Ways with the Word in the New World:
Language and Literacy Socialization among
Born Again Christian African Families
in Massachusetts

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ABSTRACT

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This ethnographic study aims to understand how African parents use religion to help raise their children in the U.S. It is based on 18 months of fieldwork among African immigrant and refugee families, who identify as born again Christians and attend one of two churches located in the Greater Boston Area of Massachusetts.

The parents in this study have voluntarily left or fled the homes and countries (predominantly Rwanda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, and Burundi) where they were raised and now have children of their own to raise in a new country and culture. They are using God (in concert with church, prayer, and the Bible) to cope with the challenges and find understanding, belonging, and betterment for themselves and their children. Their ultimate hope is for their children “to know God.” But what does it mean, “to know God?” Why is this so important for these parents? How do parents help children “to know God” (i.e. what processes are entailed)? And how does this shape their identities and intrapersonal and interpersonal development? This ethnography aims to answer these questions through an analysis of the language and literacy processes of socialization. I describe local child rearing theories, which influence interactions with children and the everyday routines they follow; the characteristics and practices through which a sense of belonging and community is fostered; as well as the practices of praying, engaging with the Bible, and discussion about what their faith means psychologically and socially. Parents and children are teaching and learning from one another through their participation in church services, Sunday school, and Bible studies; in
routine prayer individually and collectively; in conversations about God and the world; and reading and discussing the Bible at home at night.

I also examine the consequences, theoretical and empirical, of such socialization processes on the understanding of self and one’s relationships with God, other believers, and non-believers. I conclude that in learning to distinguish God’s voice among their own thoughts, children are potentially developing a Christian sense of self. Yet, adults and children encounter competing discourses within different communities of practice about with whom one should be friends. Social relationships entail positioning him or herself in the way one talks and acts so as to be (or not be) identified as a believer. These African born again Christian parents are socializing their children to be and become believers.
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A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY AND QUOTATIONS

For the purpose of clarity, standardization, and the protection of my participants, I use the following conventions in this dissertation:

I use the term *African* to refer to participants who predominantly have emigrated from sub-Saharan Africa or whose parents have. This is a term participants often use to identify themselves and others.

I use the term *born again Christian* to refer to all participants in this study. It suggests that one has accepted Jesus as one’s personal savior. Participants may in fact identify more specifically as *Pentecostal*, however not all participants identified as such and thus I could not use the term to describe them. That being said, I use the term *Pentecostal* to refer to Spirit Church, since that is its stated denominational affiliation.

I have given pseudonyms to all participants, churches, and specific cities/towns (besides Boston) in accordance with IRB stipulations. For participants, I have selected biblical names for their pseudonyms, which reflect the spirit of their own given names. Also for the protection of my participants, I have not linked a pseudonym to the specific country of their birth. However, in order to give readers an indication of whether a parent is a speaker of Kiswahili or Luganda, I have taken up the following convention: I have added to parents’ pseudonyms the titles of Mama or Baba, meaning mother or father respectively for Kiswahili speakers, and Auntie or Uncle, for Luganda speakers. This convention reflects a custom followed by the majority of my participants. It is customary for children and sometimes adults (among Kiswahili speakers) to refer to parents as Mama (mother) or Baba (father) and then the name of their eldest child (regardless of gender). For example, when I had my daughter whose name is Ella, my name became Mama Ella. Or if I had had a son named Michael, my name would have become Mama Michael. (Note: The eldest child’s name is not always used. Sometimes, they use the name of a different offspring who is present.) The custom is different among Luganda speakers. In that case, children (and sometimes adults themselves) often refer to adults as Auntes or Unes, but they do not change their given name. This happens regardless of whether the person has a child, but rather happens in the presence of any child. So again using myself as an example: while conducting research when children were around, the adults who spoke Luganda called me Auntie Louise, regardless if I had a child or not.

For children and youth, after their pseudonym, I have added their age (rounded up and in parenthesis) from around the time I started research.

I have removed identifying information (e.g. country of birth) or made comparable substitutions (such as with occupations) to further protect the identities of participants.

Biblical scripture is quoted from the New International Version (NIV), accessed online at [www.biblegateway.com](http://www.biblegateway.com), unless I quoted from a participant reciting from a different version.

Text placed in quotation marks attributed to participants has been edited to a certain extent in order to facilitate readability.
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And finally to my family and friends — Thank you to my parents, Gil and Lucy, for instilling in me the lifelong importance and joy of learning. Thank you to my siblings — Helen, Gil, Jr., and Ashley — for your laughter. Thank you to Krissy and Caitlin for your unwavering support. Thank you to those people who provided childcare support while I wrote this dissertation. Thank you to my husband, Louis, for your love and encouragement to keep going. And thank you to my daughter, Ella Field, for inspiring me to finish this research while reminding me what is most important: family and the feelings of belonging and unconditional love.
For my family
I did not start out my fieldwork with an aim to study religion in conjunction with African immigrant and refugee populations in the U.S. But like many anthropologists who have come before me, where you start is not often where you end up.

Initially, I intended to study the discontinuity between home and school literacy practices of refugee kindergartners from the African Great Lakes Region. I laugh now thinking about the topic I had proposed. Theoretically, it was sound, but realistically it actually proved completely untenable. For months, I tried to find participants that fit my desired sample criteria in the Boston area. After six months, I had called several different refugee placement agencies asking them to connect me with families, but I barely could get someone on the phone. Reality check #1 — these agencies are run by overworked social workers who are in charge of far too many families and their well-being, making sure they have everything from toilet paper to a school for their children and a job for the parents. Understandably, they had no time for me and my esoteric research project. I decided to take a different approach.

I found a Mutual Assistance Association and showed up at their door. The director introduced me to two families, one from Rwanda and the other from Burundi, who had children going in to kindergarten. I thought to myself, “Success.” Now I just had to network with them to find other families. A summer went by and at the end I had met several other African families, but they were immigrant (when I wanted refugee), had children of other ages (not kindergartners), and were from different countries — how was I supposed to control for all of those different factors? My desire for control and a clean sample seems silly now. In anthropology, we learn that life is messy, people do not fit into neat boxes, and they are “on the move,” as George Bond has always pointed out. Hence, the importance of ethnographic research...
to follow them where they go and try to understand the complexity of who they are and what they do.

But still I was reluctant to change my criteria. It was not because I was being dogged about the strength of my theoretical inquiry; rather I think I was more scared about how to conduct a study defined by a more heterogeneous, unbounded sample. I did not know how to study such a nebulous set of people. My prior research was at an orphanage in rural Tanzania — nice, clean, bounded membership there; no doubts about who was “in” my study and who was “outside” of it.

Then the bottom dropped out: the only two families I had met who fit my sample criteria decided to withdraw from the study after I went through a formal, written consent process. I got in my car, called my husband, and cried. He reminded me that everything happens for a reason and works out for the best. I was dubious, but I calmed down and reassessed. For one, I realized that my consent process was too formal for a population like refugees, who were nervous to trust others, especially in a foreign land. I was a random young woman who showed up in their lives and wanted to tag along with them everywhere they went and ask them very sensitive questions about a past that they might like to forget, let alone discuss with a stranger. How was I to change their mind and earn their trust? I had already spent a tremendous amount of time with them to develop that trust, and I think I did establish enough to the extent that they let me follow them around for a couple of months. But when I formally presented all that I wanted to do and asked them to sign on the dotted line, they got overwhelmed and politely backed out.

Fortunately, one of the mothers inadvertently had shown me a way to overcome my predicament. She had introduced me to the Pastor of her church, which was attended predominantly by African immigrants and refugee families. I sought his help and he saved me, or
rather my research. One Sunday, he stood up in front of his congregation, introduced me as someone who wanted to help them, and asked families to be part of my research. He knew that people, particularly refugees, would be reluctant and perhaps shy about their immigration status. And so he disarmed them with the best weapon he had, “Remember, Jesus was a refugee.” After the service, several mothers approached me offering to help.

At that point, though, I still had not accepted the church as the central setting of my study, nor religion as a topic of inquiry. Religion is an area that I was unfamiliar with professionally and uncomfortable with personally and thus shied away from it. Elzbieta Gozdziak and Dianna Shandy (2002) have noted that there has been a lack of research on the intersection of religion and spirituality in the study of migrant populations:

Despite the diversity of religious and spiritual beliefs and practices that sustain many refugees and forced migrants in their processes of displacement, migration, and integration into the host society, contemporary considerations among both researchers and policy makers tend to neglect the role of religion and spirituality as a source of emotional and cognitive support, a form of social and political expression and mobilization, and a vehicle for community building and group identity. [129]

I surmise that the lack of attention on the role of religion and spirituality in the lives of migrant populations is due to researchers’ own atheism. I was not an atheist per se, but rather someone who had put that question on hold for a while. I grew up going to an Episcopal church and was confirmed as a 13-year-old, but the whole experience was more of a social event than a spiritual one. I was also someone who often caught a case of the yawns during church service and had a hard time concentrating. So church was not a place where I wanted to spend the majority of my time conducting research. I finally realized, though, that church was one of the only places in this area where Africans hung out together regularly. African immigrants and refugees did not live in urban ethnic enclaves like generations of other immigrant populations before them. Their migration experience and resettlement was different. Owing to the cost of living, availability of jobs, and municipal resources, they are spread out in urban and several suburban towns in
Massachusetts. Thus, church became a place where they found others who shared a degree of commonality. More importantly, I realized that church was a place that my participants cared about, deeply. The final piece that pushed me to accept the church and religion as central foci of my study was a tragedy in my life: my husband and I had a miscarriage. The Sunday after I found out, I went to church with one of my participant families. I clasped my hands together, bowed my head, and cried. It was time to face God and examine his role in my life, as well as theirs.

There is an old adage among anthropologists: *Go where the data lead you*. I wish it had not taken me so long to accept where the data were leading me, but fortunately I moved my stubborn self out of the way just in time to become a member of a new community. To be sure, I am a researcher in that community and still exploring my own faith. But I soon stopped standing up in church when they asked guests to introduce themselves. I was invited to the wedding of a church member and then a baby shower and a BBQ. Members asked where I had been when I did not show up for a service. I had to explain my absence. The Pastor started asking where my husband was and why he did not come to service. After I nervously revealed that he was Jewish, he said that he was still welcome and joked that we wouldn’t talk about Jesus. Towards the end of my research, my husband finally did come to church with me and they embraced him like they had me. And a year after I stopped my research, and left Boston to move to California, I returned to visit the church and introduced them to my daughter. Even after a year of absence they welcomed me again and offered a blessing and prayer over my baby.

This is an ethnography of this community in general, and specifically about how parents in particular use God, the Bible, and church to socialize their children in the new unfamiliar terrain of the U.S. — a continent away from where they were born and raised. But like all
ethnographies, it is also an ethnography of myself in relation to them. The observations and analyses that follow are through my eyes. Thus, my personal experiences and opinions matter. This is why I chronicle my journey in relation to my data in the preceding and following pages. This ethnography is also about how I became more spiritually aware and comfortable with the thought of my own faith and the faith of others. In the end, I did not become a born again Christian (I can only say that I believe in God and grew up Episcopalian), but I do acknowledge that God exists and plays a role in my life. It is also significant to know that I was not a parent while I conducted research, but became one as I analyzed what I had observed. I am more in awe of the time, energy, and openness of the parents who were willing to talk to me, a non-parent, about their opinions and experiences. They showed more patience with my “dumb” questions, than I probably would have if someone asked me about how I parent. Therefore, I want to humbly thank all of my participants for welcoming me into their world, showing me how they parent, and parenting me in an unfamiliar environment. I will continue to draw on the lessons I learned from them as I parent my own child.
Introduction
Africans Raising Children in America
to Know God

It is Sunday morning and I am up early. I quietly dress — not in my usual comfortable jeans and casual shirt, but in a crisp, white blouse and long deep purple skirt with a gold pattern that shimmers in the light. I eat as much as I can, knowing that I will not be eating lunch until after 2pm. I slip out the door and drive to church. The Cambridge streets are quiet as Harvard undergraduate and graduate students, like my husband, sleep. I drive along the Charles River through Central Square, passing Starbucks, Sleepy’s mattress store, TD Bank, MetroPCS. The bells have already tolled 9:45 am and I must hustle if I want to make it to church by 10:00 am.

I wind my way over the Tobin Bridge and exit into the heart of a Boston suburban city shortly thereafter. Shops are red brick like those of Harvard’s, but slightly more worn. I begin to read the signage: Western Union - Checks Cashed Here, TPS Aquí, Centro Latino Cuzcatlan, La Economica Spanish American Grocery Store, International Nails. I stop at a crosswalk and wait for several Hispanic families to cross the street, making their way up the steps to a Catholic church. I then continue on the main road and turn down a side street. Small multifamily houses line the left side of the street and I turn into the empty parking lot of a Head Start program. I walk to the adjacent lot and through a gate in the high chain link fence. White commercial trucks for a drain cleaning service fill the parking lot; but otherwise it is a nondescript commercial building just two stories high. I look up and see a yellow sign hanging from a second-story window, reading Spirit Church, Sunday church service 11-1pm, Wednesday midweek service 7pm, and cell group meetings throughout the week. There are no symbols on the building or door
leading upstairs to indicate that this is a place of worship. As I approach the top of the stairs, I see the Pastor’s mother-in-law and greet her, “Bwana safiwe [Praise the Lord].”

A few children mill about: some hanging closely to the legs of their parents, others running around with one another playing games. They speak to one another in English, while their parents speak to one another mostly in Kiswahili or English, or for a few Kinyarwanda or Kirundi (the national languages of Rwanda and Burundi, respectively). Once Mama Regina or Mama Danica, parent-teachers of the younger children’s class, arrives with their own children in tow, Sunday school begins. While the younger children pray, play games, and talk about biblical stories outside in the hallway with their teachers, the adults have their own Bible study with an assistant Pastor in the inner sanctum where regular services are held. Part of the inner sanctum is cordoned off by a Chinese screen divider, behind which the youth have their Sunday school class led by Imani, an unmarried woman. At 11am, the main church service begins and continues often way past the scheduled end time of 1pm. During that time, congregants raise their hands towards the sky praising God and singing jubilantly; they close their eyes and speak their prayers out loud, sometimes crying as they do; and they echo the Pastor’s sermon given in English and simultaneously translated in Kiswahili with “Amen” and “Hallelujah.” Afterwards, the youth sell candy and baked goods to raise money for their retreat. Sometimes, if there is a special occasion, the congregants head downstairs to a room they borrow from a daycare center for adults with mental illness to eat wali kwa mbuvu (rice with goat meat) together.

In a pamphlet handed out during service, Spirit Church describes itself as a “multi-national Independent Pentecostal Church that conducts its service both in English and Kiswahili.” When you call the office, a young woman on the voicemail greeting describes the church as “a family-oriented church where people of all nations are welcome and accepted.” And indeed, many
congregants express to me how the church feels like a “family” or “community.” This church is a spiritual, social, and emotional sanctuary for them. Having emigrated from different countries in Africa, predominantly those of the Great Lakes Region, these immigrants and refugees are trying to cope and adapt to their new world, living in suburban Massachusetts. As one parent remarks, “It’s easier to go to heaven than America.” In addition to the financial, linguistic, cultural, legal, and other obstacles they face, parents are trying to find meaning and belonging for themselves and their children. It is hard raising children, and these parents are doing it in an unfamiliar cultural environment without their extended family. And so they turn to God and church to help. This ethnography is about how these African parents are raising their children to know God in the U.S.

**Growing Up “Totally Different”**

Parents are acutely aware that their children are growing up differently than they did in Africa. When Mama Danica shares stories from her childhood with her children, she says that they are always “amazed” because her childhood was “totally different.” For example, when she was little, she used to play outside without restrictions in her neighborhood. Her parents grew up in a rural area, fishing and farming with animals. But “now the world has changed,” she explains, and her children really “envy” that part of “our lives.” She lives with her husband and children in a large apartment complex without a backyard. At the same time, though, she remembers her mother being very strict with her. In comparison, she believes that her children get away with a lot more in the U.S. “They have life so much easier than us,… [and so we] try to make them know.” Like Mama Danica, most parents recognize both how much easier *and* how much harder life is in the U.S. for and with children.
On the one hand, many parents tell their children about the hardship they experienced in Africa, for example fetching water and firewood for cooking, or even the difficulty of finding or buying food. Mama Elinore remembers people walking and singing together at night to scare off animals. And so, like many other parents, she reminds her children of all they have; Auntie Pura likes to tell her children, “You are lucky.” Auntie Pura and Mama Elinore now live with their respective husbands and children, as well as a few relatives, in single-family homes.

But on the other hand, many parents talk about how difficult it is for children to grow up here and for parents to raise children. Practically speaking, physical safety is much more of a concern in the U.S. It is also more expensive to raise children in the U.S., and parents lament the absence of extended family and neighbors who can help with childcare. But even more so, parents point out that the U.S. affords more “freedom” and thus children are “exposed” to a lot more. For example, one father explains that same-sex marriage is not condoned in Uganda, and there are more drugs in the U.S. Television is a culprit, parents say, but so too are children’s peers and even other adults. Mama Furaha is shocked that her four year old already knows where babies come from. Similarly, Mama Leah remembers her daughter, Leah (6), coming home from public school asking about boyfriends and sex. Auntie Helen was shocked overhearing two parents discuss in the lobby of a children’s dance studio whether to accept the “friend” request of an ex-husband on Facebook. She wonders what else her four children overhear? As a result, in America, children know more than they should, says Auntie Karmina.

To help limit children’s exposure to adult-like content, many parents limit what their children watch on television and with who and where they hang out. Remembering the continual playdates and sleepovers of my childhood, I inquire about whether these children do the same. Pastor Elijah and Mama Elijah explain that they are very “protective” of their children, because
they are “concerned” about what the children “learn[] and watch[]” at other children’s houses. Thus, when their children were younger rarely, if ever, went over to play at their school friends’ houses. They pray that their children make friends with other believers, or at the very least with those who are good influences in their lives. Some of the mothers have chosen to send their children to Christian school because of that concern, although they recognize it is not a guarantee that other children will be good influences.

Parents are not the only ones who think about with whom they interact; eleven-year-old Furaha does too. One morning, I drive with Mama Furaha who is dropping off Furaha and her two other sons at school. Mama Furaha suggests to Furaha that she drop her brothers off second. But Furaha protests, saying the doors to her school do not open until 7:20am; she does not explain further. Later, when we drop her off across the street from her middle school, she beelines for the door without stopping to say hi to anyone. Mama Furaha explains that Furaha does not like to hang outside with the other children, because they talk about bad things and she does not want to get involved. To be sure, not all of the children curtail their interactions to that degree. Many youths say they have friends who are non-believers — but the extent to which this is advised and/or sanctioned by parents and other church leaders varies. The children also question whether they can be close friends with people of other faith traditions, including Catholics, Muslims, and Buddhists.

**Growing Up “American” and “Christian”**

Like many parents, these parents worry about the cultural environment in which their children are being raised. In one sense, this is about the “exposure” and “freedom” that Auntie Karmina mentions. Not only are children exposed to more adult-like content, but they are also
exposed to American values, which do not emphasize deference to parents or elders, for example. Several parents say that their children will or do consider themselves American, as opposed to Ugandan, Rwandan, or even African. Pastor Elijah, who has been in the U.S. for over 20 years, simply states, “They [my children] are Americans, we are African.” His children were born in the U.S. Auntie Pura, who has been in the U.S. for over 10 years, laughs that her daughter, who was born in the U.S., denies that she is African. It is hard to decipher Pastor Elijah’s declaration and Auntie Pura’s laughter. Parents express a range and mixture of emotions reacting to this real, perceived, or projected identification of children — resignation, lament, uncertainty about how to feel or what to do, resolve to change the situation, and even amusement. Auntie Helen, whose children were born in Africa and in the U.S., says that she is working hard to ensure that there is “no culture clash…[since] our minds are [African] but [our children] live in America.” Despite the geographic difference in their childhoods, the majority of parents believe it is important to impart, at least in part, to their children their “culture,” as they see it through language, food, childhood stories, calls with relatives, and trips back to Africa to see them and “help out” with charity and/or ministry work. Although parents believe their children are identifying as “American,” they worry less about the actual word and more about what values they are learning because of it.

This concern with values stems directly from their faith. These parents identify mainly as born again Christians. Some parents were baptized before they emigrated, whereas others were baptized after they arrived in the U.S. They want their children to grow up with Christian values as articulated in their readings of the Bible and thus think and act with these values in mind. They want them to “make a difference,” Auntie Sharon emphasizes, meaning that their children should act differently from other children who are non-believers. Parents acknowledge, though,
that making a difference by acting in godly ways is difficult, particularly in the U.S. where Christianity, despite being the dominant religion, is not as much a part of public life as it is where many of them grew up. Auntie Helen believes that parents will have to work harder because parents and children are Christian in an anti-Christian environment, she explains. Mama Odeda recalls working for a Jewish woman, who told her to take off her cross when they went somewhere (she refused). I ask a group of mothers whether they put their volunteer work from church on their resume. Only two out of the five women say they do. Ultimately, they agree that they should put it on their resume, because if employers do not hire you because of it, then you do not want to work for them anyway. But even still, parents struggle with whether to be “out” as a Christian. Auntie Helen says she felt embarrassed to read her Bible in public while she waited for her daughter to finish dance class. She chides herself for feeling embarrassed but admits that it is still a concern. Since parents feel the hostility, they know their children do, too.

“To Know God”

Despite the hardship of raising children in a different cultural environment, parents continually remind themselves that God will help them bring up their children right. God has a plan and will provide for them — spiritually, financially, logistically — with all aspects of life. This conviction is what keeps them hopeful; it is also what they ultimately hope to impart to their children. When I ask parents about their hopes for their children, they do not hesitate — to know God, to be successful, to do better than they have, to get a good education, to be good people, and to return or visit Africa. Auntie Helen emphasizes, though, “First and foremost [it is important for them] to know God,” because in knowing God the rest will fall into place. Parents define success as having a “good job,” or “excel[ling] in whatever they [children] aspire to do,”
as well as having a “good marriage.” They also hope that they will “achieve” more than they have. Mama Elinore would like her children “to be better than me.” In what ways, I ask? “Education,… social life,… [to feel] free [to give an opinion].” Mama Furaha feels similarly. Because of the war in Rwanda her schooling was interrupted: “I didn’t get enough education. So I don’t want them to be like me… I want them to have education so that they have their better life… They can have a good job, they can have education, have a house, a good job, and they can take care of their families… My life, like sometimes I feel bad because I didn’t finish my education. And for example, even I look for job, I will not have a good job, because I don’t have any education. But for them if they have education and they study, they will have a good job.” For those parents who were not able to finish school or go at all, they see the opportunity for their children to get the education they missed out on, which will lead to good jobs and a “good life.”

Success, education, and employment are intimately linked in their minds. Parents also hope that their children will be “good people.” Uncle Gershom wants his two children to be “responsible citizens… who take the nation ahead” and “leaders…who can be trusted [and] honest.” He thinks about the “corruption” back home in his country, where it was “hard to trust people.” Mama Danica hopes her children will be “respectful, loving adults.” And Auntie Helen wants her children to “help other people,” particularly in her home country. She wants them “to know their roots” and “where they come from.” But she, like the majority of parents, emphasizes above all, the hope that their children “know God.” “First, [I want them to be] strong Christians [and] believers,” Pastor Elijah says of his children. Likewise, Mama Danica hopes the children she teaches in Sunday school will “grow up God-fearing.” This happens “by teaching them how to pray,…to read the Bible,…[through] memory verse [i.e. memorizing biblical
scripture],...[and] apply[ing] the memory verse to their lives,” she explains. As “God-fearing,” Auntie Sharon knows her children will be able to make the right decisions, and as Auntie Helen suggests, the rest — financial and material success, educational achievement, physical health and well-being, and good character — will fall into place.

But what does it mean, “to know God”? Why is this so important for these parents? How do parents help children “to know God” (i.e. what processes are entailed)? And how does this shape their identities and intrapersonal and interpersonal development? This ethnography aims to answer these questions in order to better understand how these immigrant and refugee parents are using religion as a system of meaning and as an institution (Alba et al. 2008) to cope in their new world and to raise their children. “Raise” is a multifaceted term. For me, it is almost synonymous with the term “socialization” used in theoretical and empirical research. However, “raise” implies intention. I argue these parents are making concerted efforts to raise, or socialize, their children in certain ways. More than recognizing their African roots, parents want children to accept Jesus as their personal savior and identify as born again Christians. They want them to be different from other children and adults around them who do not identify as such. They want them to think and act in godly ways, as articulated in the Bible. Therefore, this ethnography analyzes the language and literacy processes of socializing these children to become and be “believers.” It also examines the consequences, theoretical and empirical, of such processes on the understanding of self and one’s relationships with God and other believers and non-believers.

**Conceptual Frameworks: Theorizing Religion, Immigration, and Socialization**

In this dissertation, I build upon theories and empirical work in multiple areas: the anthropology and sociology of immigration, the anthropology of religion and Christianity,
psychological anthropology, and the anthropology of language and literacy socialization. The intersection of these areas helps to frame and illuminate my understanding of my participants’ lives. In particular, I focus on religion and immigrant integration; socialization, learning, and identity; and understanding the notion of belief and self among participants in this study. I will provide an overview of these concepts here and then develop and draw conclusions from in subsequent chapters.

*Religion and Immigrant Integration*

Timothy Smith (1978) calls migration a “theologizing experience,” for the process of leaving that which is familiar and settling in an unfamiliar environment often leads migrants toward greater religious commitment and participation (see also Olupona and Gemignani 2007:8-9; Warner 1998b). This has been true for migrants coming to the U.S. before and after the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, as it was “when Abraham left the land of his father, when people of the Exodus followed Moses into the wilderness, and when Jeremiah urged the exiles who wept by the rivers of Babylon to make the God of their past the hope of their future” (Smith 1978:1175). Often migrants are quick to seek out a religious institution soon after they settle, and many of them attend one on a regular basis. In a national survey of immigrants, Wendy Cage and Elaine Ecklund (2006) find that among migrants who express a religious preference, almost half of them (47%) say they attend a religious service once a week or more.

Scholarship on religion and immigrants who came to the U.S. post-1965 has only recently reemerged since the 1990s (Alba et al. 2008; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000a; Olupona and Gemignani 2007; Warner 1998a and 1998b). There is no mention of religion in Portes and Rumbaut’s (1996) seminal text on immigrants (Dryden-Peterson 2009); and no religion in the
index for the *1999 Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience* (Hirschman, Kasinitz, and DeWind 1999), as pointed out by Yang and Ebaugh (2001) (see also Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000:4-5 for a discussion on the lack of focus on religion in prominent immigration journals). With the help of institutional investment — such as Harvard’s Religious Pluralism Project (directed by Diana Eck); the Social Science Research Council’s International Migration Program to study Religion, Migration, and Civic Life (led by Josh DeWind); Religion, Ethnicity, and the New Immigrant Research (RENIR) project (led by Helen Rose Ebaugh); and the Pew Charitable Trust’s Gateway Cities Project and the Center for Religion and Public Life — large scale research projects again refocused scholarly attention on how religion affects immigrants from new locations, including Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia, and Africa (albeit Africa is often neglected in studies).

Both earlier and current studies have largely focused on how religion affects the “integration” (a.k.a. incorporation, assimilation, acculturation) of immigrants into American society. Texts, such as Handlin’s *The Uprooted* (2002[1951]) and Herberg’s *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (2012[1955]), show how religion helps immigrants psychologically and spiritually overcome challenges. Religion is used to make sense of the world, cultivating a “meaningful cosmos of a world experienced as specifically senseless” (Weber, Gerth, and Mills 1946:218). Other scholars examine how religious institutions help immigrants socioeconomically by offering welfare services (Hirschman 2004; see also Casino 1987; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Foley and Hoge 2007; Holifield 1994; Yang and Ebaugh 2001). As an institution, religion plays a role in the integration process by 1) creating ethnic communities; 2) offering welfare-type services; and 3) encouraging civic participation (for review, see Dryden-Peterson 2009:205-223). Some of these studies argue that religion is a facilitator of immigrant integration, whereas others
see it as an inhibitor. For example, Greeley (1972) has called religious institutions a “mobility trap,” even if they provide crucial psychological or material benefits, (see also Ebaugh and Chafetz 1999; Min 1992). And from a more recent national survey, Cage and Ecklund (2006) tentatively conclude that religious centers isolate immigrants from integrating into American society.

Dryden-Peterson (2009) points out that much of this literature echoes Durkheim’s (1915) articulation of religion as a mechanism for social solidarity and collective consciousness. Taken collectively, these studies show how religion can be seen as “a system of meaning” or as “an institution” in the integration of migrants (Alba et al. 2008). As a system of meaning, Alba and colleagues explain: “[R]eligion has furnished immigrant communities with symbolic interpretation of the experience of immigration, ritual reinforcement of identity, and the moral support of self-esteem. Descriptions of the meaning-making function of religion use the categories of religious studies and focus on beliefs, values, worship practices, and devotional piety” (2008:4). As an institution, religion fulfills a social service function, which includes financial assistance, political activism, and educational support. I analyze religion both as a system of meaning and as an institution in this study.

How “integration” (a.k.a. incorporation, assimilation, acculturation) is defined and measured in studies varies. Most studies approach the concept by thinking of an individual and the values or attributes of “American” culture and society against which to measure them — for example English language proficiency, employment, socioeconomic status and mobility, political and civic engagement, attainment of academic degrees, and feeling “American.” Instead, Dryden-Peterson (2009) argues:

[M]any African migrants also have communal desires, rooted in the worldview of ubuntu, that shape the ways they seek to integrate. African migrants are not just searching for a job in the United States; they are searching for a new community. I argue that communal ties have instrumental benefits, but they also have
intrinsic psychological and emotional benefits, including identification and a sense of belonging, which are often overlooked as part of migrant integration. [340]

Although *Ubuntu* is originally a Xhosa word that signifies interconnectedness, the word and its meaning exist in several languages throughout Africa, including Kiswahili, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, and Luganda, which are dominant languages among the participants in this study. Dryden-Peterson argues that it is a worldview that defines and shapes African immigrant integration patterns. To that end, she compares the ways African migrants (referencing both immigrants and refugees) create “bonding” relationships *within homogeneous* groups and “bridging” relationships *across heterogeneous* groups in schools and churches.

In this vein, I, too, follow my participants in their quest for a feeling of belonging, connectedness, and identity for themselves and for their children. Instead of measuring integration, I examine the *processes* through which interconnectedness is fostered, whereby one identifies him or herself and is identified by others as a member of a particular group. These are the processes of *socialization*. I argue that socialization is a key dimension of the concept of “integration.” Indeed, it enables (and disables) certain social relationships, which then create the sense of community that Dryden-Peterson (2009) articulates above. Thus, I turn now to theories of *socialization, learning,* and *identity* through which I aim to illuminate the central role religion as a system of meaning and as an institution plays in the lives of the immigrants and refugees who participated in this study.

