" serves as a useful reminder about how temperament can influence our formation. For some, conversion is of a volitional type, in which "the regenerative change is usually gradual, and consists in the building up, piece by piece, of a new set of moral and spiritual habits." Aspects of this definition overlap with this project's discussion of formation. Yet, for others, a sudden or instantaneous conversion can occur, evidenced by the story of Saint Paul. Because CBCO rituals can be powerful events, I leave open the possibility that participating in a single

Consistently employed, CBCO rituals can develop justice-oriented citizens who not only critique the injustice which persists in established political systems and practices but renegotiate the relationship between the governing and governed. This is vital if structural injustice, which persists in the normal patterns of political decision-making, is to be addressed and greater participatory parity achieved. Chapter three made this argument by applying ritual thinking to the CBCO model.

Yet, the quest for just social change is complicated, even with promising possibilities like CBCO. Ken noted that an idealized understanding of justice might contribute to this. He observed that those involved in ABLE were prone to

> romanticizing community organizing….I think our hearts do hurt for those who were experiencing injustices, but I don't believe that the congregations who are represented there are committed to really systemically do anything, because it's not a one and done thing. There's work, you have to address these ills from a system perspective, and that takes blood, sweat, and tears, and I don't think there's a commitment there. [362]

Though Ken is speaking about ABLE in particular, his point about romanticizing the pursuit of justice echoes more broadly. A fuller understanding of justice and its demands for systemic reform, even of our existing political processes, is required if we are to make progress. This includes a better appreciation for the challenges that might complicate the work as well.

Whereas the last chapter pointed to the value of CBCO in cultivating justice-oriented citizens, this chapter used ritual thinking to illuminate potential complications to such formation. As my time with ABLE demonstrated, consistent employment of CBCO rituals, essential for justice-oriented formation to occur, can be difficult. Thus ABLE was challenged in two respects. First, ABLE's complicated organizational history encouraged a culture of ambivalence toward

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ritual might transform how one approaches social change and understands citizenship. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences: A Study in Human Nature,* reprint (New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 206.

[362] Ken in interview with author, February 23, 2016.

CBCO rituals. This, in turn, prevented the rituals from becoming the operational norm and limited their formative power for those involved. Second, the diverse nature of ABLE meant that participants held various visions of citizenship. While some leaders readily resonated with the justice-oriented character of CBCO rituals and were strengthen in their justice-oriented understandings, the preexisting participatory instincts of others proved to be an additional obstacle. These leaders often reinterpreted CBCO rituals in ways that muted their justice-oriented character, and this in turn reinforced these leaders participatory understandings of social change. This hindered the formative process intended by CBCO.

Though these insights emerged from applying the lens of ritual to the particular experiences of ABLE, they hold value for Christian ethicists concerned with injustice and its persistence within forms of political participation. As this chapter demonstrated, altering *how* we undertake social change will also require attention to the role of institutions and the impact of individual formation, particularly as privileged or marginalized citizens. Our assumptions regarding appropriate forms of political participation are deeply shaped by social location. In highlighting these additional aspects, ritual thinking illuminates more essential questions which must be considered in pursuit of just social change. In my conclusion, I reflect on the trajectory of this project and ritual thinking's key contributions, and consider valuable, future lines of inquiry.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

When I was a community organizer, a single sheet of paper containing thirty-three CBCO organizing principles hung on my wall. I have quoted a number of them in the previous pages. One of my favorites – "Small is beautiful" – inspired the title of this project. Like many other organizers, I learned and applied this principle to strategy development to help leaders discern which social issue or portion of a community problem to address first. "Small is beautiful" suggests that even small steps are meaningful, by themselves and for what they might build to in time. Fixing a single dangerous bus stop today could develop into a campaign to fund public transportation properly citywide. It could also provide the training ground for increasingly competent community leaders. This interpretation resonates with Hauerwas and Coles's affirmation of the "politics of small achievements" in a world dominated by the "politics of compulsory speed."[363]

