# The Death and Resurrection of a Church

## Group Formation and Shifting Identity After Parish Closure

Alejandra Oliva
Columbia University Department of Sociology

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# Abstract

When Our Lady Queen of Angels closed as a part of routine parish reorganization in 2007, parishioners formed a weekly protest and prayer group that met outside the church on Sunday mornings. This group has continued for over eight years now. Through participant-observation and interviews, this study looks at the causes of the longevity of the protest group, as well as their alienation from the institutional Catholic church. Thanks to networks formed through in-church participation, parishioners were able to find and activate a protest group. The group's continued existence owes itself to the transition of the group's goals from protest to praise. The implications of its longevity represents an institutional failure on the part of the archdiocese to maintain parishioners through changing times, and the experiences of these parishioners can be used to develop better policies in the future.

# Contents

**Abstract** **1**

**List of Figures** **3**

**List of Tables** **3**

**1 Introduction** **4**
1.1 Research Questions . . . . . 6
1.2 Overview . . . . . 7

**2 Historical Context** **9**

**3 Literature Review** **22**
3.1 The Church and Reorganization . . . . . 22
3.2 Social Movement and Identity . . . . . 27
3.3 Theoretical Frameworks of Identity . . . . . 31

**4 Methods** **34**
4.1 Study Design and Rationale . . . . . 34
4.2 Sampling and Recruitment . . . . . 35
4.3 Data Collection . . . . . 36
4.4 Participants . . . . . 37

**5 Results** **39**
5.1 Institutional Abandonment and Alienation . . . . . 39
5.2 Participation and Networks in Social Movement . . . . . 45
5.3 Church Ownership . . . . . 51
5.4 Group Purpose and Longevity . . . . . 56
5.5 Non-Traditional Services and Catholic Identity . . . . . 60

**6 Conclusion** **65**

**7 Appendices** **70**
7.1 Appendix A: Role of the Researcher in the Study . . . . . 70
7.2 Appendix B: Interview Schedules . . . . . 74
7.2.1 Parishioner Interview Schedule . . . . . 74
7.2.2 Priest Interview Schedule . . . . . 77

**8 Acknowledgements** **78**

**9 Bibliography** **79**

# List of Figures


1 Our Lady Queen of Angels, exterior . . . . . 9
2 Map of East Harlem and Our Lady Queen of Angels . . . . . 11
3 Demographics of Neighborhoods with Closing Churches . . . . . 16
4 Photograph of the Congregation . . . . . 50
5 Group Goals, as Stated by Parishioners . . . . . 82


# List of Tables


1 Participant Breakdown. . . . . 36
2 Parishioner Demographics . . . . . 38

> How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? If I forget you, Jerusalem, may I forget my right hand. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy
>
> Psalms 137:4-6

# 1 Introduction

It's 11:10 on a bright, hot Sunday morning in September 2013, and I am a little late. There is a group of seven women standing in a semi-circle of benches, singing quietly, in a little park adjoining some housing projects on a dead-end street in East Harlem. They are across the street from a one-story brick church. Brass letters around its main door tell us this is Our Lady Queen of Angels. I approach quietly, not wanting to interrupt anything, but I do. The woman at the center springs forward. She gives me two packets of paper and whispers to me.

"We're on page three," she says. "And here's the reflection. What's your name, honey?"

I tell her, and the other women around the circle nod in welcome before getting back down to business. It's time for the readings. Margarita reads a portion of what's printed on one of the papers they give me – Psalms 119:135.

*"Haz que tu rostro resplandezca sobre tu siervo, y enséñame tus estatuos."*

"Make thy face to shine upon thy servant; and teach me thy statutes."

They discuss it, bouncing between English and Spanish, one of them translating for Josie, who doesn't speak much Spanish. Josie tilts her head at me.

"What about her? Does she want to say anything?"

Patty looks at me.

"No, thank you. I'm alright," I mumble.

Then come a few hymns which I can quietly mutter along to, and the profession of faith. Margarita, who is leading the profession that morning, crosses the semi-circle, missal in hand, and lets me look on with her.

These women are the main body of what used to be the church of Our Lady Queen of Angels, a Catholic church in East Harlem. The church closed five years ago, but a few members of the congregation still include the church in their Sunday morning rituals, their original protest meetings evolving into gentler devotionals each week.

We give each other the Peace, saying "*la paz contigo*," to each other. A woman runs up to the group, and all of them tease her for being late.

"You're just in time!" Patty tells her. "You can give the benediction."

"*Que Dios te bendiga,*" she says, making the sign of the cross on my forehead, and the forehead of every other woman there.

After the service is over, and we've prayed for peace in the world and in ourselves, and Patty has spoken the official words of ending, they cross the street to the church and stand in front of it, heads bowed. Patty prays for the church to open, and then slowly, they disband, drifting down the sidewalk towards the rest of their Sundays.

I first became interested in the community surrounding Our Lady Queen of Angels while I was researching an article on the closure of churches around the city for Columbia's student newspaper in the fall of 2013. A woman who had been a parishioner at Our Lady of Vilnius, another church that closed in 2007, mentioned that there was still a protest group that met on Sundays outside of Our Lady Queen of Angels. When I first went to one of their services, I was unsure of what to expect, but was immediately welcomed, and many of the parishioners stayed afterwards to answer questions about the church. When

I left that first Sunday, Patty, the leader of the church, told me that I would always be welcome back there. Later that semester, I conducted a small research project with them for Professor Van Tran's Immigrant New York class, where I interviewed a few of the women I had met. At that point, they had been holding outdoor meetings for six years.

Parishioner retention after reorganization and closure is a huge issue facing the church. According to a study done by Peter Borré, the chairman of Council of Parishes, an anti-reorganization advocacy group, 25-30% of parishioners walk away from a newly merged parish in the initial shockwave of a merger, and within a year, a further 40% of parishioners leave.[1] The remaining parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Angels represent a group that left the church in that initial shock, but who continue to consider themselves Catholic.

Eight years after the church's closure, the group is still meeting outside. With the archdiocese orchestrating the closure of another three churches in the neighborhood, the story of Our Lady Queen of Angels and their estrangement from the Catholic church is vital to understanding where the institution and its users can fundamentally misunderstand each other, and help to develop better policies surrounding the closures.

## 1.1 Research Questions

The primary question motivating research on the parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Angels was how the shuttering of the church affected this group's Catholic identity. While all the parishioners still identified as Catholic to some extent—the outdoor meetings were nothing if not inspired by a traditional mass—this identity would have shifted on their feelings toward the New York archdiocese. The archdiocese is the institution that still controls any church

[1] West, Melanie Grayce. "New York City Catholics Brace for Fresh Wave of Mergers." *The Wall Street Journal.* 10 February 2015.

the parishioners might attend in the New York City area. As a result, changes in their Catholic identity or feelings about the archdiocese will, in turn, lead to changes in behavior, including a lack of parish attendance, and in turn will reinforce the existence of the outoor church service. Parishioners will feel that the archdiocese has abandoned them, and this will lead, not necessarily to a dissociation from Catholic identity, but in a change in how that identity is expressed.

A further venue for investigation is into the cause of the ability of the parish to continue existing, albeit in altered form, past the end of its archdiocean support. While the group that continues to meet outside the church eight years later is a fraction of the original protest group, and an even smaller splinter of the original congregation, the remanining members have shown a remarkable committment to the group by lasting through a single winter's worth of weekly outdoor meetings, much less eight. The existence of a protest group past the church's closure—notwithstanding the longevity of this particular group—is unique among the closed parishes of Manhattan. The existence of the group may be traced to the social networks formed through participation in civic life at the church prior to its closure. The longevity of the group, in contrast, is likely the result of the group's ability to evolve from parish to protest group to religious group again.

## 1.2 Overview

Section 2 will provide a historical context for the church within the neighborhood, and for the group within the history of activism surrounding parish reorganization. It will also provide some background into church organizational structures.

Section 3 will review the relevant literature on parish closure, activist cycles

and social movements, and the history of the church in New York. It will focus especially on the experiences of marginalized and immigrant communities and the church, particularly in urban settings, as well as broader-reaching statistical surveys of parishes affected by reorganization. In addition, it will explore models for the creation and behavior of social movements and collective action. The introduction will also include theoretical frameworks, with emphasis on Gloria Anzaldúa's framework of third-culture creation at the meeting between two, as well as discuss the influence of Ada Maria Izazí-Diaz's mujerista theology on the group's politics.

Section 4 presents the study design and methodology. It will describe the in-depth interviews done with group members and former parishioners, as well as the priest associated with the church prior to its closure. These interviews focused on allowing subjects to recount their church closure narratives, and discussing changing Catholic and group identities. It also describes the participant observation, carried out over the course of six months, at weekly group meetings.

Section 5 discusses study findings. It will focus on participation in civic life in and around the church while it was open, and how it led to the sense of ownership felt by parishioners towards the church building and community. It will also touch on the ability of the protest group to survive by changing their focus and mode of interaction. Finally, it will address the sense of abandonment felt by group members, leading to their continued alienation from the overall Catholic institution.

Finally, section 6 ties findings back to exisiting literature, and concludes with a discussion of the implications of the results for theory, practice and future policy, as well as the study's limitations.

## 2 Historical Context

In order to fully understand the situation of Our Lady Queen of Angels and the people who have formed a community around it, it is important to understand the history of the church and its neighborhood, as well as of the archdiocese that kept it, and eventually closed it. Our Lady Queen of Angels was built in 1886, and closed 121 years later, in 2007.[2] During that century-and-a-quarter, the neighborhood around it changed, transforming the congregation with it, and eventually leading to the church's closure.

Figure 1: Our Lady Queen of Angels, exterior, and rectory. Source: *Remich, Steve.* The Wall Street Journal.*10 February, 2015.*

The church and adjoining rectory were built during a period of vast expansion for the New York Archdiocese. Just 36 years after the elevation of what was then just the diocese of New York—a change that signified the growing importance of New York Catholics, and granted the newly-made archbishop some

[2]Buckley, Cara. "Outside A Shuttered Church, Sermons on the Sidewalk." *The New York Times* 22 February 2009.

power over neighboring dioceses—Archbishop Michael Corrigan ordered the construction of the church, one among 200 built in his 17 years as archbishop.[3,4] Our Lady Queen of Angel's original function was to serve a community of German immigrants that had recently begun to settle in the area, which was then growing into a suburb of New York, farther south on the island.[5] The adjoining school was opened in 1892, and a nunnery opposite the rectory housed the Sisters of St. Agnes, who taught at the school.[6,7] Thanks to its connection to the founder of the American Capuchin Order, Father Bonaventure Frey, who lived at the church for several years after his arrival in New York, the church enjoyed special treatment early on in its life – in 1898, it was the site of an exhibition of a relic of St. Anthony of Padua.[8,9] Our Lady Queen of Angels also had a longstanding relationship with the Capuchin order, and had a Capuchin priest more or less consistently until its closing.

By 1939, when the WPA published their *New York City Guide*, the area near Our Lady Queen of Angels had transitioned to a primarily Italian zone, a move that began shortly after the construction of the church, although by 1939, Spanish Harlem was already beginning to encroach from the south and west near Central Park.[10] Even then, Harlem, which had once been farmland, was known as "a poor man's land," "the largest single slum area in New York."[11] Our Lady of Mt. Carmel, nearby on E. 116th Street, is still the site of the

[3] "Archdiocese of New York." *Catholic-Hierarchy.org* 26 November 2014.

[4] "Historical Sketch." *Inventory of the Church Archives in New York City—The Roman Catholic Church Archdiocese of New York - Vol. 2.* Works Public Administration: 1941. pp. 20.

[5] Matz, Joyce and Carmen Villegas. "Save Our Lady Queen of Angels." *East Harlem Preservation.*

[6] "Our Lady Queen of Angels School." *Our Lady Queen of Angels School.*

[7] "April 20-21, 2013: Sisters of St. Agnes Plan Reunion at Sacred Heart, Yonkers." *Capuchin.org.*

[8] Jeron, Otto, O.M. *The Capuchins in America.* 1906. pp. 90

[9] "Bone of a Saint Kissed Thousands Gather to See a Relic of St. Anthony Exposed." *The New York Times.* 19 December 1898.

[10] *New York City Guide.* The Federal Writer's Project: 1939. pp.253.

[11] ibid.

Dance of the Giglio, a traditional Italian celebration, and is seen as one of the centers of Italian life in East Harlem.[12] The mostly-Catholic Italian populations maintained a large number of churches in the neighborhood – today there exist Catholic churches every few blocks (see map, fig. 1), and as the neighborhood transitioned to primarily Latin American immigrants, the levels of Catholicism in the population stayed high.