**Socialization, Learning, and Identity Theories**

This dissertation primarily makes use of theories pertaining to *socialization* in order to understand the role of religion in immigrant lives. Socialization is about the implicit and explicit ways novices, most often children, learn a worldview and practices particular to a group so that
they may engage and be recognized as a member of that group (see early studies like Mead 2001[1928]; Harrington and Whiting 1973; Whiting 1941, 1953; and see later studies like Whiting and Edwards 1988; Whiting and Whiting 1975). Because I argue that parents are raising their children purposefully, I also draw on Cremin (1976) and Varene’s (2007) idea of education as a “deliberate and deliberative human activity” (2007:1562) found in all contexts, not just schools. I examine the religious education that is going on at home and in church.

In this study, I focus on language — oral and written — as a way to examine how children are being socialized. *Language socialization* is about learning to use language and learning through the use of language to become a member of a particular group (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a and 1986b). It draws from understandings of language acquisition, child development, and sociocultural context. As children develop linguistic competence, they also develop cultural competence, or the particular ways one comports oneself in thought, feelings, speech, and action in different contexts (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002). Cultural values, ideologies, and worldviews are embedded in everyday interaction. By studying caregiver-child talk and behavior, we gain insight into these orientations, their influence on social structure, and the nature of sociocultural continuity and change. This attention to change is important, for although children and novices are learning certain linguistic and cultural patterns, they have the potential to change them as well (Ochs and Schieffelin 2011).

Practice theory dovetails language socialization theory, as it provides a crucial understanding about the nature of learning. Inspired by the work of Lev Vygotsky among others, Lave and Wenger (1991) posit that learning is in fact legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice. *Participation* is the operative word: learning is not just one type of activity but rather part of all activities; furthermore, learning is not necessarily about
internalizing concepts and skills, but rather about increasing one’s participation in activities in relation to other people. Thus, learning is not just a cognitive process (i.e. learning knowledge and skills), but more so a social process characterized by the interaction of newcomers and old-timers engaged in activity. In this study, I mostly cast children as the newcomers and parents and church leaders as the old-timers, or masters, who are engaged in activities like praying and reading the Bible at church and at home. I focus on the processes of how these children learn “ways of belonging” in the way they speak, act, and engage with certain artifacts, namely the Bible (Lave and Wenger 1991:35). These processes undergird the ongoing identity construction for children and youth attending this particular church. By processes, I mean the ways in which children and adults are learning the beliefs (thoughts) and actions that are associated with being a “believer,” or “born again Christian.” I aim to describe how they are becoming members of this community of practice, for “learning and a sense of identity are inseparable” (1991:115). To be sure, this is not the only community of practice into which they are being socialized, but it is the one that I focus on in this study.

*Identity* is a convoluted term. In one sense, identity can be thought of as conferred through ascribed or achieved changes, like those associated with certain rites of passage. For example, in Christianity, baptism and confirmation are important rites of passage that signal one’s identity as a Christian, for they bestow a membership “status” with a declaration that one believes in God the Father, the son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. However, I argue that major rites of passage are not the only ways through which identity is conferred. Rather identity is constructed and performed through everyday conversations and public acts. These are the subtler but equally powerful ways that identity is created* and maintained.* In this way, I borrow Lave and Wenger’s (1991) perspective on identities as “long-term, living relations between persons and their place
and participation in communities of practice” (53). In other words, one has to learn to perform certain ways of talking and behaving in relation to others in order to be seen as a member of a particular community. These ways of talking and doing can be contested and changed, which means membership is negotiated everyday as one participates in repetitive practices and discussions. In a church setting, this happens predominantly in Sunday school or Bible studies for children and adults.

The Bible plays a major role in the way that children are socialized to become a member of this community of practice. Thus, I also draw from a sociocultural perspective of literacy and literacy socialization theory. New Literacy Studies conceives literacy as more than the cognitive skills required to read and write; rather it is about the ways people engage with printed (and digital) text and give meaning to it (Street 1984, 1993; see also Barton and Hamilton 1998; Gee 1990; Heath 1983). Literacy is “a set of socially organized practices” (Scribner and Cole 1981:236) situated within and influenced by historical circumstances, political and economic structures, and cultural ideologies. It is intimately connected to a sense of self and identity, or “ways of being in the world” (Gee 1990:174-175). The ways one interacts with and talks about printed (or digital) text positions him or her as an insider or outsider to a particular group. In this sense, the Bible becomes an important cultural artifact, or “object inscribed by the collective attribute of meaning” (Bartlett and Holland 2002), in the tandem processes of “creative self-making” and negotiation of “others perceptions of one’s self” in identity work (Bartlett 2005, emphasis in original). Literacy socialization is then about learning to use printed (or digital) text and through the use of text to become a member this community of practice (Sterponi 2011; see also Cochran-Smith 1984; Heath 1983; Scollon and Scollon 1981). In this study, I look at the
way parents and church leaders orient children in their engagements with the Bible to become believers or born again Christians.

**Empirical Studies at the Intersection of Religion, Immigration, and Socialization**

As anthropologists and other social scientists have pointed out, religion plays an important role in socialization processes all over the world. In a study of three communities in the Piedmont Carolinas, Heath (1983) shows how children’s participation in church socializes them to particular ways of storytelling, which enables them to become part of their communities at home respectively, but disable some children from being seen as high achievers at school (see also follow-up study, Heath 2012a). In Bangladesh, Maddox (2005) explores how secular and religious literacy practices influence gender and family roles. In Western Samoa, Duranti and Ochs (1988) show how parochial school socializes children linguistically and socially away from Samoan expectations of adult-child interactions and task accomplishment and towards more Western patterns.

As people emigrate from their countries of birth or childhood, religion continues to play a role in socializing them towards either religious, ethnic, and/or cultural identities and values. Unfortunately there are only a few studies looking at the intersection of religion, immigration, and socialization (Ek 2005:77; see also Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Warner and Wittner 1998). In the case of Samoan immigrants living in Southern California, Duranti, Ochs, and Ta’ase (2004) find that children are socialized toward Samoan cultural values through teachings in Sunday school. In a study of language and literacy socialization in *doctrina* and catechism classes, Baquedano-López (1997, 2000, 2002) explores how narratives of Our Lady of Guadeloupe construct different collective identities: whereas in *doctrina* classes where Spanish-speaking
Mexican and Mexican heritage children co-construct with their teacher a collective Mexican identity, one that is dark-skinned and has been oppressed, in catechism classes a teacher constructs a multi-ethnic Mary which reflects the group of children who are multi-ethnic yet speak English predominantly. In both cases, identity socialization favors ethnicity. In contrast, in a study of Central American and Mexican youth in a Pentecostal church, Ek (2002, 2005) finds that youth are being socialized to a Christian Pentecostal identity, which downplays ethnic or national identity, in Sunday school classes and services. She finds that practices, such as biblical narratives, prayers, and hymns, push youth towards *el camino* (God’s path) and away from *el mundo* (the world). In this case, religious identity overshadows ethnic identity. Yet, religious identity and ethnic identity are not necessarily always in conflict. In Kattan’s (2009) study of young children in Israeli families who have temporarily relocated to the New York City area, she finds that they develop strong ethno-religious identities. These studies are important comparative cases for this dissertation.

These studies highlight the tension and interplay between religion and ethnicity in identity work. Especially in the historical record of immigrant studies in the U.S., these categories interact in particular ways. Herberg’s (2012[1955]) analysis of the sociological processes and evolution of immigrant identification is particularly relevant and noteworthy. Ethnic affiliation has not been and is not always a category with which one identifies. Examining the three waves of European immigration pre-1920s before legislation changed, Herberg notes that first generation immigrants sought to recreate their old lives, which centered on the village church. However, they could not in effect “transplant” the old church, for its bend towards regional identification no longer applied in the U.S. context. And so, national consciousness emerged, eclipsing regional identification, as immigrants sought out others who spoke their language and
had similar cultural values and practices. Immigrants were often forced to start new congregations, defined by language and culture, when they were ostracized from other “American” congregations and from mainstream society. Herberg argues, this is how America became divided into ethnic groups. These ethnic churches “transcended ‘old country’ particularism and grouped according to the newly relevant ethnic (linguistic, cultural, ‘national’) lines.” As the second generation came of age, they were torn between identifying as “American” and their respective ethnicity, which was intimately connected to their religion and church. As the second and third generation headed towards the American “melting pot,” they were expected to change their affiliation toward nationality, language, and culture, but they were “not expected to change” their religion (emphasis in original). “And so with the third generation it is religion that became the differentiating element and the context of self-identification and social location,” Herberg concludes.

More recently, Olupona and Gemignani’s (2007) edited volume on African immigrant religious communities in the U.S. comment on how ethnicity and religion factor into identity formation. In particular, Biney (2007) takes issue with Ebaugh and Chafetz’s (2000) assertion that immigrant worship communities serve to reproduce ethnic or cultural identity. Instead, in his research on the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York, Biney finds that congregants maximize their religious identity over any ethnic or cultural one. Bongmba (2007) comes to a similar conclusion in his study of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star for Cameroonian and Nigerians in Houston, Texas. Other authors, like Gemignani (2007), show how a combined ethnoreligious identity affects gender relations in African Pentecostal/charismatic churches in Northern California. In effect, ethnicity and religion (among other factors) not only play important roles in individual identity formation, but also in the production of imagined
communities. For many African immigrant religious communities, Olupona and Gemignani note, “[T]he imagining of community involves the connection to, and remembrance of, an African homeland” (2007:4), either through language, food, dress, or song, among others. In this dissertation, I will explore the extent to which religious, ethnic, national, and even pan-African identifications are maximized or minimized within this community of practice, and how that identification shapes and is reinforced by the processes of socialization.

These insights on the interplay between religion and ethnicity in the context of immigration are an important historical backdrop against which to understand and with which to compare the identity work and community-building among my participants.

**Belief and Self**

Diving deeper into theoretical understandings of religion and identity, this dissertation also draws from and comments on the interplay between notions of belief and self. Both entail important psychological and social dimensions.

Belief is a contentious term and area of inquiry in anthropology. The historical debate centers on locating belief within a psychological realm attributable to an inner state of mind versus within a social realm as a product of culture. For example, whereas Weber (1958[1904-05]) understood (religious) belief as a product of the process of introspection on everyday experiences, Durkheim (1915[1912]) was more interested in understanding belief as a part of the shared social phenomenon of religion. Part of the larger theoretical and empirical issue stems from linguistic imprecision; part from the limitations of scientific inquiry; and part from the production of knowledge from primarily Western and Christian biases. Linguistically, Pouillon (1982[1979]) lays out the multiple meanings of ‘belief’ as: 1) the cognitive acceptance of the
existence of something or someone; 2) the social learning of perceiving the world from a particular standpoint (i.e. through socialization); or 3) a commitment to someone or something through trust. In Christianity, one’s “belief in God” can entail all three meanings. Yet, is what one says about what another believes, actually what they believe? Needham (1972) points out that if belief is an internal state of mind, then it can only be studied internally by the self. It is not verifiable by a second party, like an anthropologist. When anthropologists record ‘beliefs’, these ‘beliefs’ are in fact decontextualized reflections on believed understandings. Thus, we need to be clear that these are statements about belief. Furthermore, Asad (1983, 1993) argues that the category of religion, and the understanding of ‘belief’ as part of that, cannot be universally applied because it is the product of particular historical and cultural context. In a famous debate with Geertz (1973), who conceives of religion as a set of beliefs (inner states of mind) made evident through cultural symbols, Asad sees this type of thinking as a product of Western thinking and Christian tradition (see also Ruel 1982 for the evolution of ‘belief’ in Christianity).

Subsequently, some scholars have suggested abandoning the term belief (Needham 1972), or at least writing “against” the term with a good amount of “skepticism” (Lindquist and Coleman 2008). Most recently, Carlisle and Simon (2012) and others have tried to embrace the psychological and social dimension in their approach to the term and analytical topic in a special issue in Ethos. They define belief not as the “propositions to which one consciously assents,” but rather as “subjective commitments to truths, by which we mean subjective commitments to those truths as being true” (222). They want to highlight the ongoing struggle subjects make in order to understand what belief entails and one’s commitment to it in different social settings and over time. I follow their lead.
The exploration of the subjectivity of belief is about understanding the dialectic between an agentive individual and their experience with governing sociocultural structures (this perspective is similar to other conceptualizations of subjectivity — see Biehl et al. 2007; Luhrmann 2006). I understand the self as an unbounded member of a relationship socially constructed and reconstructed over time and variable in different situations. Beliefs are not definitively associated with doctrine nor consciously espoused by subjects. Different discourses emerge in different contexts, and thus subjects must negotiate multiple discourses, which may be contradictory or ambiguous. This results in multiple truths. As Carlisle and Simon (2012) articulate, belief is about “living through” these multiple truths: “We therefore locate belief in the cultural and psychological processes through which individuals work to integrate personal experiences and socially learned doctrines and discourses — including those concerning what it means to believe — into truths to live through” (2012:223, emphasis added). The identity work that I examine here is about the processes of learning one kind of truth. It is about the social construction of a certain kind of truth that 1) perceives the self and 2) organizes the world in a particular way, and 3) influences (but does not necessarily dictate) one’s social relationships with others. The latter part is critical. As Bielo (2012) asserts, Christian selfhood (or at least the study of it) is about the development of certain relational commitments.

In my study, these relational commitments are worked out as participants engage with others in talk and activity to negotiate what constitutes the psychological propositions to which they strive to commit. It cannot be emphasized enough that this identity work is a constant work-in-progress. Part of being a “believer” is about constantly striving to become a “believer” (Elisha 2008). My participants (like social scientists) are continually working out what belief means psychologically and socially. Explicitly and implicitly, they are developing a certain kind of self
in relation to God and others predicated on the notion of “belief” or being a “believer.” There is an intrapersonal element — developing the notion of a self that embodies God and godly thought and action — and an interpersonal element — developing a relationship with God and with others who are also believers.

Further engagement with theory and pertinent empirical research will happen in the following chapters.

The Demographic and Religious Context

The presence of African immigrant and refugee born again Christians in the suburbs of Boston reflects the historic changes in U.S. immigration and Christianity. The number of Africans living in the U.S. has exploded in recent years by a staggering 344% between 1990 and 2010; based on the U.S. Decennial Censuses and the American Community Surveys, the population increased from about 360,000 to 1.6 million (Migration Policy Institute 2012a). They now make up 4.1% of the total foreign-born population (Migration Policy Institute 2012b). A number of factors contribute to this increase, including economic change, political turmoil, war, and personal reasons. As a result refugees and asylum-seekers represent a portion of this total. From 1975-2011, about 260,000 African refugees were admitted to the U.S. (Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration 2010). Almost half were admitted post 2003, and over 18,000 (about 24%) were from the Great Lakes Region (the group predominantly studied here), which includes Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. Immigrants from eastern and central regions of Africa, which include these countries as well as others, numbered over 475,000 and 88,000, respectively, in 2011 (Migration Policy Institute 2012b). The majority of African immigrants are admitted to the U.S.
through the Diversity Visa Program (often called, “The Visa Lottery”), which was established with the passing of the 1990 Immigration Act (see Appendix 3, Table 5 for all the types of visas participants in this study used to enter the U.S.).

The majority of the participants in this study live in the suburbs of Boston. In 2000, there were 47,000+ foreign-born Africans living in Massachusetts, which ranks 7th among states with a population of foreign-born Africans (Migration Policy Institute 2012c). Central and/or Latin Americans were the more numerous foreign-born populations in the cities where participants lived or those nearby.

Because my participants do not live with other Africans in urban ethnic enclaves, the church has become a site where they can socialize with other immigrants and refugees from Africa. Olupona and Gemignani (2007) note that where there is density of Africans from a particular country or linguistic region, immigrants and refugees typically create a place of worship where services are conducted in a specific language. However, more typically, places of worship serving Africans have pan-African congregations, as is the case with Spirit Church. Services may be conducted in lingua francas, such as English (predominantly), French, or Kiswahili, and/or may have simultaneous translation in another language. On the continent, Africans practice a diversity of religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, and traditional African religions, and the same is true of African immigrants. However, African Pentecostal (also called and similar to charismatic) churches are the most numerous in the U.S. This denomination of Christianity “emphasizes holiness, fervent prayer, charismatic revival, proximate salvation, speaking in tongues, baptism of the Holy Spirit, faith healing, visions, and divine revelations” (Olupona and Gemignani 2007:31). This is the official denomination of Christianity of the primary church in which I observed, namely Spirit Church. That being said,
the term participants use to identify themselves varies: some call themselves Pentecostals; others say evangelicals; others born again Christians; and still others are content with simply Christian. There are differences among these terms, and there are differences in the degree to which participants believed in and practiced different tenets of Pentecostalism specifically. As Carlisle and Simon (2012) argue, believing in something or someone is an ongoing struggle. Moreover, the very tenets of Pentecostalism can be contested theologically. Because of these differences, I have decided to use the term born again Christian to identify participants because the majority of the adult participants have accepted Jesus as their personal savior and experienced a water baptism, hence the term born again. That being said, I make efforts in the next paragraph and in this dissertation as a whole to explain what Pentecostalism means and how it is practiced since it is the official affiliation of the primary church from which I drew participants (the secondary church being Grace Church, which describes itself as “evangelical”).

Pentecostalism is one of the fastest growing sects of Christianity in the world (Anderson 2004; Robbins 2004). The first Pentecostals in Africa were missionaries (from the Azusa Street church) working in Liberia and Angola in 1907 (Anderson 2004). Pentecostalism was founded by an African American preacher named William Seymour, who started the Azusa Street church in Los Angeles in 1906. Pentecostalism spread to central and east Africa by British, Swedish, U.S. American, and Scandinavian missionaries. Globally there are three generalized forms: 1) Classical Pentecostals; 2) the Charismatic renewal movement; and 3) Pentecostal or ‘Pentecostal-like’ independent churches in the Majority World (Anderson 2004:13). Differences revolve around the emphasis on “initial evidence” of the gift of the Holy Spirit (i.e. speaking in tongues), and the third form is distinguished further by the use of certain ritual symbols in healing services. In general, besides doctrinal emphasis on “initial evidence,” Pentecostalism is
characterized by greater participation by congregants and the Holy Spirit in the service. This manifests in vocalizations of Amen, Hallelujah, applause, laughter, dance and singing, and displays of the gifts of the Spirit, and certainly characterized the services I observed. Other distinguishing characteristics were also evident in my data, including a focus on spiritual warfare, dualisms (e.g. believer vs. non-believer), and a ritualized break from past, present, demons, and other non-believers (Robbins 2004). In general, converts tend to be rural migrants in cities who are poorer or otherwise feeling like outcasts amidst social change. These characteristics are reflective of the experiences and demographics of my participants. Because Pentecostal congregations tend to be more heterogeneous, religious identity is often emphasized over racial, ethnic, class, linguistic, or other social categories. This is reflective of the sect’s more egalitarian roots and efforts to remain so in its logic, social organization, and emphasis on ritual life and the feel of worship services (Robbins 2004:126). In general, Spirit and Grace Churches are part of this expanding religious movement that encourages one to accept Jesus as one’s personal savior, receive a water baptism, and share the Word of God (i.e. evangelize).

Spirit Church began as a fellowship prayer group in 1998, meeting in a classroom at Harvard University. When it outgrew the space, the church moved to several locations before it began renting out the second floor of a building in a suburb where many of its immigrant congregants lived. The Pastor says there are over 70 “active” members of the church, who come from more than 11 different countries, including Rwanda, Burundi, the DR Congo, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, the Sudan, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, and Haiti. While I conducted research, church services usually attracted between 30-100 people each Sunday. The church is open 7 days a week for congregants to use as a sanctuary. There are also activities throughout the week including Sunday worship, midweek service, Friday overnight prayers,
Saturday rehearsal and youth group, and “cell group” bible studies arranged in people’s homes throughout several towns. For the most part, children and youth attended Sunday service and Saturday youth group because of bedtimes. The church is supported almost entirely by tithes and donations, which the full-time Pastor manages along with an accountant (an African immigrant himself living in another state), who has offered his services for free.

Owing to a lack of space, Sunday school for children and youth was held from 10-11am before church service. At Spirit Church, the division of Sunday school classes by age was not entirely clear-cut. One teacher said that there were supposed to be four classes: 1) 0-9 year olds led by Mama Regina; 2) 9-12 year olds led by Subira (19); 3) 13-17 year olds led by Imani; and then a bible study for the adults. But the Pastor described the division among classes slightly differently: 1) 3-7 year olds; 2) 7-13 year olds; and 3) the teenagers. He mentioned, though, that the teenagers in the second class were uncomfortable that they were in class with such young children and so they joined the older group. Following that and the fact that there were not enough children to fill three separate classes, I found that only two classes really met: 1) 0-13 year olds led at different points by teacher Subira and parent-teachers Mama Regina and Mama Danica, and 2) 10-20 year olds led by teacher Imani. Attendance ranged each week: on average 9 children attended the younger class and 12 youths attended the older class.

After Sunday school, church service began at 11am and usually lasted until 1:30, although 1pm was the intended end. The service was conducted in both Kiswahili and English, with a congregant serving as translator for one or the other language depending on who was speaking. Service began with prayer and a song, during which words were sometimes displayed on a project screen or eventually a TV. A church leader would then make announcements and welcome new members and visitors, who were asked to stand up and identify themselves.
Afterwards congregants were welcomed to give testimonies about how God had been working in their lives. On occasion, the Pastor conducted special ceremonies, such as infant dedications, where parents were asked if they would train the child in the way of God. Then, we launched into praise and worship, being led in song by a male music director, a team of female adult and youth singers, and male musicians who played drums, guitar, and keyboard. While the music boomed at an almost deafening level, adults and children danced in their seats and in the aisles. During the last song, congregants filed up to give their tithes and offerings (for a special family in need or cause) and then fell into praying out loud in multiple languages, including speaking in tongues. Then, the Pastor gave the Word of God, or extended this honor to another congregant or special guest. During the sermon, the children were supposed to sit quietly and some in fact did; others leafed through the Bible; drew in the empty pages at the end of the Bible (which they were not supposed to do) or on other pieces of paper; read other books; played with their parents’ cell phones; or excused themselves to go to the bathroom (but often times ended up playing in the hall or outside until someone shooed them inside). Finally, the service closed in prayer.

Towards an Ethnography — Sampling, Methods, and Analysis

I did not set out to study African families specifically in church settings (see Preface); however, in the Greater Boston Area, I quickly learned that this is where they congregate. They do not live in ethnic enclaves in an urban area, as previous generations of immigrants have and/or larger populations; rather they settle (or are resettled, in the case of refugees) in the suburbs that have a lower cost of living. And even in these suburbs, they are scattered across multiple cities/towns. Thus, church on Sundays, as well as mid-week services and small group meetings, provide opportunities for this population to connect and support one another.
emotionally, spiritually, and materially. This makes sense given that 62.7% of sub-Saharan Africans are Christian (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2011) and that African immigrants make up only 4.1% of the total foreign-born population (Migration Policy Institute 2012b). As a result, African immigrants and refugees are more likely to be part of religious congregations than other immigrant groups and more likely to worship in heterogeneous groups (Foley and Hoge 2007). Moreover, the countries from which participants emigrated overwhelmingly identify as Christian — DR Congo (95.7%), Burundi (94.1%), Rwanda (93.4%), Uganda (86.7%), Kenya (84.8%), and Tanzania (59.6%) (Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2011).

For this study, I compare data generated through participant observation, direct observation, semi-structured interviews, and a focus group with attendants from two churches: Grace Church, which has a congregation mostly from Uganda; and Spirit Church, which has a more or less multinational congregation made up of immigrants and refugees from 11 different African countries (predominantly the DRC and Rwanda, see Appendix 3, Table 2 & 3) and their children. Both churches are a part of a network of about five self-described “African churches,” which are located in several suburban areas northeast of the city of Boston. Spirit Church officially identifies as Pentecostal. Grace Church does not officially identify as Pentecostal, however it is devoted to “evangelism,” which its promotional material explains as “simply helping people come back to the grace and embrace of God through Jesus Christ.”

Collectively, the participants in this study mainly come from the African Great Lakes region (see Appendix 3, Table 3), although some participants emigrated from other sub-Saharan African countries. With the exception of Uganda, Kiswahili is often the lingua franca in the region and in the diaspora, since there is tremendous linguistic diversity in maternal languages.
In addition, particularly in the U.S., English (and sometimes French) becomes the other lingua franca. Given the heterogeneity nationally, ethnically, and linguistically, I chose to use the term “African” to describe participants, because it is an inclusive term that encompasses all of their countries of origin. Moreover, it is a term that my participants continually used to refer to themselves. Although there is a danger of essentializing difference, most of my participants did not see this as troubling. In fact, it is potentially surprising that such close interpersonal relationships did develop among some of these people given the current and historical interethnic violence that has plagued the African Great Lakes Region from which they emigrate. Immigrants and refugees identified either as African or by their countries of origin, depending on who was present and the conversation at hand.

Participants include parents and their children, who ranged in age from 0-20 years old, as well as other adults (particularly church leaders) interacting with these target participants (see Appendix 3, Table 1). Within church communities, the participation and trust of attendants is often initially, if not ultimately, dependent on the trust bestowed by church leaders. Thus, after earning the support of pastors at both churches, I recruited parents through snowball sampling, who then gave permission for their children to be part of the study as well. In the analysis that follows, I sometimes use “children” as a catchall phrase or distinguish between children, who are mostly 0-13 years old, and youth, who are mostly 10-20 years old (Note: the age range overlaps). This is an emic division that emerged owing to the separation between Sunday school classes at Spirit Church. To be sure, there are major developmental differences within these age ranges, but small numbers in any one set of ages prohibited me from targeting a sub-section. Moreover, in church and home settings, children continually interact with others who range in age, and when it
comes to religious practices, parents and parent-teachers at church only tend to differentiate their interactions and messages between the two categories of children and youth.

I observed participants predominantly at church on Sundays, particularly Sunday school classes for children (see Appendix 3, Table 7) and youth at Spirit Church; at a Bible study on Monday evenings for mothers who attend Grace Church; and at home, when I interviewed parents and observed family Bible reading at night. In addition, participants were kind to invite me to other gatherings, including a wedding, baby showers, birthdays, barbecues, and other religious events, like ministry fundraisers and conferences, and I generated data from these settings as well. Since main church services are only held on Sundays, I mostly attended church service and observed Sunday school at Spirit Church. At one point, I tried to alternate weeks going to service at the two churches, but I felt that my relationships with participants “lapsed” because too much time had passed in between. I also tried attending mid-week services, but because these were held in the evenings many families did not attend since this was bedtime for many younger children. In choosing between Spirit Church and Grace Church for Sunday service I chose to attend services mostly at Spirit Church, as opposed to Grace Church, for linguistic and research question purposes. The services at Spirit Church are translated simultaneously in English and Kiswahili, which is a language I understand and speak conversationally, whereas the services at Grace Church are conducted without translation in English and Luganda, which is a language I neither speak nor understand. Moreover, owing to the more multinational congregation of Spirit Church, I felt it a more dynamic setting to observe social relationships and identity socialization. To balance my attendance at Spirit Church on Sunday, I participated in a Bible study for mothers at Grace Church (which did not exist at Spirit Church). There were no
Bible studies offered specifically for fathers at either church, although there was a men’s Bible study at Grace Church and Spirit Church.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with parents from both Spirit Church and Grace Church (see Appendix 3, Table 6). The majority of interviews were with mothers only, although there were a few interviews that I conducted with mothers and fathers together, and one father alone in one case. Interviews proved harder to set up than I anticipated. All parents lead busy lives, juggling work and family obligations. But immigrant and refugee parents in particular seemed even harder to schedule interviews with, because many worked multiple jobs. Almost every interview I set up was rescheduled at least once. Moreover, many parents could only spend about an hour to an hour and a half with me as they felt they had to meet other work and family obligations on both weekdays and weekends. Nevertheless, during interviews, parents opened up and shared their lives and opinions with me. I also generated more data through informal interviews and conversations during other social activities.

In order to guide the more formal interviews with parents, I adapted the Ecocultural Family Interview (EFI) protocol, developed by Thomas Weisner and colleagues (1997; 2002) This interview protocol asks parents to go through their family’s daily routine, which reveals not only the range of children’s activities but also parents’ goals, values, and beliefs about child development that motivates these routines and influences parents’ roles in that process (see Appendix 1 for EFI Protocol). In addition, questions reveal what kinds of resources the family feels are available and which resources are unavailable and thus constrain their daily routines. As recommended by Weisner, I often set out my list of questions in front of parents to begin our conversations and previewed what I hoped to cover. I noticed that this transparency made parents feel at ease. These interviews proved instrumental in leading me to focus on the role of religion
in these families’ lives. As parents walked me through their day, they talked about how they would read the Bible with their children and pray at bedtime. I was initially surprised. I had anticipated that they would read children’s storybooks, similar to *Goodnight Moon* from my childhood. But only a few families included these types of books alongside Bible reading at night. Thus, I began to tailor our conversations toward exploring the role of religion in their lives and in parenting their children. We discussed how they became born again Christians, how God helps them parent, and what they hope children learn about God and why. Interviews also explored family history, including how they came to the U.S. and the stories parents tell their children about their own childhood. Initially, I expected to explore their past thoroughly, including any painful or traumatic events. However, I quickly realized that many parents did not want to remember those experiences, and I did not want to disrupt any of their efforts to heal or move on. Thus, this ethnography is less about their past, and more about their present and future aspirations. As such, I asked parents about their hopes and worries for their children, which I saw as ultimately driving the ways they parent.

The extent to which I could probe children’s perspectives was limited. Many of the children were too young developmentally to reflect on their experiences and many youths did not open up when I engaged them in one-on-one conversations. (More than likely they saw me as an extension of their parents and teachers.) That being said, I was able to record some of their insights and commentaries from their conversations during Sunday school, youth group, and from stories their parents shared with me. I also made an effort to include their body language during group interactions, which can indicate their attitudes. I have included these data in the following chapters.
In order to probe youths’ perspectives further, I conducted a focus group with those who attend services at Spirit Church. Parents granted their permission orally beforehand (see Appendix 2 for Focus Group Questions; see Appendix 3, Table 8 for group statistics). Nineteen youths participated, of which eight were girls and 11 were boys and whose ages ranged from 10-20 years old. Twelve of the youth were born in Africa, whereas seven were born in the U.S. Of those 12 youths who were born in Africa, seven of them had lived in the U.S. for one-three years, two of them for four-six years, and three of them for seven-nine years. All but one said they can have a general conversation in at least two languages, mostly English and Kiswahili, with four languages spoken as the maximum (other languages include Kinyarwanda, French, and Spanish). Although 15 of them speak with their parents in a language other than English at least part of the time, all youths read the Bible exclusively in English (with one exception who reads in Kiswahili and English). For the focus group, the youth were separated by gender and further split into four groups total (i.e. two boy groups and two girl groups). I split the groups so that their responses could be compared with one another. Ultimately, it would have been better to have three groups for each gender, but time and numbers prevented this. With each group, I asked a series of questions aiming to explore their opinions and experiences about what they are involved with at church, including reading the Bible, and how it affects their faith and relationships with others. While I moderated the conversation, I tape recorded the discussion and had an assistant record responses by hand.

I also collected a few drawings from some of the younger children, which I use to understand their perspectives. During church service, two to three children would sit next to me and ask for a pen and piece of paper. I did not prompt them to draw anything in particular, nor establish any restrictions. Once they finished drawing, I would ask them to tell me what they had
drawn and then record it on the back of their drawing. I did not generate nor collect these drawings systematically from each child on a regular basis, for I did not want to intervene in the regular proceedings of church. The interaction was initiated by the children.