Yet, "small is beautiful" has taken on additional meaning in this project. It signals, as I hope has become apparent, the importance of attending to what is perceived to be inconsequential. For Christian ethicists concerned with social justice, this takes the shape of reflecting on *how* justice is pursued, in particular paying attention to the "small" details of political participation. A closer look at discrete acts of political engagement illuminates their weighty significance. Consistently and collectively employed, such acts contain the potential either to contribute to participatory distortion or to work towards greater participatory parity. The

[363] In part, Coles' involvement with IAF inspired this distinction, for IAF practices the "complex art of listening" and prioritizes the "establishment of relationships." Hauerwas and Coles, *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary*, 4, 19.

better to understand and respond to this possibility, in Chapter two I introduced ritual thinking, an analytical tool which enables investigation into the formative character of acts of political engagement. Through the lens of ritual, it becomes apparent that the small act of voting, for instance, not only records popular will, but also cultivates a taste for individual political decision-making. With ritual thinking, Christian ethicists gain a theoretical frame through which to engage the vital question of *how* justice is to be pursued.

In Chapters three and four, I demonstrated how ritual thinking could unpack and illuminate issues of injustice within political activity. Through my investigation of CBCO and its alternative rituals in Chapter three, I highlighted how "small" political rituals enliven distinct understandings of citizenship and social change.[364] This is obscured if acts of political participation are considered to be merely tools. The ritual of lobbying, for instance, maps onto a participatory vision of citizenship, in which existing political processes are assumed to be adequate and fair. Through this ritual, citizens can influence public decision-making and secure just outcomes. At the same time, lobbying reflects and reinforces the exclusionary nature of our current political process by relying heavily on civic skills, which are not evenly distributed throughout the population. For example, certain communication skills are needed to make the "clear, focused, and persuasive case" expected by elected officials during a lobbying visit."[365] Without such skills, one's access to the political decision-making process is greatly limited. In contrast, CBCO rituals concretize a justice-oriented vision of citizenship, which critiques

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[364] Appreciation of the diverse rituals of political participation, which encourage people to persist in seeking influence and decision-making power, keeps me from Sheldon S. Wolin's pessimistic read of politics today, in which "the citizen is shrunk to the voter: periodically courted, warned, and confused but otherwise kept at a distance from actual decision-making and allowed to emerge only ephemerally in a cameo appearance according to a script composed by the opinion takers/ makers." Sheldon S. Wolin, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought,* Expanded Edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 565.

[365] Congressional Management Foundation, *Face-to-Face with Congress: Before, During, and After Meetings with Legislators* (Washington: Congress Foundation, 2014), 10. http://www.congressfoundation.org/storage/documents/CMF_Pubs/cmf-face-to-face-with-congress.pdf

existing processes and seek systematic reform. In turn, 1-1s, research meetings, and actions cultivate a taste and skills for collaborative leadership and democratized power needed for participatory parity. Civic skills are not presumed nor the primary requirement for political participation through CBCO rituals. Instead, CBCO rituals affirm and nurture relational and critical thinking skills, enabling the participation of more persons in public decision-making. Considering individual political rituals within the larger context of citizenship makes apparent the cumulative impact of consistently employing certain political rituals to seek justice. *How* justice is pursued has importance for our collective political life. In light of commitments to structural justice and political parity, ritual thinking makes clear the tremendous promise of CBCO rituals as they contest exclusionary aspects of existing political processes.

Chapter four continued the work of Chapter three, though shifting focus to the lived experience of one CBCO group, ABLE, and using ritual thinking to illuminate complications related to just social change. Though CBCO rituals are promising alternatives to participatory forms of political engagement, their efficacy in forming justice-oriented citizens necessary for systemic reform of political structures and decision-making processes is by no means assured. Using the lens of ritual, Chapter four identified two aspects that challenged the formation of justice-oriented leaders within ABLE. For one, ABLE's complicated history encouraged organizational ambivalence towards CBCO rituals, which lessened their use and weakened their formative power on participants. In addition, several ABLE leaders brought with them deep participatory understandings of citizenship and this presented an additional obstacle to their justice-oriented transformation. Their pre-existing participatory understanding of *how* social change should occur limited the use of or reinterpreted CBCO rituals in ways that inhibited

intended justice-oriented formation. For instance, the 1-1 was reimagined as an interview rather than an invitation for collaboration.