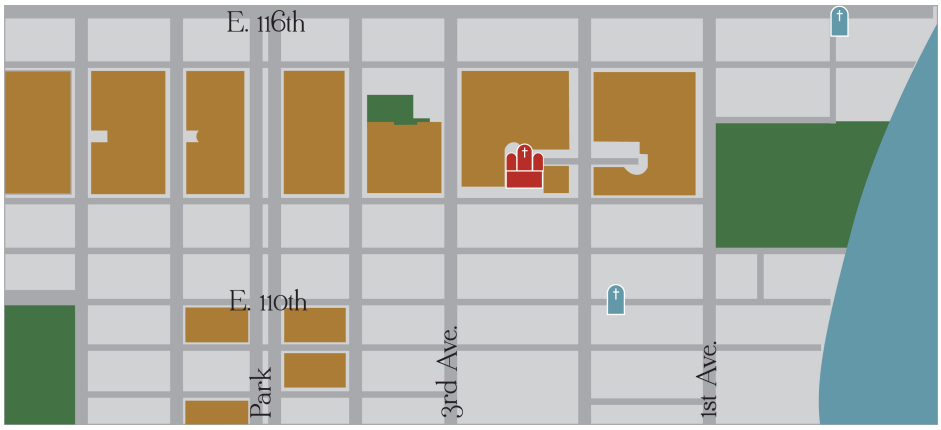



Figure 2: A map of the surrounding area, 2014, with Catholic Churches. *Map by Alejandra Oliva*

However, the biggest change to the neighborhood surrounding Our Lady Queen of Angels came in 1959. On June 30 of that year, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) completed the Jefferson Houses, a low-income public housing project surrounding Our Lady Queen of Angels.[13] The Jefferson Houses were just one of a series of projects built between 1948 and 1964 between 112$^{th}$ and 115$^{th}$ streets, stretching between Lenox and 1$^{st}$ Avenues.[14] Between 1950 and 1960, the black population in census tract 180, where Our Lady Queen of Angels is located, jumped from 3% to 22.5%.[15,16] In addition, since the 1960s

[12] "Our History." *East Harlem Giglio.* 28 November 2014.
[13] "Jefferson Houses." *New York City Housing Authority.* nyc.gov.
[14] "NYCHA Housing Developments." *New York City Housing Authority.* nyc.gov.
[15] United States Census Bureau. "Table SE:T13: Race (100% Count)." *Social Explorer: U.S. Census 1950.* 16 November 2013.
[16] United States Census Bureau. "Table SE:T13: Race (100% Count)." *Social Explorer:*

census, the percentage of Hispanics in the neighborhood has nearly doubled, growing to 71.9% of the population in 1990, and dropping back down to 64.9% in the last census.[17,18,19] The vast majority of the Hispanic population here are Puerto Rican, Mexican, and Dominican.[20]

The growing number of low-income Latin American immigrants was largely due to post-world-war immigration waves.[21] Puerto Ricans, with their American citizenship, made up the vast majority of this wave of immigration, and by 1980 would be the single largest ethnic group among Catholics in the New York archdiocese.[22,23]

While no clear record exists of the year Our Lady Queen of Angels began to offer Spanish-language services, many Catholic churches began to offer bilingual services in their basements, sometimes independently-led without a Spanish-speaking priest, in about the 1950s.[24] Given the bilingual nature of the church, and the high number of immigrants in the neighborhood (almost 30%, although that number does not take into account Puerto Rican immigrants, which, as already established, made up a huge percentage of the recently-arrived), the outreach branch of the church was an instrumental part in making recently arrived Catholic immigrants feel at home, and preventing them from defecting to Protestantism.[25] Programs to help attract Puerto Rican and other Latin American immigrants to the church were common, and different cardinalships took

*U.S. Census 1960.* 16 November 2013.

[17] United States Census Bureau. " Hispanic & Puerto Rican Last Names (100% Count)." *Social Explorer: U.S. Census 1960.* 16 November 2013.

[18] United States Census Bureau. "Hispanic by Country of Origin." *Social Explorer: U.S. Census 1990.* 16 November 2013.

[19] United States. Census Bureau. "Hispanic or Latino by Specific Origin." *Social Explorer: U.S. Census 2010.* 16 November 2013.

[20] ibid.

[21] *New York City Guide.* pp.266.

[22] ibid.

[23] Díaz-Stevens, Ana María. *Oxcart Catholicism on Fifth Avenue: The Impact of the Puerto Rican Migration upon the Archdiocese of New York.* Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame Press, 1993.

[24] ibid.

[25] United States Census Bureau. "Foreign Born." *Social Explorer: U.S. Census 2010.* 16 November 2013.

on different levels of involvement and outreach.[26] The peak of Latin American immigrant outreach came during Cardinal Spellman's tenure as archbishop, and included summer programs and the creation of a Puerto Rican Saint's feast, which legitimized the community as a central part of Catholic culture in New York City.[27]

The church was also a center of community building during the increasing levels of violence that surrounded it in the '90s. In May of 1993, the church held a vigil for 6 people who were killed in the neighborhood.[28] The church falls into the 23rd Precinct, and while all incidences of violence have fallen since the 1990's, an admitedly tumultuous decade, with overall crime rates decreasing 71.9% since then; the 23rd remains one of the most dangerous precincts in the city.[29]

58% of the 2,378 households in the census tract earn less than $30,000, and much of the area around it is in similar conditions.[30] In fact, the average income is substantially less than $30,000, coming in at $25,400.[31] As a comparison, the federal poverty line for a family of 4 in 2014 is $23,850, a number that is likely higher for a similar lifestyle in New York.[32]

This particular neighborhood in East Harlem was vulnerable on many different axes, and through the presence of the cluster of projects, permanently-marked as low-income. These visible symbols of poverty and racial alienation served as potent symbols for parishioners of their need, and would come to play

[26] Diaz-Stevens, Ana Maria. *Oxcart Catholicism on Fifth Avenue.*

[27] ibid.

[28] Chan, Sewell. "Funeral Held for Six Killed in East Harlem." *The New York Times.* 9 May 1993. 18 December 2014.

[29] "Compstat 23rd Precinct: Vol. 21, No. 49, Report Covering the Week 12/1/2014 Through 12/7/2014" *Police Department City of New York.*

[30] "Mapping America, Every City, Every Block: Households Earning Under $30,000" *The New York Times.* 2009. 16 November 2013.

[31] "Mapping America, Every City, Every Block: Change in Median Income Since 2000." *The New York Times.* 2009. 16 November 2013.

[32] "2014 Poverty Guidelines." *U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.* 22 January 2014.

a huge role in how they constructed the narrative of the closure of their church.

While East Harlem was changing rapidly, the Catholic church in New York was also undergoing demographic changes. The population of Catholics in Manhattan decreased by over a third between 2000 and 2010—from 564,500 to 323,300.[33,34] Many of these Catholics have instead moved to the outer fringes of the archdiocese's territorry—Westchester, Rockland, and Duchess Counties.[35] In addition, the New York Archdiocese, like Catholic churches all around the world, were facing a shortage of priests—a 22% decline in numbers between 1981 and 2001.[36] Meanwhile, the number of Catholics nationwide, particularly in America, where many mostly-Catholic Latin American immigrants were arriving, was growing at a rapid pace, leading to 17% of all U.S. parishes being priestless by 2005.[37,38] This shortage was particularly notable in mostly-Hispanic parishes. 38% of Catholics identify as Hispanic nationwide, where only 3% of U.S. Catholic priests do so.[39] When 26% of parishes nationwide specifically serve Hispanic communities, and Hispanic priests were so low, it is unlikely that Hispanic parishes recieve Hispanic priests.[40] While it is not necessary for priests and the laity they work with to be of a similar race, in an inner-city neighborhood like East Harlem, and particularly in a city like New York, with police strategies that disproportionately affect young men of color, a certain familiarity with the city from the perspective of a poor person of color may increase parish identification and closeness with the priest.

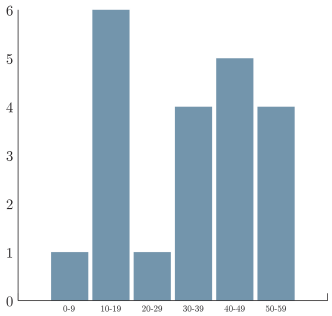
Many archdioceses around the country had already undergone reorganization

[33] RCMS. "RCMS:T3: Major Religions" *RCMS 2000.* 16 November 2013.
[34] RCMS. "RCMS:T3: Major Religions" *RCMS 2010.* 16 November 2013.
[35] Luo, Michael. "New York Archdiocese Sets Biggest Closing in Its 150 Years." *The New York Times.* 29 March 2006.
[36] Davidson, James D. "Fewer and Fewer." *America: The National Catholic Review.* 1 December 2003.
[37] ibid.
[38] "Frequently Requested Church Statistics." *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.*
[39] "Fact Sheet: Hispanic Catholics in the U.S." *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.* 2014.
[40] ibid.

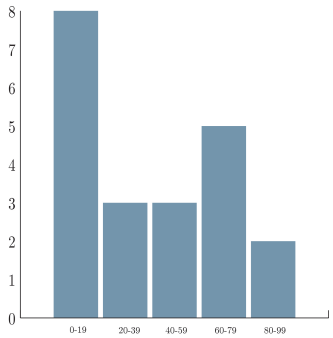
processes, closing parishes and opening new ones, including those of Chicago, Detroit, and Boston. [41] Announcements for the New York archdiocese's reorganization came in early 2006, when it announced plans to close 31 parishes or convert them to lower-status missions or chapels (essentially, churches without a territorry or permanent priest) and 14 schools, primarily in the five boroughs, while opening five additional churches in the next year.[42] Among these was Our Lady Queen of Angels. [43]

By January of 2007, when the final reorganization list was released, 10 churches were to be closed and 11 were downgraded into chapels or missions.[44] This represented a total of about 6% of the total number of parishes under the archdiocese's control.[45] The process was described in a press release as one that was intended to identify the "religious, spiritual, and educactional needs of the Catholic faithful throughout the entire archdiocese," and incuded analysis of "demographic information, Catholic population analysis, sacramental and fiscal data," and site visits to affected parishes.[46] However, closer analysis shows that of the 21 churches affected, 11 were in areas primarily populated by non-whites, and in 9 of them over 40% of the population made less than $30,000 a year (close to the poverty line for a family of 4.) [47,48] See fig. 2 for further breakdown of church closures by neighborhood racial and class composition. In an article in the *New York Times* in 2007, Cardinal Egan explained that selecting which parishes would close was about more than the simple numbers.[49] He de-

[41] Luo, Michael. "New York Archdiocese Sets Closing." *The New York Times.*
[42] "Parishes and Schools Recommended for Realignment." *New York City Archdiocese.* 28 March 2006.
[43] ibid.
[44] "Realignment Parish List." *New York City Archdiocese.* 19 January 2007.
[45] Vitello, Paul and Christine Haughney. "Hopes and Habits Persevere at Churches Gone, but Not Destroyed." *The New York Times.* 16 May 2009.
[46] "Archdiocese of New York Annouunces Realignment Decisions." *New York City Archdiocese.* 19 January 2007.
[47] "Mapping America, Every City, Every Block: Racial/Ethnic Distribution." *The New York Times.* 2009. 16 November 2013.
[48] "Mapping America: Households Earning Under $30,000" *The New York Times.*
[49] Luo. "Archdiocese to Shut 21 New York Parishes." *The New York Times.* 2007.




(a) Percent of Households With an Annual Income of Less than $30,000.




(b) Percent White Residents.

Figure 3: Each one of these histograms. shows the number of churches with percentages of populations within the specified range. Source: *"Mapping America: Households Earning Under $30,000." The New York Times.*

scribed, instead, a more holistic process that involved "visits, [...] consultations with experts, and [...] conversations with everyone included."[50] However, the archdiocese never released statements about why each choice had been made, leaving parishioners in the dark, and the demographic data for each church is not publicly available. Many parishioners felt that conversations with archdiocesean officials had been nothing more than lip service, particularly when their churches wound up on the list of closures. This more subjective metric for closure, and the lack of transparency on the part of the archdiocese about their decisionmaking process behind closure means that many parishioners at closing churches felt betrayed and targeted by the archdiocese.

While this analysis serves as a rudimentary idea of the socioeconomic and racial effects of closing the churches based on their immediate neighborhoods, there are some issues, with equating geographical location with church attendance, particularly in a city both as densely packed and easily accessible as New York. Especially since many churches spring up as immigrant community centers, parishioners may travel outside their neighborhoods to attend a church with others who share their nationality or language. For example, St.

[50] ibid.

Vincent de Paul, one of the churches that was absorbed into another parish, is located in Chelsea, in a neighborhood that is 71% white and where only 19% of households make less than $30,000—fairly well-off and white.[51,52] However, the church was known for its draw for francophone immigrants, particularly from Haiti and Africa—a particularly poor group of immigrants.[53] In addition, Manhattan's particularly small census tracts occasionally show misleading data—for example, St. Brigid's is located between Alphabet City, an extremely poor district, and the East Village, a very wealthy one, but its actual physical location is in a census that is relatively wealthy, meaning that those nearby in attendance might have more varied socioeconomic backgrounds than those seen in the data.[54] These two examples suggest that while census tract data can be useful to approximate demographic characteristics of a certain parish, their accuracy is limited. While the opposite could be true—for example Italian immigrants traveling into East Harlem to visit Mount St. Carmel,—the overall trend is for poorer immigrants to travel into wealthier areas for their church. If anything, the archdioceses' reorganization affected even more disproportionately than shown poor parishioners and parishioners of color.

Our Lady Queen of Angels recieved a tentative closing date of March 1, 2007.[55] As the date approached, numerous avenues were explored as options to keep the church open, including consultations with activists from Boston who had recently fought to keep their own churches open, contestations of the canonic law involved in the closures, and applications to have the church found

[51] "Mapping America, Every City, Every Block: Racial/Ethnic Distribution." *The New York Times.* 2009. 16 November 2013.

[52] "Mapping America: Households Earning Under $30,000" *The New York Times.*

[53] Dunlap, David W. "A French Church Nears Its End, but Not Without a Contretemps." *The New York Times: City Room Blog.* 5 April 2012.

[54] "Mapping America: Households Earning Under $30,000" *The New York Times.*

[55] Barron, James. "A Church Protest Ends Quickly, but the Anger Is Likely to Endure." *The New York Times.* 13 February 2007.

a historical site by the New York City Historical Preservation.[56,57,58]

Among the advice given by Peter Borré, the chairman of Council of Parishes, which had fought the closures in Boston, was to hold an overnight vigil, and so, on the night of February 12, one was held.[59,60]

The following account of that night is pieced together from an eyewitness account by Francis X. Piderit, posted on the blog *Catholic Truths,* and the *New York Times'* account of the sit-in. I use accounts from both a journalist and an eyewitness that have mutually confirmable details, and not those narratives told to me by parishioners in order to try and present the events as neutrally as possible. The interpretations that the current parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Angels give to the events of the sit-in go a long way to color their feelings about the archdiocese. The narratives that they have crafted about this night are an important aspect of the investigation, and in order to best understand them, it is key to have a baseline understanding of the facts. While Piderit is a biased observer, he was also able to get details from inside the church that *Times* reporters were not able. Much of his account can be verified by the reports given by the *Times*, which has a rigorous fact-checking standard.