As I generated data using these methods over the course of 18 months, I took extensive fieldnotes and audio-recorded focus groups and semi-structured interviews (when given permission). I said goodbye to my participants in June 2012 when I moved to California. I began systematic analysis two months later. As I read through my entire dataset, I openly coded my fieldnotes from participant observations and semi-structured interviews in order to determine general themes inductively and deductively from my theoretical framework. Later I refined these codes through more focused coding to determine certain patterns and processes within themes (Emerson et al. 1995).

It is important to note that I did not transcribe recordings and therefore did not use discourse or conversation analysis. I found that transcription proved too time-consuming for me and too costly to outsource. Instead, I used the notes that I took during an interview or group gathering to write a very detailed fieldnote with direct quotes within a day of the event and used the recording for verification purposes. The fieldnote then became the text I analyzed with the open and focused coding method described above. I found this method of analysis worked well, both logistically and analytically. I believe the conclusions I have drawn would be the same if I had transcribed recordings and coded those instead. Fundamentally, the analysis is a triangulation of what people do, what they say they do, and what they say they ought to do.

Ethnographic methods were best for this study because this population is in fact quite heterogeneous. Take the case of Mama Furaha (born in Rwanda and considers herself Rwandese), her husband (born in Rwanda and considers himself Congolese), and their children
(one born in Kenya, two born in the DRC, and one born in the U.S.) who are all being raised in the U.S. Mama Furaha and her husband each speak more than four languages. They use mostly Kiswahili and some English to speak to their children, who respond in a mixture of Kiswahili and English. How do you categorize this family? Which variables are more salient — country of birth, ethnic identification, maternal language, current spoken language, what country they are raised in, or which town they live in currently? Because of the heterogeneity of these variables and thus the small numbers within each category, I decided to make the criteria for participation in this study more general and inclusive. Thus, the participants are: 1) parents who attend one of the two churches from which I sampled; 2) identify as a Christian, born again Christian, Pentecostal, or evangelical Christian, 3) parents who have emigrated from an African country, and 4) they have at least one child between the ages of 1-18, with a focus on those families who have children in elementary school. Families had an average of almost three children, with a maximum of five children living in a house with their parents (see Appendix 3, Table 4).

In an ethnographic study such as this, it is hard to count the number of participants, since I attended many public events and interacted with a couple hundred people on varying levels of frequency. Nevertheless, I have made an effort to categorize and count the people from whom I generated data. I have created a hierarchy of tiers and categorized participants based on the extent to which the data generated from them pertain to the thesis of this dissertation (see Appendix 3, Table 1). The opinions and experiences of participants categorized in Tier 1 and 2 represent the core of the ideas presented here.

The majority of parents in this study have a bachelor’s degree that they earned before their arrival to the U.S. There are a few parents who attended primary or secondary school, and still others who have more advanced graduate degrees in medicine and education. More than half of
the parents arrived in the U.S. after 2000. Most parents now work full-time in medical services as administrators, registered nurses in hospitals, and health aids and counselors in residential treatment facilities and in homes for the elderly, disabled, and mentally ill. A few other participants work as skilled factory workers, technicians, teachers, engineers, or managers in other industries. In addition, many participants volunteered at church in varying capacities, serving as Pastors, assistant Pastors, Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, Bible study leaders, musicians, singers, or translators. Many participants said they serve to fulfill a calling from God or the senior Pastor. On average, parents are dual earners, and a few parents even work two jobs and on the weekends. Most families rent their homes, which are located in gated communities or apartment complexes, some of which are federally subsidized. Yet there are a few families who own and live in single-family houses. Thus, the socioeconomic status of participants ranges from low- to middle-income. Parents send their children to public school on average; although a few families send (or have sent) their children to parochial school.

From this sample and these methods, I aim to describe how these African immigrant and refugee parents are using God to raise their children by studying their language and literacy practices at home and at church. Although snowball sampling makes the conclusions from this research not generalizable beyond the sample, I believe that they are theoretically and empirically fruitful for future comparisons with other migrant groups who are using religion (or not) to cope with the challenges they face in this new world.

For this research, it is important to protect the identity of my participants, for some are refugees and others may have an illegal immigration status. Therefore, in this dissertation, I have given pseudonyms to all participants, churches, and specific cities/towns (besides Boston) and
removed or changed some identifying information in accordance with IRB stipulations (see A Note on Terminology and Quotations).

**Overview of Chapters**

The following chapters explore how African parents raise their children to know God from a macro and micro level. On a macro level, Chapters 1 and 2 frame this study by presenting an overview of how parents think about and incorporate religion into their family life. Chapter 1 discusses parental ethnotheories on their role vis-à-vis their children and God and how this shapes their daily conversations, interactions, and routines with their children. I also discuss parents’ religious histories and their current involvement in faith practices like praying and reading the Bible.

Chapter 2 is a portrait of a family from this study. It is written following a research method and writing style called *portraiture*, developed by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot (Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis 1997; see also, Lawrence-Lightfoot 1983, 1988, 1990, 1995, and 2003), which blends conventions of empiricism found in the social sciences and aesthetics found in literary novels (among other art forms). It is a close kin of ethnography, but it analyzes data and produces a text that aims for the following: 1) a focus on goodness, as opposed to pathology; 2) a wider audience of readers who may not be familiar with disciplinary theory and jargon; 3) deep storytelling that is holistic, complex, and comprehensive; 4) generalization, so that all readers identify to some degree with the subjects and thus the particular in fact begets the universal; 5) image and essence which is at the same time empathic and critical; 6) transformation for both the subject and the writer/artist, as well as their relationship. Therefore, the text produced is written almost entirely in narrative form, like a short story or novel. It makes use of symbolism and imagery for
example, yet is rooted in systematic scientific inquiry of its subject and subjects. I decided to write Chapter 2 in this manner, because I found it to be the most effective way to provide the deeper context, perspective, and counter balance that the more traditional theoretical and analytic chapters needed. Chapter 2 is a portrait of Mama and Baba Furaha’s family, which describes a bit about their past and present life. From the past, it describes where parents and children were born, stories that the parents tell their children from their childhood, how they got to the U.S., and when they decided to become born again Christians. From the present, it describes their daily and weekly routines, including an example of their family’s Bible study. From this portrait I hope readers come to understand that although these parents are devout born again Christians who are raising their children to be believers, this family does not spend all of their time in prayer, Bible study, nor attending religious events. Children in this study attend dance classes and do homework; families watch movies and go to Six Flags together. In fact, many parents said that their favorite times with their children often involve just hanging out. Their lives are filled with secular activities that they love. Therefore, the portrait of Mama and Baba Furaha’s family aims to situate the ways they incorporate discussions about God, prayer, and the Bible into their daily lives and routines. It illustrates the conscientiousness of parents in the choices they are making and the efforts they make to fulfill the hopes they have for their children. The portrait also creates the opportunity for readers to draw their own conclusions from the data presented. For this reason, I do not include a chapter that explicitly draws a comparison between this family and others. Note that this family should not be considered entirely “representative” of all the families in this study. No family portrait can serve that purpose. However, many of the opinions and practices described in the portrait are similar to those of other families. I hope
readers will keep this portrait in mind as they read the more traditional theoretical and analytic chapters that follow so that subsequent data may be contextualized and further compared.

Chapter 3 operates from a macro and micro perspective. On the one hand, it presents an overview of the people with whom I interacted and the churches where I conducted participant observation. On the other hand, it critically examines how a sense of community and family is cultivated and thus presents the larger community (versus their immediate family) into which and within which these children are being socialized. Certain secular and sacred practices facilitate close social relationships that minimize demographic differences and maximize their shared identity as born again Christians.

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 focus on the processes by which children are socialized to be born again Christians, or believers. Chapter 4 looks at the practice of praying. In Sunday school, children not only learn the nuts and bolts of prayer, but also learn to pray by participating in group prayer. This practice shapes children’s intrapersonal and interpersonal development in particular ways: children are taught that their thoughts are not entirely their own and that they are never alone. This equips them to approach the world around them in a particular way and simultaneously puts them in a different world than their peers at school, for example, who are non-believers. Chapter 5 looks at the particular ways children are taught to engage with the Bible. As they learn biblical stories and scripture, children are supposed to “embody” the text so that they think and act in the world as believers. Chapter 6 examines how children (along with adults) continually struggle with what belief means psychologically and socially and how to handle doubt from within and without. Through discussion and engagement with the Bible, they learn how to position themselves as believers.
Chapters 1-6, with the exception of chapter 3, follow a similar format. I begin with a vignette describing a single event or an edited compilation of events and conversations from my fieldnotes, which ethnographically illustrates the topic for the chapter. I follow with a section that introduces the topic from a theoretical perspective, makes any additional methodological points, and gives the guiding questions that frame the chapter. Next, I present several sections analyzing the data I generated on the chapter topic, and then a section describing theoretical and empirical implications of the data. And finally, I conclude by tying the chapter back to the general thesis of the dissertation.
On Monday evenings, I push through traffic in Harvard Square, Porter Square, up through Arlington and usually arrive on a quiet street about 30 minutes north of Boston right at 7pm. Across from a fire station, a small 2-story building stands rather unremarkably. There is a small, ruffled green awning with white numbers that identify its address, but no other symbols indicate that it is the home of Grace Church. I make my way upstairs to a small room that is unadorned, except for the small red, green, blue, and yellow chairs for children stacked along the wall. I see Auntie Helen. Tonight, she wears a loose dress and a beige knit sweater that hangs long around her skinny frame that belie the fact that she has had four children. She has a narrow face, broad smile, and hair that stretches three inches away from her ear. She alternates between reading the Bible and The Power of a Praying Parent by Stormie Omartian (1995), as she waits patiently for the other women (usually five-nine) who often arrive late to the mothers’ Bible study. While she reads, she has a notebook and pen in hand. Auntie Helen started the Bible study for mothers in 2009 and since then has become the group’s de facto leader.

I warmly greet her and pull up a chair next to her. We catch up on the happenings of the week. We chat about birthdays, since mine is the following day and she and her husband both celebrated their birthdays recently. I learn that yesterday (Sunday) she and other mothers of the group met with some other mothers invite them to join the Bible study. Unfortunately, there were not many new mothers there, because some missed the text message announcing the meeting. Another problem in attracting new members is that Mondays are the only day that the church has space available for their meeting, and that day has proven difficult for other mothers to attend.
Nevertheless, Auntie Helen hopes some new mothers will join them. At the very least, she hopes they will read the book, *The Power of the Praying Parent*, which the group has been discussing recently. It consists of 30 chapters that interweave the author’s personal experience with lessons on how other parents can pray for their children’s health, safety, character development, friends, and other issues. Each two-three page chapter focuses on a particular prayer request followed by related scripture passages. Auntie Helen recognizes that immigrants “work hard” and are “always on the move,” but she wants to remind them to focus on their children and so she introduced the book. She wants to help everyone get out of the constant mindset of “run run run.” “Sometimes the more money you have, the more money you waste,” she philosophizes. The purpose of the mothers coming together is to help one another refocus on what is most important: their children.

Auntie Ruthanne comes in with her toddler, who is in his pajamas. Auntie Helen, Auntie Ruthanne, and I continue to chitchat as we wait for other women to arrive. We converse in English, because I do not speak Luganda, but their rapid rate of conversation and spirited laughter suggest that they are at ease linguistically and emotionally in this second (or fifth for one mother) language. Auntie Sharon comes in with her infant, the youngest of 4 children. She lays out blankets on the floor for her to sleep on. All of the women have taken off their shoes at this point and relax in chairs or on the blue grey carpet, creating a loose circle. I casually listen and partake in their conversation but also start reading Chapter 10, “Being the Person God Created” (Omartian 1995), since I, like many mothers in the group, have not had a chance to read the two-page chapter before coming to the meeting. I quickly discern the main point of the chapter: “Destructive things happen to us when we don’t respond to God’s voice. We can pray
that our children have ears to hear God’s voice so such misery doesn’t happen to them”
(Omartian 1995:82).

Around 7:30, Auntie Helen starts the mothers’ Bible study with her usual refrain, “When two or three are gathered in His name, He will hear us.” They begin with testimonies, describing what they are thankful for, how they have been challenged during the week, and/or how God has provided for them. Auntie Helen begins. She thanks God for the good meeting she had with the new mothers yesterday. Auntie Helen says she is also thankful that all of her children are now in school, as opposed to daycare. It is the first time in 12 years. She is trying not to put in extra hours at work, and instead spend more time with her kids. She states, “God wouldn’t want me to sacrifice my family… Amina? [Amen?]” asking the other women for confirmation. They respond definitively, “Amina.” As she has spent more time with them, she now sees how God is “providing.” In fact, God is providing more than she or her husband is. Auntie Sharon and Auntie Ruthanne follow with their testimonies, just as Auntie Lena walks in the room to join the group. She has just put her three children to bed. Auntie Helen looks to me to give a testimony. I am always slightly caught off guard and nervous, for I am unaccustomed to talking about God’s role in my life. Nevertheless, I try to reflect meaningfully as they do each week.

Auntie Lena shares her testimony next. She reveals that her brother was recently drugged by his classmates at an international school (located in Europe). Fortunately he went to the doctor, they gave him a soda and told him he would be okay. She talks about how “God is good” and how “He send[s] me a verse everyday.” The women are shocked, as am I. We make conjectures as to why it happened and discuss what we would do: Would you pull him out of school or would you put your son in God’s hands and be assured that “God will take care of our children?” Auntie Ruthanne said she would immediately pull him out of school. But Auntie
Helen emphasizes, “God is protecting him.” Her voice, though, reveals that she is torn. Auntie Lisa joins our conversation.

Auntie Helen directs the meeting to a discussion of the chapter, “Being the Person God Created.” She suggests that everyone get five minutes to share their reflections on the chapter. Auntie Sharon reflects, “[We] have to know our hearts desire” and then use it for God. We need to pray that we bring out our children’s “gifts” and “talents.” Auntie Lisa suggests that maybe they should start “scrapbooking,” like other Americans. For example, her son, Lazarus (4), used to want to be a clown and now he wants to be a doctor. They want to remember all of these aspirations.

Auntie Pura joins the group of mothers as Auntie Ruthanne begins her reflection on the chapter. Auntie Pura has recently taken the in her medical services job from 11pm-7am, which is why she is late and recently has not been able to make it to the bible study. She is exhausted, but she says that it is better than the 3-11pm shift because then she misses being with her children at home. She says both adults and children tend to compare themselves to others. She does not compare anymore. Auntie Helen remembers that when she was little she “always wanted to be the rich kid in school.” Auntie Sharon jumps in directing their attention to Hebrews 13:21. She reads the verse out loud from her Kindle: “Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.” She says that we should not compare, because for example, someone might be an opera singer, whereas another cannot carry a tune. She says, “We read the scriptures to them” to show children what God wants them to be. She adds that her son (5) is the lawyer in the house, always making sure his point is heard.
Auntie Helen says that she prays differently for each of her kids, because they are different. She requests that all the mothers create a list of prayers for each of their children and bring it to the group meeting next week. “[It] will make us directional,” suggesting that our reflections and prayers need to be focused and intentional. She says that each day she focuses on one child and adds prayers to her list. She suggests buying special books for each child to do this. She also suggests that they should encourage other mothers they know to be praying parents so that they will be good and faithful servants to God.

Having shared our reflections on the chapter, the group moves into a tighter circle to close in prayer and song. Auntie Pura makes a prayer request for her son. We all stand to sing. Some close their eyes, swaying back and forth, as they harmonize in Luganda. We then reach our hands into the middle of the circle and place them on a list of children’s names for whom they pray each week. Auntie Helen prays for the children’s health and well-being, as well as their teachers in school and in church. The other women respond to her prayers with affirmations, Amens, and “Thank you, Jesus.” Suddenly, the women start praying out loud individually, yet all at once. Some kneel while others wander around the room, speaking in a mixture of Luganda and some English. They go on for a number of minutes, and then their voices fade away without a signal. The mothers transition back to casual conversation, opening a canister of chai (tea) to share. I linger for a few more minutes savoring the milky tea that I love but do not know how to prepare. I then take my leave. I hear their conversation switch back into Luganda.

Despite the long hours they work and spend taking care of their children, these mothers make a concerted effort to attend this Bible study each week. As Auntie Sharon explains, these meetings “give[] me a break…[from] all the craziness.” She gets “support” from her “woman friends.” She sees how others deal with the parenting issues they face and “get[s] knowledge”
about how to cope. You might feel alone, she explains, but when she goes to the mothers’ Bible study she does not feel that way. She adds that it is good for her faith since she can no longer attend church services on Wednesdays. As I attended each week, I too grew closer to the women and learned a lot about how they parent and see their relationship with their children. These women consider themselves born again Christians and make an effort to parent through this lens. Their ideas about God and their relationship with Him shape their ideas about how children naturally behave and what they, as mothers, can do to help raise them. This chapter is about these *parental ethnotheories* and how they shape family routines.

**Local Theories of Child Rearing**

Interaction between caregivers and children is driven by local theories, or *parental ethnotheories*, about “the nature of children, the structure of development, and the meaning of behavior” (Harkness and Super 1996:2). These theories are often revealed as caregivers explain, paraphrase, correct, model, and/or script children’s speech and behavior to what is culturally deemed appropriate (e.g. Ochs 1988; Schieffelin 1990; see also edited volume Schieffelin and Ochs 1986b). These theories are intimately tied to cultural understandings of what it means to be a child, parent, family, and the understanding of self. They affect social interaction patterns as well as choices in activities and the establishment of routines. In their now classic essay, Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) compared caregiver-child interactions in Western Samoa, Papua New Guinea, and America and found that whereas Samoans, Kaluli, and the American working class adapt children to situations, the American white middle class adapt situations to children (see also Heath 1983). In Samoa and Papua New Guinea, children are not considered conversational partners; thus adults do not alter their speech for them (e.g. use baby talk) nor change their
environment (e.g. baby proofing the house), like they do in white middle class America. Moreover, caregivers in different cultures prioritize certain attributes for children, “optimizing certain potentials of human development over others” (LeVine et al. 1994:1; see also Paugh 2011). For example, Kaluli want their children to be assertive (Schieffelin 1990); Samoans aim for their children to be respectful (Ochs 1988; see also Zentella 1997 for the same emphasis for Puerto Rican children in the U.S.); and Japanese emphasize the importance of empathy and indirection (Burdelski 2011; Clancy 1986). The differences in these expectations affect their interactions and routines, and in turn ultimately influence the way children think, speak, act, and become certain persons (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002; Paugh 2011; Schieffelin 1990; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a and 1986b).

Religion can have a strong influence on parental ethnotheories, caregiver-child interaction, and family routines (Paugh 2011). Fader (2009; see also 2000, 2006), for example, studied Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn, New York and found that adults believe children are born with an inclination for good (yaytser hatoyv) and for evil (yaytser hure). It is the adults’ responsibility to promote the good over the bad for the benefit of a child’s moral development (khinekh). In this study, we will see that parental ethnotheories are significantly influenced by religion. Ideas about the nature of children, ideal behavior, how they learn and develop, and the role of parents is informed by scripture in the Bible as interpreted and espoused by the Pastor in sermons, as well as discussed and negotiated by parents in group Bible study. The Bible plays a particularly dominant role influencing parenting practices, because Pentecostals believe the Bible to be true and the foundation of their faith and life.

In addition, parental ethnotheories are shaped by engagement with other religious literature and media, such as The Power of a Praying Parent in the case of the mothers’ Bible study at
Grace Church. Therefore, parental ethnotheories are in one sense particular to this community of practice, but also similar to other parents parenting through the lens of Pentecostalism, evangelicalism, or Christianity more generally.

In the *Handbook on Language Socialization*, Paugh concludes, “It is therefore critical for language socialization researchers to contextualize their studies of verbal and embodied practices within the ideologies of child rearing that inform and render those practices meaningful” (2011:165). To that end, I lay out parental ethnotheories about the nature of children, their role and God’s in child development, and the attributes parents hope their children will acquire. I have teased out these ethnotheories from interviews with parents and church leaders using an adaptation of the Ecocultural Family Interview protocol (Weisner et al. 1997; see also Weisner 2002). Weisner and colleagues argue that activities are critical sites for analysis because they reveal cultural values and goals regarding development, as well as available resources, constraints, feelings and desires, and appropriate talk and behavior. In other words, they reveal what matters for parents and children and how they shape and are shaped by the environment in which they live. Weisner and colleagues call this ecological-cultural context the *ecocultural niche*. Thus, I analyze interviews about everyday routines in order to understand the theories that undergird the ecocultural niche.

In addition, data on parental ethnotheories and routines emerged from an analysis of participant observation in Bible studies and services at Spirit Church and Grace Church, particularly the mothers’ Bible study at Grace Church. In addition to caregiver-child interaction and choices in everyday activities (Paugh 2011), I also used caregiver-caregiver communication and interaction as units of analysis so as to understand parental ethnotheories. Caregivers constantly communicate with one another about the nature of children, appropriate development,
and their role in it. They share their own parenting stories, as well as ones about which they have heard. In discussion of these stories, they evaluate strategies and outcomes, discussing what they would have done differently if they could do it over or if they had been in the person’s shoes. Thus, I posit that caregiver-caregiver discourse is rich with parental ethnotheories and analyze them for such.

In sum, I analyze caregiver-child interaction, caregiver-caregiver discourse, as well as choices in everyday activities in order to glean parental ethnotheories. In this chapter, I show how local theories of childrearing affect the family routines parents establish, as well as their choice of language in particular activities. Because these parents consider themselves born again Christians and parent through this lens, I begin by presenting their religious histories and relevant activities.

“Knowing” Jesus Growing Up: Parents’ Religious Histories

Uncle Gershom says he always believed in God. When he was growing up, he explains that his family was not religious but his father would make him go to Sunday school. I ask if he and his wife would call themselves born again Christians, Pentecostals, Evangelicals, or Christians in general. Uncle Gershom looks at his wife, Auntie Karmina, “Pentecostal?” he questions. Auntie Karmina says that Pentecostals and born again Christians are really the same thing. She talks it out, noting that evangelical is really about evangelizing, and thus more or less comes to the conclusion that she and her husband are born again Christians. Uncle Gershom was Anglican when he was growing up. He became born again in 1998 after watching someone preach on TV. He then was baptized. There is a difference between “knowing” Jesus and “taking Him as your personal savior,” Uncle Gershom explains. Auntie Karmina was born into a born again family
but clarifies that it was really her “parent’s religion.” She became born again in 1996. All of my parent participants “kn[ew]” Jesus growing up, as Uncle Gershom would say. In Bible study and in interviews, parents remembered their own parents praying and reading the Bible. Auntie Keilah remembers her mother getting up at 3 a.m. before her children to pray. Not every parent, though, grew up with parents who were born again Christians. In fact, the majority of my participants did not have parents who were born again — most were Catholic, some Methodist, Anglican, and there were others whose parents went to church or just sent their children without necessarily “believing” in God. Even if they did have parents who were born again, parents who I talked to decided at some point in their adult life to be born again, “taking Him as [their] personal savior,” as Uncle Gershom puts it. Pastor Elijah further clarifies: Baptism is not for babies, because they have “no knowledge of faith.” Moreover it is not in the scripture. To be baptized you have to be old enough to know bad from good, which usually comes around 12 years of age. The Bible says that only after you believe should you be baptized, which is an “outright symbol,” showing that you have died and risen with Christ. You then are baptized in a “biblical way,” which entails being fully immersed in water. They usually do it during the summer in the ocean.

Each parent has their own story about how they found Jesus, but there were some common themes. Some were inspired, as Uncle Gershom was, by someone who preached about Jesus and His love. Mama Elijah, although having come from a devout and prominent Catholic family, was inspired by her new husband, Pastor Elijah. Sometimes inspiration was coupled with a traumatic experience, as Mama and Baba Furaha experienced (see chapter 2 with a portrait of her family). About half of the mothers in the mothers’ Bible study I observed decided to be baptized after they immigrated to the U.S. and started attending services at Grace Church. Auntie Pura
describes how she found Catholic church service boring in the U.S; there was no drumming and only one person singing. The service at Grace Church, though, felt more like what she was used to in Africa. Finally, I surmise, although no one explicitly talked about it, that people who became born again after they immigrated to the U.S. were also swayed by the relationships they were developing with other African immigrants and refugees, who attended services at Spirit Church and Grace Church. Spiritual awakening is often tied to social relationships.

Interestingly, although most parents note their decision to accept Jesus and be baptized as one of the three most significant events in their lives, many parents vacillate on what to call themselves even after I gave them options — born again Christian, Pentecostal, Evangelical, etc. Some parents pointed out some degree of difference between the terms, but ultimately many came to the conclusion, as Auntie Karmina does, that they more or less mean the same thing: you have accepted Jesus as your personal savior. It is important to note that not all parents of the children whom I observed at church were born again Christian. There were a few who considered themselves Catholic, attending Catholic services separately and/or Spirit Church or Grace Church occasionally. There were also a few who did not see themselves as a particular denomination or as particularly religious. Nevertheless, the vast majority of these parents make a conscious decision and effort almost on a daily basis to use God, prayer, and the Bible in their parenting. This necessitates that they themselves immerse themselves, and thus their children, in the Word (i.e. the Bible) and in prayer. Let’s look more closely at their efforts to do so.

**Parents’ Religious Reading Habits**

Parents believe that they are models of good behavior for their children, and so they work hard to pray and read the Bible on a regular basis. Not every parent is able to do these activities
every day; many parents admit they fall short of this goal (with the exception of perhaps the Pastor). However, they have different ways of helping themselves do so. For example, Mama Elinore has three Bibles, one next to her bed (in English), one by the couch in the living room (in English), and a small one in her bag (in Kinyarwanda). She also has a calendar with Bible verses on tear-away sheets. She admits that she has not been keeping up with it. I look over and it reads February 28, just over a month before I interviewed her. Technology helps too. In mothers’ Bible study, Auntie Sharon usually reads Bible passages on her iPad. Mama Danica has an app on her phone that sends her a verse and a “reflection” or “devotion” each day. These are produced by Billy Graham, a nationally recognized American Christian Evangelist who counseled several U.S. presidents.

In addition to the Bible, parents read other Christian-related materials, which they learn of through recommendations from friends. Auntie Karmina is reading a novel by Joyce Meyer, a best-selling American Charismatic Christian author of more than 80 books. Auntie Pura is reading *Hidden Joy in a Dark Corner: The Transforming Power of God’s Story* by Wendy Blight (2009), the autobiography of an American Christian whom God helped to deal with the trauma of being sexually and physically abused at knife-point. Auntie Pura’s favorite magazine is *Psalm 31*, published by Blight’s ministry. Bibles and other Christian-related media are not the only reading materials for parents. Auntie Karmina is reading a book on medical administration, while Uncle Gershom is reading a book on how to drive. But books, magazines, and other media with storylines about finding Jesus or with Christian values feature prominently in their reading lists. It is amazing to think that these parents find the time to read the Bible or other materials amidst long hours at work and taking care of their children. It signals their commitment to their faith and the necessity to engage in activities that continue God’s presence in their lives, including
parenting. The choices they make and routines they establish for their children are influenced by their theories on child rearing. I look next at how they conceive of their relationship and role vis-à-vis their children.

“His Children”: The Relationship between Parents, Children, and God

Although they may have birthed them, these mothers believe their children do not ultimately belong to them; rather they belong to God. They are “His children” and are given to parents to look after, as Auntie Helen recalls the Pastor at Grace Church describing. One mother describes parents as “stewards” of their children: they supervise them, keep them safe, and care for them; but ultimately children are not theirs. Auntie Helen explains, God gives her daughter, Tamra (12), to care for until she gives her back to Him.

While parents play their role as “stewards,” they see God playing His role as provider for and protector over their lives and their children’s. One week, Auntie Lisa, describes her recent issues in finding a babysitter for her three children. She had been desperate and once she had found one, she says she was blind to the red flags that started creeping up. For example, her infant would cry incessantly when she saw the babysitter. In retrospect, she believes that this was God trying to communicate to her through her children. And even though she ignored the signs, she is relieved that God was watching over her children even when she was not there. Likewise, Auntie Sharon comments that many first-time mothers are fearful, but we have to remember, “God takes care of our children.” This is not to say that parents shun a responsibility for providing and protecting their children. They often see themselves working in tandem with God and communicate this to their children. For example, when Auntie Pura finds out about something bad that her children did and they wonder how she knew, she tells them, “I am
everywhere.” She tells them that she has eyes and ears in the back of her head. She half-jokes, “I am like God for you here.”

The belief in God as provider and protector is one that parents also try to instill in their children. Mama Danica says once a month she gets together with her daughters and asks them if there’s “anything bothering them here or out there.” Recently, they said that they worry about their parents getting sick. They wondered who would take care of them. Mama Danica reassured them, “God takes care of [you].” She encouraged them to pray, “God will guide you through it.” Believing in God this way helps both adults and children to cope. In a particularly critical situation, Auntie Karmina remembers helping Absolom (6) understand and deal with his sudden illness: when he was sick with rheumatic fever in the hospital, Auntie Karmina told him, “The Devil makes us sick.” She told him that he “must pray,” “ask[ing] God for healing.” In addition, he must “laugh at the Devil,” because when you laugh at the Devil, you fight him away. After Absolom’s fever broke, he told his mom that he laughed at the Devil. These parents put their faith in God and His control over everything and try to instill that faith in their children.

Although these parents see God as a provider and protector, and encourage their children to see God in this light too, they also want to “instill the fear of God” in their children. Mama Leah says she wants her daughter, Leah (6), to be scared when she does bad things because God will not like it. God is someone who simultaneously (and somewhat paradoxically) should be loved and feared; someone who is a friend and a disciplinarian.

Ultimately, these mothers believe God has a plan and they have to trust Him, especially when it comes to their children. They have a role and God has a separate one: as Auntie Helen advises, “Play your part and God will play His.” In this respect, God is seen as a parent to parents and to children. In a meeting meant to attract other parents to their Bible study, Auntie
Karmina and Auntie Sharon led a discussion with other potential mothers and one father about the chapters they have been reading. Auntie Karmina explains that Ch. 10, “Being the Person God Created” (Omartian 1995), is about children comparing themselves with others. She says it is important to pray for what God wants the child to be. Uncle Jariath presents the case of a youth who said he does not know what he wants to be. He hopes God will help parents discern what that is and help guide the child. Auntie Elyse points out, though, it is hard to force the kids to do something at that age. Auntie Sharon clarifies that if you are a praying parent, God will tell you. For example if a child is playing with a Bunsen burner, he is supposed to be a doctor. They all laugh. It is also important that parents listen to their children because God will speak directly to them and tell them what they should be, or at least imply it. Auntie Sharon says it is important for parents to “train [children] to listen to their inner voice.” Uncle Jariath recalls a story in the Bible about the boy, Samuel, and Eli. Auntie Elyse says that God was training Samuel to listen to Him. Auntie Karmina says we should pray for God to use parents to speak to their children. Auntie Sharon reads from The Power of the Praying Parent about how it is important “to nurture, to develop, [and] to train”; and then the rest is for the Lord. She quotes Isaiah 44:4: “And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.” She says it all goes back to praying on our knees to give parents wisdom. Auntie Karmina remembers that Pastor has said that in every part of life, they and their children may not be the best, but it is important to do your best, and eventually their best (i.e. what they are good at) will be revealed. Auntie Bracha says that sometimes we think God does not speak to children because they are children, but He does. Kids will ask questions, and God will give parents answers. God’s plan for each person includes a profession, which should be developed based on the talents that He has given him or her. In their discussion, God is described as someone who parents parents to help
children figure out what profession they should pursue, as well as someone who parents children by guiding them to discover their own talents. This is so that everyone can “be[] the person God created.” In addition, these parents also believe it is their responsibility to “train” children to “listen to their inner voice,” for that voice is God’s. Uncle Jariath draws a parallel to the biblical story of God training Samuel to recognize that the voice he hears is His and not Eli’s. Thus, God is considered the ultimate parent, whereas parents serve as intermediaries and should pray that God uses them to speak to their children, as Auntie Karmina encourages.