Though these insights emerged from the particular context of ABLE, they are informative for Christian ethicists. The experience of ABLE leaders illuminates the hold latent understandings of "good" citizenship and "appropriate" political engagement have on individuals and emphasizes the importance of institutional resources in their reformation. As persons charged with interpreting and vitalizing the Christian tradition, ethicists are uniquely positioned to offer support and guidance to Christians pursuing social change. To do so, however, Christian ethicists have to be more self-reflective about their own political instincts and how they might be shaped by professional middle-class experiences of political enfranchisement. A more considered look at our own political formation is required if we are to be successful in reimagining political decision-making and comprehensively responding to structural injustice. Justice-oriented formation is needed to enact the systemic reform required for greater participatory parity in political decision-making.

Together, Chapters two through four draw attention to the significance of small actions and the importance of reflecting on *how* justice is pursued. In this way, ritual thinking encourages the beautiful possibility that Christian ethicists might grow more adept at recognizing and addressing the problem of structural injustice, which can both accompany and result from political action. Ideally, such scholarly reflections will inform and energize the social justice efforts of ordinary Christians.

To introduce ritual thinking, much of this project has centered on the case study of CBCO. This narrower focus has allowed me to demonstrate ritual thinking's value as an analytical tool that can illuminate the complexity of injustice in concrete ways. Yet, ritual

thinking makes broader contributions to the field of Christian ethics by encouraging conversations often inhibited by traditional dichotomies. As I noted in the introduction, Protestant Christian ethicists has often debated whether the norms of faithfulness or effectiveness ought to govern Christian political activity. For some, like Hauerwas, Christian should engage the world as faithful disciples and let go of criterion such as efficacy. For others, often in the lineage of Niebuhr, Christians ought to be responsible pragmatists and recognize the untenability of absolute faithfulness. As a result, the scholarly conversation has tended to center around *whether* political action ought to be undertaken and has devoted little time to considering *how* justice ought to be pursued.

A brief glance at Niebuhr and Hauerwas's work exemplifies the meagerness of the advice offered. Niebuhr provides a few principles to guide political activity, such as the need for "humility and repentance" and allegiance to the less privileged to inform and temper existing means of securing social change.[366] However, the responsibility to act politically persists even if it always falls short, as "human progress will depend upon the judicious use of the forces of nature in the service of the ideal."[367] As a result, Niebuhr tends to gloss over *how* any particular political action might fall short, and instead defaults to established political processes for the closest approximation of justice through the balance of opposing forces.

For his part, Hauerwas reframes the conversation so that Christian politics is identical to Christian witness of the peaceable Kingdom of God. Worldly political activity risks participation in politics "based on coercion and falsehood" and outcomes achieved through "unjust means" are

[366] Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Ethic of Jesus and the Social Problem" in *Love and Justice: Selections from the Shorter Writings of Reinhold Niebuhr,* ed. D.B. Robertson (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1957), 37.
[367] Reinhold Niebuhr, "Must We Do Nothing?" in *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics*, Wayne G. Boulton, Thomas D. Kennedy, and Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 425.

unacceptable for Christians.[368] As a result, Hauerwas urges limited political activity, focusing instead on how religious rituals might cultivate a holy people. Reflection on whether certain political acts might be less coercive or more just means by which to engage in political decision-making he leaves unconsidered.[369]

Within this context, ritual thinking is promising as it brackets questions of whether or not Christians should engage politically and focuses first on identifying and weighing the diverse political rituals available for use. The lens of ritual gives Christian ethicists space to pursue new questions regarding political action rather than getting bogged down in old debates. Within this project, ritual thinking has enabled me to reflect on what structurally just political action might look like. In doing so, I have drawn on and extended elements within Niebuhr and Hauerwas's work. Like Niebuhr, I affirm both the need to examine critically social structures and the Christian responsibility to address concrete social injustices. In fact, my objective in this project has been to encourage political action that is more responsive to the demands of justice. At the same time, my overall approach resonates with Hauerwas and his emphasis on the process of discernment. Hauerwas is deeply influenced by Niebuhr's brother, H. Richard, and his famous argument that the *"first question we must ask is not 'What should we do?' but 'What is going on?'"*[370] In calling for careful attention to and robust evaluation of various political acts, I have used ritual thinking to encourage greater reflection on political activity, something that Niebuhr tends to undervalue.[371] In doing so, ritual thinking has enabled a level of discernment that