The protest began on Sunday, February 11, after the evening mass, when a small group of people stayed behind as the church was closing.[61] That night, Father Gerald Mulvey, the primary priest at the church, stopped by a few times, and was startled by the protester's presence. [62] The next morning, a few more parishioners joined them and a press conference was held at 2 p.m., during which

[56]Luo, Michael. "As Churches Set to Close, Faithful Seek Help From Some Who Fought Back." *New York Times.* 27 January 2007.
[57]"Letter to Cardinal Egan." *East Harlem Preservation Society.* 6 March 2007.
[58]"Save Our Lady Queen of Angels." *East Harlem Preservation Society.* 14 February 2007.
[59]Luo. "Faithful Seek Help." *New York Times.*
[60]Barron. "A Church Protest Ends Quickly." *The New York Times.*
[61]ibid.
[62]Barron, James; Jennifer 8. Lee. "After Vigil to Protest Church Closing, Six Women Are Arrested." *The New York Times.* 13 February 2007.

time the bathroom locks were changed by agents from the archdiocese.[63,64] A group of around 40 people had gathered by the evening, all of them occupying the church.[65] At 7 p.m., two "large men" later determined to be part of a security team hired by the archdiocese locked all the doors to the church, and impeded others from coming in, including city Councilwoman Melissa Mark-Viverito, who had been supporting the protesters since the church was scheduled to be closed.[66,67] At around 9 p.m., two archdiocese officials, Msgr. Dennis Matthews, who had helped develp the reorganization plan, and Edward Regaidas, the director of insurance for the archdiocese, arrived at the church.[68] The two read a letter, first in English and then in Spanish, asking the protesters to vacate the premises, and letting them know of other churches in the area ready to accomodate them.[69] The two archdiocean officials then left the sanctuary where the protesters were gathered,and retreated into the sacristy.[70,71]

One of the protesters, Carmen Villegas, was able to open one of the doors of the church at around 9:30 p.m., and let in a series of reporters, protesters, and police officers.[72] The police conferred with the church officials in the sacristy, and at around 10 p.m., told protesters that they had to leave by 11:30.[73] At that point, six of the protesters decided to stay and potentially be arrested, while others left the building because of issues of immigration, age, illness, or childcare.[74] Several stayed in the area to speak to the press about their

[63]ibid.
[64]Piderit, Francis X. "Intimidation at Our Lady Queen of Angels, New York: Eyewitness Account." *Catholic Truths Blog.* 13 February 2007.
[65]Barron; Lee. "Six Women Are Arrested." *The New York Times.*
[66]Piderit. "Eyewitness Account." *Catholic Truths Blog.*
[67]Barron. "A Church Protest Ends Quickly." *The New York Times.*
[68]ibid.
[69]ibid.
[70]Piderit. "Eyewitness Account." *Catholic Truths Blog.*
[71]Barron."A Church Protest Ends Quickly." *The New York Times.*
[72]Piderit. " Eyewitness Account." *Catholic Truths Blog.*
[73]ibid.
[74]Barron. "A Church Protest Ends Quickly" *The New York Times.*

protest.[75] At 11:15, six women were led out of the church in handcuffs, and charged with trespassing.[76]

After that evening, the archdiocese posted signs that the church would be permanently closed effective immediately, "as a result of this regrettable event and the possibility of future events of this kind," and this reasoning has also been used against the possiblity of opening the church as a chapel for Sunday Mass or a youth center.[77,78] Since Our Lady Queen of Angels has closed, however, there have been weekly vigils outside the churches, miniature-masses every Sunday morning.[79] These were often led by the women who had been arrested at the church, and often had homilies by Ada María Isasi-Díaz, a prominent feminist theologian at Drew University.[80] Isasi-Díaz is the originator of *mujerista* theology, which focuses on the role of Hispanic women, particulary those who are poor, in the Christian faith, and attempts to make both theology and feminism more relevant to the lives of women.[81]

The group has also held three outdoor funerals or memorial services over the years: Carmen Gonzales' funeral was held in 2007, and Carmen Villegas' funeral and Ada María Isasi-Díaz's memorial service in 2012.[82,83,84] These three funerals not only represented the passing of some of the leaders of the group, but, in the cases of Gonzales' and Villegas' funerals, an additional opportunity for protest. In both cases, letters were sent to the archdiocese asking for the church to be reopened to allow a proper burial, and in both cases, the requests

[75] ibid.
[76] ibid.
[77] ibid.
[78] Vega, Tanzina. "Members of a Closed Church Keep Protesting, Prayerfully." *The New York Times.* 15 July 2007.
[79] Buckley. "Sermons on the Sidewalk." *The New York Times.*
[80] Vitello, Paul. "Ada María Isasi-Díaz Dies at 69."
[81] ibid.
[82] Chan, Sewell. "An Outdoor Funeral for a Protester of a Church Closing." *The New York Times.* 31 August 2007.
[83] Gonzales, David. "A Woman's Final Wish, Denied by the Church That She Loved." *The New York Times.* 14 December 2012.
[84] "Memorial Service." *Ada's Blog.* 4 August 2012.

were denied. [85,86]

As time has gone on, particularly with the losses of the community organizers among them, the group size has decreased, with fewer people attending each weekly vigil, and proactive activism has also slowed—there is less letter writing, fewer new campaigns are mounted.

The building itself still stands in its location. There is an active convent next to it that occasionally uses the main sanctuary for services, and the school behind the church also holds programs in the building. While other churches in more profitable neighborhoods like Mary Help of Christians in the East Village were sold to development companies and demolished to become condos, the relatively low property values of Our Lady Queen of Angels and the good structural integrity of the building have kept it standing.[87] The church's presence in the neighborhood continues to anchor the protest group to the cul-de-sac on 112$^{\text{th}}$ Street.

In August of 2015, the church is planning to redistrict over 100 additional parishes, including closing another three churches in East Harlem alone.[88]

[85] Chan. "An Outdoor Funeral for a Protester." *The New York Times.*
[86] Gonzales. "A Woman's Final Wish, Denied." *The New York Times.*
[87] "Some Activity at Mary Help of Christians Lot." *EV Grieve.* 10 April 2015.
[88] Otterman, Sharon. "Heartache for New York's Catholics as Church Closings Are Announced. *The New York Times.* 2 November 2014.

# 3 Literature Review

In the last 20 years, dioceses around the country have begun to carry out parish reorganization processes, and academic study of the subject has grown. However, the story of Our Lady Queen of Angels is not only about the closure of the church, but about the identities of the people that made up its body, and how they fought for its continued existence. The research that pertains to this investigation can be divided into three distinct categories: the church, social movements, and identity theory.

## 3.1 The Church and Reorganization

Many of the studies done on the reorganization of Catholic dioceses are conducted by Catholic scholars to aid in the creation of policy and practices. The goal of the majority of this research is to determine whether the reorganization process is an effective tool to accomplish the goals of the archdiocese, and what types of reorganizational tools best serve parishes.

These studies include the National Study of Parish Reorganization (2003), which had the goal of finding "best practices" implemented by parishes nationwide during reorganization.[89] The survey included questions in three parts—the planning, the reorganization itself, and the effectiveness in meeting the goals set out during planning.[90] The study draws on surveys from 123 dioceses and 273 individual parishes within those dioceses.[91] It found that the most common goals of reorganizations were: having each parish be able to celebrate the Eucharist each Sunday, reducing priest workload, and ensuring that no Catholic would have to travel an unreasonable distance to attend mass.[92] These goals

[89] Rexhausen, Jeff; Michael Cieslak, Mary L. Gaultier, and Robert J. Miller. *A National Study of Recent Diocesan Effots at Parish Reorganization in the United States: Pathways for the Church of the 21st Century.* Dubuque, IA: Loras College Press, 2004. iv

[90] ibid.

[91] ibid.

[92] ibid.

align fairly closely with those listed by the New York City archdiocese, which said in a press release at the time of the closure that the realignment was "designed to identify the religious, [and] spiritual needs [...] of the Catholic faithful throughout the entire Archdiocese and determine how those needs could best be met."[93] The study recommended that dioceses should consult experts and the community during the planning stages, and train priests of closing dioceses carefully and use the time to develop pastoral leadership.[94] They also suggest that the process be carefully documented and evaluated, in order to create a body of data that may be useful to other dioceses.[95] This study takes an explicitly institutional viewpoint, and as such, fills a certain need. However, it does not consider parishioners as clients whose needs need to be met by the archdiocese, and as a result, largely ignores their reactions to reorganization. Parish closure primarily affects parishioners—priests are well-enough ensconced in the institution to be sure of employment, but parishioners must find new churches. This means losing a preexisting community and in turn creating or finding new communities. As a result, a more in-depth, long-term, and smaller-scale study of reorganization's effects on parishioners is a necessary addition to the body of research. While it may not directly affect dioscean goals or policy surrounding the closures, a better understanding of parishioner's concerns at such a fraught moment may aid in the ultimate goal of parishioner retention.

Meanwhile, other studies have been done charting the history of reorganization, particularly in urban centers. The focus here, while more closely focused on parish and public reaction, also sought to find best practices for the church across a large segment of population.[96] After a first round of closures and reor-

[93] "Archdiocese of New York Announces Realignment Decisions." *New York City Archdiocese.* 19 January 2007.

[94] ibid.

[95] ibid.

[96] Rzeznik, Thomas. "The Church in the Changing City: Parochial Restructuring in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia in Historical Perspective." *U.S. Catholic Historian.* Vol 27, No. 4. 2009. p. 74

ganization in the 1980s, Philadelphia archdiocese's 1993 reorganization focused on the "cluster method" of reorganization, which allowed smaller subsections of the archdiocese to self-determine and organize, under a wider set of archdiocesean guidelines.[97] In many ways, the Philadelphia 1993 closures are similar to those in New York in 2007: churches in the inner-city were targeted just after a period of economic decline, hitting just when the neighborhood was "crippled by job and population loss, increasing crime rates, and political marginalizaiton."[98] As a result, when the closures came, parishioners felt "an overwhelming sense of betrayal by church leaders."[99] While Rzeznik's research is focused on the archdiocese as a whole rather than any one parish, it does highlight an important tension that is present in all church closure narratives: that between the institutional need for centralized decision-making and high-level organization, and the community's desire for autonomy and self-determination.[100] This tension is particularly visible in the story of Our Lady Queen of Angels, where the desire for parochial autonomy led a group of the faithful to essentially break off from the main church and become fully autonomous.

Institutional organization, particularly in a city as diverse as New York, is informed and influenced by those who occupy the services of the institution. New York's history of immigration means that the church's early history was largely formed by Irish and Italian immigrants, in the first waves of immigration to the city at the turn of the century—an influence that continues today, given that every cardinal of the New York Archdiocese has been of Irish-Catholic descent.[101] However, by the 1980s, the largest group of Catholic immigrants within the archdiocese were Puerto Ricans, many of whom were concentrated

[97] ibid. p. 74
[98] ibid. p. 73
[99] ibid. p. 73.
[100] ibid. p. 74
[101] "Archdiocese of New York." *Catholic-Hierarchy.org* 8 February 2015.

in East Harlem.[102] In her book, *Oxcart Catholicism on Fifth Avenue: The Impact of Puerto Rican Migration Upon the Archdiocese of New York*, Ana María Díaz Stevens analyzes the history of both marginalization and inclusion of the Puerto Rican community within the larger framework of New York's archdiocese.[103] This history focuses on the self-sufficiency of Puerto Rican Catholicism, cultivated by years of priest shortages on the island, as well as on their interactions with the already well-established New York archdiocese, and its attempts to provide a kind of familiar Catholicism.[104] What is most notable about the history of New York's Puerto Rican Catholics is the church's lack of insistence on their assimilation. By the 1960s, the church was offering separate services in Spanish, and organizing cultural days like the Puerto Rican Day Parade, and special services dedicated to Nuestra Señora de la Providencia, Puerto Rico's patroness.[105] This historical context represents the church that many of the former parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Angels grew up in—several are of Puerto Rican, and many of those who are not Puerto Rican are hispanoablantes, and benefitted from these changes. However, the period Díaz-Stevens provides context for only reaches to 1990, and the reorganization of churches in neighborhoods primarily occupied by Hispanic immigrants (and, by extension, Puerto Ricans) is another key chapter in the history of the relationship between Puerto Rican Catholics and their church in New York.[106] This research continues Díaz-Stevens', albeit at a smaller scale.

The role of the church as an institution is to provide its parishioners with a home for their spiritual needs—including forgivemenss, moral guidance, or healing. These responsibilities extend through the closure of a church or the merging of a parish, and are key in allowing the church body to adequately

[102]Díaz-Stevens. *Oxcart Catholicism on Fifth Avenue.*
[103]ibid.
[104]ibid.
[105]ibid.
[106]ibid.

transition between one spiritual home and the next. Michael C. Weldon, a priest in the San Francisco archdiocese, looks at the theological implications of church closure, and attempts to use the preexisting rituals of the church to soothe the hurt around it, as well as to foster a new sense of community among integrating parishes.[107] Weldon focuses on the power of liturgical ritual to provide closure in a mourning process he traces back to the original destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in Biblical times.[108] This comparison is a notable one, considering that canonical law states that the archdiocese and not the people are the owners of the physical church building. Theologically, this building in itself is not holy, but rather, is made sacred by becoming the worldly home of the church, much as the body houses the soul. The loss of the temple is one that is still mourned in Jerusalem, and is considered to be one of the great spiritual tragedies of the Judeo-Christian religions. Weldon's comparison gives legitimacy where there was none to the mourning of those that have lost their spiritual homes. While much of the research surrounding parish reorganization takes the outcry of the community surrounding a church to be an unavioidable evil of reorganization, Weldon's strategies to ensure a successful transition between parishes acknowledges the pain associated with closing a parish, while emphasizing the possibilities inherent in establishing a new, blended parish and community. Weldon's research, through in-depth interviews with parishioners and priests of parishes that had undergone significant reorganization, provides cases when ritual was able to bridge a gap between two groups, and others in which it was insufficient.[109] However, his research presupposes an interest on the part of the archdiocese in creating a smooth transition as a result of reorganization, something that was not necessarily seen in New York's transitional

[107] Weldon, Michael C. *A Struggle for Holy Ground: Reconciliation and the Rites of Parish Closure.* (Collegeville, MN: The Order of St. Benedict: 2004).
[108] ibid.
[109] ibid.

period. The priest at Our Lady Queen of Angels did not recieve any type of emotional management training, and given that the church was closed early, was not able to carry out any sort of closure ritual.