Although parents see themselves as helping children to hear God’s voice and discover His plan, they also recognize that they can get in the way. For example, in discussing Ch. 13, “Having the Proper Motivation for Body Care” (Omartian 1995), Bertie realizes that she needs to “stop fighting” with her daughter about eating healthy foods and let God guide her. Likewise, it is important for parents not to interfere with God’s plan: Auntie Lisa reflects that they shouldn’t put pressure on their children to get a better job because we are “blocking” God’s will. We “need to accept our children for who they are.” Sometimes, she admits she compares her children in subtle ways to her neighbor’s child. Auntie Pura argues, though, that there are some good things that children can learn from other children. For example, she wants her child to be more like Tamra (12). Auntie Helen, Tamra’s mother, looks shocked with her eyes and mouth slightly agape. Auntie Pura explains that Tamra is good about telling someone when she is leaving the house. Auntie Lisa remarks, though, that instead of telling her daughter to be more like Tamra, Auntie Pura should pick out the behavior without referring to the particular person. Auntie Sharon chimes in, saying that one comparison is okay but it is bad to keep comparing. Instead, Auntie Pura should give a “consequence.” Auntie Sharon thinks that parents should not compare siblings because it affects their “self-esteem.” Auntie Helen admits, “I’m guilty of that.” Auntie
Pura recalls that her other daughter has reminded her (Auntie Pura) once that she has told her (the daughter) to be herself. Auntie Ruthanne adds, “Society makes us want them to be doctors, lawyers.” Where we fail our children, Auntie Helen asserts, is if we do not encourage their God given talents. Parents must encourage it or give them other trainers to encourage it. She remembers that when she was little she wanted to be a dancer and was getting all these great parts in plays. But her mother did not encourage it. Her mother only wanted her to be a doctor. She says it was because that is what parents “thought in Africa,…[but] now they know differently.” She says, “because [of the] African in me,” she has looked down on Asher (9), her son, who wants to be a dancer. “But now as a praying parent,” she has decided to put him in dancing school.

Their conversation here is fiery and quick. Although many of them admit to comparing their children to others or hoping that they will do something else or be someone else, they are trying to make efforts to not “block[]” God’s will. Instead, they hope to uncover and facilitate God’s plan for their children. They believe they should accept their children for who they are meant to be, as evident in their talents. They emphasize the importance of not projecting their, nor society’s, idealizations and biases.

As the mothers in Bible study reflect on each topic presented in The Power of the Praying Parent and the events in their lives, they frequently talk about how they need to be good examples for their children. They believe that children have a natural tendency to copy their parent’s behavior. As Auntie Sharon articulates, “These children imitate what we do, so if we imitate our God, [they will too].” In another conversation, Auntie Helen explains that if they do not read the Bible to their children, they will not read the Bible when they grow up. Auntie Sharon adds that if children see their parents “compromising” on their beliefs, they will too. For
example, when Auntie Sharon got married, she wanted the DJ to play only Christian music. Others urged her to expand the playlist, to cater to them at her own wedding. But she stood her ground. It is important for children not to see their parents compromising. And so, she explains, they have to read the Bible, because otherwise children will do like others.

These mothers recognize, though, that they are not always good examples for their children, and thus when children are not acting appropriately, usually the parents are to blame. Auntie Sharon explains that she believes children rebel against their parents, because they are learning this pride from their parents. She gives the example of her children who were recently demanding a cell phone. Instead of seeing children as naturally rebellious or demanding and needing to learn restraint or respect, these parents see that they are the ones who need to “change their ways,” as Auntie Sharon asserts. Parents are culpable if children are disobedient. Parents need to learn not to be prideful. Auntie Sharon adds that they have to show how to share and be kind, because “what you are is what you teach them.”

In sum, children belong to God and parents are responsible for helping them to see God’s plan for them. They also believe that it is their responsibility to be good examples for their children who naturally imitate them. If children disobey, it is because their parents have not taught them the importance of obedience or have taught them bad habits. Obedience is a priority in childrearing for these parents.

The Importance of Obedience

The importance of children obeying their parents and elders was a common refrain in the mothers’ Bible study at Grace Church, as well as in interviews, Sunday school, and sermons during the Sunday service at Spirit Church. Obedience is seen as a value that stems directly from
the Bible: as Auntie Sharon recalls, the Bible says to honor your father and mother. She quotes Proverbs 20:20: “If someone curses their father or mother, their lamp will be snuffed out in pitch darkness.” One Sunday at Spirit Church, Pastor Elijah spent an entire sermon about “restoring the Divine order in the family and in the church.” “Anytime a relationship is not working, chances are somebody is not obeying the Word of God,” Pastor Elijah explains. “In the Bible it says husbands must learn to love their wives,” “wives must learn to submit to their husbands,” which means to honor and obey husbands, and “the Bible is clear that children must obey their parents.” He reminds us that each one of us is somebody’s child. It is important to obey these tenets, so that we will live longer lives. If we do not, our lives will be cut short. He continues, “Church members must obey their spiritual parents.” If you do not follow these, you are “in rebellion to God.” He talks about how the word Reverend comes from the word reverence. Mama Valerie has trouble translating this into Kiswahili. The Pastor explains, “Obey” means to “listen to, to follow, to submit, to yield.” For example, “Wives must submit to [their] husband in everything.” He says the same thing is true regarding leaders. It is not your place to say that the Pastor is wrong. “If fighting this, [you are] fighting God, and no one has fought God and won.” Obedience is tantamount for all who accept Jesus and follow God; disobedience can disrupt relationships with others and can lead to a shortened life. And disobedience even among family members is seen as an act of “rebellion” to God. Auntie Sharon summarizes from *The Power of a Praying Parent* that rebellion is “pride put into action.” This is true for children as well as adults, for we are all “children of God,” as Assistant Pastor Kadmiel lectured during his sermon once. Age does not matter, he explains. When someone becomes born again, they “depend everything on God.” But in particular for children, a father emphasizes that he has to show a child direction and how not to talk back.
In addition to being obedient to parents, parents believe they must impart to children the importance of being obedient to God. This means learning to “hear” God when He speaks to you and when you read His Word. And it also means embodying godly behavior. Mama Elinore encourages her children to “love each other,” because “God is love.” In particular, parents reference God and godly behavior when children do something bad. For example, when sisters Danica (11) and Hannah (7) are fighting, Mama Danica says that she will “incorporate the forgiving aspect” and how “God commanded us” to forgive one another.

Not every Christian parent (meaning a parent who parents through this lens) emphasizes obedience. Why? In this community of practice, why is obedience prioritized as a child development goal? On the one hand, different denominations of Christianity place more value on certain virtues over others. For example, in Catholicism, emphasis is often placed on the acknowledgment and repentance of one’s sins. This determines one’s worth, and worthiness is essential for one’s salvation upon death. In contrast, in evangelical traditions, one is accepted into heaven by the “grace” of God. This means that you reach heaven not through your actions but by accepting Jesus as your personal savior, for you are loved in spite of all of your transgressions. The way you live reflects how closely you hold the truth of the Bible. Thus, as believers in the literal truth of the Bible, they parents in this study tend to place more emphasis on obedience to God’s Word in the Bible. These are generalizations, though. This community’s emphasis on obedience is a reflection of local culture as well. Pastor Kadmiel explains that their emphasis on obedience is also part of the “African way.” He identifies obedience and respect as pan-African values. Although also essentialist, many participants would agree. Therefore, it seems that the emphasis on obedience is the result of some combination of denominational and cultural influences. It is the articulation of universalized and localized forces.
Use of the Bible in Parenting

In Bible study, mothers continually made reference to the importance of the Bible in parenting. First, they see the Bible as a resource on how to parent their children. Auntie Bracha points out that although many people are parents, they do not know how to parent according to what the Bible says. Auntie Pura recalls the story of a speaker at a women’s conference who spoke about how she started mothering as her mother once did — yelling and hitting her children. She has learned since not to pass on that anger and instead is learning how to parent through the Bible. I ask Auntie Pura if she relates to this story and she says in part. Her mother did not yell, but she did find herself yelling a lot to her children at some point. Her mother was a single parent and so she often left her children with other people when she went to work. Auntie Pura remembers those other people yelling.

Reading the Bible also strengthens the power of parents’ prayers for their children. Auntie Helen says that the only way they can protect their children is to learn how to “pray effectively,” which happens through knowing the Word of God. One mother described the Bible as if it were a different language: if you speak Spanish to a Chinese person, she explains, they will not understand you unless you teach them. The Word is like “weapons” in the battle they wage against the Devil everyday. Thus, parents see the need to continually reread the Bible in order to familiarize themselves with the stories and scripture, so that they can direct their children’s behavior to more godly ways. In these ways, the Bible is used indirectly in parenting, influencing parents and their prayers as they parent their children.

The mothers also use the Bible directly to parent their children. Auntie Pura says she tells her daughters Bible stories when they are sitting around the dining table. And when her daughter,
Deana (8), questions why she and her sister need to help with the dishes, Auntie Pura explains that Jesus helped his parents and thus it is important to help her out. Mama Leah tells her daughter, Leah (6), stories from the Bible, like Matthew 5, which begins with the Beatitudes that Jesus delivers during his Sermon on the Mount:

3Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
5Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
6Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
7Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
8Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
9Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
10Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.
12Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Mama Leah explains that the stories and scripture help to counsel children, “When you do this, you go heaven…when you do this, you go no heaven.” I ask her if she reads from the Bible everyday, but she says that she references it really when Leah is bad. When children raise a question or a behavior issue arises, parents pull out the Bible and read to their children (or recite scripture or a story from memory). Auntie Sharon recalls that when her children were a bit incredulous about being obedient and respecting their parents, the children took out the Bible in order to make sure that that was what it said. In addition, by reading the Bible, Auntie Karmina notes that her son, Absolom (6), knows “God as a healer, … [as someone] who answers prayers.” For example, when his father and sister finally joined them in America, Absolom noted, “God is a provider” and “God is a good God.” Uncle Gershom, Auntie Karmina’s husband, adds that in reading the Bible, he knows it will help his children “build better character,” and he hopes that they will also learn “responsibility.” In these cases, the Bible is used not only to inspire good behavior in children, but also to help children get to know God better, verify His will and “instill
the fear of God” in them. Remember God is considered a parent, the ultimate parent, and so reading from the Bible is like listening to God’s voice.

Moreover, these mothers believe that children should have direct access to God’s Word. In fact, despite very limited financial resources, Mama Leah bought a Children’s Bible for Leah from one of the Pastors. Auntie Karmina emphasizes that it is important to get Bible storybooks for their children. Children’s Bibles and storybooks are often written in simple sentences with modern vocabulary and grammar. They focus on some of the more well-known stories that act as parables of good and bad behavior. Not every child or family that I came across had a children’s Bible or storybook at home, but this does not mean they did not believe in children reading the Word of God. In referencing stories in the Bible or encouraging them to read from adult Bibles, they continually try to make His will accessible, physically and cognitively. They believe this will have a lasting effect on children. Auntie Karmina quotes Proverbs 22:6: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

Moreover, many parents have picked names out of the Bible for their children. Some children are named after specific people in the Bible, whereas others are given names inspired by the text and its meaning. Baba Furaha chose his eldest daughter’s name because it means, “God is sufficient.” Some parents choose names that simply symbolize their faith and their place in life, whereas others want to inspire certain godly attributes.

“A Praying Parent”

Just as these parents believe they should parent according to and with the Bible, they also believe that they should parent through prayer. Prayer plays a central role in the way parents think of themselves as parents and in the way they actually parent their children. One father
expressed that prayer for children should start in utero when the baby is “forming.” Prayer serves the dual purpose of protecting them against the Devil’s meddling and of revealing God’s way. It is preventative, as well as proactive.

Although the Bible emphasizes the importance of praying, it does not explicitly talk about being a “praying parent.” The mothers’ desire to become praying parents is further encouraged by reading, *The Power of a Praying Parent*, by Stormie Omartian (1995). A praying parent is one who serves as an “intercessor” in their children’s lives: “An intercessor is one who prays for someone and makes possible the ability of that person to respond to God” (Omartian 2007:10, emphasis original). In the introduction of the book, Omartian talks about her own constant worry that she would not be a good parent or that something terrible would happen to her children. She realized that she needed to “cover[]” every aspect of her children’s lives with a prayer. These mothers agree with Omartian that they cannot leave the fate of their children to “chance.” They see the world as a “war zone” and without their prayers, “it’s like sitting on the sidelines watching our children…getting shot at from every angle” (Omartian 1995:22). One father expressed his fear that if he does not pray as a parent, “the Devil will use him” as an instrument of evil. By becoming a praying parent, parents call upon the power of God to protect and provide for their children.

Therefore, each week these mothers read a chapter about how to pray for *specific* things and people in their children’s lives. Following Omartian, they believe that a generic prayer, like asking God to protect their child, is not enough. Omartian’s book consists of 30 chapters outlining different areas in a child’s life for which parents should consider praying, such as “Attracting Godly Friends and Role Models,” “Being the Person God Created,” “Having the Motivation for Proper Body Care,” and “Praying through a Child’s Room.” After reading each
chapter, the mothers continually expressed surprise that they had not thought to pray about that aspect. As Auntie Helen describes, before reading she would not have known all the different things to pray for but the book has helped her. Moreover, Omartian recommends that parents keep a written list of these prayers so that they are reminded to pray for them each time. Some of the mothers talked about the list of prayers that they kept and referenced as they prayed.

Just as the individuation of prayers is important, so too is the individuation of children. Omartian and these mothers believe that each child is “unique” and thus requires a unique set of prayers. Auntie Helen explains that she prays differently for each of her children because they are all different. Moreover, the mothers believe not only in praying for their own children but also for other children whom they know personally or about whom they have simply heard. They keep a running list of the children for whom they want to pray. At the end of each mothers’ Bible study, they kneel in a tight circle, close their eyes, bow their heads, and place a hand on the sheet of paper that lists the names of each child. This way of praying is called “laying of hands” and a common practice among born again Christians. I asked the mothers once how it works: They explain that the laying of hands is used in addition to prayer and is typically, but not exclusively, done by church elders. Auntie Sharon reads James 5:13-14 from her Bible: “Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord.” She asks me, “Do you understand?” I say kind of. They further explain that it is better, or more “efficient,” when others pray for you than when you pray for yourself. Elders in particular are important because “all [of their] authority [is] from God,” Auntie Helen explains. They were “anointed” by God and thus different from other believers. They are able to talk to God and thus bring “different conjuring.” Even though they are not church elders, these
mothers still believe that by laying their hands on a sheet of paper with the names of individual children their prayers will be more powerful. The physical presence of the list is important; and in fact, when Auntie Helen lost the list, the mothers stopped the practice in Bible study. Again it suggests that generic prayers for undifferentiated children are useless. For prayers to be effective, they must be specific and targeted for individual children.

In Bible study, these mothers also discussed how they parent their children while praying with them. Auntie Sharon explains that it is important to pray out loud so that your children can hear you. Even the Pastor, she recalls, has said to pray out loud with your husband so that he will hear your prayers and vice versa. For example, while praying with your husband out loud, you can say, “I hope my husband stops drinking.” When parents pray alongside their children, parents are essentially communicating to them with God serving as an intermediary. While praying out loud with their children, parents can (in)directly express their hopes and disappointments in their children’s behavior. In one sense, God is used as a buffer to soften the criticism. In another sense, God is used as a greater threat (or more important supporter). In either case, God is seen as the ultimate parent, whose authority and importance exceeds that of a mother or father. As Omartian says, “The key is not trying to do it all by ourselves all at once, but rather turning to the expert parent of all time - Our Father God - for help” (1995:16).

In addition to God, parents turn to other parents for prayer support in parenting. Auntie Sharon emphasizes, “We need parents to help each other.” She adds that they can pray over text message. When she says this, there is incredulous laughter among the group of mothers and father gathered. Auntie Karmina backs her up, saying that you can “pass a prayer” through text message. Uncle Jariath embraces this, whereas Auntie Elyse wonders what happened to calling. Auntie Sharon clarifies that you can send out a message via text saying, “Let’s pray for this,” for
example. It is not about sending a prayer but rather “sending prayer requests,” Auntie Bracha clarifies.

Being a praying parent is new for most of the women; besides the book, this model is not something with which they grew up. In one conversation, Auntie Lena wonders if her mom used to pray for her as she is doing now. Auntie Helen surmises that their mothers were prayerful, but her mom, for example, did not know about the technique of “specific child, specific prayer.” Auntie Elyse agrees: although her mother came from a born again family, she does not think she prayed for them like that. Moreover, the mothers feel that raising their children in the U.S. requires this different kind of parenting. For example, in discussion of the chapter, “Having the Motivation for Proper Body Care,” Auntie Helen came to the realization that whereas people in America are “body conscious,” they are not in “Africa.” And since her children “are going to have this [American] culture,” she needs to pray for their healthy eating.

These discussions hint at an underlying cultural mélange emerging in this community of practice. There are many factors influencing their parenting style: their own parents and upbringing, general parental ethnotheories popular in parts of Africa and the U.S., and global and local Christian perspectives. Omartian’s book is a representation of the latter. In one sense, it is surprising that these mothers have adopted Omartian’s perspective and parenting technique so whole-heartedly. Blond and blue-eyed Stormie Omartian grew up on a Wyoming ranch, abused by her schizophrenic mother and ignored by her father. The family moved to Southern California, and owing to the abuse, she sought solace in drugs, alcohol, other religions, and even suicide. She finally felt “peace” after she accepted Jesus as her personal savior. She pursued a successful acting and music career, and then became a best-selling and award-winning Christian author. She now lives outside of Nashville, TN with her husband, with whom she raised three
children (Omartian 2008). Arguably, her experiences, American upbringing, and her looks make her seem an unlikely role model for these Ugandan immigrant women. Nevertheless, these mothers find her model of parenting relevant and helpful. In fact, at no point did I hear the mothers disagree with her nor note how their current lives or backgrounds were different from hers. These mothers felt Omartian’s approach to be illuminating and emotionally beneficial. As Omartian describes, “As I covered Christopher in prayer and released him into God’s hands, God released my mind from that particular concern” (1995:18).

Religious Routines at Home

From the examples above, we see that belief in God affects the way that parents approach parenting. It also creates and punctuates certain routines. For example, most of the families with whom I interacted attended church on Sunday. The frequency in attendance fluctuates from family to family — some attending every Sunday whereas others made it to two out of four Sundays in a month. Sometimes parents came to church without children; sometimes children came to church with friends’ parents instead of their own. And sometimes one parent would come with only some of the children. Attendance depends on mood and time, access to transportation, childcare/issues, work or school demands, and in a few cases, different religious affiliations of a mother and father. Regardless, all families consider church part of their routine each week. Moreover, many of the families try to attend at least one other service or Bible study during the week. At Spirit Church, there is a mid-week service on Wednesday, overnight prayer and fasting sessions one Friday/Saturday each month, youth group on Saturdays, and regional “cell group” meetings for adults. At Grace Church, there is the mothers’ Bible study and a men’s Bible study, among other groups. Two of the mothers in the mothers’ Bible study also take their
children to another evangelical church for a girl/boy scouts type of Bible study on Fridays, and another mother takes her children to her daughter’s school twice a week for Bible study in the evenings. These activities happen amidst other after school activities like dance, Tae Kwon Do, piano, and drama lessons. Again, the same constraints inhibit families from going to these other meetings sometimes. For example, Auntie Lisa’s family used to go to church on Wednesday or Thursday, which was easy with one child, she explains, but now with work and more children it does not happen. Even still parents feel that these gatherings are important enough to make the effort when they can. On top of all of this, there are also ministry fundraisers and religious conferences a few times during the year in different parts of the U.S. and Canada, one of which is hosted by Spirit Church.

In addition to services and Bible studies throughout the week, parents incorporate religion into children’s bedtime routines. Not every family prays, reads the Bible, and sings together each night, but all parents mentioned that these activities happen on a regular basis depending on fatigue, time, and work schedules. For example, Auntie Pura’s husband works as a health aid from 3-11pm every day, including weekends, and so she is in charge of bedtime.

When parents engage their children in prayer, Bible reading, and song, the nature of their participation is quite similar. Children are often asked to pray out loud individually, and/or sometimes recite the Lord’s Prayer ensemble. With Auntie Sharon and her four children, how much they pray depends on how tired she is because the three boys take forever, she points out. She says they pray for their bed, toys, friends at school and at church, and food. She reminds them that some people do not have food. She explains that children pray for what they see during the day. Before these individual prayers, though, they will say the Lord’s Prayer first (with the exception of her infant). From the Bible, a parent or a child usually reads a well-known story, as
opposed to reading the Bible cover to cover, which only Pastor Elijah’s family has done three or four times when his now teenage children were younger. Most families, though, select stories or verses that their children know already from a children’s Bible or a biblical storybook. Auntie Helen says she chooses ones that will be “interesting” or “fascinating” to the children or connect to things they are learning at school. She is looking, though, for a “daily bread,” which she describes as a calendar that tells you which stories to read and which questions to ask. Some parents mentioned that they ask their children what they were learning in Sunday school and sometimes ask them to recite the memory verses they are learning.

After stories, parents predominantly ask their children questions of fact to check for understanding, but also sometimes more philosophical questions. For example, Pastor Elijah and Mama Elijah ask their children about the “characters” in the Bible, what they learned, and then, “If it were you, what would you have done?” Auntie Karmina and Uncle Gershom ask their two children the names of the people in the story, what they did, who would they like to be, and other questions. Uncle Gershom mentions that lately Nitza (3) has been asking a lot of questions recently like, “Why was Jesus crucified?” and “Where is He now?” Their Bible reading and questions will last anywhere from 10-30min. Many parents brought up how much their children love the question and answer period. Auntie Lisa says her children get competitive with one another as to who can answer the most questions. Only Mama and Baba Furaha’s family approached Bible study differently. In that family, they asked one of their three eldest children (ages 6-11) to select a Bible passage in advance, reflect upon it, and then “preach” about it to the family (see chapter 2).

Only two families include other children’s books in their bedtime routines; other families read children’s storybooks to their children at other times. These books come from the bookstore
or library, or are even gifts from teachers at public school. Two mothers take part in a parent-child literacy program, for which teachers send home a special “reader’s bag” of books for parents to read to their children. In class, parents work on their own cognitive reading skills, as well as learn how to read books to their children using exaggerated inflections and emphasis in their voice and questions about the story and pictures to engage their children. These strategies are intended to promote reading skills and academic performance for their children.

Parents’ overwhelming choice to read biblical stories at bedtime reflects the emphasis they place on faith in their lives and their children’s. At its most basic level, the Bible explains, “Why we go to church,” “who we worship,” “why God created us,” “why we’re here,” and “why we pray,” Auntie Sharon says. It also teaches children “to love God” and to say thank you. These are fundamental questions of understanding for these families. Auntie Lisa emphasizes that the children “need to be grounded in the world.” They need to know that it is “not just themselves” in this world, but that there is also a “higher power.” The Bible is thus a “source of strength.” Enoch hopes that reading will help them “build better character” and learn “responsibility.” Moreover, Pastor Elijah points out that it provides a “whole picture” — it’s “not just about faith” but also “poetry, history, [and] geography.” The use of the Bible is a deliberate choice by parents to help orient their children’s worldview towards God. It is an essential tool in their parenting.

That being said, some parents mention the importance of other children’s storybooks. Auntie Karmina explains that these books help children “get to know more” about the world and “make your mind open wide.” Auntie Lisa points out that children need to know about the “secular” world too, and so she chooses other fiction and non-fiction books that include a “secular part,” but are also value or faith-based. The one exception, however, are Harry Potter-like books; she would never allow her children to read Harry Potter. The first time I heard this I
was shocked. *Why?* I asked, thinking of how much I loved all seven books about a wizard coming of age and conquering evil, not to mention the fact that it is *the* international best-selling book series of all time by J.K. Rowling (2013). But, as Pastor Jared explained to me, witchcraft is considered “demonic to us, to faith.” Mama Danica considers that it “goes against my belief as [a] Christian,” because witchcraft is associated with the Devil. Baba Furaha clarifies, “Why is it witchcraft? Because no one else can give power to a human being except God. [For example,] in the Bible we believe only God can… make you rich […] because… the divine provision of God is unlimited… Something that claims to be religions, but does not preach the real Christ is [a] cult… [That’s] why my children should not read those books… When you read you need to practice… So why should my children be witches?” Like other parents, Baba Furaha believes that books should provide children with examples of good behavior that reflect Christian values. That is why they read the Bible to their children, and pick “secular” books that reflect Christian values, or at least do not celebrate witchcraft, like *Harry Potter* does. But more than that, Baba Furaha points out that witchcraft has different connotations for this group: “Maybe you can’t understand what I’m talking about, but we who come from Africa know what the meaning of witchcraft [is]…” He, nor Pastor Elijah who brought this up too during a sermon, ever elaborate on this point. But witchcraft has a long history in Africa (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Evans-Pritchard 1935, 1976).

Parents’ belief in God and commitment to tenets of their faith also influence how they create policies and monitor their children watching television, movies, and music. The amount of television children are allowed to watch range: some are allowed to watch an hour each weekday, whereas others are allowed to watch as a “treat” after they have finished their homework and chores. For the most part, parents monitor which shows or movies they can
watch, steering their children away from sexual or violent content and sometimes blocking specific channels, like Nickelodeon and ABC family. Shows promoting Christian values, positive endings, and/or biblical story lines are preferred. But some children are allowed to watch cartoons, including Sponge Bob Square Pants, Dora the Explorer, and Curious George. Many families watch movies together. I ask Mama Leah if she watches Disney films, like *Cars* and *Sleeping Beauty*, with her children. But she says they watch cartoon movies like Samson and the Bible, Abraham, and Ester. Most of the movies that parents watch with their children relate biblical stories or Christian values. Some of the movies are from Nigeria, whereas others are aired on the Trinity Broadcasting Network or the Hallmark channel. Parents also watch and listen to DVDs with Christian music and music videos. Mama Leah says Leah (6) likes dancing to DVDs of Tanzanian singers singing in Kiswahili. She also puts English subtitles on at the bottom, but they are hard to read as they go by so quickly. Music videos of singers and choirs from Nigeria, Tanzania, or Rwanda sometimes played in the background when I went to visit families. Auntie Pura says that her daughter likes to watch and dance along to a DVD of the Cedarmont Kids, for it calms her down when she is angry. Auntie Pura puts the DVD in for me and a small group of white, teeny bopper-looking kids come on stage singing while younger tweens in the audience sing along excitedly and mimic their actions. These children are recruited from the Tennessee area where the founders of Cedarmont Music, LLC live. Auntie Pura sings along, emphasizing the lyrics about how Jesus is better than Superman or other Superheroes.

**The Language of Prayer and the Bible**

As parents describe their bedtime routines, I ask them about the language they use to pray and to read the Bible with their children. Although many of them talk about the desire for their
children to speak their language, the majority of parents report that praying and reading the Bible happen in English. Both Auntie Sharon and Auntie Lisa from the mothers’ Bible study explain as most others did that they want their children to “understand” what they are praying for; and so they encourage their children to pray and/or read the Bible in the language they feel most comfortable, which happens to be English. The Pastors at both Spirit Church and Grace Church share this belief. In fact, Auntie Sharon mentions how the Pastor at Grace Church told her that parents should encourage children to pray in the language they feel most comfortable. At Spirit Church, Pastor Elijah encourages congregants to read out loud together during service in whichever language they have in the Bibles they have brought with them or borrow from the church. Assistant Pastor Kadmiel and his wife read the Bible in Kiswahili, whereas his two daughters read it in English. He says, it is important to “encourage the faith,” not necessarily the language it is in. This is in the face of the fact that he and his wife strongly believe in teaching their children their language and thus speak Kiswahili exclusively to them: “If they will [lose] the language, it will be easy for them to lose the culture,” he emphasizes. Second, if they go home to Africa, it is a “shame” if they cannot speak Kiswahili, because it means, “We don’t value who we are.” Yet, when it comes to communicating with God, understanding what they are reading and saying to God trumps the desire and necessity to practice other languages. It is more important for them to understand the concepts associated with God.

Comparatively, Baquedano-López (1997, 2000, 2002) found that Mexicans at a Catholic church in California chose to pray and read the Bible in Spanish, because it is the “language of the heart”: “[W]hile these Latinos reside in a state where English is the official language of the public sphere children in doctrina are being socialized to use Spanish for what is close to the heart: for them religious practice” (1997:30). In contrast, although religion is just as integral to
my participants, they do not see their heritage languages in this way. Instead, their choice of language in religious practice is about cognition, not affect.

To be sure, reading the Bible in another language may not be an option for many of my participants. Many parents do not have Bibles in their native languages, and they are difficult to procure in the U.S. Auntie Sharon wishes she had a Bible in Luganda. Mama Leah wished she too had a Bible in Kinyarwanda. At the time, my sister was working in Rwanda and so I asked her to bring a Bible back in that language. Interestingly she found it difficult to find one, but eventually succeeded. Mama Leah was overjoyed when I presented it to her (she paid for it). Even those who do have Bibles in Luganda, Kiswahili, Kinyarwanda, and Kirundi do not necessarily read the Bible exclusively in that language, nor read to their children in that language. Colonial history and the increasing spread of English as a global *lingua franca*, particularly in evangelizing work, may have something to do with this. Notwithstanding history and globalization, the important fact here is that understanding God trumps furthering cultural identity. Only one father saw praying as an opportunity for his children to learn his language. For the majority of parents, it is more important to be uninhibited when communicating with God and when reading his Word, than it is to take these opportunities to develop fluency in their parents’ native languages.

**Conclusion**

As we see from the examples above, parents have strong ideas about the nature of children and development, as well as the role they play in that development. God is considered the ultimate parent, providing for and protecting their children. This is not to say that parents abdicate responsibility and involvement, but rather they play a role in tandem with God. They
must be “praying parents,” calling on God to watch over and help with every aspect of each of their children’s lives. And yet they know that praying is not enough. Auntie Helen adds, they “need to go beyond prayer and be proactive in their lives.” They are responsible for instilling obedience and respect in their children; steering them away from immoral TV and books; nurturing their God-given talents; and encouraging friendships with other believers, among other things. Ultimately, parents see themselves as “stewards.” These parental ethnotheories guide their interaction with children and the activities they choose (or avoid) for them. They motivate and craft daily family routines, which include secular and sacred activities. In other words, these local theories of child rearing undergird socialization in this community of practice (Paugh 2011). These parents consider themselves believers and strive for their children to be the same. As models of good behavior, parents must read the Bible, go to church, and pray regularly with their children so as to instill these behaviors in them. Raising children to “know” God and rely on Him to guide them in the world requires effort, but it is worth it.