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[368] Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 377, 380.
[369] It may be that Hauerwas believes that political engagement of any kind encourages the troublesome mindset that humans control history. This contradicts his emphasis that faithful Christians live out of control. Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 381.
[370] Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 377. Italics in original.
[371] In "The Grace of Doing Nothing," H. Richard Niebuhr argues that "the problem we face is often that of choice between various kinds of inactivity rather than of a choice between action and inaction." In contrast to H. Richard Niebuhr who leans towards certain forms of "inactivity," I am proposing a process of discernment, which generally presumes action of some kind unless given a good reason not to do so. H. Richard Niebuhr, "The Grace of Doing

Hauerwas laments is often missing within Christian ethics in its overenthusiasm to work within the "world's social ethic" while at the same time ritual thinking has made space for positive valuations of certain political acts.[372] Hauerwas might still be reluctant about Christian involvement in politics but the lens of ritual can help unpack discrete political actions and investigate whether the "worldly" convictions Hauerwas believes are embedded in political activity are present and, if so, in what form. Ritual thinking can also suggest more promising alternatives which better reflect the demands of Christian discipleship as understood by Hauerwas.[373] In sum, ritual thinking provides space through which underdeveloped questions within Christian ethics might be pursued.

In addition, ritual thinking allows Christian ethicists to engage the problem of structural justice more comprehensively. On this point, I draw on two of Young's insights about how structural injustice operates within our society. For one, Young notes the process of reification.[374] Reification "consists in actors' treating products of human action, in particular social relations, as though they are ….natural forces."[375] In other words, reification makes natural what is, on some level, constructed and contingent and "functions as an excuse to accept the harm or disadvantage of certain groups because it is as futile to try to change these processes

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Nothing," in *From Christ to the World: Introductory Readings in Christian Ethics*, Wayne G. Boulton, Thomas D. Kennedy, and Allen Verhey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 419.

[372] Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 375.

[373] William T. Cavanaugh models a more nuanced, politically engaged understanding of Christian ritual and social justice in "The Church in the Streets: Eucharist and Politics." However, I agree with political philosopher Paul S. Rowe that Cavanaugh holds onto Hauerwas's tendency to valorize the church and underappreciate the nonmartial aspects of the state. Paul S. Rowe, "Render Unto Caesar... What? Reflections on the Work of William Cavanaugh," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 71, No. 4 (Fall 2009): 595.

[374] This is one of the four strategies that Young names by which responsibility can be avoided in regard to structural injustice: "(1) reification; (2) the denial of connection; (3) the demands of immediacy; (4) the claim that none of one's roles calls for correcting injustice." Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 154.

[375] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 154.

and their outcomes as it is to try to prevent earthquakes."[376] By breaking down political participation into discrete actions and highlighting their full significance, ritual thinking both reflects and extends Young's de-reifying approach.[377]

Most simply, Young suggests addressing structural injustice by attending to specific acts and their contribution to larger social processes. Ritual thinking does this by exploring the discrete political rituals that constitute political participation but goes further to enable a deeper appreciation of the formative stakes involved. For example, the lens of ritual helps us pay attention to a participatory ritual like lobbying and note that it requires certain communication skills to be employed. As these skills are not evenly distributed, lobbying encourages the de facto marginalization of certain populations or what Verba et al., called participatory distortion. However, ritual thinking illuminates why advocating for more civic education to develop these skills broadly, as Verba et al., do, may not address the problem. As I outlined in Chapter three, lobbying is structured in such a way that hierarchical power dynamics between elected official and constituent are affirmed rather than challenged. This cultivates a taste for and acceptance of hierarchies within and beyond political participation, often obscured by the rhetoric of democracy. In other words, rituals like lobbying encourage a level of comfort with hierarchical political systems and it is through their consistent use that unjust arrangements become naturalized. Our expectations of political decision-making become skewed in such a way that democracy can be used "to describe situations where only a section of the population is granted