Reorganization affects congregations deeply, and displaces worshippers, forcing them to create new communities at different houses of worship, and destabilizing their relationship with the archdiocese. Not only that, but the loss of a church as an "anchor" in a neighborhood, "providing institutional stability and offering essential social services," can have a strong material effect in particularly poor communities.[110] As a result, parishioners often organize to save their churches, forming social action groups.

## 3.2 Social Movement and Identity

These groups, particularly given the fraught territory of a struggle by Catholics against *the* Catholic institution, often require careful identity management on both sides of the picket line. The manner in which current and former parishioners at Our Lady Queen of Angels began to frame their identities in opposition to or in alignment with the archdiocese is key to understanding how the group has successfully coalesced and continues to operate, eight years later. In order for collective action to take shape, a sort of collective identity must be defined—"a cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution."[111] This cognitive, moral, and emotional connection was one that, for the parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Angels, shifted its focus from the archdiocese to the idea of Catholicism without the church.

This shift in identification contradicts in some ways, the Nicene Creed, the declaration of faith spoken by all Catholics during mass.

[110] Rzeznik, Thomas. "The Church in the Changing City." 73.
[111] Polletta, Francesca and James M. Jasper. "Collective Identity and Social Movements." *Annual Review of Sociology.* 2001. Vol 27:283-305.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.

I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins [112]

The church described by the Nicene Creed is catholic—here meaning all-encompassing—but more importantly, apostolic. An apostolic church, particularly in the case of the Catholic church, refers specifically to the pope, who is seen as the successor to St. Peter, and in turn represents the direct lineage between the 12 apostles to today's church, and an infallible connection to God. This connection makes the Roman Catholic church define itself as the One True church, and as a result, salvation can only come from membership, and adherence to the institution of the church.

In addition, the importance given to Baptism as one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic church. In fact, a study conducted by Andrew Greely argues that the sacraments, along with passing the faith along to children, are the only two statistically significant reasons that Catholics stay in the church.[113] These sacraments can only be performed by a church official, and can only really be performed *in* a church. Not only does this make leaving the Catholic faith difficult, but churches that contain the sites of important sacraments in a parishioners life will have particular significance.

This means that any shift in identification must be carefully managed to prevent a schism with what is officially recognized as church doctrine. Parishioners at other churches in the city recognized the potential for excommunication as a result of their protest actions.[114]

While these were risks assumed by the parishioners in protesting the closure of their church, it also indicates a moment of identification with the parish over the institution: Catholic authority to them was not housed in St. Patrick's

[112] "What We Believe." *United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.*

[113] Greely, Andrew. *The Catholic Myth: The Behavior and Beliefs of American Catholics.* (New York: Collier Books, 1991.)

[114] Elaine Derso (parishioner at Our Lady of Vilnius) in conversation with the author, September 2013.

Cathedral, or even realistically the Vatican, but rather Our Lady Queen of Angels. Because of a similar identification across actors, a social movement coalesced out of the larger parish, and began to act collectively.

For individual actors, becoming part of a larger collective action or social movement requires just such a shift in identity.[115] These shifts are part of a more formal "mapping" process that Lichterman identifies.[116] In his study, Lichterman relies on participant observation of two different religiously-based groups for non-evangelizing civic action, one of lay people and one of clergy from different denominations and religions.[117] He proposes the idea of map creation as a necessary process for each group, despite their lack of directly religious action, because of their interfaith compositions. This process is defined as orienting group action based on a percieved landscape of "'people like us' and 'people not like us."'[118] He continues by talking about the importance of performativity in mapping—the idea that despite two individuals having the same religious identity, a differing map of how to project that identity will create a rift between them.[119] These rifts, as in the case of Our Lady Queen of Angels, have the potential to be wide enough to constitute a full schism with the Catholic church, at least for some parishioners.

Collective movements are in turn created and delineated by these identity shifts, and the movement itself seeks to continually refine and redefine identity as part of maintaining its boundaries. [120] While other factors play into the formation of any social group, each follow a pattern. As established by Herbert Blumer, any social movement has four steps:[121]

[115]della Porta, Donatella and Mario Diani. *Social Movements: An Introduction.* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.) 285.
[116]Lichterman, Paul. "Religion and the Construction of Civic Identity." *American Sociological Review.* Vol. 73 No. 1. February 2008.
[117]ibid.
[118]ibid. 84
[119]ibid. 100
[120]della Porta, Diani. *Social Movements: An Introduction.*
[121]ibid. 150.

1. **Social Ferment**: a period of growing, unfocused and unorganized agitation. At Our Lady Queen of Angels, this period occurred when parishioners were beginning to hear the news of the church potentially closing. A few members of the church were trying to get people involved, but most saw the chuch closing as an unlikely outcome.

2. **Popular Excitement**: the underlying causes of discontent are more clearly defined, along with objectives of action. Ocurred in January 2007, when the church was officially marked for closure, and culminated in the closure of the church in February, and continued on through the first few years of meetings, when media attention levels were still high.

3. **Formalization**: marks the beginning of disciplined coordination of strategies through the creation of a formal organization. Arguably, this began to occur during the set of years where Carmen Villegas was still in charge of the parish group, when letter-writing campaigns, picketing, and other measures were employed.

4. **Insitutionalization:** marks the crystallization of the movement into a part of society and its transformation into a professional structure. This step never occurred at Our Lady Queen of Angels.

These steps provide a framework to examine the group formation at Our Lady Queen of Angels, and to determine how the group has lasted as long as it has without institutionalization as its most commonly understood. These steps work as a baseline, and allow us to see moments when the narratives of Our Lady Queen of Angels differ from organizations that follow a more expected path. While their delineations of these steps are not precise, and events and characterstics often overlap and cannot necessarily be observed in the history of Our Lady Queen of Angels, they do allow us to have a framework around which

to construct events.

## 3.3 Theoretical Frameworks of Identity

Conceptions of race and gender intersect with the story of Our Lady Queen of Angels in a way that is primarily pericevd by the parishioners. All but one of the parishioners in the group are women, and all of the remaining parishioners are poor and of color. They see themselves, and their neighborhood, as being largely marginalized by society as a whole, and as a result, see the church as having an additional obligation to help them.

These identities were brought to the forefront by one of the organizers of the movement, Ada María Isasi-Díaz, a feminist theologian who attended the church while it was open and occasionally preached at its sidewalk services.[122] Isasi-Díaz was a controversial figure in the Catholic Church, often advocating for the ordination of women.[123] Her book, *Mujerista Theology*, argued for a reimagination of poor Hispanic women's lives as being fraught with moral choices through which their Christianity might be best expressed.[124] Isasi-Díaz's theories best fall under the umbrella term of liberation theology, dedicated to the pursuit of social justice through religious action.[125] Her centering of the narratives of women of color, particularly poor Latinas (the identities of the majority of the group members), and her direct influence on the church group, allowed them to gain a sense of self-reliance that might not otherwise exist.

In a chapter she wrote about her experiences at Our Lady Queen of Angels for a book on Global Catholicism, Isasi-Díaz uses the framework of the church closure to examine the ways and places in which Hispanic women's Catholicism

[122]Vitello, Paul. "Ada María Isasi-Díaz, Dissident Catholic Theologian, Dies at 69." *The New York Times.* 5 June 2012.
[123]ibid.
[124]Isasi-Diaz, Ada María. *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century.* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.)
[125]ibid.

clashes with the more institutionally-branded Catholicism.[126] She argues that for Hispanic women, their faith is conscience-led, family-oriented, and practical, they "follow church rules and teachings they agree with and ones that help them in their daily lives."[127] The church building itself is important in the daily lives of the women, primarily as the home for the community of faith that the women consider the "real" church.[128] While Isasi-Díaz can be guilty of romanticizing her subjects, what she calls "grassroots Hispanic women," a shorthand for poor and relatively uneducated women, she establishes an important ethno-religious framework for the women of the church and their relationship to institutional Catholicism. Her research, while it uses the closure of the church as a sort of case study, is far more interested in the individual theologies of the parishioners at Our Lady Queen of Angels, rather than the social effects of the closure.

Another theorist that centers the narratives of poor Latinas is Gloria Anzaldúa. Her book, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, posits the existence of a third culture, in the spaces between another two.[129] Anzaldúa's theory primarily surrounds the U.S./Mexico border, and focuses on her own lived experiences. However, in the preface to the first edition, she says that the phenomena she calls the Borderlands "are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch."[130] So many of these distinctions apply to the area surrounding Our Lady Queen of Angels—the wealth of the archdiocese contrasted with the poverty of the parishioners remaining at the church, the slow gentrification of East Harlem, the racial diversity of the neighborhood

[126] Ada María Isasi-Díaz, "Hispanic Women: Being Church in the U.S.A." in *A People's History of Christianity: Twentieth-Century Global Christianity, 7th Ed.* ed. Mary Farrell Bednarowski. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008.

[127] ibid.

[128] ibid.

[129] Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera.* (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.)

[130] ibid.

give plenty of evidence of a metaphorical border. However, using Anzaldúa's text as a lens also allows for the observation of the physical symbolism of the outdoor services across the street from the old church. Much in the same way that the interior of the church was once seen as a sanctuary from evil, both physical and spiritual, here the threshold of the church building itself serves as a demarcation between the institution and the people. By continuing to meet outside the church, the parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Angels are continuing to highlight this exclusion, and creating space for themselves to create a church environment that best serves their own needs.

In the following chapters, the relationship between these two groups will be further explored.

# 4 Methods

## 4.1 Study Design and Rationale

These research questions are best answered through the analysis of qualitative interview data from a study of parishioners and former parishioners, as well as others closely involved in the closure of the church eight years ago. There are several reasons for choosing qualitative methods to conduct an inquiry into the protest group surrounding Our Lady Queen of Angels. The first is that qualitative methods can best capture the narratives that those involved with the closure have constructed around the closure of the church and the existence of the protest group. These narratives hold great importance to the group, as their collective identity is constructed around shared mythologies and symbols created at its inception, according to Della Porta and Diani.[131] This approach does not necessarily seek to find an objective reality, but instead, much as the protesters themselves do, focuses on the "experiences, symbols, and myths" that hold such importance to the possibility of continued social action.[132] This also allows participants to place importance on the aspects of the group or narrative that they find most important, thus allowing a clearer understanding of what forms their own conceptions of identity. Second, with the rich, in-depth descriptions of social phenomena, qualitative research is particularly well-suited to study social processes in context. This is critical, given that the aim of the study is to understand how participants' identities have been shaped over the last eight years of group membership and exclusion from institutionalized religious life. Qualitiative research prioritizes the self-identification and narrative at the heart of this study. It also allows a gap in the research to be filled, by prioritizing the narratives of parishioners over that of the institution.

[131] Della Porta; Diani. *Social Movements.* p. 106.
[132] ibid.

The in-depth interviews were designed to explore the identities and narratives participants had crafted for themselves around the closure of the church, and whether certain differences in these narratives were predictive of group membership. The concept of a Catholic identity was operationalized by personal history within the church, church involvement prior to closure, and current identification, including service attendance.

In addition to interviews, in-person participant observation of the informal Sunday services was conducted, in order to look at attendance and participant interactions. Observations were conducted semi-regularly between November 2014 and April 2015, for the duration of the two-hour service. Obtaining a variety of weather conditions and temperatures was particularly important for this study, given that attendance varies greatly in the outdoor services depending on the weather. Notes were taken discreetly during the service, and later transcribed, as well as a voice-recording of general observations immediately after.

This allowed me to observe first-hand many of the dynamics I had asked parishioners to describe during interviews. While elements like group leadership and gender roles within the group are delicate to describe, and may be easily interpreted differently by any number of members of the group, outside observation made it possible to see these dynamics in play. While my presence in the group as a researcher and another participant naturally influenced how these roles were enacted—I was given the weekly task of reading the responsorial psalm, for example—the long-lasting bond between these people meant that to another extent, the effects of my presence was somewhat negligible.

## 4.2 Sampling and Recruitment

The sample consisted of 7 participants. See Table 1 for a breakdown.

| Participant Type | Number |
|---|---|
| Parishioner | 6 |
| Priest | 1 |
| **Total:** | 7 |

Table 1: Participant Breakdown.

The inital sample of parishioners was constructed as a convenience sample—those who regularly attended service were interviewed first, and as more people began attending service in the warmer weather, or I was present for more sporadic attendees' visits, more particpants were added.

I was able to interview almost all regular attendees, except for one woman, who declined to be interviewed. She had not participated in the original efforts to save the church because of her position as a public official, and had instead joined the group because of a close friend, who subsequently passed away. However, she held one of the main leadership roles in the church—she led services when Patty was away, and had been a part of the group since very early on. I attempted to convince her that hers was a perspective I wanted, and sent her my interview schedule ahead of time, but she still refused. She appears in this study in scenes of close observation, but was not interviewed.

Finally, the priest interviewed was found by doing research into which priests were at the church at its closure. Of the two priests present, one had been relocated to India, while the other was local, as a result, only one was interviewed.

## 4.3 Data Collection

All interviews were recorded and transcribed by me. Three of the interviews were conducted in Spanish for the ease of the participant, and these were then translated into English in their entirety, based on the transcripts. Interviews were conducted at local eateries, in the benches in front of the church, or at participant's homes, depending on particpant preference. Interviews for parish-

ioners were based around an interview schedule based around particpant's background information, a personal history with Our Lady Queen of Angels, Group Dynamics, Gender Roles, and Catholic Identity (for a more detailed look at interview schedules, see Appendix B.) A similar, but smaller subset of questions was asked to the priest. The interview guide included both questions and general probes, and was refined based on initial interviews done during the writing of a newspaper article for Columbia's *Eye Magazine.* I attempted, in each interview, to cover core topic areas, but also probe and maneuver as deemed appropriate.

Participant observation was conducted semi-regularly for several months, from November of 2014 to April 2015, allowing for an illness for the duration of most of February. Nevertheless, a wide range of temperatures and weather conditions were captured. Discreet notes were taken during two-hour services and expanded on afterwards. Both the group leader and I regularly took notes during service, she as part of an effort to better her ministry, or as part of her own religious furthering, so my own notetaking was not out of the ordinary.

## 4.4 Participants

This study began with an analysis of in-depth interviews collected from a variety of participants (See Table 2 for a detailed breakdown of the parishioner-participant demographics.)