Therefore, religion as a system of meaning and as an institution (Alba et al. 2008) plays a major role in shaping the ethnotheories and thus socializing routines of these families. God and his Word are considered resources for parenting, helping parents protect and guide their children. Pastors and other believers are considered helpful too. Informal conversations about hardship and triumphs in the hallway or over the phone (and even via text); sermons from Pastors inspired by and interpreted from biblical scripture; Bible studies focused on parenting; and other media, pop culture, and literature, like The Power of a Praying Parent (Omartian 1995), all serve to shape discourse affecting theories, interactions, and routines. The emerging discourse is both a site of cultural and religious reproduction, as well as an organization of diverse perspectives (Wallace 2003). Doctrinal beliefs and practices are discussed, (re)interpreted, and negotiated
alongside other beliefs and practices. Parents must continually assess the validity and viability of competing perspectives and work to negotiate and commit themselves to the truths that they see as true. Thus, their identity work as parents frame and shape the identity work of their children, as both parents and children work at constructing “believing selves” (Carlisle and Simon 2012).

To get a better understanding of the parental ethnotheories and routines socializing children, the next chapter takes an intimate look at one family.
Chapter 2 - A Family Portrait
The Wise Builders: Mama and Baba Furaha’s Family

I park my car on the street in front of the Serenity Apartments, one of several federally subsidized housing developments nestled on the edge of Suburban City. Although the red and white brick apartments rise up only three stories high, you cannot see the river, which is a block away separating two cities before it empties into the Boston Harbor. The small housing complex of about 95 units is unimposing, unlike the 1000+ unit housing projects I grew up seeing in my childhood city of New York. But like New York City, Suburban City sits on a small piece of land of just over 2 square miles and is densely populated with 35,000 people. The majority of these residents are immigrants to the U.S., previously Irish, Italian, and Polish and now Hispanic, Asian, and a growing number of Africans.

I arrive a few minutes after 9:30pm. The late October evening air is cold - the cold calm before the impending snowstorm forecasted. As I step inside the apartment, I immediately feel the heat, probably from a heater but also from the six people gathered in the family’s cozy, clean living room. Baba Furaha, dressed in a white tracksuit that contrasts sharply with his dark brown skin, sits at his solitary desk in the corner, staring intently through his small wire rimmed glasses at the computer screen and the books on his lap. Watching TV from the black leather couches behind him are his wife and four children. On the three-seater couch facing the large flat screen TV sit four-year-old Amaris, nine-year-old Caleb, and their mother, Mama Furaha. To Mama Furaha’s left on a matching three-seater sit her two other children, six-year-old Gabriel and 11-year-old Furaha.

At this late hour, even Mama Furaha’s large eyes, which are usually wide and bright, are starting to droop with sleepiness. Her arm is wrapped around her youngest, pulling her close to
her slender yet fleshy figure. Her maternal nature is a quality to which I was initially drawn. Mama Furaha was born with a name that meant one who cries in Kinyarwanda. She did not like the name, and I too think it unfitting of this woman who exudes a joyful spirit. When she was baptized, she selected a particular name for herself, because she liked it. In many parts of Africa, including Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, it is common for a mother to adopt the name of her child as her own and become known as Mama ____ (the name of their child).

The site in this living room is familiar, for I have observed their home life and interviewed the family over the past few months, but also familiar in that I too come from a family with two parents and four children. This time, they await my arrival before beginning their Friday Bible study. In our previous conversations about the family’s daily routine and literacy activities at home, Mama Furaha had casually mentioned these weekly family gatherings. I asked if I could observe one evening. Her face registered shock at my interest. Perhaps it was because she wondered about my personal religious exploration? I had been attending services at their Pentecostal church in order to meet and learn about the lives of African immigrant and refugee families. And I had made no secret about the fact that I was a researcher interested in the education (also called socialization in scholarly research) of their children. Moreover, I had been forthright with the fact that I was Episcopalian (and that my husband was Jewish, which helped them understand why he did not attend service with me). I had approached Mama Furaha and her husband, Baba Furaha, to be part of my study only about two months prior to my visit that night. Perhaps Mama Furaha’s shock came from the fact that she had not considered these family Bible studies a part of “education,” because to her education meant formal schooling. But I define education more broadly so that it includes what is going on
outside of school. In fact, I am more curious about the education, or socialization, going on at home and at church. And so I ask: What kinds of reading, writing, and storytelling activities go on in these spaces? What motivates these activities? How do parents structure their day to support these routines? How do parents and children interact with one another, and what does this imply about what they are simultaneously teaching and learning from one another? I construct this family portrait to help illustrate the answers to these questions.

I notice that it is almost balmy inside the small two-bedroom apartment tonight, unlike on my previous visits when we sat on the black leather couches in our sweaters and jackets. The family is far from their countries of birth and the events of the past. Mama and Baba Furaha were born in Rwanda, but Baba Furaha does not consider himself Rwandese. His parents were born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and met while they worked for an Italian company in Rwanda. Back then, “during colonial times,” Baba Furaha explains, it was all the same country – controlled by the Belgians – therefore likening the move his parents made from “Massachusetts to New Hampshire [or] Maine.” In spite of the complicated colonial and modern history, he identifies himself as Congolese. I wonder how Mama and Baba Furaha’s children will identify themselves, since they were born in different countries and now are being raised in the U.S.?

Like their parents, Mama and Baba Furaha did not meet in their countries of birth. After fleeing the Rwandan genocide in 1994, escaping to the Congo, they met and married in Kenya. In 2000, they gave birth to their first born, Furaha. Her father named her, and in fact all of the children, drawing inspiration from the Bible and his new found faith as a born again Christian. Since neither parent was employed at the time, one of her given names means, “God is sufficient.” After they moved back to the Congo, they had Caleb in 2002 and then Gabriel in 2005. Baba Furaha only spent a month with his second son before he boarded a plane for the
The mother and her three children went to live in Burundi. Two years later the four of them joined Baba Furaha in the U.S. Their joyful reunion ushered in their last born in 2007, Amaris.

The whole family is now gathered together in the living room, relaxing on the black leather couches. I shake off the late October chill as I greet them in Kiswahili, “Habari [How are you]?” They have just come back from a Friday evening prayer service at Spirit Church, a multi-national Pentecostal church that the Pastor describes as “family oriented.” Mama and Baba Furaha’s family attend most Fridays and Sundays, and even sometimes on Saturdays. The four children and their mother watch cartoons while Baba Furaha studies for his degree in Christian counseling and works on his new ministry, sponsoring youth to go to school in the Congo. The mood is calm, almost sleepy.

Baba Furaha moves from his wooden desk chair to the third black leather chair, an oversized seat for one person. He sits alone, presiding over the family prayer meeting that is about to start. As I sit in between Gabriel and Furaha, Baba Furaha asks me if the family should speak in English. My conversations with him and the rest of the family are usually in English, peppered with occasional Kiswahili expressions or greetings. I know, though, that their family conversations are usually conducted in Kiswahili, and so I encourage him to carry on in Kiswahili. I make this decision at the risk of not understanding everything that is being said, but I want to try to experience this occasion as the family does each week. Plus, I have asked the family’s permission to record the Bible study, so what I am not able to understand immediately I will able to listen to later on. Over the past six years, after living in Tanzania for almost a year collectively and taking Kiswahili classes on and off, I have studied enough to be able to engage in most basic conversations, but I often default into English because I am uncertain in my
abilities. The family knows that I speak Kiswahili but does not know the extent of my proficiency, nor really do I.

Baba Furaha clasps his hands, bows his head, and calls the family to prayer, “Bwana safiwe [Praise God].” We answer quietly, “Amen. The family service continues in Kiswahili. He asks his youngest daughter Amaris to start the family off in song. She remains quiet, her eyes wide with a hint of fear or perhaps resentment that she had to turn off the TV. Baba Furaha encourages her again, asking jovially if she is afraid of me. She finally sings a few notes, her father encouraging her to sing louder, and then the family joins in, cautiously, “Baba, Baba, hakuna kama wewe [Father God, Father God, there is no one like you].” They sing a few more lines without any enthusiasm, which is surprising to me since I have heard their fellow born again Christian brothers and sisters revel and weep as they sung during previous Sunday services.

Baba Furaha invites his eldest daughter, Furaha, to preach. She reads out loud in English Genesis 22:1-12 from her own Bible that rests on her bright pink cotton pants. She is dressed head to toe in pink with a pink headband over her braided hair pulled back in a ponytail. She reads the story of Abraham, whose faith is tested by God when He asks him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. Before Abraham slays his son, an angel steps in and tells Abraham that he has proven his devotion. Here ends the reading.

Furaha reflects on the details of the story and its meaning. Although quiet, her voice is steady as she speaks in Kiswahili, mixing in a few English words, like “crazy,” “test,” and “faith.” She works off her notes, which are penned in English in careful script: “When god [sic] tells you to do something you have to do it even when it sounds crazy or silly. Always trust god [sic] because he [sic] knows what he [sic] is doing for you and you just have to believe him [sic]
and trust him [sic] because its [sic] for the good and than [sic] at the end god [sic] told him that he [sic] was testing him.” While Furaha is talking, I notice that Amaris has her fingers in her ears as if to block out the sound. Her small body leans over the arm of the couch, her braided and beaded pigtails brush the leather. I wonder if she understands all that is being said? She told me once, with a shy, yet defiant pout, that she does not like speaking Kiswahili. Furaha’s talk lasts just two minutes and at the end we say, “Amen.”

Baba Furaha turns to Caleb and asks him to reflect on the story and what Furaha has preached. Caleb, whose head has been resting on his mother’s shoulder while his eyes try to blink away sleep, recounts the details of the story. His voice is soft and his speech mumbled, but it is clear that he knows it. Baba Furaha repeats the most important message, “Kusikia Mungu [To listen to God].” He asks Gabriel next, “Amefundisheni [What has she taught us]?” He starts, “Abraham,” but then stops, now self-conscious. His father tries to help, “Alifanya nini [What did he do]?” But Gabriel remains quiet. Someone yawns. His father tries again, “Ukikataa...Ni mbaya ou mzuri [If you deny God...is it bad or good]?” A sheepish voice responds, “Mbaya [Bad].” When I am around, Gabriel has always been the more reserved of the two boys, hiding behind his more boisterous older brother. His father grunts his approval, and then turns to his three-year-old, “Amaris, kaa vizuri [sit properly].” He repeats his original question to her, but she remains quiet too. So he moves on. He asks his wife to repeat the message of the story. In Kiswahili, with a few words in English, Mama Furaha repeats that it is a story about a test of faith. Baba Furaha follows with his quiet but forceful voice emphasizing that they must listen to God. He switches to English, “Something that sounds crazy maybe impossible or unusual...no matter how your strength are...tunahitaji [we have to].” In both English and Kiswahili, his voice has an oratorical quality, inviting response from his listeners. Caleb pipes in, “Strrrreenggghh,”
exaggerating the consonants. This outburst is characteristic of his ebullient personality, but also may come from his anxiousness to be done with the Bible study and having me there.

Before the family closes with prayers, Baba Furaha invites me to contribute to the discussion. I am caught off guard; I intended to blend in. But instead I am welcomed into the family circle, invited to share my thoughts as each family member has. In my broken Kiswahili, I marvel at Abraham’s faith, revealing that I don’t know if I could have done what he did. As I speak, the children are shocked not by what I say but in the language I say it in. I know this is the first time they have heard me say more than a greeting in Kiswahili. I can see Amaris smiling, almost snickering, but I am not offended. Rather I am pleased, hoping that it will bring us closer. Baba Furaha listens intently to my message and reflects that I already sound like a mother, although I have no children of my own at the time.

The family service closes with prayers. Baba Furaha asks each member of the circle, including me, to offer thanks. My prayers sound like a cross between Furaha’s, who thanks God for each family member and for my safe travel home, and Amaris’, who thanks God for “maji [water]” and “juci [juice].” I offer thanks for family, friends, house, and food; everyone and every “kiti [chair]” (I mean to say “kijiji [thing]”) that helps us to “inshi [enter]” (I mean to say “ishi [live].” The reverent family gathering has lasted just 20 minutes.

The family Bible study happens Friday and Saturday nights two weeks out of the month, because the other two Fridays and Saturdays are spent at church for overnight prayer sessions. Each time they meet, one of the three older children is asked to preach. In the week leading up to the gathering, he or she will select a passage from his or her own Bible, a children’s version in the case of the two boys, and then reflect on its message, sometimes drawing upon their personal experiences.
When Mama Furaha describes this ritual to me, I marvel. I am impressed by the parents who have set up this practice and the children who try their best to fully engage in it, even as young as they are. I ask Mama Furaha to tell me more. She explains, “A lot of parents, sometimes they don’t... give the kids [the opportunity] to preach. A lot of people, they just teach them, but they don’t give the kids that chance to teach.” I ask, “Why is that important?” Mama Furaha says, “It’s very important because we teach them how they can do something by themselves. Because sometimes it’s very encouraging like when Caleb or Furaha, when they are preaching to us, we listen to them. It’s like learning when she’s out there, she will be able to do the same thing. And sometimes when she’s teaching us, you can get something... She’s teaching us because she wants to search for [answers], [to] read, and she [wants to have it] sunk in her heart.” I rephrase what she has said so as to check my understanding: “So it helps, the messages she reads about, it helps her to remember them when she goes out into the world?” Mama Furaha affirms, “Yeah because she have to know well because she [has] come to teach us [during the family Bible study]... When she’s teaching us, when she’s learning, she’s getting something and she [is] going to come to us to, because you have to have something in order to give to another. You can [can’t] give something which you don’t have.” Mama Furaha describes the importance of giving children the opportunity to teach, not just listen and learn. In the preparation and act of teaching, she explains, they learn how to complete tasks independently and they internalize the message that they share. When the biblical message of faith in God, for example, has “sunk in her heart,” “she will be able to do the same thing” as she goes about her everyday tasks, remembering to follow His Word. I turn over her final words again: “You have to have something in order to give to another.” I wonder about its larger meaning in the context of this family’s history. What is it exactly that these parents have that they are giving to their children?
Their material possessions were stolen or left behind in the Rwandan genocide. They have had to start their life in the U.S. from scratch, almost like building a house from the ground up.

The Foundation

In separate interviews with Mama and Baba Furaha, I ask them to tell me about the three most important events in their lives. They both tell me the story of how they were “saved.” Being “saved” entails accepting Jesus as Lord, confessing your sins, and experiencing a water baptism in order to be born again. Neither Mama nor Baba Furaha were born or raised as Pentecostals. Baba Furaha’s parents were Catholic; Mama Furaha’s parents “didn’t have any religion,” but now are Protestants. Mama and Baba Furaha found Jesus after they had left Rwanda.

Mama Furaha was about 17 or 18 when she was saved. She remembers people preaching the Gospel at her doorstep at a refugee camp in Congo. I ask her why she felt this experience was so powerful. “Hmmm,” she says as she takes time to consider this. “I think it’s like the life I was leading… uh and a lot of stuff I went through with. And then… when they was teaching me the Bible and then it’s like I knew,” she emphasizes. “There was somebody who love[d] me and then it touched me…” She raises her voice in pitch here before continuing in a lower key, “Because [the] life I was living with my sister and then [she takes a short breath] my brother in law gave me hard time so during that sadness and hard time they came and told me there was someone who loved me who cares about me. So it was more easier for me to accept.” For Mama Furaha, she found love through faith, the two now intimately connected. I wonder if one of the ways she conveys her love for her children is by sharing with them her faith in God. Perhaps through rituals like the family Bible study?
Baba Furaha’s conversion to Pentecostalism was influenced by his classmate in Kenya and “especially when I start to remember, to recall…” His tongue lingers on the “l” as if dreading to continue or weary from remembering. But he continues, “…the past, what happened in Rwanda, in my life, even in Congo. I gave my life to Christ. Yup.” He concludes rather matter of fact, raising his eyebrows above his glasses and looking directly at me. His devotion to Jesus and his experience during the genocide are intimately connected. The genocide is another one of his three most important life experiences: “One of them [important life events] which I’m not going to be deeper is genocide in Rwanda. It is — I can’t forget that stuff which has shaped my life, even my Christian belief.” There is a long pause. I can sense his reluctance. “When I remember what happened at that time — how I lost my friends, how we lost everything we had in our family and stuff and all I went through and — still alive. So I can’t [only can] realize that God still have a good plan for my life. And that’s why I gave my life to Christ.” He does not mumble his words, but rather enunciates his pronunciation of the English words, his sixth language. The events that he experienced in Rwanda are too painful for him to describe. But that experience is integral to his rebirth in faith. Baba Furaha believes that he is “still alive” today because God had a “plan” for him. He was saved not once but twice — first in body during the genocide and then in spirit when he devoted his life to Jesus. When he returned to the Congo with his wife and daughter, he started a youth ministry.

Neither Baba Furaha nor Mama Furaha like to recall “the past”; so in our discussions I never ask specifically about what they experienced during the genocide; any memories that do come up are in reference to which kinds of stories they share with their children and which they do not. I ask Baba Furaha whether he tells his children about his childhood. “I did,” he says. “For my children, the other story we went through back home in Africa, we can’t tell them…Maybe
when they grown up.” Unsure of what he means by the “other story,” I ask tentatively, “Because of the war? Is it too painful?” He does not hesitate, “They are not stor[ies] that can build them up. It can create maybe something like… hatred or can rise in them some kind of questions that can bring an answer to another question and come to the point where we can’t tell them things which they cannot bear now.” I am surprised by his explanation. I had assumed that he would not want to talk about the war because of the trauma that it would bring to him, but instead he thinks about the trauma that it would bring to his young children. Furthermore, he believes that retelling these violent events would only beget more “hatred.” Instead, he focuses on conversations and stories that can “build them up.” I begin to imagine Mama and Baba Furaha “building up” their children with stories and rituals much like bricklayers building a house. Their faith in God seems to provide a strong foundation for this family.

The Frame

The family Bible study is only one type of educational activity in which this family engages, and one that happens only about four times per month. The rest of their days are structured by a routine that is rich in other educational activities. During the week, Mama Furaha wakes up at 6 a.m. just as her husband comes home from work to fall asleep. She helps her children get ready for school and drops off the three oldest before heading to school herself with her youngest daughter. Monday through Thursday, 8:30-10:30 a.m., Mama Furaha and four-year-old Amaris attend a program at a progressive school, co-run by Boston University and the Suburban City Public School district. The program seeks to promote reading and writing early in childhood by supporting the parents, mostly mothers, in their own English literacy development. Each day, Mama Furaha records her own and her children’s literacy activities in a “literacy log”:
doing a spelling bee with the children, reading a book to Amaris and talking about it, among others. The parents also read aloud in groups from young adult fiction books and listen to the “Book of the Week,” a children’s book like *Llama, Llama Red Pajama* by Anna Dewdney (2005). The “Book of the Week” is also read each day to their children in a separate preschool class. Teachers read this book in an emotive style, asking lots of questions, which is a style of story-reading they hope parents will use with their own children at home.

After the mother and daughter return home from school, Mama Furaha cleans the house or continues her English studies online. Amaris plays with her favorite Dora doll or reads a book from the red “Raising a Reader” bag that comes home with them every week from school. Sometimes Mama Furaha will read with her, employing the active reading style that the teachers at their school have modeled for them. And sometimes, she lets Amaris watch PBS or cartoons, because “they teach alphabet, they teach how to read,” Mama Furaha explains. Even Mama Furaha likes to watch and learn. Mama Furaha then prepares lunch for her other children, who will be hungry when she picks them up after 2pm since they do not like the lunch at school. Occasionally Baba Furaha will help her pick up Furaha, but not always since he is often sleeping or attending school himself, previously having earned his Bachelors and now working on his Masters in Christian counseling.

When the children arrive home from school, they eat rice with boiled chicken and collard greens or *ugali* (made from maize flour and resembling a thicker consistency of mashed potatoes) with cabbage and beef, among other typical east and central African dishes. They then take a nap, later rising to work on their homework in the living room. Baba Furaha is often awake by then working on his own homework. After homework, the children engage in other reading and writing activities of their choice. Recently, Caleb has gotten into *Diary of a Wimpy*
Kid (Kinney 2007) (I even saw him reading it during church service once). Furaha likes to read “friendship books,” “teen books,” and “6 month to live books” or write in her journal about friends, school, or made up stories. Gabriel likes to ask his parents to read storybooks to him, borrowed from the public library or their school. I ask Baba Furaha what he likes about reading to the children and he says it does not matter, as long as they are not “witch books,” turning the “i” sound into an “ee” sound and squinting his eyes at me. They seem to penetrate my skin and find me guilty of enjoying books like Harry Potter, by J.K. Rowling (2013). He emphatically declares that wheeches are “demons” and wheechcraft is “destructive” and “evil,” again drawing out the long “ee” sound. As a result, he doesn’t like them to read those kinds of books, because it “can’t help them,” he says. Instead, Baba Furaha encourages the children to read the Bible for 15 minutes each night after they have finished their homework. I remember his words about the importance of “building up” his children.

Just before 10 p.m., the family gathers and Baba Furaha prays for them before he heads out for work, cleaning in a hotel kitchen. Right before bed, the children pray again — sometimes individually, with their mother, or in a group — thanking God for all that they have been blessed with. I remember the prayers I use to say with my mother, “Now I lay me down to sleep…” I still occasionally recite these prayers and thank God for the blessings in my life.

This schedule repeats the next day, replete with a diversity of what some researchers would call literacy practices. These practices are not about the cognitive skills that people develop, like letter recognition and letter-sound combinations important to reading a sentence. Rather a study of literacy practices is about the meanings behind the interactions and activities. Researchers, like Shirley Brice Heath (1983), Brian Street (1984), and James Paul Gee (1990), argue that literacy should be seen as multiple practices with different purposes that are particular
to different situations. In other words, the reading, writing, and oral storytelling activities that go on at home are sometimes unique and different from those that go on in school. Tom Weisner and colleagues (Weisner 2002; Weisner et al. 1997) see a family’s activities as rich sources of information, for they are motivated by certain cultural values about child development for example and constrained by other obligations and limited resources. They call this the *ecocultural niche* (short for ecological-cultural) in which a child grows up and develops. It is an educational context in that a child is constantly learning from and influencing the environment and people by whom they are surrounded. In this family, Mama and Baba Furaha balance their family’s daily routine with their own efforts to further their education and provide financially for the family. I can see their efforts to create routines that will enable activities that are supportive and complementary to their children’s formal education at school. Much like the frame of a house, these routines structure their daily life, family interaction, and cognitive development.

**The Bricks**

When I ask Baba Furaha if he tells stories to the children, he dismisses my question. We sit across from one another on the black leather couches, the coffee table separating us. He emphasizes that he does not have time, which is undoubtedly true. We had trouble scheduling time for our conversation together. Between working the night shift, going to school during the day, launching his ministry, building a library in the Congo, and building a training center for ministers in Rwanda, I do not know when he sleeps. In our discussion, though, he clarifies that although he may not have time to tell fairy tales or make up stories, as he interpreted my question, he makes time to tell them “biblical stories” and a few stories about his childhood. He
uses these stories to correct their misdeeds “when they try to do something wrong, behave in a bad manner.”

He gives me an example, “There is a time Caleb used to throw away food for no[] reason. And when he used to do that I used to use that opportunity to show him, and to teach him that there are children somewhere in this world, especially where we come from in Africa, they are looking for this food and can’t get it.” I smile, remembering the similar reprimand I used to hear growing up from my friend’s parents. But for Baba Furaha and Mama Furaha, who also tells a similar version of this story, I feel their story carries more weight for it comes from personal experience. Mama Furaha remembers how she, like other girls in “Africa” (her generalization), was responsible not only for fetching water from outside the house but also the wood to light the fire necessary to boil the water to cook the food. She reminds her children that these arduous tasks are ones they do not have to perform. I remember when my father used to remind me that he had to walk a mile to school when he was younger. I was always suspicious that he embellished the story a bit, but regardless his message was always clear to me. And it seems that the message is clear to these children too.

One afternoon, I sit shoulder to shoulder with Furaha on the black leather couches and ask her to tell me stories that her parents tell her. She speaks comfortably with me. She pushes her glasses back on her small nose and explains that her mother is really the one who tells most of the stories that have “lessons.” I am impressed that at age 11, she is completely aware of the underlying purpose of their stories. Furaha recalls one story her mother told her once when she had not been listening. Once, when Mama Furaha’s mother was little, she too ignored her own mother when asked to do something. Instead she went outside to play with her friends. In the early evening when all the mothers called their children in for the night, her mother locked her
out of the house. She was alarmed and frightened, but after banging on the door and promising never to do it again, her mother let her into the house. This story is one that has now stuck with Furaha.

I suspect, though, that the messages of these stories may not always be clear to them, nor are they always clear to me. For example, Mama Furaha recounts another story she has told the children about the war. Although she, like Baba Furaha, does not like to talk about the war, she says she has told the story of when she got “lost”: “When I was during the war, when I get lost I was I think 13 [or] 12 years [old]. So I was telling them [her children] story when we run, it was night and we run no clothes.” She pronounces the last “es” as a separate syllable. “And they [her children] were laughing, ‘You no clothes!’” She smiles, but I am not laughing. I am confused and shocked. “The children were laughing?” I ask incredulously. “Yeah. And so then I told them there was my neighbor, it was night, [s]he had a little baby, so because of the war, [s]he had a cat, [s]he grabbed the cat,...she thought it was her baby.” She is still smiling and laughing a bit. Is it nervous laughter perhaps? Or is it that she has tried to find humor in an otherwise tragic story? “Oh,” I say with grief, feeling my chest grow heavy. “But then we run. And then the morning, ‘Oh this is not a baby here.’ The baby was left in her house and now [s]he has a cat.” It appears that she has come to the end of her story, but I am in anguish. “So what happened to the man, did he go back for his baby?” I am even confused as to whether the story involves a man or a woman and their baby, since she often confuses her pronouns in English. “We went back in the morning. I didn’t know what happened because the war came once I didn’t get chance to know what happened to the baby.” This is not the ending I hoped for, but I leave it at that and move on.

I ask her if she tells them a lot about the war, but she says it only happens sometimes. She says it is difficult to tell the stories but she does sometimes, and only certain stories, when they
ask. This has recently been happening with Furaha, who for homework has been asked to write about the past. Although Mama Furaha does not want to talk about it, she feels, “I have to.” “Why is that?” I inquire. “Because she asked me and she want to know. I think she’s now older to handle it.” I wonder if we are ever able to handle stories like these? At the age of 29, even I am taken aback by the weight of her story. I am confused as to how to understand it. Is it a story to build them up? Perhaps, but I think more in the sense of giving them a part of their family’s history. I suspect that these stories will continue to take on new meaning for the children as they grow older.

Besides stories from the Bible or childhood, Mama Furaha remarks that the children “love to listen for stories,” her tongue fully rounding out the “o” of love. She stretches her fingers and moves her hands apart to add emphasis. I wonder what she means since I had assumed that stories included those from the Bible and childhood. But the stories she means are the ones she “makes up.” She is the only one that tells these, because Baba Furaha “is not good at making up stories,” Mama Furaha explains with a chuckle. Baba Furaha “encourage[s] them to be good, to do good at school. But make up story? I’ve never even seen him make up story. It’s hard for him.” Mama Furaha also encourages them to do well in school but she motivates them with stories she makes up. Before the school year began, for example, Caleb did not like to read. To encourage him to read, “I just make up a story,” she says, shrugging her shoulders as if to suggest how easy they come to her: “Once upon a time there was a boy. He didn’t like to read a book. So when he grow up, he didn’t want to go to school and he didn’t have a nice job because he never learned to read.” The message and its intended audience are clear to me, however Mama Furaha does not think Caleb knows they are explicitly for him. Regardless, the story conveys a simple message about the importance of reading, education, and success later in life.
“I want him to have that picture in the future,” she explains to me. And it seems that perhaps her “made up” stories have already had an impact. Recently, Caleb has expressed an interest in reading independently. Now when he comes home from school, the first thing he wants to do is to read a new book. Mama Furaha’s voice rings with delight, “Yeah so I’ll used to tell stories who doesn’t like to read books but now it’s like it went inside and he like to read books!” Her new problem is that she has to remind him to do his homework before he can read other books. But she is happy — her made up story has made an impact.

I hear Baba Furaha’s quiet, oratorical voice in my head repeating the refrain, “build them up.” These made up stories, like the biblical stories and the ones from their childhood, all seem to serve a common purpose. They are used to “build up” the children and educate them. Like bricks, these stories help to build their children’s character, encouraging them to not be wasteful, to listen to their parents, and to continue their formal education. Mama and Baba Furaha’s stories remind me of the fables from my childhood. My favorite was always the tortoise and the hare from Aesop’s fables. But not every story is entirely clear in its meaning. And I continue to ponder the story about the mix up between the baby and the cat.

**The Mortar**

When I ask Mama Furaha, “What were some of the best times you’ve had with your children?” she replies, “I think story time,” and smiles a wide grin revealing her well polished, straight teeth. Later she explains, “Because when I tell them story they are happy and they are curious they want to know more. And it’s like, like it’s time for me to relax and for them to relax. Yeah, because it makes even me happy. Like when they’re happy and I’m happy. I feel
like I forgot like we have a lot of stuff sometimes. We forgot about like everything.” The stories she refers to here are lighthearted ones.

One of the children’s favorite stories she frequently tells is about a mouse: “I was like 12 [or] 11 and I was working in my, our house, and we have a mouse. And when I was working I step on mouse.” I gasp as her eyes dance and the corners of her mouth stretch wider. “And I run and the mouse came running after me and I was shouting, ‘Ah mama!’ They [Her children] love that story.” She laughs with her tongue protruding slightly between her teeth. I laugh too, taking pleasure in the simplicity of this story. I am also surprised that such a simple story is their favorite. In fact, the same story was told to me in two separate interviews with Mama Furaha and Furaha. And so I am curious, “Why do you think that story is so powerful?” Why is it this story, of all the stories she tells, the one that gets repeated? Mama Furaha responds honestly, shrugging her shoulders, “I don’t know. I think it’s because they’re scared about mouse and we have mouse here.” She laughs lightheartedly. “So maybe when they picture that maybe that’s why they love it. I don’t know.” We both laugh at the puzzle.

All the stories I have heard, besides this one, emphasize the differences in the way the parents and their children grew up. Perhaps the mouse story is one of a few childhood stories she and Baba Furaha tell that actually resonates with the children? It is one experience that emphasizes some commonality between their childhoods, for in other childhood stories about not wasting food or the importance of listening to parents, Mama and Baba Furaha recall memories from a different time and place an ocean away. Although they are important stories for moral development, I imagine that the children are constantly reminded that they are growing up in a place that is far different from their parents. The mouse story is a reprieve from that; it is the glue, or mortar, that binds them together, highlighting the fact that their mother can also be
vulnerable and frightened. Moreover, I imagine that the way in which she shares this story also connects them together emotionally and physically. Her laughter and theirs combine to draw them closer. Even when she reads storybooks, she likes to make her children “giggle.” They seem to soak in her cheerful and caring nature. I too am drawn to this woman who puts me at ease when I sit knee to knee to talk with her.