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[376] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 157. Judith Butler has made this point regularly when discussing gender roles. For more, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

[377] Specifically, Young calls for "identifying the specific kinds of agents and actions that contribute to processes that produce outcomes that we regret or judge unjust, and then discussing and debating with one another what actions would need to be taken by a self-conscious collective in order to change those processes." Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 157.

citizenship; the remainder, which may be a majority, are merely subject."[378] As a result, the onus falls on marginalized members to enfranchise and educate themselves rather than systemically addressing the structural injustice woven into the political decision-making process. The lens of ritual enables a clear-eyed understanding of how our participation in certain activities can reinforce structural injustice despite intentions to the contrary.

Young notes an additional challenge to addressing structural injustice, which she calls "the demands of immediacy."[379] With limited attention and energy, we tend to be preoccupied with the "demands that relationships of immediate interaction make on us."[380] This can obscure our "general responsibilities of justice" to the millions of strangers we are connected to "by our participation in structural processes."[381] While acknowledging the importance of responding to the "demands of immediacy" and addressing particular manifestations of injustice, Young is reminding us not to overlook our participation in larger patterns of exclusion and injustice. For example, in our zeal to secure a particular policy outcome, we can fail to notice how particular political activities leave uncontested a political system which is not accessible or accountable to all. In calling for attention to *how* justice is pursued within Christian ethics, I have attempted to foreground a "general responsibility" of justice, participatory parity, which can be easily missed. Young doesn't suggest that the tension between "the demands of immediacy" and "general responsibilities of justice" can be or ought to be resolved, rather that we have a duty to recognize and to respond responsibly to these competing obligations. Through ritual thinking, Christian ethicists might be better equipped to recognize "the dynamics of the reproduction of privilege

[378] Pateman, "APSA Presidential Address," 14.
[379] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 161.
[380] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 161.
[381] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 161.

and oppression" within political engagement and undertake "self-conscious action" in response.[382]

Through this project, I have hoped to reframe Christian ethics conversations around political action and structural injustice. To initiate that process, I have engaged with certain questions and subsequently introduced others for future study. As the last chapter signaled, just social change requires not only greater attention to the ritual character of political activities, but also consideration of the formative role of institutions and the formation which results from our experiences as privileged or marginalized citizens. To close, I want to reflect briefly on these two future lines of inquiry.

First, this project has indicated how important institutions are to the formative process. As I demonstrated in Chapter four, ABLE's organizational ambivalence to CBCO rituals contributed to their limited use and weak formative influence on individual leaders. A stronger organizational commitment to employing CBCO rituals would have reinforced the formation process. Consequently, it is important to consider the ways in which churches might support the formation of justice-oriented citizens and just social change.[383] I see at least two possibilities. First, churches can become more intentional about providing leadership opportunities for all members, which would foster broad civic skills competence essential for participatory

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[382] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 164.

[383] Identifying the church as a formative institution is pretty unremarkable within Christian theology; more unusual is how I am reflecting on this role. Both Niebuhr and Hauerwas acknowledge the socializing power of the church, but debate its value for their particular concerns. Affirming the need for politically active and astute Christians, Niebuhr sees the church as largely irrelevant if not obstructive to that undertaking. For Niebuhr, the church encourages a religious idealism that, in turn, misrecognizes the nature and necessity of seeking justice politically, particularly its use of pressure and conflict rather than pure moral suasion. He casts churches as cultivating personal morality rather than enabling direct political involvement. As a result, a positive role for the church often disappears in Niebuhr's work as it is not equipped to form the kind of realist political actors he deems necessary. In contrast, Hauerwas affirms the character formation provided by the church. Cultivating a people who faithfully witness the Kingdom of God and manifest peace instead of effectively pursuing the relative, realistic justice is precisely the purpose of church. For more on the above points, see Reinhold Niebuhr's "When will Christians stop fooling themselves?" and Stanley Hauerwas's "The Servant Community: Christian Social Ethics (1983)."

citizenship. Verba et al., observed that though civic skills are most often learned and practiced in "high status" jobs and higher education, churches are well-suited to provide an alternative training forum, particularly for those in "low-status" jobs or with minimal education.[384] Political inactivity, and subsequent participatory distortion, can be tied to a lack of confidence in one's own ability, which the church could address by cultivating much needed civic skills in politically marginalized persons. Adopting such a role would allow conversations to continue around the place of the "unattainable ideal" of Jesus' teaching and relative justice in our political society while practically enfranchising more Christians into political participation.[385] Though participatory political rituals are the norm, competence in civic skills is necessary to ensure that the most unjust political possibilities do not come to fruition.