Parishioners at Our Lady Queen of Angels prior to its closure tended to be Latinas, a demographic that has held essentially true within its present-day, smaller iteration. All parishioners were Hispanic, although two would be categorized as Hispanic Black.

In addition, half of the interviews were conducted in English, while the other half were conducted in Spanish. This more or less accurately reflects the

| Characteristic | N/Range |
|---|---|
| **Gender** | |
| Male | 1 |
| Female | 5 |
| **Age Range** | 51-90 |
| **Race/Ethnicity** | |
| African-American/Black | 2 |
| Caucasian/White | 0 |
| Latin@ | 6 |
| **Language Preference** | |
| English | 3 |
| Spanish | 3 |

Table 2: Parishioner Demographics

language composition of a weekly service, both in terms of the ratio of speakers present and in terms of which elements of the service are conducted in which language. All of the participants are bilingual to some extent, but almost all of them expressed a clear preference for one language or the other. In either case, the preference was accomodated, and interviews in Spanish were transcribed in Spanish and then later translated as needed. For more information on the role of language in the research, see Appendix A: The Role of the Researcher.

Finally, the gender disparity in the participants was one that existed in the group itself, both before and after church closure. The dissemination of the faith to children is a task often left to women, particularly in Hispanic communities.[133] All of the women in the study are mothers, and each one remained at the church in part to give their children a spiritual home.

[133]Isasi-Díaz. "Hispanic Women: Being Church in the U.S.A."

# 5 Results

This section will chart the split between the parishioners at Our Lady Queen of Angels and the archdiocese of New York after the closure of their church. Through a series of fundamentally different interpretations of the purpose of the church and the mission of the archdiocese, parishioners at Our Lady Queen of Angels became alienated from the overall diocesan institution. When Our Lady Queen of Angels was selected as a church to be closed in 2007, parishioners felt that their church had been targeted for closure because of the socioeconomic status of the neighborhood. They mobilized intra-church social networks to form a social movement and met with archdiocesan officials to try to save their church. In these meetings, when their sense of ownership of the church clashed with canon law, parishioners felt that their spiritual homes were taken away from them, a reaction that archdiocesan officials did not understand. As a result, they created their own group, in which they were able to establish their own conceptions of what it means to be Catholic. The group, by retaining elements of both social movement and church atmosphere, was able to maintain its cohesion, and last beyond the typical lifespan of essentially unsuccessful movements.

## 5.1 Institutional Abandonment and Alienation

When the archdiocese of New York first released a tentative list of the churches to close in 2006, many parishioners did not believe that the church could actually close. This disbelief primarily stemmed from a general perception of the church's health. Attendance numbers were about average for a church in the neighborhood, the building was in good condition, and was the only building that was wheelchair accessible in the immediate neighborhood.

However, by 2007, when it became clear that Our Lady Queen of Angels

would close down, parishioners struggled to find an explanation for their church's presence on the list. While meetings were held between archdiocese officials and members of targeted parishes, theoretically to get their input on the reorganiztion, the overall impression of parishioners was that the decisions had already been made.

> "To this day, we don't know. They haven't given us exactly a reason why they closed the church. They said changing demographics, they said financial, they said not enough priests, you know, which is it? Which one was the deciding factor that we didn't know about and that we couldn't do anything to change? But I don't think they wanted us to change it, because then there would have been a dialogue, and there wasn't one."
> —Patty, group leader.

Parishioners felt that the dioscean failure to engage with them in open dialogue about the causes behind the selection of specific churches for closure indicated at best, previously made decisions, and at worst, some kind of hidden motive.

When the primary motivation behind the closure of a church was given as meeting the "religious, spiritual, and education needs of the Catholic faithful throughout the entire Archdiocese," and that the methods for these selections go beyond "simply getting the numbers," and instead privilege "above all, conversations with everyone concerned," it makes sense for parishioners to expect a more fully fleshed-out dialogue during meetings.[134,135]

> "Internally, there were campaigns to increase tithing, there were several alternatives made, there was a program created for how to raise funds, but the archdiocese didn't accept any of it. It was already the last stage, and they didn't accept it. Because of diplomacy, they listened to us, but it was already decided. That's what bureaucracy is like. They diplomatically give you alternatives but they have the decisions already. What hurts the most, I'll tell you again, is that they're the spiritual leaders."
> —Edmundo, parishioner

[134] "Realignment Announcement Decisions." *Archdiocese of New York.*
[135] Luo. "Archdiocese to Shut 21 Parishes." *The New York Times.*

Instead, parishioners felt as if the archdiocese was attempting to "manage" them emotionally, rather than listen to plans to try to save the church.

> "Norma and Carmen and a bunch of people got together and came up with a plan as to how Our Lady Queen of Angels could be self-sufficient, so they would not have to have any financial support from the archdiocese. And when they had the meeting, with the archdiocese, they said, 'Oh, we don't want to hear about that.' 'Why not? We have a viable plan that can help us to stand on our own, we won't need to take any assistance from you guys.' 'Oh, no, we just want to hear about your emotional [reactions]' First of all, I feel like the decision was made already, and everything else was just a formality, was just for show."
> —Patty, group leader

However, the priest at the church at the time, who was also present at the meetings, interpreted them very differently.

> "We went and gave our case for the parish [to the board], and we did a good job and they really listened. I didn't think it was likely they would entertain us, but they really did, and they listened, and we were engaged in the conversation and their questions."
> —Fr. Gerard, priest

The differences between both of these interpretations of a similar meeting lies in the expectations created beforehand. Father Gerard, as a priest who had spent several years working for the archdiocese, was experienced in the bureaucratic nature of interactions with the institution. As a result, he came into the meeting expecting to be stonewalled, and was surprised and pleased at the amount of attention given to the parishioners. For him, the meeting had a "good" outcome. On the other hand, parishioners coming into the meeting had little to no experience dealing with the archdiocese as an institution, and so in their idea of the church, it was closely conflated with the biblical ideals of the church—an institution that was there to listen to and care for them. To them, an outcome that reflected what they believed about the church as an institution would have been one where Our Lady Queen of Angels did not close. When the

church did close a few months later, their feelings about the archdiocese had to be revised.

> "I lost faith in them, I did. I lost faith in them. I used to see them before as always being good and I'll do what they say, but after they did that with the closing of the church, I see that they see it more as a financial business thing and not so much as a religious thing."
> —María, parishioner

María's loss of faith in the archdiocese stems from her view of them as moral leaders—her obedience to the precepts of the archdiocese are closely tied to her perception of them as doing good work. When this goodness is percieved to be less, so is her mandate to obey them.

In contrast to the goal of "doing good" that María had ascribed to them, she places the idea of making money, or being a business. This is not inherently a bad thing, but most of the parishioners I spoke to had the idea that the archdiocese should strive to do more than this. To them, the idea that finances, and particularly class, would be a reason to close the church is inconcievable, but seems to be the only reasonable explanation left.

In the absence of a concrete reason given by the archdiocese, they felt that class and the relative socioeconomic levels of neighborhood and parishioners played a role in determining which churches to close. This directly contradicts Biblical mandates to care for the poor and disenfranchised: "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute." (Proverbs 31:8) This percieved contradiction of one of the most basic mandates of the Bible made parishioners begin to doubt the moral standing of the archdiocese, an institution meant to be a spiritual and moral leader.

> "I feel like they don't care about the individual person, because we're all supposed to be the lambs, you're supposed to be leading us, you're supposed to be the shepherd. What are you leading us to?"
> —Patty, group leader

This distrust grew after the archdiocese made the decision to have parishioners participating in the sit-in arrested. Patty was one of the seven women led out in handcuffs after the sit-in.

> "I felt like 'How dare you treat me this way?' you know? All of the years I have been faithful to this church, and at the same times, I felt like I'm going to do what I have to do, you know?"
> —Patty, group leader

Other parishioners, in part because of old age, or illness, were allowed to leave the church before the arrests. Margarita is 90 years old, and in an informal interview, told me that other parishioners did not allow her to be arrested because of her age. However, when we spoke again more formally, she interpreted her lack of arrest differently.

> "I didn't let myself be handcuffed. I won't give that plesure to the big ones, to they laugh at us for being hadcuffed, and fighting for our church. That was the most painful, fighting for the church, and then them taking us out."
> —Margarita, parishioner.

Margarita interpreted her lack of arrest not as a sign of her advancing age or potential ill health, but rather as a means of resistance in and of itself. She did not see those women that got arrested as a laughingstock, but still interpreted her own actions as those with the most dignity for her.

Having parishioners arrested in what had been their spiritual home was a final nail in the coffin, even to those that were more sympathetic to the archdiocese. Father Gerald himself found the arrests did more to distance parishioners from the church than to help the transition to a new parish.

> "I know when they [had protesters arrested] they turned off a lot of parishioners, because some of them realized—you know, what I was trying to do is end it gracefully, and to help them transition to another parish. One woman said to me, 'I'll never speak to them again, they robbed us of something, they think they didn't but they robbed us of something."'
> —Fr. Gerald, priest

The image of rooting out parishioners, particularly women of color, from the church by force, and arresting them, also contradicted the historical idea of the church as sanctuary, both physical and spiritual.

> "Back in the day, people used to run to the church for protection, to hide out, and here they are, signing us over to the police. I wasn't too happy with it, and I do remember that the last thing that I did say was to Father Marty. He was there, and he was trying to justify everything that had happened, and I said, 'You've been with us how many years? How many years you been with us, Father Marty? You knew about this way before we knew, and you knew how it was going to come down. You was supposed to be our closest pastor, the one that played basketball with the kids, and you didn't let us know. And that's really, really dirty,' I told him."
> —Luz, parishioner

Here, we see the arrests are seen as not only an institutional betrayal, but as an individual betrayal by a member of the clergy with whom Luz had a personal relationship. To parishioners, this indicated a final severing of relations between the institution and themselves. For priests—the closest connection between the parishioners and the larger institution—to take the part of the institution, confirmed that the organziation was rejecting them at every level. As della Porta and Diani note, interactions with authority can represent important sources of identity can facilitate the motivation to act and hostility towards those in power and their representatives.[136]

This narrative of systematic alienation and betrayal experienced by parishioners at the hands of the archdiocese has a profound effect on their interactions with the institution. The loss of moral authority by the archdiocese in the eyes of the parishioners, once a spiritual and moral leader, left parishioners freer to pursue collective social action against them. This alienation from what had once been an infallible authority begins the process of the identity shift that della Porta and Diani consider necessary to joining a collective action.[137]

[136] della Porta, Diani. *Social Movements.*
[137] ibid.

## 5.2 Participation and Networks in Social Movement

For many of the remaning parishioners, being a part of the church meant not only attending mass on a weekly basis, but also taking part in one of the many branches of civil society that were based around the church. From in-service activities like the choir, eucharistic ministry, or being a lector, to Catholic organizations such as the Catholic Mothers, the Legion of Mary, and the Holy Rosary, to community-based services like voter registration drives and youth programs, the church was a center of community involvement and activism.

Everyone I spoke to that remains at the church was active in some aspect of this civil society. Patty was briefly a member of the parish council and sang in the choir. Luz was also a choir member at the same service as Patty. María and Gloria were eucharistic ministers. Edmundo and his wife were on the parish council, and they also organized a volleyball league for the women of the church, as well as the feast for the veneration of Our Lady of Guadalupe in December. Margarita was a part of several organizations, including the Legion of Mary and the cursillists. Each of these activities was responsible for more closely integrating them into the community of the church, and allowing them to form networks.

> "Eventually, I started singing in the choir, and there's a Psalm that says 'When you sing, you pray twice,' and that, to me, has always been very deep, and I've always liked to sing. In doing that, like I said, about service, I felt a certain responsiblity, because when I missed a Sunday, people would say 'Oh, where were you, we missed you last week, we love to hear you sing.' And so that, to me, was like wow, I felt like I was making a difference."
> —Patty, group leader

Even those that didn't necessarily feel a sense of community in the church were able to form relationships with others there through these activities. Luz, who describes her mass attendance as "in and out" on Sundays still relied on Patty, who she had met through the choir, to tell her news of the church's

closure and subsequent actions.

However, extra-mass participation alone was not enough to warrant the creation of church networks: the parishioners of today's version of Our Lady Queen of Angels were split between two separate services, one in Spanish earlier in the morning and one in English at 11. Parishioners had very little contact between one service and the other: Edmundo describes a sort of transitory knowledge between one group and the next one in the half-hour between the end of one mass and the beginning of the next, but no real connection between one service and the other.

One church member, though, cut through the divisions between the masses, and is largely responsible for activating the church network in response to the threat of closure. Carmen Villegas was a community organizer and had been employed by the archdiocese, which left her with a great number of connections within the church institution. However, even though she was a member of the Spanish service, she was well-known throughout the community of Our Lady Queen of Angels. Her role in the initial moments of the protest were as one of Blumer's "agitators," someone who alerts the rest of the community to the issue at hand, and rallies them.[138] Every parishioner I interviewed spoke about Carmen, and many of them cited her as the reason they joined in the social movement. Patty, now the leader of the group, describes an interaction with her, in which Carmen convinces her to join the social movement to save the church.

> "And Carmen, Carmen Villegas was the one who kind of drew me in. She said, 'We can't let them do it,' and I said, I'll never forget this, I said to her, 'Well, if the priests say this is the best thing, shouldn't they know better, and shouldn't we just follow along?' And she said, 'Patricia, they're priests, they don't know everything, they're people just like the rest of us.' And I thought 'But they're still the priests, they're the heads of the church, and this is the church we

[138] della Porta, Diani. *Social Movements.*

> go to.' They're like, to me, they were almost like a authority figure. And she said, 'It's like your parents. Do you always do what your parents say? Do you always follow behind your parents? Are your parents always right? They're not always right, and sometimes you just have to go against them."'
> —Patty, group leader

Villegas' words to Patty are the result of a sort of practical Catholicism—one that recognizes that "honoring thy mother and father" doesn't necessarily mean obeying their every order, and in that same way, recognizes that the church, however holy, is composed of fallible humans. This somewhat progressive view of the archdiocese were not necessarily shared by all of the parishioners, those that joined her group were at least in disagreement with the archdiocese on the subject of the church closure.