**The Roof and Spire**

“What do you hope for your children?” I ask Mama Furaha. She responds assuredly without hesitation, “To have education.” Her eyes revealing the excitement she holds for their future. Her hope is motivated by the opportunity she was denied in her childhood because of war.

In the early 1990s, when she was in fifth grade, Mama Furaha lived with her family on the border of Rwanda and Uganda. Most Americans only know about the genocide in Rwanda that started in 1994, a civil war between the Hutus and Tutsis that left about 800,000 people dead. What many people are not familiar with are a series of raids launched from Uganda by the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF). The raids started before 1994 and played a large role in the imminent genocide and its aftermath. These are the raids that Mama Furaha remembers from childhood, which led to the end of her formal schooling. She recalls, “I stopped school because…where we lived it was, like, border Rwanda and Uganda, because the enemies, they were coming from Uganda and we were in the border. And so we [they] used to come at night, they attack us, they take like gold, cows, they take like everything you have. And they go back. So we used to run at night, and then during the day we come back. And then when we get worser… So that was my big problem because that’s why we didn’t finish school. So we used to go to school in… [She searches for an analogy that will make sense to me]... In
Manhattan[pseudonym], they attack Manhattan. We move to the Bronx[pseudonym], so we go back to school in the Bronx. And sometimes we don’t go because it’s during the war. We used to go to school and then they throw the bombs into the school. So we run. So it was like I go to school for 1 year, I stop for 3 months, I go back because we were moving, moving, moving.”

She and her two younger sisters ended up in a refugee camp in Rwanda before her older sister and her husband picked them up and took them to Kigali, the capital city of Rwanda. The school in Kigali placed her back in 4th grade but the genocide broke out before she could even finish that. They fled to a refugee camp in the DR Congo, but she could not go to school there either: “It was hard…there was no school in the camp, everybody stayed home, no one, no teachers, no life there, just camp.” Her voice drops. Even when her brother in law finally was able to move them to Kenya after getting their passports, the schools there said she was too old to attend primary school. Now, in the U.S., she is improving her English and hopes to enroll in courses to earn her GED one day. She and I sit on different black leather couches, almost knee to knee, in one corner of the room. She sits forward with her hands wedged between her knees. She speaks candidly in English, her 5th language after Kichiga, Kinyarwanda, Kirundi, and Kiswahili. I am amazed since I only speak three languages — English, French, and Kiswahili — and even with just three I am not as willing as she is to speak in a language that is not my first.

I inquire about from where her personal desire for education comes. I wonder if it is from her parents, but she corrects me, “Both my parents they didn’t go to school and they didn’t use much time to tell me how it was important to go to school. The only thing — I feel bad. And I don’t want my children to be like me because it’s very important to go to school when I used to be smart but I didn’t get that chance to finish school. So I feel bad.” This is an unusual moment. In our conversations, she never harps on her past or current struggles — she always has a wide
smile and a bright laugh — but her missed opportunity to complete school is an exception. She is not despondent, but still she laments: “You don’t have education, you pass a lot. Like us, because we have a lot of experience — the war, the life was hard. Even after we come, sometimes we don’t have money to go to school, because we have to pay for school. Sometimes to get food is not easy, to get clothes, but here there is everything you want. Everything.” I don’t doubt her struggles, back then or now, but her well-kept house and effervescent personality do not reveal them.

Nevertheless, in missing school, she feels other opportunities and experiences passed her by, including the luxury of not worrying about paying for food or clothes. Moreover, she and Baba Furaha now have to pay to further their formal education, whereas her children are able to go to public school for free. As a result, “I’m very strict about education,” she says. “So we have to challenge them [the children], challenge them to take education serious, because we pass the experience, and we don’t want them to pass the same experience.” She adds that education is particularly important for “now.” I interject, “Why now?” “Because long time you go to farm, you don’t have to go to school,” she explains. “But now you have to have occupation you have to go to work and you have to study and so it’s very hard in the life. You have to have education.” When the children tell her they want a big house, she reminds them of the importance of education, which will allow them to get a “good job” and a “good salary” so they can buy that big house and “take care of their families.” The hardship she endured as a child trying to go to school during a war and now as an immigrant in the U.S. while caring for her family has fueled the emphasis she places on education, for herself and for her children.

The value that both Mama and Baba Furaha place on education is clear in the way they structure their family daily routine, coordinating work and school schedules for all family
members. They create the space and provide the encouragement needed to help their children complete their homework. But in addition, it seems their educational efforts extend beyond school related practices and are “deliberate,” as anthropologist Hervé Varenne (2007) and educational historian Lawrence Cremin (1976) would argue. The select stories Mama and Baba Furaha tell from childhood, the Bible, and even their imagination are intended to educate, or “build up,” their children in character by offering important moral lessons. I also wonder about whether the purpose of some of these childhood stories is to convey a sense of family history or identity. Mama Furaha replies emphatically, “Yeah sometimes, like, when I tell them about Africa how we used to live there, I think that it’s very important for them to know who they are.” The stories from their childhood, both ones from their daily routine and the traumatic events, are told with purpose. The meaning might not always be clear, but perhaps they will continue to take on new meaning as the children get older. Even though the difference in their childhood experiences are vast, the children listen for their parent’s messages and appreciate those stories which do mark the similarities, if even as small as a mouse.

More importantly, though, their Bible study ritual reveals a commitment to build up a family in and through faith. The Bible provides opportunities to continually teach and learn from one another, and most importantly from God. The Pastor from their church, Pastor Elijah, once reflected on the difference between informal and formal education in his sermon at Spirit Church. He said that baptism in the church is “an invitation into the church” but then that person needs to be taught. He continues, “People like [Minister] Tobias, Baba Furaha and Louise [referring to me] who go to school… that’s formal… but there’s also informal [education]… You [Parents] have nothing to offer your kids because [if] you have not been discipled either formally or informally… [t]hey [children] will be lost… If you are not discipled in church, you cannot
disciple at home… That child need[s] to be discipled by you informally.” In this sermon, Pastor Elijah implores congregants to study the Bible and become a disciple of Jesus Christ. He tries to impart this and other wisdoms from the Bible to help support and influence congregants, particularly parents in his “family-oriented” church, as he describes it. Mama and Baba Furaha are one set of parents who use religion (relying on the Word of God and their church) to help raise their children. The next chapter looks at the processes that make this church community a “community.”

**Epilogue**

I return home and take down my dusty Bible buried at the top of my tall bookshelf. The binding and pages crackle as I open it, reminding me that I probably have not touched it since I received it: June 10, 1995, the date of my confirmation. The Bishop has inscribed the first page: “Louise, As you grow in age may you grow in God’s Grace,” William E. Swing, Bishop of California. The thin, almost translucent pages feel soft in my hands as I turn to the parable of the wise and foolish builders:

46 Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? 47 I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. 48 He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. 49 But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck the house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete. -Luke 6:46-49

*The translation in Kiswahili reads:*

Chapter 3
Fostering Community

It is Mother’s Day and the congregants at Spirit Church are led through a series of songs of praise by a gifted singer, who just arrived from Tanzania. Afterwards Baba Regina, a father of five children, welcomes visitors to stand and introduce themselves. One mother’s aunt is visiting from Kigali, as well as her cousin, who lives in East Boston. She glows as she looks upon these familiar faces. She is raising five Rwandan teenagers by herself, only one of whom is her biological son. Later in the service, Pastor Elijah gives a sermon about “restoring the Divine order in the family and in the church.” He references Isaiah 38:1: “In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. The prophet Isaiah son of Amoz went to him and said, ‘This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover.’” Pastor Elijah follows with the “revelation” that he received from this passage: “In the Bible it says husbands must learn to love their wives… [and] wives must learn to submit to their husbands,” meaning that they must honor and obey them. He continues talking about the importance of obedience in the family and the church, as well as how husbands should show their love to their wives (e.g. calling them during the day or helping with dinner and the dishes) and cultivate spiritual intimacy by praying together.

After the two and a half hour service, I drive a few of the youths to Pastor Elijah’s house for a barbecue. We sit at a long table that stretches the length of the yard and wait for congregants to bring meat to cook on the grill and other side dishes. The youth and children play inside and outside of the house, while the mothers as guests of honor on this Mother’s Day sit at the table and talk. Once we have eaten, Pastor Elijah stands to give a short speech honoring the mothers, particularly the single mothers and fatherless children. He asks Mama Danica, who
originally suggested the focus on single mothers and fatherless children, to say a few words. She quotes a passage from Psalms, reading from her iPhone. She notes that there are several passages in Psalms that talk about caring for single mothers and the fatherless. Pastor Elijah asks the single mothers and then the children who are fatherless to stand and be recognized. He calls up Baba Ira, noting that he had recently been appointed the children’s “father.” (In a previous Sunday service, a guest pastor had said that God was calling him to fill the role for these children). Baba Ira repeats that the Lord has called him to fill the role. He asks for their prayers, as he will need a lot of money to help these children. He also says that the youth have his phone number and can call him whenever they need. He will also meet with them occasionally. Pastor Elijah asks Felix (15) and Shayna (15) to speak on behalf of the male and female fatherless children. They timidly mumble their thanks to everyone. Pastor Elijah follows, saying that both God and Baba Ira will be their father, and the congregants of church will be their family. As such, the church will continue to support single mothers.

Perhaps it seems obvious that since it is Mother’s Day, there is a focus on family and the church acting as such. But this was not the only time that church was likened to a family or community. Often when I asked parents why they chose to attend services at Spirit Church or Grace Church, they likened it to a community or family. For example, Mama Elinore said she likes Spirit Church, because it “feels like home.” I ask in what way, and she reflects that it acts like a “family” in that “they care.” She loves that they throw baby showers for one another, cook together, attend each other’s weddings, and go to each other’s houses when someone dies, which they had done the previous week after Sunday service (and the drive was an hour and half each way). At Spirit Church, Mama Elinore says she is “not alone.” This feeling is also expressed among congregants at Grace Church, as the following example reveals.
The group of women gathered to begin their weekly mothers’ Bible study meeting with testimonies that describe what they are thankful for, how they have been challenged during the week, and how God has provided for them. After Auntie Helen gives her testimony, it is Auntie Sharon’s turn. She thanks God for “His provision.” She shares that she and her husband came to an important realization this week: they had contemplated moving from their two-bedroom apartment, which they share with four children, to a bigger house in a different suburb. However, they realized that the size of their physical house was less important than having “community,” which they had found through the church. They enjoyed “coming together and fellowshipping,” developing a “community because you’re family.” If they moved, they would be farther away from that community. Auntie Helen interjects to comment, “So you created your own family here.” Auntie Sharon turns to me to clarify, “I came here by myself.”

Auntie Ruthanne begins her testimony. She prefaces it by sharing with me that she lost her mother two or three weeks ago. She explains that everyone in her family is so depressed, and she has been sad too, but now she has told herself that she no longer wants to be sad. She wants to “live the legacy she [her mother] left behind” — her mother taught her and her siblings “strength.” Echoing Auntie Sharon, she says that she also has felt the “community” here, because everyone called when they heard her mother had passed away. She thinks that if she had been in Atlanta, Georgia, where she first settled after coming to the U.S., that that would not have happened because there was “no sense of community” there. The way the community supported her here, she explains, “Resembles[es] things that happen in Uganda.” She adds, “I appreciate communities like this.”

As I conducted fieldwork, I found myself spending more and more time with participants at faith-based gatherings, such as church services, social activities like barbecues, and the
mothers’ Bible study just described. In many conversations, my participants continually likened church and its congregants to a “community,” “home,” or “family.” It is not about the physical space of a church, but rather the feeling that is created when people interact, which makes you “feel like you’re home,” as in Uganda or in Africa more generally, Auntie Sharon explains. In this chapter, I explore how these feelings and close social relationships are fostered among immigrants and refugees and the role that religion, particularly Pentecostalism, plays as a system of meaning and as an institution (Alba et al. 2008). These relationships are at the core of the “community of practice” (Lave and Wenger 1991) into which, I argue, these children are being socialized.

**The Church as “Community”**

Religious congregations have long been sites for the theorization of identity and community formation among immigrants (see Herberg 2012[1955]). In the U.S., ethnicity often plays a prominent role in the origination of these congregations as well as the ongoing attraction and continued participation of congregants (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000). From the RENIR project, which compares 13 ethnic and religious communities (e.g. Mexican, Salvadoran, Filipino, Chinese, Asian Indian, Vietnamese; Catholic, Protestant, Buddhist, Islamic, Hindu) in the Houston area, Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) contend that immigrant religious congregations function primarily as sites for the reproduction of ethnicity and culture despite variation in the ways congregants emphasize religious versus ethnic/cultural identities across the communities. This happens through 1) physical styles evident in architecture and dress; 2) the celebration of ethnic holidays and practices; 3) a congregation’s religious practices; and 4) a congregation’s social activities, often involving food preparation (2000:80-99). Likewise, Nida (2007), Beck
(2007), and Gemignani (2007) conclude that ethnicity plays a primary role in identity formation among a diverse set of African immigrant religious communities, including Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, West African Muslims, and African Pentecostal/charismatics, respectively. Given this research, is ethnic identification the reason for this feeling of community and belonging among my participants?

In contention with Ebaugh and Chafetz’s conclusion, some scholars have shown that ethnicity is not always prioritized; instead spirituality and religious doctrine can have a greater influence over immigrant identities (Biney 2007; Bongmba 2007). Biney (2007) finds that spirituality and communality are the dominant reasons which explain why Ghanaians join and continue to go to the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in New York. As Biney sees it, spirituality manifests in a particular use of the Bible and deliverance services, while communality is about the emphasis on communal relations over a focus on the individual. Similarly, Bongmba (2007) notes that Cameroonian and Nigerians consciously project a Christian identity, downplaying their ethnicity, because of their commitment to the proselytizing mission of the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star, with which they affiliate.

In light of this tension in the literature, I explore the degree to which ethnic and/or religious identifications factor into the feeling of community as expressed in the opening vignette. In a study of socialization, it is important to examine the community into which children and youth are being socialized, particularly the connective tissue that binds people together. I seek to examine the processes of relationship-building within the more homogeneous community of Grace Church, resulting in bonding social ties, as well as within the more heterogeneous community of Spirit Church, resulting in bridging social ties that cross national, ethnic, linguistic, and/or immigration status distinctions (Dryden-Peterson 2009:43-44). Deep
and meaningful relationships necessitate an “intimacy” that must be “cultivated” (Bielo 2009).

And so I ask in this chapter: 1) Which characteristics do immigrants and refugees recognize are salient to their relationships and feelings of community, or belonging? Which characteristics of difference are ignored? 2) What are the practices through which social relationships are fostered? What is unique about religious practices, and in particular Pentecostal and born again Christian practices, that engender strong communal feelings?

**Characteristics that Foster Community**

Congregation members of both Grace and Spirit Churches continually referred to church as a “community,” “home,” or “family,” suggesting that it was a comforting or familiar place or haven. The frequency of these references and the choice in descriptive words towards others who share a similar faith led me to look more closely at what inspires these feelings of connection.

Participant explanations suggest three important dimensions: 1) particular demographic characteristics of congregants, 2) spiritual/religious characteristics of congregants, and 3) pan-African cultural characteristics.

*Demographic characteristics.* Church members noted the importance of culture in explaining why church felt like “community,” “home,” or “family.” Magda, a nineteen year old who emigrated from Tanzania following her parents, told me that Spirit Church “feels like home,” because there are “people from my country” who speak Kiswahili. Ethnicity/nationality and language of congregants emerged as the most salient demographic characteristics participants identified. As Pastor Elijah of Spirit Church explained, Spirit Church and Grace Church are part of a network of what he calls “African churches” in the Greater Boston Area. True Light and Grace Churches have Ugandan pastors, and the latter preaches in Luganda. Good
Faith Church has a Kenyan pastor who conducts services in English. And La Foi is French Congolese. In other words, he too suggests that the ethnicity/nationalities of the pastors and the language of preaching attract people who identify with those characteristics. In spite of the diversity in maternal tongues among participants, and particularly those who attend Spirit Church, I did not notice it as a decisive factor in creating bridging social relationships. They used English or Kiswahili in many cases as a lingua franca. However, participants did note the importance of having at least a few members of their church speak their same language.

Yet, Spirit Church presents a more complex case, as its membership is more diverse than other churches in the network. Attendants come from 11 different African countries and speak a wide variety of languages (with varying proficiencies). So why is it that some Africans choose to attend Spirit Church, as opposed to another church in the network? One possibility could be geographic proximity between a congregant’s home and the church, however many congregants traveled the long distance from home to church by foot, car, or public transportation, depending on their financial means. Many congregants often offered to pick up others who did not live within walking distance or have access to transportation. Rather than geographic proximity, migration experience does more to explain a congregant’s choice of church. As one Congolese woman pointed out, refugees tend to go to Spirit Church. Although Pastor Elijah at Spirit Church at first dismissed migration experience as a factor, he later reconsidered and reflected that more than fifty percent of Spirit Church members came as refugees to this country. He too came to the U.S. as a refugee from the DRC (also living in Tanzania and Kenya) more than twenty years ago. He speaks four languages, although primarily preaches in English and occasionally in Kiswahili (church service is simultaneously translated in these languages, thanks to church volunteers.) In this way, Pastor Elijah’s multicultural background, multilingual proficiencies, and migration
experiences seem to parallel those of his congregants, and thus attract other African immigrants and refugees like himself.

**Spiritual/Religious characteristics.** In addition to particular demographic characteristics, congregants noted how spiritual or religious characteristics of the congregants played a role in their relationships with others. As the opening vignette illustrates, Auntie Sharon’s feeling of “community” had to do with “fellowshipping” — or coming together to worship in a particular way. Likewise, Imani, a woman in her late twenties, emphasized that the style of worship mattered. She had been a Methodist but was unhappy with her church in the U.S. and the way they worshipped. She described Methodists as too focused on “doctrine” and were too “prescriptive or prescribed.” When she came to Spirit Church, she felt at “home” and more “free.” Her feelings of community, like Auntie Sharon’s, emerged from recognizing and identifying with others who worship in a particular way. Although there is a relative structure to Pentecostal church service each week, testimonies from congregants and the Pastor make it feel more personal, spontaneous, and emotional (Shoaps 2002). It is not unusual for congregants to cry or cry out in response to their conversations with God or to hearing others describe their conversations, visions, or experiences. This style of worship that many of my participants sought out is characteristic of Pentecostal and charismatic churches worldwide (Robbins 2004).

**Pan-African Cultural Characteristics.** Of the five African churches, Spirit Church has the most diversity in terms of the number of countries congregants have lived in, languages spoken, and differences in migration experiences. Paradoxically, this diversity is often downplayed by members who gloss over their national, ethnic, linguistic, and immigrant status differences and identify with other congregation members as “African.” When I asked assistant Pastor Kadmiel why he first attended Spirit Church, he first pointed to its spiritual/religious
characteristics as a church of born again Christians practicing true Christianity and then added that congregants are “more related to my culture.” He explained that they share similarities since they all come from “Africa.” I questioned his use of the general term, inquiring whether he recognized the cultural diversity on the continent. He pushed back, saying that if you put all “black Africans” together, they have a lot of similarities, especially in the way “we worship.” He explained that it is evident in the music, food, dress, and type of preaching. Pastor Kadmiel was not the only one who felt this way. I repeatedly heard Spirit Church leaders and congregants refer to their common “African” heritage and culture during sermons and casual conversation. In the use of the term, people blurred differences in their ancestry. Moreover, they tended to blur any assumed line between culture and religion. As Pastor Kadmiel highlighted above, people are “African” in the way they dress and in the way they worship. Some scholars have even argued that the spread of Pentecostalism in Africa is attributable to some degree to African “roots,” which are evident in the “‘orality of liturgy,’ ‘narrativity of theology and witness,’ emphasis on participation, use of dreams and visions in worship, and model of mind/body correspondence that promotes healing by prayer” (see discussion in Robbins 2004:126). Pastor Kadmiel and others’ willingness to ignore certain differences and identify as “African” reveals how powerful religion is in the development of relationships and the feelings of belonging in a way that non-religious, social organizations or institutions cannot achieve. Religion, and in this case Pentecostalism in particular, affords the opportunity to transcend certain boundaries and connect with others through faith first and foremost. This proves true particularly in the diaspora where there can be great diversity among immigrants and refugees.

In sum, particular demographic, religious, and cultural characteristics play a key role in the selection of one’s church, which engenders a sense of “community,” “home,” or “family.” In
some cases, certain characteristics may go unrecognized, such as type of migration experience; however in other cases, certain characteristics are fully recognized, such as specific country of origin, language, denomination, and style of worship, and even homogenized in some cases under the umbrella term of “African.”

It is important to realize that the feeling of connection within this heterogeneous population, particularly at Spirit Church, is no small matter. The congregants of Spirit Church come from a region that has historically experienced interethnic violence resulting in the death and displacement of millions of people. But at Spirit Church, for example, Hutus and Tutsis, two ethnic factions from the Great Lakes Region, worship and pray together without much, if any, tension (or at least during my fieldwork). Thus, this begs the question of how these heterogeneous, or bridging, social relationships develop (Dryden-Peterson 2009). Is it just that people are in an unfamiliar environment and thus look for people who share some cultural and/or spiritual characteristics? Perhaps to some extent, but I argue that this is not enough to sustain relationships, nor to promote the feelings of community and belonging that my participants expressed. Deeper bonding and bridging social ties are nurtured through particular religious practices of language and interaction. This is more fully examined in the next section. Like Biney (2007) and Bongmba (2007), I find religious identification more salient than ethnicity.

**Practices that Foster Community**

Even though demographic, religious, and cultural characteristics are powerful enough to initially attract people together, they do not fully explain how meaningful social relationships are fostered — particularly across national, ethnic, linguistic, and/or immigrant status differences — to the point where people refer to one another as a “community” or “family.” Remember, this is
not just about where people spend their time on Sunday or any other day of the week, but rather how people make major life decisions, as illustrated by Auntie Sharon’s case presented in the opening vignette. I argue that there are certain practices, or processes, that nurture the development of relationships and the feeling of connection and belonging. Many of these practices are unique to religion, particularly Pentecostalism, in contrast to other social organizations. Some practices are cultivated consciously on the part of church leaders and members; in other cases, processes are unconscious, or at least not made explicit. Considering both explicit and implicit practices, I have identified four to explore in greater depth that cultivate this connection: 1) social activities and interactions; 2) institutional and faith-related practices; 3) self-othering discourse; and 4) fictive kinship terms.

Social activities and interactions. Both church leaders and members organize activities which enable people to socialize with one another informally and share important life events, holidays, or other special celebrations. As described in the vignette, Mama Elinore feels that church members at Spirit Church “care” about one another, because they attend one another’s baby showers, cooking parties, weddings, and wakes. To exemplify how church members “care,” Mama Elinore points to the fact that together church members at Spirit Church celebrate baby showers, cook, attend one another’s weddings, and go to each other’s houses when loved ones have passed away. Many of these events are announced during church service on Sunday, and some of them, like baby showers, immediately follow service. At first, I was surprised that after a lengthy two and a half hour service that went beyond lunch hour, many people still attended these affairs. But as Pastor Elijah once remarked as the church congregation transitioned from Sunday service to a celebratory meal downstairs, “There is fellowship in eating together.” Just as a family would, “so as a church, we want to eat together.” Gemignani (2007:141-142; see also
Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000:396) also notes the importance of food preparation as a contributing factor to the development of fellowship and the gendered ethnoreligious identities of her interview respondents. The fact that church members are willing to attend social events even after a long service is a testament to the fact that they value spending time with one another. Along with the sharing of food, organized activities around life events, holidays, and other special occasions create opportunities for adults and children to develop close relationships.

Social interactions also happened spontaneously but in equally powerful ways. As Auntie Pura explained, church members reached out to one another when they needed help. This certainly proved true for Auntie Ruthanne (introduced in the opening vignette), who received calls from church members when her mother passed away. In moments of personal suffering, spontaneous outreach serves to bolster close interpersonal relationships among church members. Similarly, church members also reach out to those in the congregation whom they do not know. For example, Pastor Elijah solicited donations of household necessities and cash offerings for newly resettled refugees from his congregation on different occasions. Spontaneous outreach, whether grounded in pre-existing relationships or not, as well as organized social activities are critical practices through which feelings of “community,” “home,” and “family” are fostered.

That being said, it could be argued that social activities and interactions are characteristic of many organizations and clubs and thus not unique to religion in this case. I argue, though, that they do feature prominently and in unique ways among born again Christians. In particular, Pentecostalism promotes a ritualization of life with multiple services throughout the week, long services (some overnight), and a strict moral code that shuns drinking and illicit drugs, among other things, and encourages people to a life of prayer, routine fasting, and mission work (Robbins 2004). At a concert to promote the mission work of one congregant, I spoke again with
Mama Elinore about the $20 admission ticket and the $150 admission ticket to an upcoming conference sponsored by Spirit Church. To me, these prices seemed steep, especially for immigrants and refugees with limited financial resources. As Mama Elinore pointed out, though, “We don’t drink... [or] go to clubs.” Looking around, she continued, “[This] is our happiness.” Thus, social activities not only provide opportunities for congregants to get to know one another better, but also serve to regulate their day to day lives and to reinforce, albeit perhaps subtly, the religious connection between them.

**Institutional and faith-related practices.** Even more than organized activities and spontaneous outreach, institutional and faith-related practices and activities serve to strengthen relationships through an explicit spiritual dimension. These particular activities create opportunities for people to reflect, worship, or act on a spiritual mission together on a weekly basis. First and foremost, the act of attending church service on Sunday is a foundational institutional practice that creates opportunities for interpersonal spiritual reflection and interaction. The service follows a fairly routine sequence of events. For example, at Spirit Church, we opened in prayer, shared announcements and welcomed visitors, sang a few songs led by a “praise and worship” team of singers, gave tithes and offerings, listened to the Word of God, sang a few more songs, closed in prayer, and then adjourned. Although these practices can be interpreted as spaces for individual spiritual reflection, I argue that among born again Christians in particular, they are also important for interpersonal interaction. For example, prayer at Spirit Church, like at many other Pentecostal institutions, is conducted out loud. In some cases, the Pastor will lead a prayer, while attendants simultaneously speak their own prayers out loud next to one another (see also Corwin 2012). In some cases, people become emotional, crying out and weeping. Prayers then become shared public practices, which “cultivate intimacy”
In these cases, intimacy is created on two levels. On one level, people can listen to others’ prayers and learn about their hopes, fears, and private lives. This can happen between two people who simply sit next to each other in church and do not know each other well, or this can happen with people who know each other very well. I have heard the Pastors at Grace and Spirit Churches encourage husbands and wives to pray together, as well as parents and children. In several interviews, parents revealed that they learn a lot about their children through their prayers.

On another level, intimacy is cultivated by the fact that people believe in praying in a similar way. For Pentecostals and charismatics, this is not just about praying out loud but also about praying, or speaking, in tongues. This is a distinguishing characteristic of Pentecostalism, for it is considered one of the gifts that can be bestowed upon believers by the Holy Spirit (Robbins 2004). It happens when a person suddenly begins to speak in another language, which is unintelligible to the speaker or to a listener. It is believed that when speaking in tongues God is literally speaking through someone. Another gift recognized by Pentecostals and charismatics is the interpretation of tongues, which means that when someone is speaking in tongues, another person can interpret what God is saying. Believing and participating in this practice, and arguably witnessing it happen, is another way that intimacy is cultivated. Thus, I argue that this style of praying is one example of religious practice, unique to Pentecostalism in particular, that fosters close communal and familial relationships.

Evangelizing, and talk about evangelizing, is another example of a faith-based practice particular to Pentecostals, charismatics, and other evangelical Christians (Robbins 2004) that deepens a feeling of connection. Evangelizing is the act of declaring your faith and sharing the Word of God with someone who is not a believer in God and/or Jesus. Although this means that
it often occurs in the presence of non-believers, the subsequent discussion of the experience is an important practice in bringing believers together. This often happens in the context of Bible studies, which serve as educational spaces that foster close interpersonal connections, as the following example reveals (Bielo 2009). In youth Bible study one Sunday at Spirit Church, Imani, the teacher, asks the youth to reflect on their experience with evangelizing: “How many of you have led someone to Jesus Christ?” Only a few hands are raised in the circle of about 20. Then Yinon (16) asks her what she means. She rephrases, “How many of you have preached with someone?” The majority of the hands go up, some shyly. Kenaz (16) jumps in and says that he once argued with a Catholic girl and got so frustrated that he wanted “to punch her in the face.” She argued that Catholics can go to heaven through Mary. Zachary (16) jumps in to add that he had an argument with others about evolution, because many of them believe that we came from a cell. He asks Imani, “Is it good to argue about religion… [especially] if [you’re] not going to change them?” For example, he says that some Muslim girls think they are the only “good” ones. Imani replies, “Debate is one thing, declare is another.” She advises, “Don’t be uncomfortable declaring,” but with debate “be careful that you don’t get frustrated.” The class discusses some of their experiences with evangelizing. Although these instances happen outside of the physical space of church and presumably away from other believers, the discussion of the experience serves to unite people even if the experiences were rather frustrating, confusing, and awkward. This is another way that intimacy is fostered: Bible study offers a space within which congregants share the challenges and frustrations they encounter in their daily lives, which in turn promotes feelings of closeness. Discussion about evangelizing, like attending Sunday church services and praying, is thus an important faith-based practice that supports the development of intimate relationships and the feeling of belonging. Moreover, these practices
create a transcendent community, where material or worldly boundaries such as nationality are not emphasized.

*Self-othering discourse.* Another important practice for the development of social ties is embedded in the example above from the youth Bible study. The practice of evangelizing is an act of positioning oneself as different from others, while the ensuing discussion about the experience is an act of positioning oneself as similar to others. I call this self-othering discourse. To further explain, let me present the continuation of the discussion from the youth Bible study: Zachary says that he is “scared of Muslims” because they “worship the Devil.” Imani is surprised and tells him, “You don’t need to be scared...[they] won’t do anything to you.” Regina (16) asks if it is “Okay to have friends [who] are Buddhist,” or any other religion. Imani says ultimately no, it is not okay to have “close friends” who follow different religions. She keeps them at a distance. Yinon asks, what if they put faith aside. Imani explains that you “can’t put faith aside,” because ultimately “we see the world differently.” She clarifies that that is not to say that they should not work with others in class or be polite or friendly. But she reminds them of scripture and how you can’t fraternize with the “spirit of darkness.” In this portion of the event, a few of the youths question with whom they can be “friends.” In the public schools they attend, they interact daily with peers who practice different religions, such as Buddhism and Islam. I imagine that in the often liberal and secular space of public schools, youth are encouraged to develop relationships with those who are different from them. However, some Pentecostals, like Imani, would argue that this is problematic, for it is antithetical to the life to which they have devoted themselves in becoming born again Christians. As she explains, born again Christians “see the world differently” and thus cannot develop close personal relationships with those who hold fundamentally different perspectives. Likewise, Pastor Elijah continually emphasized during his
sermons, “Either you are a believer or a non-believer.” When you become born again, “From that moment, you have declared war against the witches.”