Both in addition and simultaneously, churches can demonstrate "prophetic imagination" about political engagement, envisioning and enacting something different than the current norm of participatory political rituals, both within and beyond Christian ethics.[386] This suggestion builds off an insight of Hauerwas, in which he observes that the church allows the world too much authority in setting the agenda of Christian social ethics.[387] Hauerwas seems to understand, as Friedland and Alford suggest, that our participation with governing bodies and state bureaucracies can shape our vision of the world as they dictate the methods or approaches through which desired ends ought to be sought.[388] For Hauerwas, giving over such authority to "worldly" institutions is troubling and, within Christian social ethics, has encouraged a fascination with the "cause of justice" when the church ought to care for "the widow, the poor,

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[384] Verba et al., *Voice and Equality*, 319.
[385] Niebuhr, "The Ethic of Jesus and the Social Problem," 32.
[386] Term coined by Walter Brueggemann. See Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination, 2nd Edition,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001).
[387] Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 375.
[388] Friedland and Alford, "Bringing Society Back In," 251.

and the orphan" and point to "the reality of God's kingdom."[389] While Hauerwas's concerns have merit, his proposal to "live out of control" and embody virtues of patience and hope is problematic in light of Christian commitments to protect human dignity and dismantle structural injustice.[390] What is required, instead, is a way to make fine-grained judgments about Christian action in the world. With the help of the lens of ritual, it becomes possible for the church to discern and evaluate various forms of political action in light of Christian responsibilities rather than uncritically adopting worldly approaches.

Practically, the church's prophetic imagination about faithful political participation can manifest in various ways, such as offering explicit, organizational support for CBCO and other justice-oriented approaches. Tina, for example, affirmed the importance of clergy commitment to CBCO for her continued involvement, while Michael lamented the disengagement of his pastor and congregation.[391] Michael was surprised at the low congregational involvement with ABLE as social justice was a church priority and attributed it to the lack of pastoral investment.[392] A church's prophetic imagination may also be witnessed through crafting a congregational culture that develops justice-oriented tastes, virtues, and modes of perception. One ABLE church, for instance, adapted 1-1s for use within its own congregation to encourage collective leadership and the robust participation of every member in church life. Rather than simply surveying members to understand their priorities for the congregation, 1-1s provided a forum through which each individual was invited to take on a particular leadership role. Through such actions, the church can challenge prevailing tendencies toward participatory political rituals in its justice work.

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[389] Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 375.
[390] Hauerwas, "The Servant Community," 380.
[391] Tina in interview with author, April 1, 2016. Michael in interview with author, February 5, 2016.
[392] Michael in interview with author, February 5, 2016.

Second, this project has demonstrated that we tend not to be self-reflexive about our convictions and tastes concerning citizenship or established political systems. The content of those beliefs often goes unarticulated; the origins of those instincts even more so. Our perceptions of good governance and appropriate political rituals are shaped by our personal and professional backgrounds as well as experiences of inclusion or exclusion. Yet, reflexivity is needed to address structural injustice. We have to become aware of and take responsibility for the consequences of these convictions and the rituals which enliven them. *How* we, as individuals, choose to participate politically has implications for the broader community. I have attempted to initiate this conversation by noting connections between participatory citizenship orientations and forms of social privilege.

However, to enable difficult but necessary discussions around our "forward-looking responsibility for justice" as it relates to political participation, adopting the term "political privilege" may be helpful.[393] The concept of privilege has been employed widely to denote various advantages available to only certain populations and seems an appropriate descriptor of the de facto marginalization of particular citizens I have described in these pages. Through the concept "political privilege," Christian ethicists might be better able to conceptualize the inequity experienced in political decision-making and our participation in it.