Edmundo, was one of the growing number Mexican parishioners at the church while it was open. When Carmen asked him if she could invite the media to the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe in December of 2006, he, and a few other Mexican parishioners, disagreed.

> "On the 12th, she said [the reporters] were coming, and we said no, because we don't like to mix religion with that. We told her that everything stayed between people, and if the cardinal wanted to close the church, we weren't going to change the situation by going public with it. Well, but she did like that, so when there were events organized by the Puerto Ricans, we had reporters, we had journalists, we had all of them. And up to a certain point, it does help, because it built up pressure against the church."
> —Edmundo, parishioner

Edmundo, while he agreed that the church ought to remain open, disagreed with Carmen about the methods she used to bring it about. He asked her not to bring reporters to his own ethnic celebration, but when reporters came for other events at the church, he recognized that he didn't have the authority to ask her not to bring the media into the church.

Carmen M. was in the church, helping the priest close it, when the first

Sunday morning meeting was held. She describes the priest turning red and sobbing, and having to comfort him. On seeing Fr. Gerald's pain, Carmen M. found herself unable to continue supporting the tactics that Carmen Villegas was using.

> "Carmen Villegas did a lot of wrong, raising up the way she did[...]
> I was with her for a while, but then I wasn't."
> —Carmen M., parishioner

In her critique of Carmen Villega's behavior, Carmen M. targets "the way," in which she rose up, not the cause she was fighting for.

However, in so distancing herself from all branches of the archdiocese, Carmen Villegas allowed her group of protesters to begin mapping their identities as oppositional to the goals of the archdiocese more clearly, and allowed them to consolidate across language barriers as well. Villegas' position as the central hub of the social networks of Our Lady Queen of Angels allowed her to bring together disparate groups of parishioners to work towards a single goal.

Eight years in, the language barrier has all but disappeared. Patty, the leader of the group, has gone from speaking limited conversational Spanish to being essentially fluent, a change that both she and other parishioners noted. Services are carefully managed to approximately split evenly between English and Spanish, and occasionally readings are read in each language.

The network that Villegas created, however, is still in place. In January, in my first week back at school from winter break, I recieved the following text from Patty:

> (1/3) Gladys & I spoke to The Wall Street Journal. They're doing a story about the church closings. They're sending a photographer on Sunday. PLEASE try to
> (2/3) make it to service Sunday and spread the word. Call anyone i know who Used to come to service & incite them back.
> Also, Lourdes, Adas sister is still
> (3/3) in hospital after her appendix surgery. No reflection this week.

Thanks

The reporter's presence was important to the group. Throughout their existence, they have been highly conscious of their media presence as a way to transmit their narratives, and keep pressure on the archdiocese. However, with the passing years, media interest understandably diminished. This would be the first article written about them since my own, a year prior, and the first national piece since 2009.[139] However, with the new round of church closures expected in East Harlem this summer, media interest was beginning to arise again, and Patty saw this as a way to reignite interest in the cause, not only for the general public, but for her parishioners.

When I arrived at the service that Sunday, the weather was particularly miserable—during the service, it transitioned from rain to freezing rain, and the sidewalks were slick. However, that day was the largest service I attended at Our Lady Queen of Angels. Not only were most of the regulars I had come to expect during the winter there (with the notable exception of Margarita, who makes it a rule not to come when the sidewalks are slippery), but Edmundo had made sure his wife Norma, who usually taught catechism classes at St. Ann's on Sunday mornings, and their teenage son came. In addition, a few of the more sporadic attendees came: Josie, and Gladys, who was not a regular attendee, but had once been an important part of the activist group.

Patty and I both arrived early, although the photographer was already there when we arrived. He was a youngish man, white, but who spoke college-level Spanish. Patty chatted with him a bit before the service in English, commenting on the weather, her illness, and giving him the outline for what would usually happen during the service.

While the rain necessitated a change in venue—under some scaffolding down

[139] Buckley. "Sermons on the Sidewalk." *The New York Times.*

Figure 4: Photograph of the congregation, originally run in the Wall Street Journal. From left to right: me, Patty, Zaida, Luz. Source: *Remich, Steve.* The Wall Street Journal.*10 February, 2015.*

the block—instead of the usual benches in front of the church, the rest of the service went as usual, bouncing between English and Spanish. The photographer moved around the group a little during the service, taking pictures, but also partially participated, singing along to a few of the songs, and bowing his head during prayers. His presence with the camera made a few parishioners self-conscious. At one point, Zaida stopped her reading and seemed a little embarrassed to be photographed, but he told her to relax and just act normally. After this interaction, his presence passed mostly unremarked until the end of service.

Catholic services end fairly formally—the priest, (or in this case, Patty), says "The mass is ended, go in Peace," which is the cue for parishioners that they may leave. In this case, after the Dismissal was given, every parishioner stayed for a while after, talking to the photographer. They seemed well-practiced in

what to say, but also deeply genuine. Patty spoke about losing the church which had seemed like a home to her, Luz about anger towards the archdiocese. I had heard very similar things from them on my initial visit to the church, and in the interviews I had conducted, but the sentiments being expressed were deeply felt. Parishioners stayed for another half hour, and began to drift off after that, despite the drop in temperature during the service. For the next few weeks, different parishioners would ask about the article during the services, and whether it had run.

This whole scene shows the mobilization of the extended social network that surrounds the church to help it. While the number of attendees at the informal services on a weekly basis is a fairly low, static number, the church, and the parishioners around it, still have the power to draw in a larger extended network. Patty, the leader of the group, judged the journalist's visit important enough to warrant an activation of these networks, and sent out a text similar to the one I got to many parishioners and former parishioners. Having robust numbers eight years in is not only a newsworthy event, but also applies pressure on the archdiocese to reopen the church. The power of the networks around the church testify not only to Patty and Carmen's ability to mobilize people, but to the people's attachment to the church, even past its closure.

## 5.3 Church Ownership

Through years of attendance and the creation of communities and networks, those parishioners that remain developed a sense of ownership of Our Lady Queen of Angels.

> "I would say, I have three different homes: this apartment here, my work, and the church." —Carmen M., parishioner

Many of the older parishioners had been at the church since they had baptized their now-adult children there. This sense of ownership became particularly fierce when the archdiocese closed the church. Margarita had been attending the church since the 1950s, and is, in most ways, an exemplary Catholic. She attends Mass daily, and is often the first one called to say a rosary when a family member passes away. However, when the church closed, her anger towards the archdiocese came from a place of protectiveness of the church.

> "Well, I said something I shouldn't have said. I said 'Who is the cardinal to close the church?' That's what I said to the reporter. It came out of my soul.[...] Then it came out in the paper that I insulted the cardinal, but those weren't my intentions, because I respect him as a servant of God that leads the churches, but I found him in the wrong when he closed the churches.[...] I did wrong in putting myself against them closing our church, but it was our parish, and I raised my children here, they had their first communions here, they were raised here, my daughter graduated from here, and then came back here and became a teacher. And still it's closed.
> —Margarita, parishioner

While Margarita's conflict with the church clearly stirs up guilty feelings—she respects the cardinal, and regrets having spoken out against his decision—she also claims the church as her own. Her claim on the church comes from her years of attendance, and the personal landmarks that have occurred there. Given her intimate, longstanding involvement with this particular church, she is able to claim it as her own, and as a result, question the archdiocese's authority over it.

For other parishioners, the ownership of the church came not necessarily from their history at the church (which were generally also long, all in excess of a decade before the closure), but from the amount of effort put into the church.

> "I remember thinking, why aren't they asking us how we fell about the church being closed? We're the ones being closed, we're the ones donating our money, our time, our effort, you know? But they didn't, and it's closed."

—Patty, group leader

For parishioners, it seems natural that the time and energy spent at a church should in turn translate into some amount of say in what happens to it. Their ownership of Our Lady Queen of Angels was based on emotional and spiritual attachment, a basis that they felt ought to have been honored by the church institution. However, as mentioned above, the mental image of the church-as-institution that parishioners carried was based not on the archdiocese's administrative and organizational roles, but rather as a spiritual figurehead for the area, primarily focused on parishioner's spiritual wellbeing on a parish-by-parish level.

The archdiocese, on the other hand, had difficulty at a fundamental level understanding parishioners' claims on Our Lady Queen of Angels. Under canon law—the body of laws created by church leadership for the government of the Catholic Church—parishes belong not to parishioners or an individual priest, but rather to the archdiocese as a whole. As owners of the property, it is well within the jurisdiction of the archdiocese to close the church.

Going beyond canonical law into a more directly theological explanation, a parish serves as a splinter of the same wider body of God.

> "You're not baptized into the life of a parish, per se. If you listen to the rite of Baptism, you're baptised into the life of Christ, into his death and resurrection, and into the life of the church, which is universal.[...] And sometimes I see people, when they move, they keep coming back to the parish, even though its a real hike sometimes.[...] That's nice, but you have to take your gifts, your talents, and take them to your new parish. Some of [the parishioners] didn't want to hear that."
> —Fr. Gerald

This ease of transition that the church expects from parishioners directly contradicts the experiences of those parishioners that only went to one church. Many of them had tried one or more of the churches in the neighborhood, and

had found some issue with them. Edmundo felt that St. Paul's was too strict in its theology. Patty found St. Ann's cliquey and exclusive. When María arrived at Our Lady Queen of Angels for the first time, she knew:

> "I felt there, like I used to feel in St. Cecelia's when I used to go there, growing up. I felt that, you know, that closeness. They reminded me of that. So I think that's why I took so quickly to the church."
> —María, parishioner

María speaks of a homecoming to the church—a place that reminds her of her childhood religious education. This formed the basis of her attatchment to the church, and from there, her sense of ownership.

Carmen G. and Margarita, who still go to mass on a daily basis and have been attending several churches since before Our Lady Queen of Angels closed, were less focused on culture and more on services in their selection of churches—whether or not a church offered daily mass, for example. However, for every other parishioner, the culture of the church was the primary factor in deciding which of the nearby churches they would attend, and all of them said that Our Lady Queen of Angels felt like home in some way. The cultural differences that these parishioners found from church to church play a significant role in their choice of a "home parish," and in asking parishioners to imagine these communities as interchangeable, the archdiocese ignores the importance of these differences to the parishioners. In turn, asking parishioners to transition between one parish and the next without properly recognizing the loss of what was a unique community of faith can only alienate parishioners.

Before the church was closed ahead of schedule in response to the sit-in, a celebration mass was planned for the last Sunday the church would be open. Michael C. Weldon speaks of the importance of rituals such as these in order to bring healing to a community, but also warns of the importance of framing

these carefully, lest it feel callous.[140]

> "They were scheduled to have this like... I don't even know what you would call it, a celebration mass? It's like, it was the final mass, but like, this isn't a celebration, this is a sad thing. Like, no, we're not leaving."
> —Patty, group leader

To Patty, the idea of the celebration mass in the face of the loss of her church was roughly akin to calling a funeral a celebration. At best, it rang empty, at worst, it sounded like a celebration *that* the church was closing, not of the church itself. There was also an idea of forced emotional management in the idea of a celebration. This insistence on dictating the tone of the closure only emphasized the archdiocese's ownership of the church, not even allowing parishioners their own emotional state.

Despite the church's attempted management of the emotional aspects of the transition, those on the frontlines still felt unprepared to face the anger of the parishioners.

> [In response to a question about whether he had recieved training]: "A little bit, not as much. More could have been done. But you know, most of it was after the fact, in terms of how to close the parish down, the sacramental records, where they would go, the bank accounts and how to merge them and all that. I think they realized that no matter how you [talk to parishioners] people are going to react some way, and you can't control it."
> –Fr. Gerald, priest

Father Gerald's lack of training or preparedness, combined with the ill-advised "celebration mass," go against even the most basic of Weldon's recommendations. Weldon argues, in fact, that "lament is a way of empowering those facing profound loss," and in seeking to curtail the expression of that lament, the archdiocese was, in fact, removing a source of potential healing from parishioners.[141]

[140] Weldon. *Struggle for Holy Ground.*
[141] ibid.

The contested ownership between parish and archdiocese of the church became one of the sites of greatest alienation. Where parishioners believed the church to be theirs because of the community they had created there with their personal histories and time, the archdiocese's insistence on transitioning them to a different church with a minimum of hurt feelings made parishioners feel, not cared for, but rather misunderstood and manipulated. This misunderstanding, particularly from an institution that is percieved as being understanding and caring, only served to deepen the alienation of protesting parishioners from the institutional church.

## 5.4 Group Purpose and Longevity

The alienation from the archdiocese as a source of spiritual leadership, and the consolidation of church networks by Carmen Villegas allowed the group of parishioners that still meets today to have their beginnings, but their evolution over the next few years allowed the group to maintain itself. While the group is no longer focused on active protest, and is instead closer to a passive resistance to the archdiocese, it passed through several of the steps necessary to constitute a social movement. These steps, as defined by Blumer, are social ferment, popular excitement, formalization, and institutionalization.[142]

The social ferment stage of the group at Our Lady Queen of Angels began in late 2006, when the archdiocese initially released a list of parishes under consideration for closure. This stage is characterized by growing, unfocused and unorganized agitation, in which a few voices are leading that agitation, but the primary population has not quite joined with these agitators.

Many of the parishioners at this stage did not believe their church could actually be closed, others simply hadn't heard of the possiblity. It was during this stage of protests that Carmen Villegas did the most work, alerting parishioners

[142]della Porta, Diani. *Social Movements.*

to the reality of closures in other parishes, and recruiting them to help in the various efforts she was working on mobilizing.

This stage overlaps closely with the popular excitement stage, wherein parishioners began remapping their identities in opposition to the archdiocese, as was discussed in the previous two sections. This stage of the process of social movement is dedicated to clearly defining the underlying causes of discontent—the abandonment by the archdiocese, as symbolized by the closure of Our Lady Queen of Angels,—and objectives for action—having the church remain open. inclu The next step, formalization, includes the disciplined coordination of strategies through the creation of a formal organization. While the parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Angels never formalized an organization, several protest measures were carried out by members with expertise, and supported by others. Carmen Villegas, for example, organized a protest that involved following Cardinal Egan with signs. A *New York Post* article tells of a crowd of 30 or 40 people protesting at a church where the Cardinal was set to observe mass.[143] Other protests included letter writing campaigns to the archdiocese and the Vatican, a petition for the declaration of Historical Landmark Status organized in part by the East Harlem Preservation.[144] These actions were all primarily set in motion by Carmen Villegas, and were a fairly consistent part of group activities, up until Villegas' death in January 2013. However, the centerpoint of the group's activities was the weekly meetings on Sunday.