Pentecostalism is known for creating a dualistic worldview, with the present in tension with the past, the church vs. the world, public versus private life, believers versus non-believers. Thus, those who are not believers and that which is not godly are cast on the side of the Devil. This is a global characteristic of Pentecostalism (Robbins 2004). It is interesting to note that my participants, who are all African, make a further association between the Devil and witchcraft. I surmise that this is the result of a long legacy of witchcraft in Africa (e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Evans-Pritchard 1935, 1976).

This stark contrast drawn between believers and non-believers is what I refer to as “self” and “others,” respectively. The message is that one should seek out believers and turn away from non-believers. Formal sermons and informal discussions create a particular discourse that focuses on the need to and the ways to position oneself as a born again Christian in contrast to others (e.g. through evangelizing) and in connection with others (e.g. by discussing the experience and finding others who share the experience and their similar worldview). Thus, self-othering discourse also serves as a practice for identity work through the erection of salient boundaries to distinguish who is part of a group and who is not.

In this process, certain similarities among participants are highlighted (i.e. the fact that they are born again Christians who believe in evangelizing), whereas certain differences are ignored (e.g. national, ethnic, linguistic, and/or immigrant status). Self-othering discourse is also a common feature of sermons, conversation among adults, and discussion between parent-teachers and even younger children. Positioning oneself as a believer out in the world (i.e. non-church settings) can be an alienating experience. However, in church, discussion about the
experience is an act of positioning oneself as a believer, which serves to foster deeper connections among believers.

In reality, not all evangelicals proselytize or proselytize all the time. Many of them have close relationships with others who are not evangelicals. But I argue that being exposed to and participating in the discourse at church, even if in debate, fosters communal ties. When a person positions himself or herself as an in-group member through certain talk or behavior, it promotes a feeling of belonging, which in turn promotes bridging social ties (Dryden-Peterson 2009) within heterogeneous groups.

Fictive kinship terms. The connection people feel to one another is also sustained through the use of certain linguistic terms in reference to one another. These references go beyond the label of “believer” or “non-believer,” as we saw in the examples above, and make use of familial terms. This creates another layer of intimacy through a notion of fictive kinship between people who are not related by blood or marriage. In one sermon, for example, assistant Pastor Kadmiel preached to attendants that we are all “children of God.” Similarly, Pastor Elijah on several occasions encouraged certain acts from church members, such as calling others to ask if they need a ride to church or giving a special offering to newly resettled refugee families, to show that they are “brothers and sisters” in Christ. It could be argued that these phrases are not unique to Pentecostal churches; they are certainly characteristic of other Christian denominations and other religions. However, in Pentecostalism, they signify a specific egalitarian connection among congregants. Historically and contemporarily, Pentecostals often establish integrated churches that cross race, class, and ethnic lines (Anderson 2004; Bergunder et al. 2010; Robbins 2004). Religious identity is maximized whereas other differences are minimized. Pentecostals share the experience of being converted. And this is evident in other fictive kinship terms among them.
For example, when a church member has brought another into the faith, thereby playing a major role in their conversion to become a born again Christian, the church member becomes the “spiritual mother [or father]” of their “spiritual daughter [or son],” the new convert. The use of familial terms here signifies the close personal relationship that is created through this process.

In sum, the feelings of “community,” “home,” and “family” in connection to church and its members are explicitly and implicitly cultivated through specific practices: 1) social activities and interactions; 2) institutional and faith-related practices; 3) self-othering discourse; and 4) fictive kinship terms. These practices suggest that religion as an institution and as a system of meaning serve to promote intimacy and thus nurture close relationships among church members. In this study, practices, such as evangelizing, praying out loud, and speaking in tongues, show that Pentecostalism and Pentecostal churches play an important role in the diaspora for African immigrants and refugees to connect with others and create a sense of belonging.

Conclusion

The feeling of “community” that Auntie Sharon and Auntie Ruthanne spoke of during mothers’ Bible study (described in the opening vignette) was a common metaphor that I heard from congregants at Grace and Spirit Churches. It is a feeling that suggests deeply meaningful social relationships. I have argued that these social relationships are not just predicated on shared demographic characteristics (e.g. ethnicity/nationality and language), spiritual/religious characteristics (e.g. being born again Christians and worshiping in a certain way), or even still pan-African cultural characteristics. Rather these social relationships are fostered in the context of religion through particular practices: 1) social activities and interactions, such as celebrations of life events and personal outreach in times of crisis; 2) institutional and faith-related practices,
such as praying out loud, speaking in tongues, or evangelizing; 3) self-othering discourse which promotes identity formation and community boundaries; and 4) fictive kinship terms, such as recognizing someone as your “spiritual daughter.” These practices cultivate intimacy among people (Bielo 2009), which then promote the feeling of community. These social ties are in effect either bonding social ties among people who already share many characteristics, or bridging social ties among people who do not share many characteristics, such as nationality, ethnicity, maternal language, and/or immigrant status (Dryden-Peterson 2009).

One conclusion to be drawn is that although ethnicity and religion are intimately related and important to identity and community formation in this study, religion seems to play a more dominant role here, as Biney (2007) and Bongmba (2007) find in their studies. As an institution, religion creates a space that promotes social interaction; and as a system of meaning, religion promotes the interpretation of personal connection through a spiritual lens. In particular, these cases reveal the special role Pentecostalism plays in the African diaspora for these participants: it regulates and ritualizes daily life in an unfamiliar environment and encourages practices that promote social relationships through belief and spirituality foremost. The relationships that result maximize a religious connection and minimize ethnic (and other) differences to create bridging social ties. In other words, a pan-religious identity connects this community.

Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) would suggest that such a lean towards religion, over ethnicity, may be the result of a more multi-ethnic congregation or its religious mission focused on proselytizing: “A shift in emphasis from an ethnically specific set of religious practices and identities to one that is more ‘pure’ and ethnically inclusive typically begins to occur under two circumstances, which may coexist: 1) within multi-ethnic congregations to promote unity, and 2) when religious institutions — or at least their leaders — define the proselytization of non-co-
ethnics as a central institutional mission” (9). This may be the case for Spirit Church, which has more diverse set of congregants, but not for Grace Church, which has a less diverse set of congregants. Moreover, regardless of church affiliation, all participants conveyed feelings of community and belonging when describing why they attend church. The development of these feelings and actual social relationships is also particularly noteworthy in the case of this subset of the African diaspora since many immigrants and refugees have come from areas that are currently or historically have been engaged in violent conflict.

In addition to noting the salience of religion here as a way of coping in their new world, I want to draw attention to the importance of practices over characteristics in identity and community formation. Ethnic and religious characteristics certainly may draw people together, influencing their selection of church, but the development of close social relationships that affect continued attendance at church and life decisions is the result of participation in activities and other practices, as Lave and Wenger (1991) argue. Although Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) point out the role social and religious activities play in identity formation, they do so to show that ethnicity is reproduced. I contend that these practices are important because as adults and children learn “ways of belonging” (Lave and Wenger 1991:35) through engagement in secular and religious activities and discourse with one another, they also develop a sense of belonging — that feeling of community, family, and home — that goes along with it. This feeling is the glue for bonding and bridging social relationships that make up this community of practice into which children are socialized.

The next three chapters look at the processes through which parent-teachers at church socialize children into this community of practice. They engage children in specific practices —
praying, engaging with the Bible, delineating and defending one’s faith — which are integral to being/becoming a believer.
Chapter 4
Learning to Pray and Be a Pray-er

At the top of the stairs at Spirit Church, a small group of seven children begin to gather. Some wander among their parents and church members and others swing their legs from the powder blue office chairs arranged in a semi-circle in the hallway. Sunday school classes at Spirit Church occur before regular church service begins. Pastor Elijah wishes they had more space so that children could have Sunday school while the adults listen to the sermon. But that is not possible since the church does not have enough rooms for all classes on their rented second floor. So the youngest children gather with their teachers (three different teachers led the class while I conducted research) in the hallway. The larger inner sanctuary is where the main service is held, as well as the youth Sunday school class and adult Bible study). Just after 10am, Sunday school begins.

After singing a version of the song, “If You’re Happy and You Know It,” Mama Danica, the parent-teacher, starts in on her lesson. “What is prayer?” she asks the children. No one responds. She switches to Kiswahili (one of three languages she speaks) and asks Solomon (8), who is visiting from Africa. He remains silent, looking at me wide-eyed and sits back in his chair. Perhaps my presence is intimidating? But then again Mama Danica and Solomon’s mother, who sits with us today, comment on his shyness, saying that it is understandable because it is his first time in this Sunday school class. Mama Danica encourages him a bit more in Kiswahili, “Unaomba kwa nani? [Who do you pray to/With whom do you pray? (Note: The question’s meaning is ambiguous when said in Kiswahili)]” She switches to English, the second of three languages she speaks, to ask her own daughter, Hannah (7). “Say anything,” she encourages. Hannah pauses and then speaks slowly and confidently, “When you ask God to
forgive us our sins.” Mama Danica praises her. She adds that prayer is “talking to God.” In Kiswahili, she asks Aden (5) about prayer. But his wide eyes just stare back at her (a common characteristic of his I have noticed when I visit his family at home). Mama Danica then turns to Aden’s sister, Leah (6), and asks her about prayer. “I pray for food,” she says. Mama says that that is right and adds that they also say “thank you” to God for that food. She continues, giving a scenario about someone who is sick. She asks Simon (9) what he does in that situation. Simon responds, “I ask God to heal that person.” Then Mama Danica turns to Mireille (1), but she looks away. Mama Danica summarizes, “Prayer is essentially communicating with God…anywhere, anytime. [We] ask for daily needs — food, shelter, clothing… Let’s make sure that each and every day we pray to God.” Mama Danica asks Leah, “Do you pray with your whole family?” She nods her head “yes.”

Mama Danica moves on, “Who knows the Lord’s Prayer?” She reminds them that she gave this “assignment” to them last week. She asks Aden for it, but again there is no response. Leah butts in, “He’s lying.” Mama Danica reinterprets, “Well, maybe he’s thinking.” Mama Danica reviews that the Lord’s Prayer is “a prayer [that] I want at least all kids to know.” She turns to Hannah. Hannah recites the Lord’s Prayer, although occasionally she stops and her mother helps her remember the next line. Mama Regina, one of the other Sunday school teachers and parents, joins the group with her youngest daughter, Cayla (4). Mama Danica continues with her lesson. She says that she will make copies of the prayer for the “older” children of this group. She continues, “We thank God for goodness,” like food, shelter, clothing, parents, and the “big beautiful world we live in… [We also] ask God for protection… wherever you’re going.”

After singing the song, “Shetani akija [The Devil is coming],” Mama Danica asks someone from the group to close with a word of prayer. No one volunteers. Mama Danica
announces that next Sunday they will practice how to pray around other people and everyone will pray for something. She prompts them with what they should pray for right now — “Thank God for Sunday school,” “for whatever they learned,” and to “protect us.” Simon (9) agrees to pray, hesitantly. Hannah adds her prayer, “[I pray for] these kids in Church today… that they learn Your Word… Cover them with the blood of Jesus and His wings… If their sisters or brothers are not here, I pray they get better.” The Sunday school class ends right before 11am as the hallway where they sit fills with more church members who greet one another. Both adults and children move into the inner sanctuary for the main service.

Once after Sunday school, I asked Mama Regina what was important for children to learn. She replied, the “basic” things, like “how to pray,…behave in house to parents, everybody.” She continued, “Not too much… because [the children] get confused.” Most important is that they “know how to pray” and show “respect.” In virtually every Sunday school class that I observed, the group would either open and/or close with someone praying out loud. And in over half of the Spirit Church Sunday school classes for the youngest children that I observed, the class had an explicit discussion about what is prayer and how to pray. Likewise, when I asked parents to describe their daily schedule with their family, all of them mentioned that they prayed with their children as part of their bedtime routines and many said they did so at other times too. Prayer is an important practice in these families’ lives and to this community of practice. This chapter is about the participation of children, as well as their parents and church leaders, in discussions about prayer and the act of praying at church and at home.
The “Basic” Things: Prayer

In the study of language, prayer is considered a variety of genre and practice (Baquedano-López 1999). As Baquedano-López explains, prayer is “a discursive act that bridges human limitation and the spiritual realm… Prayer, in this way, is an intrinsic human meaning-making activity that relates the known and the unknown” (1999:197). It has a “narrative quality” (1999:198), whereby one tries to make sense of past and present life experiences. Prayer can be sanctioned by religious institutions in the case of the Lord’s Prayer in Christianity, for example, and thus scripted. Or it can be unscripted and impromptu. Prayer often involves asking for help from or making a promise to a perceived higher power. And although in Christianity it is considered a conversation between an individual and God, it also can involve or index others, whereby one prays in a group with other people or for others who may or may not be present.

But how does one learn to pray? How does one come to be a pray-er? Prayer sounds, looks, and is fundamentally different in different religions, and it can even be different within congregations and families of the same denomination. Becoming a pray-er is about learning particular ideologies about what to pray for, when, where, how, in what language, etc., as well as how to speak and position one’s body appropriately in the act of praying. This chapter explores the ways that parents and church leaders involve children in discussions about prayer and the act of praying, which shapes how they become part of this community of practice of believers.

Participation is a key word in this examination of prayer. Following Lave and Wenger, I view learning as “legitimate peripheral participation in a community of practice” (1991:31). Learning is not just about internalizing concepts and skills, but rather about increasing one’s participation in activities in relation to other people. In other words, learning is not necessarily just a cognitive process (i.e. learning knowledge and skills), but more so a social process
characterized by the interaction of newcomers and old-timers in activities, like praying, and discussions about prayer. In this study, I mostly cast children as the newcomers and parents and church leaders as the old-timers, or masters. However, we will discuss later in the chapter how some children can be seen as masters in relation to others (Note: Adults new to Christianity, Pentecostalism, or this church in particular can also be considered newcomers in relation to other adults or even children). From a social practice theory of learning, a newcomer’s participation is qualified as legitimate and peripheral, because the level of their engagement in certain practices can be contingent on the access granted to them by old-timers. Opportunities to engage in the practice are essential. In this community of practice, opportunities (involving others) arise during Sunday school and at home at bedtime.

Discourse is also essential to learning:

Talking within itself includes both talking within (e.g., exchanging information necessary to the progress of ongoing activities) and talking about (e.g., stories, community lore). Inside the shared practice, both forms of talk fulfill specific functions: engaging, focusing, and shifting attention, bringing about coordination, etc., on the one hand; and supporting communal forms of memory and reflection, as well as signaling membership, on the other. (And, similarly, talking about includes both forms of talk once it becomes part of a practice of its own, usually sequestered in some respects.) For newcomers then the purpose is not to learn from talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn to talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation. [Lave and Wenger 1991:109, emphasis added]

The analysis that follows examines instances that involve talk about and talk within prayer in Sunday school classes. This type of discourse and practice is integral to the way children participate and move toward greater mastery. We will see that scripting and scaffolding techniques feature prominently in these instances. Using these techniques, parents and teachers help children implicitly and explicitly learn the ideologies, lexicon, and syntax associated with the act of praying, and the way one positions one’s body in prayer. Learning to pray in a certain way signifies their “spiritual development,” as one community member describes it.

Learning to pray in a certain way also affects intrapersonal and interpersonal development. In evangelical Christianity, Elisha (2008) argues, “The ontological condition of
faith is linked to the pursuit of radical intersubjectivity, an experience of continuous subjection to and reliance upon divine agency” (57-58). In his study of U.S. evangelicals attending a mega church in Texas, he found belief in individual agency is reduced, and thus a change in how one understands the “self.” In other words, an understanding of one’s self is predicated on the acceptance that one never thinks nor acts alone (this is not the same as saying one is not in control of one’s thoughts or actions); rather, God is always with you, speaking to you in your mind (or through signs in the world). Elisha calls this “radical intersubjectivity.” Luhrmann (2012; see also 2004) calls it a “Christian theory of mind -…[or a] ‘participatory’ theory of mind”(40-41). Whereas some may recognize their thoughts as solely theirs, Luhrmann found in her study of American evangelical Christians that through prayer they learn to distinguish their thoughts as sometimes their own and sometimes God’s. As a result, the relationship between a worshiper and God is described as more intimate than in other religions or even other denominations of Christianity, currently and historically. Although God is considered an almighty being, He is also considered a friend who talks to you and guides you on a continual basis. He is even someone with whom you can have coffee or go on a date, according to the evangelical Christians in her study (2012). The born again Christians in this study did not characterize their relationship with Him in quite those terms, but still they felt Him personally in their thoughts and actions.

In this chapter, I examine children and youth’s participation in discussions about prayer and the act of praying in Sunday school as a way of understanding the intra/interpersonal development associated with their identity work. In this community of practice, participating in prayer individually and in groups is a way for children and youth to position themselves as believers.
Opportunities to Engage in Prayer

When I observed Sunday school classes, I anticipated most of the discussion to be around Jesus, the Bible, and its stories. As a child in my Episcopalian Sunday school class, I remember discussing the story of Joseph and his coat of many colors, for example; I remember singing, “Jesus loves me.” Discussions of biblical stories and songs are certainly features of the Sunday school classes that I observed at Spirit Church and Grace Church (and will examine in another chapter), but so too are discussions about prayer. Prayer and the act of praying were not activities that I was mindful of at the beginning of this research. Only when I started my analysis did I realize the centrality of these practices — discussion about prayer and the act of praying — in Sunday school in particular and to the process of becoming and being a Christian in general. In fact, it was the frequency of these practices that brought them to my attention. And upon further reflection, perhaps the fact that one may not have a memory of learning how to pray suggests how seamless and thus fundamental this practice is to the legitimate peripheral participation in this community of practice.

Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasize how important opportunities to engage in certain practices are to becoming a member of a community of practice: “A learning curriculum unfolds in opportunities for engagement in practice. It is not specified as a set of dictates for proper practice… [N]ewcomers’ legitimate peripherality provides them with more than an ‘observational’ lookout post: It crucially involves participation as a way of learning — of both absorbing and being absorbed in — the ‘culture of practice’” (93-95). Opportunities for children to “absorb” and “be absorbed” in the culture of prayer abounded in the Sunday school classes at Spirit Church: teachers asked individual children to pray for the group at the beginning and end
of class, as well as engaged children in discussions about prayer and the opportunity to “practice” praying during class. They also frequently encouraged children to pray in their normal day-to-day lives by themselves. Many parents included praying with children as part of their dinner and bedtime routines at home. In one sense, then, children have many opportunities to engage in this particular practice. These opportunities to pray expose children to a range of newcomer and old-timer pray-ers — parents, siblings, other children and youth at church, teachers at church, etc. These different relationships offer children slightly different vantage points on how to partake, when to partake, and when not to partake in this particular activity in this community of practice. As children move into different settings, though, like public school, it is also important to note that they encounter others who do not engage in the kind of praying with which they are familiar or who do not engage in praying at all. We will look at this more closely later in the chapter.

**Discourse and Practice: Scaffolding and Scripting the Basics**

Within these opportunities to pray, talk features prominently. Although prayer is about talking to God, engagement in the practice is also about talking with others about prayer, as well as praying out loud in the presence of others. Both of these types of talk — *talk about* prayer and *talk within* prayer — are important to children’s legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger 1991:109). And as we see in the vignette at the beginning of the chapter, both of these types of talk occur in Spirit Church Sunday school classes: the two parent-teachers, Mama Danica and Mama Regina, engage the children in a discussion about the “nuts and bolts” of prayer (i.e. *talk about* prayer) and the actual practice of praying out loud in a group (i.e. *talk within* prayer). These types of talk sometimes happen simultaneously or are nested within one
another. In some cases, the talk between the parent-teachers and the children is more didactic, whereas in others it is not. Regardless, the talk between parent-teachers and children is a constant solicitation and elicitation of desired speech and actions related to prayer and praying and thus crucial to the identity work of children and youth.

**Talking about prayer**

In Spirit Church Sunday school classes, *talk about prayer* occurred frequently. During some classes, prayer was the explicit lesson of the day; in other classes, a lesson on the life of Jesus in the Bible would turn back to a discussion about prayer. Regardless, both discussions reinforce what I call the “nuts and bolts” of prayer, or the desired knowledge about the practice. This knowledge was elicited and negotiated through a series of questions and answers between parent-teachers and children. The following questions were continually raised and reviewed in the classes I observed:

1) *Do* you pray?
2) *What* is prayer?
3) *Who* do you pray *to*?
4) *Who* do you pray *with*?
5) *What* do you pray *for*? / *Why* do you pray?
6) *Where* do you pray?
7) *When* do you pray?
8) *How* do you pray?
(Note: Sometimes these questions used the second person pronoun “you,” and other times questions used the first person pronoun “we.”)

We see almost all of these questions and/or their answers come up in the vignette at the beginning of this chapter. *What is prayer?* was one of the harder questions for children to answer. This difficulty makes sense given that the children in that class range in age from 0-13 years old and developmentally may have trouble answering such an abstract question. When no one responds, Mama Danica changes the language in which she asks the question (although the
rest of the discussion returns to English). In so doing, she also changes the question to *Who do you pray to or with?* Rephrasing the question into a simpler one that requires a more concrete answer allows teachers to engage their diverse group of children who range in age (and thus development stages), language and literacy abilities, and religious knowledge and performative capabilities. With this technique and some encouragement, Mama Danica is able to get her daughter, Hannah (7), to answer her question: “When you ask God to forgive us our sins.” Mama Danica praises her and adds that prayer is about “talking to God” or “communicating with God.” Mama Danica often scaffolds the children’s learning by summarizing and re-articulating the main point. She does this after almost each child speaks and at the end of their discussion: “Prayer is essentially communicating with God…anywhere, anytime. [We] ask for daily needs — food, shelter, clothing… [We also] ask God for protection… wherever you’re going.” In addition to asking simpler questions with more concrete answers, like *what do you pray for*, and clarifying their responses, the parent-teachers also offer scenarios, like *what do you do when someone is sick*, and their own experiences to show when they pray. For example, in another Sunday school class, Mama Regina explains that she wakes up, prays, reads the Bible, which will ‘guide’ her the whole day, prays in the car, and prays at work and at school. All of these scaffolding techniques help to elicit, clarify, confirm, and/or teach new religious knowledge to the children.

Let’s examine more closely the content and performative knowledge about prayer that is constructed in the class described at the beginning of the chapter and in others I observed. When Mama Regina asks, “What do we do when we close our eyes?” Caleb responds, “Think about our actions.” Mama Regina praises his answer and adds that it is not about what you have for lunch but rather “committing what is in our hearts to God.” This simple exchange about *how to*
pray is rich with information about the cognitive and kinesthetic parts of the act of praying. Likewise the discussion around *when and where do you pray* and *what do you pray for* also reviews important temporal, spatial, and topical dimensions of prayer that are intimately connected. These parent-teachers implicitly taught that prayer is important in both proactive and reactive cases. In proactive cases, as Mama Danica articulates in the vignette, prayer should happen on a consistent, habitual basis: “Each and every day.” Discussions included the number of times a day and the time of day. For example in one class, Caleb ardently responds that he prays four times a day after counting morning, lunch, dinner, and bed...[And later in the discussion, he explains] he prays on the weekdays “to have a good day at school and be good.” And on weekends, he prays, “To protect my family.” In his responses, Caleb demonstrates that he understands that prayer can protect him and others and prevent bad things from happening.

The parent-teachers and children also discuss how prayer can help reactively, meaning after something has occurred. When good things have happened, you offer thanks to God. When you do or say bad things, you ask for His forgiveness. Parent-teachers also encourage children to pray to ask God for advice when bad things have happened. During one class, Mama Regina gives the example of Simon (9), her son, who did not do his homework. His teacher sent home a note, and as a result Mama Regina told him he should go to his room and pray about it.

Prayer is also important to “get miracles,” Mama Regina explains. In a class discussion about two miracles Jesus performs in the Bible, Mama Regina asks the children, what did Jesus do before he performed them? Ilana (10) says, “Pray.” Mama Regina emphasizes that God cannot perform any miracles for you unless you pray, “You can’t get miracle without pray[er]… Some Christians and kids don’t believe in miracles because they don’t know how to pray[].”
Children are taught that belief is not just about the psychological commitment in saying, “I believe in God,” but also the kinesthetic and social commitment to pray and talk to God.

As a result, the discussion of what prayer is and what it entails serves to reorient both the structure of these children’s everyday lives and the way they approach and respond to their own thoughts and actions, as well as those of the people around them (we will discuss the interpersonal implications of this practice later). Also, through the teachers’ scaffolding and scripting techniques, these children are developing the lexicon and syntax necessary to communicate with others about prayer. You can start to hear it in their answers as the vignette shows: Hannah understands that prayer is about asking God to “forgive us our sins,” which is a specific phrase of the International Standard Version of the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6: 9-13):

9. Our Father in heaven,  
   may your name be kept holy.  
10. May your kingdom come.  
    May your will be done,  
    on earth as it is in heaven.  
11. Give us today our daily bread,  
12. and forgive us our sins,  
    as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us.  
13. And never bring us into temptation,  
    but deliver us from the evil one.’

Talk within prayer

In addition to talk about prayer, talk within prayer is equally important for situated learning. Like the former, the latter provides the lexicon, syntax, and bodily actions through scaffolding and scripting by the teachers.

In the vignette, there are three instances when children are actually engaged in the act of praying out loud. The first involves a well-known formal prayer, called the Lord’s Prayer, a version of which is quoted in the previous section. It is one that many Christians memorize and often repeat before bed. Mama Danica helps Hannah (7) repeat this prayer for the group. The
second and third instances of *talk within* prayer happen at the end of class: both Simon (9) and Hannah are asked to pray over the group. Almost every Sunday school class that I observed began and ended with someone praying for the group.

Prayer, particularly praying out loud in a group, is recognized as a skill that needs to be practiced. When no one volunteers after Mama Danica asks for someone to pray at the end of class, she reflects that it is important to “practice” how to pray around other people. And so *talk within* prayer in these instances are important meta acts: simultaneously, they are instances when they are rehearsing the words and actions that go along with the act of prayer, as well as instances when children are actually praying (we will further discuss prayer as a skill in the next section).

The practice of praying, though, does not happen without help. Besides the Lord’s Prayer, prayers and praying are semi-structured: there is a common vocabulary and phrasing that patterns most prayers, but no two prayers are the same. Sunday school is an important space in which teachers scaffold and script the particular lexicon and syntax that people within this community commonly use when they pray. We see this when Mama Danica suggests to Simon, “Thank God for Sunday school… for whatever they learned… and to protect us.” In another class, Mama Danica offers suggestions of what to pray for and also asks children to make suggestions. She asks for someone to pray for “the children.” Bessie (8) volunteers to pray for “the church.” Hannah volunteers to pray for “the sick.” It is suggested that Baruch (7) pray for “the country” and he accepts. The children, the church, the sick, and the country are all examples of what children commonly pray for. Likewise, there is a certain syntax that patterns prayers. You can see it when Hannah says as she prays, “Cover them with the blood of Jesus and His wings.” Even though I have grown up going to church, I had not heard this expression. It is one
that is particular to this community and perhaps other congregations from a similar denomination. Pastor Kadmiel explained to me that the expression signals that Jesus took all of our sins when He was crucified on the cross. The blood cleanses our sins, and so “to be safe, [we] have to proclaim [the] blood.” Even at the age of 7, Hannah has picked up this phrase from the adults around her, including the Pastor during service and her mother at home when they pray together. The lexicon and syntax associated with prayer are both explicitly taught to children, or novices within the community (including me), as well as implicitly learned through observation and participation.

Talk within prayer also directs the language in which prayers are conducted. Since the point of practicing praying is for children to be “comfortable,” parent-teachers and other church leaders emphasize the importance of praying in the language one (including a child) feels most comfortable. As a result, this is why all Spirit Church and Grace Church Sunday school classes for both young children and youth are predominantly conducted in English. Even when parent-teachers are more comfortable speaking Luganda, Kiswahili, Kinyarwanda, or Kirundi for example, they pray in English when they are teaching Sunday school so that the children will understand them. If a child is more comfortable praying in another language, then they are encouraged to do so. When Bessie, who recently arrived in the U.S., started attending Sunday school, Mama Danica encouraged her to pray out loud in “whatever [language] is comfortable for you.” It did not matter that neither the other children nor Mama Danica could understand Kirundi.

In summary, both talk about and talk within prayer entail teaching techniques of scaffolding and scripting to elicit the desired lexicon, syntax, and gestures related to prayer and
praying from children. In so doing, children are not just learning about prayer and to pray, but also engaging in the performance of a fundamental practice of being a believer.

**Spiritual Development and Skill**

As we see in the vignette, some children, like Simon (9), need more help praying out loud than others, like Hannah (7). What explains this difference? Parents and teachers suggest several theories about how one becomes a better pray-er. Ultimately, the ability to pray is just that, an “ability” or skill that is learned both *implicitly* through observation and participation and *explicitly* through discussion. Their explanations reveal how novices, like children, move towards greater mastery in this community of practice. Imani, the Sunday school teacher for youth, calls this “spiritual development.” She explains, your spiritual development is related to 1) the “study of the Word,” 2) “prayer life,” and 3) “the way you live in faith,” which means how and what you speak about and with whom you interact. Imani remarks that not all children, including teens, are necessarily “engaged” when they pray. In fact, she remembers Baba Furaha saying that eight year olds in Africa know how to pray better than children here. Children and youth need to learn how to “pray fervently,” which means to “pray beyond that level of material issues [and] personal things.” For example, an immature pray-er would be someone who thanks God for his or her house or prays to do well on a test. I immediately think about the prayers that I have shared, particularly in Mama and Baba Furaha’s family Bible study and suddenly feel embarrassed. There is no doubt that I have not mastered how to “pray fervently.”
**Practice and Study**

Since prayer is considered a skill learned through training, some children learn to “pray fervently” through practice. Some children pray more often at home on their own or with their parents and siblings, or even more often if they come to Sunday school regularly. It stands to reason that when adults pray, their prayers come out more smoothly than children’s, since they have had more practice over the years. However, if an adult is a new believer or even just new to this particular church, their prayers may sound like those of a child or a foreigner (to that community). I found this with myself. In the Episcopalian church that I grew up going to, prayers were often recited silently. There were very few occasions that I remember when we were asked to pray out loud. And so when my participants asked me to pray during their Bible studies, my prayers came out sounding like a child’s. My voice wavered and faltered. I took more time trying to formulate what to say and how to say it. Like a child, I prayed for food, things, and the people around me — concrete things.

As children and other novices engage in *talk about* and *talk within* prayer, they become more familiar and comfortable with the words and actions associated with praying. They also learn different kinds of prayers through the study of biblical passages. For example, over a series of Sundays, the youth read particular passages of the Bible and discussed their meaning in Sunday school. In one class, Imani starts class by asking the group of 20 youths gathered in a circle to review what they talked about last week. One of the boys says they discussed Psalm 109 about “warfare prayer.” Imani asks what needs to happen before this. One youth responds that have to repent first, he says. Imani adds you have to confess and then repent, because “[you] have to be spiritually clean.” Moreover warfare prayer is “not against flesh and blood” but against “spiritual darkness.” She asks them which other Psalm they talked about: Psalm 59. She
asks them to open their Bibles and turn to the passage. She summarizes, “We shouldn’t be merciful.” Because the Devil’s “ministry,” she explains, is “to kill, steal, and destroy.” She asks them if they read Psalm 59 at home. Most people shake their head no, except one or two. She says last week they talked about prayers of thanksgiving. She explains that she wants to review so that they are “strong in word.” She wants to make sure they know “Christianity 101.” She pauses and asks if they know what that means. Elia (14) says that it means the “basics.” Again, prayer and praying are part of the “basics” of being a Christian. It is a skill that develops over time through practice talking about it and talking within it. Talk about it can also involve the study of God’s Word, the Bible, which exemplifies different kinds of prayers. “Warfare prayers” and “prayers of thanksgiving” are examples of what it means to “pray beyond that level of material issues [and] personal things.” This is the point of Sunday school classes and Bible studies: to develop spiritually in aspects such as the ability to pray more fluidly and more effectively.