Framing political enfranchisement or exclusion in terms of privilege would also give us access to more established conversations around how structural injustice operates and how it might be dismantled individually and collectively. For example, philosopher Lawrence Blum makes a distinction between the privileges of "spared injustice" and "unjust enrichment."

[393] Young attempts to tackle a wide variety of problem caused by structural injustice by noting that our "forward-looking responsibility for justice" can differ because of the "social *positions* agents occupy in relation to one another within structural processes they are trying to change in order to make them less unjust." These include "power, privilege, interest, and collective ability." Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 14.

Though Blum is most interested in issues of race, the contrasts he makes are useful for various forms of privilege. Blum describes "spared injustice" privilege as "a person of color suffering an unjust treatment of some kind while a White person does not."[394] Applied to the concerns of this project, this form of privilege describes the disadvantage of certain citizens, who experience de facto exclusion from political decision-making because their lower-status jobs have not granted them opportunities to practice the requisite civic skills. In contrast, other citizens enter political life already equipped with these skills, garnered through different employment and educational opportunities. However, privilege can also take the form of "unjust enrichment" "in which the White person *benefits from* the injustice to the persons of color, over and above merely *being spared* the injustice."[395] Within the context of political participation, this kind of privilege enables enfranchised citizens to benefit from a smaller pool of constituents demanding representation. In other words, the marginalization of some citizens serves to amplify the voice of other citizens. Though the reality of participatory distortion and the need for participatory parity have been regular themes throughout this project, the frame of political privilege illuminates concrete advantages given to certain persons and not others, and in doing so, provides a starting place to wrestle with these issues.

I began this project by recalling a 2009 St. Anthony action which highlighted the possibilities of justice-oriented political engagement. I end with a poem by José Carrasco, who has taught and mentored numerous organizers over the years for the PICO national network. These words express the deepest desire of many of those I worked alongside as an organizer, and

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[394] Lawrence Blum, "White Privilege: A Mild Critique," in *Theory and Research in Education*, Vol. 6, #3 (November 2008): 311.
[395] Blum, "White Privilege: A Mild Critique," 311. Italics in original text.

I hope they will serve as a benediction for Christian ethicists as they reflect and advise on matters of justice and political action.

> The world will not engage me
> Without bearing
> The scent of my conviction.[396]

[396] Carrasco, "Facing," in *Thoughts Wander Thru…and other verse to linger too*, 35.

Appendix: Interview Questions for ABLE Leaders

Background: Who is involved in this organization? What skills, knowledge, and values did they bring with them? What motivated their involvement?

- Where are you from?
- What is your religious background?
- What is your profession?
- Are you, or have you previously been, actively involved in a congregation / religious community? In what capacity?
- Are you, or have you previously been, politically active? In what capacity?
- What do you feel are the biggest issues facing our community / city / nation / world?
- What drew you to this organization?

Understanding of Rituals: What CBCO rituals have been are learned/used? What competencies have been developed?

- Describe [name CBCO ritual].
    - What are the essential elements? What is supposed to happen when you do the practice well? What skills or knowledge does it help develop? How does it relate to the overall mission of the organization?
- How did you learn do [name CBCO ritual]?
    - Did you learn another practice at the same time? Are they related? How so?
- How many times have you done [name CBCO ritual]?
    - Are there any contexts in which it is inappropriate?
- What do you enjoy most about it?

- What do you struggle with?
- Have you changed any elements of the practice since learning it? How? For what reason?
- Will you continue [name CBCO ritual] in the future?

Understanding of Justice: How do they understand social justice? How do they understand the relationship between religion and politics? Have these concepts changed?

- What responsibility do Christians have for justice/social justice in the community, if any?
    - Have you ever felt differently? What changed?
- What do you think is the proper relationship between religion and politics?
    - Have you ever felt differently? What changed?
- What do you feel is the biggest misunderstanding social justice?
    - Biggest misunderstanding about the relationship between religion and politics?
- Anything else you would like to add?

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