> "We refuse to give up coming to the church, and then meeting here. We wouldn't take no for an answer, and that's when we started to fight it, and to fight it you've got to meet every week, and you've got to keep it strong and keep going. And that's been our challenge for the past eight years."
> —María, parishioner

The weekly meeting, even if it has transitioned from the earliest meetings

[143] Cox, Peter. "Cardinal Sees Red." *New York Post.* 24 September 2007.
[144] "Save Our Lady Queen of Angels." *East Harlem Preservation Society.*

of protest and anger, still holds an important role in the resistance against the archdiocese. The act of meeting weekly in front of the church represents a continued resistance to the closure of the church, and a continued affirmation of their presence, despite the archdioceses' lack of formal recognition.

While the protest meetings held an important role in the resistance efforts against the archdiocese, their existence alone, without Villegas' more active forms of protest, feels insufficient, at least to Patty.

> "I don't feel like the leader because I feel like if you're a leader, you're leading somewhere, but I don't feel like I am. I come, I feel like I do the same thing week after week after week."
> —Patty, group leader

Patty feels as if the weekly meetings are not moving the original goals of the founding of the group forward, particularly after the death of Carmen Villegas.

> "[Carmen] had a lot of connections in the community, she had a lot of connections in the archdiocese. And I feel very much like we're floundering, like we're in limbo. And we keep coming, which is great, we still have this relationship with each other, but as far as the church is concerned, I don't know. I don't know what we're doing. And I know I'm not the one that has to answer, but I don't know who does."
> —Patty, group leader

To Patty, the place where the community currently finds itself is in a space of stagnation and failure. To her, the goals of the group are still bound up in the fate of the church building, and the movement's success lies in its reopening. However, none of the parishioners I spoke to, including Patty, believed the church would be opened again. In addition, none of the parishioners listed their goals in attending the service on a weekly basis as protest, or reopening the church. For more, see Figure 5: Group Goals, as Stated by Parishioners.

Every parishioner interviewed talked about the weekly meetings not as a space for protest, but instead, as a place for fellowship, and spoke about the

outdoor church using many of the same terms they had used to talk about the church indoors, particularly the idea of community.

The ability of the group to change their primary goals and to become flexible in their identities allowed them to outlast the point at which the church might reasonably have been opened again. By recognizing as a group that what mattered in their meeting was not the physical building of the church, but rather, the relationships they had formed with each other, the group has ensured their own survival, whatever the decision of the archdiocese in the long term.

> "I think we kind of fuel each other. Zaida once told me that she had visions of me sitting there by myself, and so she said 'Oh, I can't let Patty sit there by herself.' It's almost a loyalty and a responsibility to each other that we have gained."
> —Patty, group leader.

The final stage of Blumer's model of social action, Formalization, indicates the point at which the social movement crystallizes into an institution. While one would be hard-pressed to call the outdoor services institutionalized, there is an element of formality, and the idea of recieving the same benefits as one would from a more traditional church from this less-rigid alternative. If anything, parishioners felt that the outdoor church had allowed them to make connections that would not have been possible within the structure of the institutional church—with each other across languages and services, but also with their faith. I would argue that while, if the goals of the group were to reopen the church, the movement has been a failure, the group was successful in maintaining the community they so badly wanted, and providing for each other the services that a more traditional church might provide.

## 5.5 Non-Traditional Services and Catholic Identity

Parishioners at Our Lady Queen of Angels found their theology based around that of two strong women. The first of these was Carmen Villegas, who, as was discussed earlier, subscribed to a very pragmatic version of Catholicism, one that maintained the goodness of the faith while allowing for faillibility in its leaders.

The other woman was Ada María Isasi-Díaz, a feminist theologian who had attended the church before it was closed. Isasí-Diaz's involvement predated its closure—she was a frequent attendant and teacher there. However, on the church's closure, she volunteered to be an occasional preacher at Sunday morning services, and she sent weekly reflections based on the readings in the Missal. After her death in 2012, Isasi-Díaz's sister, Lourdes, began to send them out to the group. While none of these reflections survive, it is safe to say that they reflected her own brand of theology—one that centered the lives and struggles of poor Hispanic women. However, the readings and sermons that Isasi-Díaz provided also gave historical and political context for Biblical passages.

> "I love reading the reflections. It's like when you're reading a series in the newspaper, and you can't waiting for the next one to come out, it's just the same. I like to read and reflect, and to understand."
> —Edmundo, parishioner

Through these reflections, Isasi-Díaz influenced the type of Catholicism practiced by parishioners. Between her influence and that of Carmen Villegas, the type of Catholicism preached to the parishioners was more radical than one might find inside the walls of an institutionally-sanctioned church.

However, not all of the attendees are radically progressive. As a matter of fact, the group that regularly meets might be split into three separate camps of Catholic identity: conservatives, middle-of-the-road Catholics, and skeptics.

Margarita and Carmen, the two oldest members of the community, are ex-

tremely conservative. They attend mass on a daily basis, and still participate in Catholic organizations around the neighborhood. Margarita especially takes an ultra-conservative view of Catholicism—in a service, she mentioned that the apocalypse was a few popes away. Carmen, on the other hand, holds a charismatic prayer group in her home on Tuesday nights.

María and Patty are both middle-of-the-road Catholics. Both were raised as such, became distant from the church during adolescence, and then reapproached it as adults. Their faith, as they described it, was everyday and practically applied.

Edmundo and Luz, on the other hand, vocally criticized not only the archdiocese, but the church itself during our interviews. The basis for their skepticism was on the church's views towards women, and to scientific advancement throughout its history.

Between these three basically evenly-divided groups, we get a fuller sense of the spectrum of Catholic identities presented at the church. While Ada and Carmen both had strong influences on the politics of the church group, overall, the individual Catholic identities of its parishioners has not really varied, except in its feelings towards the archdiocese. However, the primary effect that being outdoors has had on the church is that many of them identify as more Catholic than they had.

A traditional Catholic mass is a rigidly structured ritual. There is an order that is followed, certain moments to stand or sit, and every time a parishioner speaks during the service, it is following a specific script—either as a response to the priest, or as a lector. All analysis of Biblical passages is left up to the priest. For Our Lady Queen of Angels' parishioners, that is turned on its head.

The voices of parishioners make up the entirety of the service. Rather than a priest giving a sermon, they discuss the passage amongst themselves. In this

passage, Patty discusses the differences between her understanding of the Bible from a traditional service and the service she organizes:

> "Nine times out of ten, you left there with no greater understanding of the gospel than what you walked in with, and oftentimes what you walked in with was litle to none, you know, no understanding. I feel bad saying this, but sometimes I would go to church, and then would have to read it afterwards, and make up my mind for myself. But a lot of times I couldn't even remember what the priest said. Dino, my boyfriend, used to ask me, 'So, you know, how was church today? What did you talk about?' And I would be like 'Yeah, what *did* we talk about?' But now, I'll go to him and say 'Today's reading was so interesting,' and, [...] he believes in God but he doesn't go to church. And so I'll say 'I can read it to you,' and I'll talk to him about it, because I got something out of it. Which, in church, rarely did I get something out of it.
>
> And so, just having the opportunity to [...]to talk amongst ourselves, in which you have different, very different, like Margarita, being like, what is she? 92 now? she has a little bit of an old-fashioned way of thinking, but it's still interesting and its still insightful. Whereas, you know, Edmundo is going to have a different interpretation of the same thing, and so yeah, it's that aspect of it we're learning... I feel like we're learning, and I never felt that way before. "
> —Patty, group leader

In the contrast between a traditional service and what she gets out of the informal service, Patty highlights the ability to discuss the reading as key in her enhanced comprehension. Her appreciation for the differing perspectives of the group stems from these discussions, and the two parishioners she mentions, Margarita and Edmundo, are often the ones who take the lead in discussion.

When Margarita is present at service, her opinion on the passage will be the first one sought. In my observations at the church, Margarita's analysis is often fairly rigid, and she will often pronounce actions moral or immoral. Her perspectives on the gospel often range into her everyday life. During Lent, one of the passages read discussed Jesus turning the vendors out of the temple. Margarita mentioned a nearby church that held a Bingo night in its basement, and said that the idea of gambling in a church was sinful, although she did

mention the gift shop located in the lobby of St. Patrick's as an acceptable form of in-church commerce.

Edmundo, on the other hand, tends to have a much more liberal explanation of the passages. Margarita generally defers to him when she has finished speaking, and occasionally calls him "El Sacerdote," the priest. His analysis also focuses on everyday life, but is not necessarily interested in passing judgment, but instead focuses on what "good" behavior might look like.

Other parishioners also speak, albeit much more infrequently, and tend to tell anecdotes, rather than strictly analyzing the text. In a conversation about giving to the poor, Carmen mentioned a young homeless man who she had been giving food to on a regular basis, and who then tried to kiss her, and broke into her apartment building looking for her. She asked the opinion of those there, to see if it was really necessary to give directly to the poor, and Edmundo counseled her to use her best judgment.

These discussions of Biblical passages by a group of demographically and religiously similar individuals allows them to interpret the passages as best as possible, but also aids in the creation of a third "border" church, halfway between the sacred and the profane, and utilizing elements of both. While the focus of the group's discussion is on religion, and the Bible, they are also able to craft the discussion so that it is applicable in their day-to-day, ostensibly non-religious life, like Carmen asking for advice on how to treat homeless youth. This creation of a church, located ideologically and geographically in a liminal space echoes Anzaldúa's conception of a Borderland, and the hybrid cultures that stem from these spaces.

> "I think my faith towards God has gotten stronger, because... because I get a little of a better understanding of the Word, but at the same time because I feel like He's guiding me, like He's giving me strength, and it's not even interfered by the church, it's almost a direct line now."

—Patty, group leader

In fact, based on her experiences both within and without the church, Patty found that the church institution ended up impeding her relationship with God.

The primacy of the institutional church as means through which to approach God is a central tenet of Catholicism. The centrality of the Sacraments, such as Baptism and Communion, to Catholic practice means that it is difficult for parishioners to break away from the structure the church provides. To solve the problem of communion, particularly, the group relies on previously-trained eucharistic ministers, Gloria and María. Eucharistic ministers offer a blessing that is, while not a full replacement for communion, one that has a history of being used when a priest is unavailable. By taking the rites of the institutional church, and transporting them to the outdoor service, parishioners are, again, able to take the best of both worlds, and are able to conduct almost a full mass without the presence of a priest.

Carmen M. legitimized Our Lady Queen of Angels as a parish in the eyes of God through theological reasoning. She cited the idea that if two more people gathered, God was with them, and in this way, Our Lady Queen of Angels remained a legitimate parish.

This hybrid service, inasmuch as a traditional Catholic mass is a symbol of a traditional Catholic faith, serves as a totem for the re-mapped identities of parishioners. These re-worked identities show, in the more radical parishioners, a lack of dependency on the archdiocese for the traditional rites and rituals of faith. While the more conservative Catholic members of the church still attend traditional masses on a daily basis, their continued presence at the services at Our Lady Queen of Angels indicates a willingness to go against church mandates, and displays a more radical interpretation of the role of Catholic authority than their worship habits might indicate.

# 6 Conclusion

The closure of Our Lady Queen of Angels had a profound effect on the Catholic identities of a group of her parishioners. The alienation that they felt from the institutional church was caused by a lack of dialogue, and a fundamental misconception of the character of the institutional church. This, in turn, allowed them to feel more comfortable in expressing their dissatisfaction with the archdiocese through collective action. The state of constant identity redefinition and mapping that occured as part of the protest group allowed the group to settle into the form of Catholicism they have chosen today—one that completely eschews the need for an institutional church, and is, instead, self-reliant. Their break from the archdiocese allowed them to adapt the faith they had learned within the institution to better fit their everyday spiritual needs.

The parish's continued existence, past not only the institutional support of the archdiocese but also past all hope that Our Lady Queen of Angels might reopen its doors, is due in large part to the social networks formed during the church's lifespan. While these networks were activated by a central figure that was able to bridge barriers of language, they continued to strengthen themselves outside of the church building. In fact, the strength of these networks is the primary reason that the parish remained active—parishioners grew to value the networks themselves over the reason they were activated (the church). Their willingness to redefine the purpose of their gatherings allowed them to continue the meetings past the end of active protest.

The story of the parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Angels can shed some light on possible policy changes for New York's archdiocese. The first moment of division between parishioners and institution was the lack of transparency. Parishioners who were directly affected by the closures were not given reasons behind the choice of their church. This lack of information led many to believe

that the church's lack of forthrighness was due to some unsavory reason, and led the church to lose moral authority in the eyes of parishioners.

The lack of transparency and lack of dialogue seemed to go hand in hand. While accepting the recommendations of every committee from every parish set to close is unrealistic in the face of a changing Catholic church, the ability of parishioners to feel heard by the institution would go a long way in assuaging the hurt felt by parishioners. This applies not only to actual closure recommendations, but also to closure ceremonies in parishes where churches are closed or merged. Parishioner input on ceremonies will allow them to emphasize what they feel is important about their church and community, and leave them with a lasting sense of closure.

Finally, the importance of final rites for the church, and the necessity for priest training cannot be understated. The emotional response of the parish is one of the most delicate moments of reorganization, and, as was seen in the case of Our Lady Queen of Angels, the mismanagement of the expression of that response can alienate parishioners permanently. While the priest of Our Lady Queen of Angels did the best he could under the circumstances, his lack of training led to pain not only for the parishioners, but for him as well.

Every single one of these policy suggestions, however, could be classified under a single larger one—in order for the church to retain parishioners after a reorganization, it must show those who belong to the closing parishes empathy. In failing to make it clear to parishioners that they understood their pain, their mental image of the archdiocese shifted from that of a benevolent church to that of a money-grubbing business. For an institution so centered on moral leadership, this shift is a disastrous one. Showing empathy at every step of the process for those affected will go a long way in aiding parishioner retention.

This study, focusing on the interaction between institution and parishioner,

and following those affected by parish reorganization in the long-term, is the only one of its kind. However, it fits neatly into a body of existing research. The focus of the 2003 National Study of Parish Reorganization was on institutional goals, and did not prioritize parishioner reactions or retention—a key part of reorganizing a parish smoothly and effectively, and something that should be taken into account when looking for best practices. Michael C. Weldon's *The Struggle for Holy Ground* charted the usage of these liturgical best practices for parishioner healing—strategies that were not employed in the case of Our Lady Queen of Angels because of the acrimonious closure. While Weldon documents a few cases of failed emotional management, the majority of the cases he cites have essentially positive outcomes. Case studies for situations where things are disastrous can be equally helpful in determining strategy, and the case of Our Lady Queen of Angels clearly shows different nodes of distancing and alienation that might have been bridged with an institution better dedicated to individual practices.

Several limitations to the study may be noted. First and foremost among these is the relatively small size of the sample, both in time relative to the total existence of the outdoor church, and in people. Ideally, this study would have been conducted in-person from the inception of the protest group, rather than beginning eight years in. Relying primarily on archival materials and interview subjects' memories made reconstructing the history of the church through any particular lens difficult. In addition, conducting periodic interviews with parishioners would allow me to more accurately chart changing feelings and perceptions as the years went on.

While the small number of parishioners of the original church of Our Lady Queen of Angels represent almost the entire group of regularly-attending remanining parishioners, interviewing those that had left the church on its closure,

and then those who left the protest group along the way would have allowed me to make comparisons between those who had left and those who had stayed.

A site for potential future research would be the new round of closures currently underway in the archdiocese. These closures are affecting three additional churches in East Harlem. While my own research does not indicate that the circumstances at Our Lady Queen of Angels could be repeated, doing a comparative study on the parishes as they undergo the reorganization process would expand the focus of the study, while maintaining the close focus on parishioner reactions.

Organizations such as Peter Borré's Council of Parishes, only briefly mentioned in this study, would also make for an interesting avenue of research. These organizations offer consultancy services to parishes affected by reorganization, and provide organizing strategies to help save parishes. Their interactions with dioceses around the country represent many of the same tensions as those in the case of Our Lady Queen of Angels, but the lack of emotional involvement on the part of consulting firm employees fundamentally changes the way they interact with sites.

The parishioners of Our Lady Queen of Angels, in their splintering from the archdiocese of New York, serve as a case study of reorganization gone wrong. Their alienation from the institutional church shows the ways in which mismatched expectations and a lack of understanding can lead to a form of institutional failure—the defection of its members. However, their ability to, once outside the support network of the church, reimagine Catholicism in their own image demonstrates a form of resiliency in the face of abandonment. The study of Our Lady Queen of Angels has much to teach us about the ways in which institutions support their members in the face of changing priorities. Reorienting to meet future needs while supporting its core members is a challenge more and

more institutions will face. Learning how to do so with grace, and a minimum of pain is vital to ensuring the continued support of all those who benefit from the services of community, religious, and educational institutions.

# 7 Appendices

## 7.1 Appendix A: Role of the Researcher in the Study

Like all the people of Our Lady Queen of Angels, I am Latina and bilingual. Speaking both languages enabled me to immediately have a basic level of access into the group—I could follow along with a full service, which is conducted in alternating languages, depending on who is in attendance. It also allowed me to communicate easily with all the parishioners, as I could give them a choice of language, depending on which was easiest for them, and as a result, each one of the interviews represents a participant's thoughts expressed in as fluid a manner as possible.

However, the Spanish dialect and accent itself may have raised some barriers. The Spanish I speak is fairly neutral. My parents are from Mexico, and as a result, I speak a Mexican-accented but fairly geographically neutral dialect of Spanish. While Spanish is not a language that is incomprehensible from one country to the next, this more neutral dialect is associated with a higher level of education across the majority of the countries in Latin America. As a result, the Spanish I spoke during interviews and during services was an immediate signifier of class and educational distinctions between myself and the parishioners at Our Lady Queen of Angels. While I did not notice any difference in how I was treated for this, there may have been.

However, I did notice a tension that may have been caused by my presence in one of my interviews. I have always been open with the group about my enrollment at Columbia, and many of them have encouraged me in my schooling. When I interviewed Edmundo, one of the first questions I asked (as with every other interview I've done,) is what his occupation was, and he answered, somewhat quietly, that he worked at a thrift store. For the rest of the interview, Edmundo made a point of telling me about his science background—he had gone

to college in Mexico, and had worked as a lab assistant there for a few years. He told me many times about the importance of studying, spoke for around 15 minutes on the ills of the American educational system, and oftentimes made scientific analogies to subjects he was talking about. I left the interview feeling as if I had been presented a very specific aspect of his history and personality, one that I hadn't seen before, and was unsure if it was a reaction to my own educational background, to having to admit that he worked at a low-skilled job, or just an aspect of himself that I hadn't had the opportunity to witness during services.

I was also the youngest member of the group by a good 20 or 30 years, and many of my interviews diverged from the schedule to give me advice—I was encouraged to stay in school, to read a lot, told how to get a husband, to best get a husband, to pray a lot. A few subjects even told me I reminded them of their children or grandchildren. At one point, during a discussion of one of the readings, Edmundo was speaking about the unseen effects of ones' actions, and he listed my presence at the meetings as one such action. My youth, he said, served as a symbol for those who walked past the Sunday morning services that the church wasn't dying, and was actually continuing on. Because of my age, especially in comparison to the rest of the group, I was seen as someone to be taken care of, but also as revitalizing the group.

In addition, my presence in the group as a researcher was seen by parishioners as encouraging. Throughout their existence, they have been highly conscious of their media presence as a way to transmit their narratives, and keep pressure on the archdiocese. As a result, my presence at the church on a weekly basis, and my interest in their story was seen as encouraging. In a response to my initial email to Patty, letting her know that I would be starting my research with them, she described my presence as a morale booster:

> Hi Alejandra:
> It'll be a pleasure to have you.
> I think the group is getting a little disheartened so this might light a spark in us all.

After my first interview with Margarita, she prayed over me, asking God to guide me on my important mission. I frequently felt that the church group as a whole was invested in my research and my presence.

These factors all combined to help me gain rapic acceptance into the group. About a month into my time there, I was given the weekly task of leading the responsorial psalm, a sign I took to mean that I was well-integrated into the community. During the Easter service, I was given the *Victima Pascuale* Sequence to read, a part of the service intended to remind churchgoers of the crucifixion.

However, despite other similarities to the group, I was not raised as a Catholic. This was particularly apparent near the beginning of my time with the group, when I struggled with different elements of the service that would have been familiar to someone with a Catholic background—the Nicene Creed, Hail Mary's, the responsorial Psalms themselves. In the whole time I was there, however, no parishioner tried to convert me or evangelize to me. I am unsure if this is because I felt my own uncertainty in the mass more than the parishioners noticed it, or simply because evangelism was not an important part of the mission of the group. The lack of evangelization made me feel safe and unjudged in the group, as if my acceptance was not contingent on my Catholicism.

Both Patty and Edmundo, during their interviews, asked me what my own religious background was, and what being at Our Lady Queen of Angels had done for my own spirituality. I was raised as a charismatic evangelical in a fairly religious family. By the time I arrived at college, I had stopped going to church, and did not actively identify as religious.

Beginning to go to Our Lady Queen of Angels, and seeing the faith of the parishioners enacted in an everyday way that required sacrifice and the choice to continue on a day-by-day basis made me reconsider my own faith. Whereas in the communities where I had grown up, religion was a sort of social currency, here there seemed to be a genuine committment to faith for faith itself, even in the face of institutional and social exclusion.

This shift in my own identity, which occurred as I gathered my data, inevitably colored how I thought about and wrote about the parishioners at Our Lady Queen of Angels. I have a tremendous respect and admiration for the people that make up this group, and in their faith. I believe this is inevitably reflected in this thesis.

## 7.2 Appendix B: Interview Schedules

### 7.2.1 Parishioner Interview Schedule

1. Background Information
   (a) Personal
      i. Name
      ii. Age
      iii. Profession
      iv. Immigrant status
         A. Where did you immigrate from?
         B. How long have you been in the U.S.?
   (b) When did you move to the neighborhood?
   (c) Do you still live here?
   (d) When did you begin going to Our Lady Queen of Angels?
   (e) How long have you considered yourself a Catholic?
      i. Were you raised a Catholic?
      ii. Did you convert later in life?
   (f) Why did you choose to begin going to Our Lady Queen of Angels?
   (g) Do you attend only Our Lady Queen of Angels services or do you go to another church as well?
   (h) How ofte do you come to Our Lady Queen of Angels services?
2. History of the Church:
   (a) What can you tell me about the church when you first started going to Our Lady Queen of Angels:
   (b) What did the services look like? What kind of people went?
   (c) Did you go to the English services, the Spanish services or both?
   (d) Do you know when the Spanish services began at the church?
   (e) Was the presence of a Spanish service a factor in your choosing Our Lady Queen of Angels?
   (f) Was there any difference in perception between one service and another? Was the Spanish service treated differently than the English?
   (g) Did you find there was a community of poeple like you at the church? Ask participants to consider
      i. Race
      ii. SES
      iii. Age/family status (for example: a lot of widows, a lot of families with young children, a lot of singles, etc.)

(h) During the time that the church was open and you went, what things changed? What things stayed the same? Ask them to address:
   i. Racial makeup of the congregation.
   ii. Size of the congregation.
   iii. Age of the congregation.
   iv. Approach to Catholicism by the priests and the congregation as a whole

(i) Can you tell me the story of finding out that the church was closing? Ask them to address:
   i. How did you feel?
   ii. Did you take any steps or actions on finding out the church was closing?
   iii. Other people took?

(j) How would you describe the changes in the congregation as the process continued?
   i. Did people start leaving preemptively?
   ii. Was the whole congregation working to keep the church open, or just a smaller group?

(k) Can you tell me about the last few weeks the church was open?

(l) Can you tell me about the sit-in?

(m) Who was arrested? Were your friends? Were you?

(n) What were your feelings when the police arrested you/the other women?

(o) How was the decision reached to begin meeting outside the church?

(p) Can you tell me about that first meeting?

(q) How have the outdoor meetings changed since then?

(r) How have your attitudes towards the church reopening changed since you started protesting?

(s) Do you think the church will open again?
   i. If Yes: What makes you feel this way?
   ii. If No: Why do you continue to come to the group?

3. Group Dynamics:

(a) What role do you think you play within the group?

(b) Who were some of the leaders when the movement first began?

(c) How has that changed?

(d) Who do you see as being a leader in the group now?

(e) What do you feel the goals of the group are?

(f) Do you feel the goals of the group have changed from when it was started?

(g) Why do you continue to meet outside?

(h) How would you describe the group?

(i) Who do you consider the core of the group?

(j) What do you think the biggest challenges to getting the church open again are?

(k) Do you and the group members meet outside of the service during the week?

(l) What are your feelings towards former Our Lady Queen of Angels parishioners who switched to a different church when it closed?

(m) Can you tell me about a time that you felt that the group worked well as a unit?

(n) Why do you think the group has lasted as long as it has?

4. Gender Roles:

(a) Did you have any kind of volunteer responsibilities in the old church? What were they?

(b) What do you consider your role towards Our Lady Queen of Angels to be now?

(c) Why do you think the people who were arrested, who stayed with the church were primarily women?

(d) How is the service you hold here different from a traditional service, particularly in terms of the roles of women?

(e) How would you describe the services you hold here, then? Ask respondents to focus on:

i. Gender

ii. Parts of the service

iii. Discussion or ability to be vocal during the service

5. Catholic Identity:

(a) Can you tell me about your early religious education, if any?

(b) Why do you choose to remain Catholic? *(*if applicable)

(c) How often did you go to mass prior to the church's closure? Now?

(d) Were you involved in any Catholic organizations before the church's closure? Now?

(e) What do you get out of the service you currently attend as opposed to the other services?

(f) Is there anything you miss from the more traditional services?

(g) Can you describe your faith for me?

(h) How important of a role does it play in your life?

(i) How have your feelings towards the archdiocese and the power structures (anything from the pope, to lower-level priests, etc.) of the Catholic church changed since the church closed?

(j) Have these changes affected your faith? If Yes: How?

(k) Do you feel that there is a space for you in the church? That the power structures of the church are looking after your best interests?

(l) Can you give me an example of a time when you specifically identify as Catholic?

(m) Why keep the group going? (Why do you continue going to the informal service?)

(n) What does Our Lady Queen of Angels provide for you that you think another church wouldn't provide?

6. Is there anything else you would like me to know that I didn't ask about?

### 7.2.2 Priest Interview Schedule

1. Name?
2. Why did you decide to go into the priesthood?
3. How long had you been at Our Lady Queen of Angels when it closed?
4. Were you involved in the decisions to close the churches?
5. Did you join in or participate in any way with the parishioner's efforts to keep the church open?
6. Did you recieve any training to prepare you for closing the church?
7. How would you describe the parish's emotions towards the end of the church's being open?
8. What do you think of the parish members still meeting outside of the church? Is there any message you would pass along to them?

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"To still meet every Sunday and stay friends forever, and be in each other's lives. Now we're a family, and that's how I feel. Even if you move away, you still come. To stay in tune with one another, like you do with your own family, so I hope we stay a family forever. I don't want to say for the next ten years or five years or whatever, no, these are...this is part of my family also. I want to stay, to be family." —María, parishioner

"To stay always united, remember that we are brothers and sisters like the children of God that we are. Respect one another." —Margarita, parishioner

"To keep running the little community that spurted out of this disaster. Because even though we all feel that there was this disaster, we all can agree that those that are there in the services that happens every Sunday, and it's not that you have to come regularly, but you come around and you know that you'll participate. You become closer."—Luz, parishioner

"To share the word, and to follow the path that Jesus showed us. [...] For us to believe in God more than in the Church. That's supposed to be the goal of the church, but I think that with so many rules, the objectives have gotten lost."—Edmundo, parishioner

"I think we do it, more than for them to open the church, for friendship and love for each other. With the hope, hope is never lost, but we do it more for the community... we've made a community."
—Carmen M., parishioner

Figure 5: Group Goals, as Stated by Parishioners