**Experience and Age**

Similar to practice, the ability to “pray fervently” comes with experience, which can come with age or life experiences. For example, Auntie Karmina believes that since her son, Absolom (6), has experienced a major life-threatening illness, he “understands” more now. When he was sick in the hospital, she told him that the “Devil makes us sick.” She advised him to “laugh at the Devil,” because when you do, you fight him and evil away. She also told him that he “must pray” and “ask God for healing.” When Absolom (then age 4) came out of his coma, he told his mom that he laughed at the Devil. Auntie Karmina explains that other children who have not
gone through an experience like this, no matter what their age, “don’t understand” the power of God and prayer.

Many churches divide children into Sunday school classes based on age. In a study of an immigrant Catholic church, Baquedano-López and colleagues (2005) mention that *doctrina* instruction is formally organized over the life span for first through eighth graders. To some extent, this is true of Spirit Church. However, the cut-off age between children and youth Sunday school classes is not definitive. Instead, Imani and the other parent-teachers determined that those 10-12 year olds who were “young” in their spiritual development would remain in the children’s Sunday school class, whereas those who had more “spiritual understanding” would move to the youth Sunday school class. Teachers tried to make the call which class a child should attend based on a child’s performance (quality of talk about God, the Bible, prayer, etc.) in class and their understanding of their family’s spiritual background. However, I also saw children migrate between these classes depending on which of their friends went to which class that day.

**Proclivity**

Even with practice and experience, not everyone develops the ability to pray more fluidly and/or effectively. Auntie Helen chalks this up to the “difference in kids.” Having four children, she says that she can see the “variety” in her children. For example, when Auntie Helen’s sister died, her eldest daughter “screamed,” which “means she got it.” Tamra (12) also started asking more questions about what was going to happen to her aunt’s children. Yet, Tamra did not pray. In contrast, her brother, Asher (9) has always been the “concerned party.” Auntie Helen explains he is always the first one to pray for people who are sick, such as when his Bible study teacher
was sick. Asher prayed for his teacher every night. In contrast, when Tamra’s Bible study teacher was sick, she did not pray once for her. And so Auntie Helen concludes that it is different for different children.

Similarly, we can see the difference in ability to pray with Simon (9) and Hannah (7) (from the vignette at the beginning of the chapter), who are about the same age and who each have mothers who teach Sunday school. Whereas Simon needed Mama Danica to prompt him with what to pray for, Hannah did not. When Hannah prayed, she needed much less encouragement and scaffolding. She spoke fluidly with the lexicon and syntax that characterized the prayers I heard from many adults. At the end of one class, she prays, “Personally heavenly Father I want to thank you for this day. As I pray for the kids to listen today, to learn about your Word, God, in church today. And I ask you, God, to forgive us our sins and listen a lot so, please forgive us. And I pray for this church and cover it in the blood of Jesus, protect those, protect these kids, and pray, and pray for people who are in trouble in danger and heal them and those who are sick. In Jesus’ name, Amen.” In this prayer, Hannah’s voice barely hesitates or self-corrections. She prays fluidly and fluently, with the right words and phrases that she has heard from others. Hannah has what Luhrmann (2012) calls a “proclivity” for prayer, the ability to pray fluidly and fluently with less practice. This fluidity could also be described as an innate ability. It does not mean that either one has have the ability to pray or not, since many people can develop the ability to pray through practice. However, there are some people, like Hannah, who require less practice than others.
**The Ultimate Pray-er: A Gift of the Holy Spirit**

In addition to practice, experience, and proclivity, Pentecostalism affords one other way that one can become a better pray-er: through the gift of the Holy Spirit. There are several gifts of the Holy Spirit described in the Bible: the gift of wisdom, knowledge, faith, working of miracles, prophesy, discerning of spirits (i.e. being able to distinguish between the Devil and God), and the speaking of tongues. The ability to speak in tongues is described in Acts 2:1-13:

1. And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.
2. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.
3. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.
4. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.
5. (And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.)
6. Now at this sound, the multitude came together and were confounded because each one heard them speak in his own tongue.
7. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these who speak Galilaeans?
8. And how do we hear each one speak in our own tongue, with which we were brought up?
9. Parthians and Medes and Elamites and the dwellers in Mesopotamia and in Judaea and Cappadocia, in Pontus and Asia,
10. Phrygia and Pamphylia, in Egypt and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,
11. Cretes and Arabians, we hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.
12. And they were all amazed and were in doubt, saying one to another, What does this mean?
13. Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

Pentecostalism is one of the only denominations which recognizes speaking in tongues as a current, modern-day form of prayer. Other denominations recognize it only historically, but not as a current form of prayer. Speaking in tongues occurs when God speaks through you. The utterances of that person sound like gibberish to most people. In fact, the person speaking in tongues does not know what they are saying; only those people who have been given the gift of “interpretation of tongues” are able to translate it for others. Pastor Elijah and Assistant Pastor Kadmiel explained to me that “tongues” is similar to the concept of language. For example, if one were in Russia, one would know if someone were speaking in tongues. It is a language that is recognizable as a distinct spoken language, but one that cannot be read or written. I asked him...
if children can speak in tongues, but he said only if there is a miracle. It is not exactly a
developmental step that has to do with age or practice, but can develop for some born again
Christians as they worship. Imani explains that it is a practice that is likened to “pray[ing] as an
adult,” or “an adult in Christ.” Pastor Kadmiel remembers the first time he heard his daughter
speak in tongues. She was about 17. He explains to me that for someone to speak in tongues they
have to have a “thirst” for it. Imani says that many of the youth question the practice of praying
in tongues. Pastor Kadmiel emphasizes, though, that speaking in in tongues is very important
because it defines Pentecostals. Otherwise, they would be like other Christians, who do not
believe in the ability to pray in this way in this day in age. Thus, the gift of speaking in tongues
is just that, “a gift” from the Holy Spirit, and one that defines someone’s identity as a believer.

Implications

What are the implications for these children by being socialized to pray in these particular
ways? Engagement in the act of praying or discussion about prayer affects the intrapersonal and
interpersonal development of these children. Their understanding of their “selves” and their
relationships with others are shaped in particular ways. This enables them to connect to certain
individuals and collectivities, while disconnecting them from others.

Intrapersonal Development

In Luhrmann’s (2012) study of American evangelical Christian adults, she documents the
cognitive changes that happen when one learns about prayer and to pray in a certain way.
Novices learn that their inner thoughts and actions are not entirely their own. Whether praying
silently or out loud, they are having a conversation with God and sometimes the “responses” that
they hear or see are from Him. Thus, she argues that one is developing a “Christian theory of mind - … a ‘participatory’ theory of mind — [which] asks congregants to experience the mind-world barrier as porous, in a specific, limited way” (40).

To what extent are the children whom I studied developing a “Christian theory of mind”? To be clear, I did not engage the children with whom I interacted in a controlled randomized trial as she did to test this hypothesis (Luhrmann and Morgain 2012). However, there were several instances that arose during my research, which suggest that some of the children’s understandings of “self” were distinctive. In an interview with Auntie Karmina and Uncle Gershom, Auntie Karmina recalls a time when she worried about her 6-year-old son, Absolom, being alone when he left the house. When she pointed this out loud to her son, he responded, “Jesus will keep me company.” In learning to pray, or communicate with God, children are also learning that they are not necessarily physically or mentally alone.

Moreover, *talk about* and *talk within* prayer is also shaping children’s understanding of their own (cap)abilities. In one discussion about prayer at a Spirit Church Sunday school class with the younger children, Mama Regina asks which miracle they [the children in class] want God to do for them. Simon (9) says he wants a “good life.” Leah (6) says she wants a “big house.” Cayla (4) says she wants a “pony” (Mama Regina doesn’t understand that word in English and I explain). Ilana (10) says that she wants to pass through school with all As, to have a “great life,” and a “big mansion” with a pool. In another class, Mama Regina asks each child, “What do you want God to do for you?” Simon says, “[Give me] my own Bible”; Caleb (9) says, “To pass MCATS”; and Ilana says, “To provide money to give those in need...and to finish education.” Although these kinds of prayer requests are considered immature, the lesson here is that God plays an integral role in helping one to accomplish something. God can make what may
be impossible possible through fervent prayer. But He can also make (or break) more ordinary things as well. This is not to suggest that things happen without action on the part of the individual, but it does emphasize for these children the importance of prayer in the accomplishment of both everyday and life goals.

Changes in children’s understanding of “self” were also evident in some of their drawings. During service, some of the children would sit next to me and ask me for pen and paper so that they could draw. (At first, I worried that parents would be upset that their attention was being diverted from the Pastor’s sermon; however many, including the Sunday school parent-teachers, assured me that it was okay, particularly for the children who were too young to really “understand” the sermon). When I gave children paper, I never stipulated what they should draw. Some of the children repeatedly drew Christian symbols - crosses and Bibles - or wrote the word “God.” Leah (6) was one of those children. Here are three of her drawings:
Figure 1: God, God, God, God

Figure 2: I love my mom and my dad and my God

Figure 3: The Devil is bad
After they drew a picture, I would quietly ask them to tell me about what they drew and write it down. In Figure 1, Leah explains that her drawing depicts me and her sitting and dancing in church. The girl at the top is Leah, saying “God, God, God, God.” Figure 2 is a drawing she made on her birthday. On the left side of the page, she writes, “Happy Birthday [her name].” On the right side of the page, she writes, “I love my mom and my dad and my God” and “My heart I do God love [her name].” In Figure 3, she draws a dollhouse, her grandpa, and pumpkins. On the far right side of the page, next to the girl, she writes, “The Devil is bad.”

Not all children routinely included religious symbols and writing in their drawings. For example, Cayla (4) liked to draw SpongeBob, a cartoon character from a TV show:

![Figure 4: SpongeBob, Patrick and siblings](image-url)
In her drawing (Figure 4), Cayla says that she has drawn SpongeBob, Patrick (another character from the TV show), and two of her siblings. In Figure 5, she says that she has drawn herself, me, SpongeBob, and Patrick at the beach.

The differences in these children’s drawings suggest that at least some of the children are developing a particular “Christian theory of mind” with a distinctive understanding of themselves in relation to God. I argue that this cognitive change is the result of their participation in practices like prayer, among others. Discussions about prayer and the act of praying at home or in church have a profound impact on these children’s everyday thoughts and actions. Not only does it physically structure their day-to-day lives, it also mentally changes their understanding of “self.” Thus, I argue that their intrapersonal development is in fact interpersonal since their understanding of “self” is one that includes God.
**Interpersonal Development**

In addition to affecting intrapersonal cognitive development, children’s participation in *talk about* and *talk within* prayer affects their interpersonal development. On the one hand, praying out loud *in the presence of* others and *for* others creates familiarity, enabling deeper personal connections; it also creates a mindfulness of collectivities outside of one’s immediate social sphere. On the other hand, the act of praying or discussion about prayer may distance a child from others who do not pray.

Researchers have found that one main cultural feature of evangelical Christians is the desire and effort put forth in “cultivating intimacy” with God (Engelke 2007; Luhrmann 2004) and other people (Bielo 2009). These close interpersonal connections can happen through Bible reading in groups, but happens more through group prayer: “[Bible reading] still requires the medium of the text and the mediating process of reading and study. Prayer requests and praise reports are a more direct means of inviting others into one’s personal life” (Bielo 2009:89). Often in an adult Bible study, one shares a testimony about how God has helped them in their lives and makes prayer requests, asking others to pray for them in their struggles. These prayer requests mean that people are sharing details about their personal lives, particularly ones that disclose their weaknesses and vulnerabilities. This kind of disclosure necessitates and builds a certain level of trust among individuals, which effectively draws people into deeper interpersonal relationships.

I observed this phenomenon continually in Sunday services and Bible studies I attended. One Sunday after we had made our tithes and offerings to the church, Pastor Elijah invited a male congregant to the altar to give a testimony. In a previous service, the congregant had asked for the congregation’s prayers for his daughter who had received a scholarship to go to school
but couldn’t go because she didn’t have the necessary immigration “papers.” During this service, he said that all the prayers had paid off because his daughter had received her “papers” and now could enroll in school. In his prayer request, this congregant shares intimate details about his family and invites others, whom he may or may not know closely, to help him. Through discussion of prayer and through the act of praying, meaningful relationships (despite differences) can develop.

When I took part in Sunday school classes with children and Bible studies with their parents, I too experienced feelings of intimacy created through prayer. After I observed my first Sunday school class at Grace Church, a girl named Denna (8) gave a closing prayer during which she prayed for all the Aunties (how she referred to her parent-teachers) and even for me. I remember instinctively smiling and feeling touched that she was thinking about me and cared enough to include me, a stranger, alongside her parent-teachers in her prayer. Immediately I felt a special connection to this little girl whom I had never met. And in fact, the feeling motivated me to approach her after class to ask her a few questions. The same thing happened the first time and each time I heard any of the mothers pray for me out loud during their Bible studies. As a white, American, childless researcher amidst a group of black, Ugandan mothers, I initially felt awkward and out of place. But hearing Auntie Helen thank God for bringing me to their group and saying that she was confident that I was part of His plan made me feel at ease. It encouraged me to keep coming back to the group. Praying for others in the immediate group around you can create closer interpersonal relationships.

To what extent is engagement in the discussion and act of praying shaping the interpersonal relationships of these children? At home, several parents mentioned that they learn a lot about their children through their prayers. To be sure, they point out that children,
particularly the younger ones, mostly pray about the mundane things they see, do, and eat. Auntie Sharon says that her three boys “pray for their bed, toys, friends at school and at church, and food…” She explains that the children pray for what they see during the day. But children also pray about “people they know,” Uncle Gershom explains, like mom, dad, friends, and grandparents. Arguably the things they pray for could be seen as superficial, but regardless parents still feel that it provides a window into their thoughts and lives. During a discussion at the mothers’ Bible study, Auntie Sharon realized that her children’s playmates are really at church, for she hears her children pray more often for peers at church than those at school.

Praying out loud is a way of communicating with those around you, although it is different from direct communication since one’s eyes are often closed and you are speaking directly to God and not necessarily to the others around you. But invariably you are talking indirectly to those around you. And thus talk within prayer at home is shaping relationships between parents and their children.

What about interpersonal relationships among the children at church? Is talk about and talk within prayer in Sunday schools affecting those connections? For many children and youth, the answer is yes. As Auntie Sharon realizes, her children’s friends are those who go to church with them. The same is true for the majority of youth who attend Spirit Church. In a questionnaire, I asked them whether they “felt closer” to their friends at church or their friends at school. Out of the 17 who responded to the question, 14 of them said they felt closer to their friends at church. Some explained that it was because of the “spiritual connection they felt with their friends at church and that they could “talk about religion and anything without thinking twice.” They felt they could “relate” to their friends at church and felt “comfortable” with them. One explained that friends at church “keep me positive from doing wrong things that I am not
suppose[d] to do.” These close relationships are developing in spite of the fact that youth spend less time during the week with their church peers than their school peers, since they live in different towns and attend different schools. This means that the time they are spending with their peers at church discussing prayer and engaging in prayer with one another, among other activities, is cultivating that intimacy that fosters close friendships.

*Talk about* and *talk within* prayer is affecting children’s interpersonal development in other ways too. It is a way for children to “engage” with different kinds of individuals and groups of people. I put “engage” in quotes since the relationships being cultivated are ones in thought, not necessarily in action. By naming people or entities in their prayers, children are engaging others inclusively. As Denna’s closing prayer above shows, prayers are offered for those who are both known and unknown to the pray-er. In the vignette, Hannah (7) prays, “If [other children’s] sisters or brothers [in the group] are not here, I pray they get better.” In other Spirit Church classes, Mama Danica has asked for volunteers in her class to pray for the church, the country, the president, and the sick, among others. As Baquedano-López notes, prayers often link pray-ers to “larger collectiv[ies]” (2000:198). It is important to note that some of these entities are secular and some are sacred. Therefore, in one sense, I argue that discussions about prayer and the act of praying promote positive interpersonal engagements, meaning they are inclusive of others. They create interpersonal connections across different kinds of boundaries — religious affiliation, age, race/ethnicity, etc.

However, in another sense, discussions about prayer and the act of praying can have a negative effect on interpersonal relationships. It can disconnect and distance children from others, particularly peers at school who do not pray. In one Sunday school class, after a discussion about where and when to pray, Leah (6) tells Mama Regina that she does not have
anywhere to pray at school. Mama Regina suggests the bathroom, but Leah says that there are people in the bathroom. Mama Regina tells her then to lower her head to her desk; no one has to know what she is doing. Even at the age of 6, Leah recognizes that not all of her peers pray, nor is it appropriate for her to pray out loud in school. The youth encounter similar dilemmas. I ask Magda (19) whether she talks about faith with her school friends. She says she has but they have their “own opinions,” and as a result she has gotten into “arguments with friends and teachers.”

In learning about and engaging in prayer at home and at church, children and youth are being socialized to be pray-ers, a fundamental performative marker of being Christian. This creates a difficult paradox. On the one hand, children are being socialized to engage and connect with a diversity of other entities, both secular and sacred, through prayer. On the other hand, this disconnects and isolates them from some of their peers, particularly the diverse set they encounter in public schools, who are not Christian and do not perform this type of ontological marker.

In sum, children are “engaging” with different individuals and groups of people through prayer both at home and at church. This happens as they pray in the presence of others and offer prayers for others.

**Conclusion**

When I asked parents about the hopes they have for their children, many of them said they want their children to have a relationship with God and to have a better life than they have had (see Introduction). Thus, parents not only pray with their children at home, but also bring them to church on Sundays and other days of the week to learn about God and how to communicate with Him. Parents hope that by developing an ability to talk with God, their
children will be able to lead better lives, meaning better Christian lives by thinking and acting differently when faced with challenges and needing material and spiritual fulfillment.

Being able to pray effectively, either privately or publicly, is challenging. It requires training, although some may have a proclivity to organize their thoughts, speech, and body in this way. Church leaders, parents, and parent-teachers help children develop this skill through specific talk about and talk within the practice of praying. As children engage in these practices they learn the nuts and bolts of prayer — including the lexicon, syntax, and kinetics — as well as the ideologies associated with prayer. The mastery of this skill depends on practice, study of the Bible, life experiences, age, proclivity, and a gift from the Holy Spirit. In these ways, children progress in their spiritual development and cultivate their identities as a believer, or born again Christian. Even Leah, who is only 6, understands that praying is fundamental to this community of practice. When parent-teacher Mama Regina asks the children, “In the life of a Christian, what do you have to do?” Leah responds, “Pray.” The processes of socialization described above equip these children to deal with the world around them in a particular way and simultaneously puts them in a different world than their peers who are not believers (see Luhrmann 2012). These children are learning that they must pray to affect the course of their life — for the better and to stave off the perils. But in learning to approach the world in this way, they are developing a worldview distinct from non-believers, which can inhibit social relationships with people who are different from them. To be sure, non-believers have distinct worldviews too, which can inhibit social relationships with believers. In either case, it is important to explore the processes that lead to the construction of these worldviews and to unearth the challenges that children may be encountering as a result of that.
In the next chapter, we will also look at how children’s intrapersonal and interpersonal development is affected by the ways they are being socialized to engage with the Bible, another integral practice to this community.
Chapter 5
Learning to Embody the Word

At the end of the hallway outside the church’s inner sanctuary where regular services are conducted, the room narrows towards the back staircase. In this little alcove, Mama Regina, one of the parent-teachers of Spirit Church’s Sunday school class, and the children set up a few rows of chairs: two to each side with a narrow passageway down the middle that only a child’s slim frame could fit through. This is the youngest Sunday school’s makeshift classroom. Eight children, ages 3 to 8, slide into the chairs, a few of them sharing a single chair. As soon as they are settled, Mama Regina asks them if they have done the homework she asked them to do — to read a chapter from Genesis in the Bible. (I am surprised that they have “homework” at such a young age and that it involves “reading” since I know many of the children are just learning to read.) Mama Regina calls on her son, Simon (9), to recount the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden. It seems fitting that in my first observation of a Sunday school class that the class is discussing one of the first “stories” in the Bible about the state of man after the world had just been created by God. Simon recounts (in English) the details of the story rather fluidly, signaling his familiarity with the story. Mama Regina reviews details of the story again by asking questions of other children. She speaks mostly in English, her third language. As the class discusses how Adam disobeyed God, Mama Regina asks the children what happens when they do things wrong at home and what should they do. The children talk about “saying sorry.” She then explains the message of the story and the message of her Sunday school lesson: everyone makes mistakes and that is when you should say, “Sorry.” She repeats her message in Kiswahili. Two of the youngest girls, Cayla (4) and Amaris (4), fidget and play around in their chairs during the discussion. At one point, Mama Regina reminds them, “Be nice… God is watching
everything you do.” The other children, led by Ivria (8), tell the girls that they should say, “Sorry to God.” At the end of class, Mama Regina remind the children to read the story of Adam and Eve in the Bible for homework and remember the consequences. Gil (7) pipes up, “But I don’t know how to read.” Mama Regina responds, “Then you [are] going to ask Mom and Dad.” I notice that Mama Regina has a well-worn Bible (in English) in her lap, but she never opens it nor points to it during the 30-minute lesson. She only refers to the text once or twice by saying, “The Bible says…”

The Bible and its stories are central features of Christian Sunday school classes. However, the specific ways in which the Bible is used and referenced are different from class to class, church to church. Is the actual text present in the class? How are scripture and stories discussed: are words from the text read out loud or are the details of a story retold by a teacher or elicited through a conversation with children? How literally is the Bible taken? Why is the Bible considered important? These different ways are affected by religious doctrine and local ideologies, and in turn affect how people (children in this case) see themselves, their relationship to God and His Word (i.e the text), and how they approach the world around them, making decisions and forming relationships with others. This chapter explores the ways that teachers and parent-teachers in Sunday school classes (as well as parents at home) socialize children to engage with the Bible in particular ways, as well as how they use the Bible to socialize children to think and act in certain ways. Engaging with the Bible in these ways enables them to participate in this community of practice and position themselves as believers.
Literacy and the Embodiment of Text

In Sunday school, children learn reading conventions different from those in school (Zinsser 1986). Whereas teachers in school may focus children’s attention to the identification of letters and their sounds; reading a book in its entirety from front to back; and/or deciphering the author’s message embedded in symbolism and metaphor; parent-teachers in Sunday school orient children toward the Bible in other ways. Learning these ways are important for children to be able to participate in this community of practice and be recognized as believers. How is the Bible used in Sunday school? And for what purpose? These are the questions I take up here.

The emphasis on “ways” of engagement with text is the result of a sociocultural perspective of literacy. Literacy is not just a set of decontextualized cognitive skills (e.g. phoneme and grapheme awareness), but rather multiple social practices laced with meaning and purpose particular to certain contexts (Street 1984, 1993; see also Barton and Hamilton 1998; Gee 1990; Heath 1983; Street 2005). And so I analyze literacy events, or “occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (Heath 1986:98), in order to articulate the literacy practices, or “‘folk models’ of those events and the ideological preconceptions that underpin them” (Street 1993:12-13). The ways that children use text are critical to their “cultural apprenticeship into a community’s values, social positions, and identities (Sterponi 2011; see also Garrett Baquedano-López 2002; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986a and 1986b). This is the essence of literacy socialization. Literacy is often a means to an end (Cochran-Smith 1984; Scollon and Scollon 1981; Teale 1986). In the context of school, the ways one interacts with the printed word is a socialization process of “mak[ing] readers” (Cochran-Smith 1984). In the context of church, the ways one interacts with the Bible is for a different purpose.
For which purpose is that? Bielo (2009) underscores the important interplay between text and action in his ethnography of men’s Bible studies in American evangelicalism. In Bible study, the men spend their time debating the meaning of what they read in the Bible (and other texts) and how it applies to their lives (see also Luhrmann 2012 on the way apophatic prayer exercises connect text to life for American evangelical Christians). Bible study participants go out into the world to try out their new perspective and return to Bible study to debrief. The Bible thus serves to inform their understanding of their place in the world and affect behavior. In effect, there exists a “social life of scriptures,” as Bielo describes. “Sacred texts — like the Christian scriptures — are not only sources of spiritual revelation, they are also powerful incitements to action.” Bibles go with their readers physically and/or in thought to a myriad of different settings and situations. “The scripture remains present as an embodied and remembered text structuring Evangelicals’ engagement with the world” (2009:159). This is an important principle that parent-teachers try to emphasize in their Sunday school classes with children and youth.

In order to affect behavior, embodiment becomes a key goal, driving the way parent-teachers talk about and engage children in the use of the Bible. The body has long been a domain of theoretical interest among social scientists. Marcel Mauss pointed out in his famous 1934 essay, “Techniques of the Body” (1973) that “there is perhaps no ‘natural way’ for the adult [to walk]” (74). The way one walks, swims, digs a ditch, marches, etc. reflects the “habits” of different societies. He uses the Latin term, *habitus*, to describe these types of imitative action. Building on Mauss’ idea of techniques of the body and *habitus*, Bourdieu defines the term as the “systems of durable transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures” (1994:53, see also 1977). These “dispositions” are produced in practice through “conditionings,” or limits imposed by structures, which are products of enduring
practices. It is a perpetual loop. *Habitus* is thus “regulated” and “regular” but not necessarily determined by historical experiences more or less appropriated by, and thus unconscious to, the individual. It exists in the grey matter between objective determinism and subjective freedom. Bourdieu describes *habitus* as “‘durable’” because it is effectively embodied, “inscribed in the body and in belief” (58), producing particular “thoughts, perceptions, expressions and actions” (55). Important to this study, *habitus* serves as a coping mechanism, “enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and constantly changing situations” (61).

Embodiment is not necessarily a new focus of study in the anthropology of religion, particularly Christianity. In a study of a mega church in Tennessee and the history of evangelical Christian theology, Elisha (2008) argues that evangelical Christianity is more than an espousal of doctrine or belief in certain doctrine; rather it is about the continual effort to embody moral qualities and lean on the divine agency of God. As one evangelical businessman describes: “‘As Christians, we’re not perfect. I mean we’re still human beings. There is a process, and if we pursue it, Christ can help us turn around and be different. Once you place your faith in Christ, his actual spirit lives in you from that point on. He lives in me, and he influences everything that I do. We’re not puppets. We still have free will, but we have the ultimate influence and power within us if we want to draw upon that’” (2008:58). This effort leads to the development of a different understanding of self — “a Christian intersubjective self” (Elisha 2008).

In the following chapter, I describe and analyze the similarities and differences in how parent-teachers, children, and youth engage with the Bible and its stories in the Sunday school classes I observed at Spirit Church for children 0-13 years old and youth 10-20 years old (note: the age range overlaps and shifted while I conducted research) and at Grace Church for children 8-11 years old and youth 12-15 year olds. In this community of practice, I argue that they are
being socialized to embody the text and its meanings, which in turn affect their perception of the way the world is organized and how they should behave in it. In effect, their use of the Bible aims to condition the habitus of children and youth so that they are able to cope with unpredictability and demonic assaults in the world outside of church. In this community of practice, this embodied dimension is an important part in the socialization of children and youth to be and become believers.

Engaging with the Bible through its Stories

In the vignette, Mama Regina and the children in her class spend the entire 30 or so minutes of class discussing an important story in the Bible about Adam and Eve from the Book of Genesis. Yet, she never opens the actual book. Instead of reading the story directly from the Bible, she elicits and reviews the details of the story by engaging the children in conversation. She first relies on her own son, Simon (9), to elicit the major parts of the story, presumably since she knows he is familiar with it from their discussions at home. And then to help others remember this important biblical story, she asks those children questions that focus on the details of the story just told. This vignette exemplifies how children and parent-teachers most often engage with the Bible — orally through its well-known stories.

The Bible is considered the divinely inspired “Word of God” as articulated by human authors. Although referred to as “the” Bible, which suggests a single book and author, it is actually a collection of books, written originally in three languages by about 40 known and unknown authors covering about 1,500 years of history. These books tell a number of different stories — some historical on the origin of the world and man, others poetic offering wisdoms on ideal belief and behavior, and still others prophetic or written as letters. Different religious
denominations of Judaism and Christianity recognize different books as part of their biblical canon. These books are divided into two sections - the Old and New Testaments - and then are further broken down into chapters and verses. The Old Testament is about God’s chosen people, the Hebrews (also known as the Israelites or the Jews), and their migration to the promised land of Israel, escaping famine and enslavement. The New Testament is about the son of God, Jesus, who is sent as a savior for the people’s sins. It details his birth, life and spiritual work in service to others, his death, and resurrection. Although different sects of Judaism and Christianity recognize the authority of different books, there are common themes among them: the authority of one God over the world and its peoples; His love of everyone in spite of their differences; the good and evil in the world which man must constantly choose between; and the salvation of man from sin through God’s direct help or through the help of different prophets and His son, Jesus (Leitch n.d.). Moreover, regardless of which books are considered part of the canon, the Bible is considered an authoritative guide on how to think and act in the world.

Interestingly, these aspects about the Bible are not the center of Sunday school classes. Rather, conversations between children and parent-teachers focus on stories told in the Bible, and really only well-known stories contained within some of the more widely recognized books, like Genesis. Therefore, in these classes, parent-teachers and children most often engage indirectly with the actual text of the Bible. As we see in the vignette, the Bible is neither opened nor the text read. This is not to say that the Bible is never opened or read, but rather in Sunday school classes particularly with the younger children it happens much less frequently. On the one hand, this is a function of the fact that some of the younger children are just learning “how to read,” meaning cognitively being able to decode and encode text. Relatedly, parent-teachers sometimes say they do not have enough “time” to read the Bible with the children. But I argue
that the practice suggests that they are learning “how to read” this important text in a different way. Let’s examine some examples more closely.

Parent-teachers do not just focus on the general gist of a story, they emphasize its details. In one Sunday school class, Mama Regina and the children discuss one of the three miracles Jesus performs in the Bible. Mama Regina asks the children for one of them. Rachel (10) offers the story of when he served 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish. Mama Regina encourages her to speak loudly. She then launches into a series of questions. She asks Ilana, her daughter (10), how many people she has in her house. When Ilana says 7, she asks her if she can imagine trying to feed 5,000 and with such little food. Mama Regina asks if 5,000 people could fit in church and the children laugh. Then she asks a trick question, how many people got none after Jesus had distributed the food? Ilana says none and Mama Regina challenges her again. Ilana sticks to her answer and reaches for the stack of Bibles on the table as if looking to corroborate her response. Mama Regina tells her to hold off and the class continues. In her series of questions, Mama Regina draws comparative examples from their lives — such as how many people they have in their families and how many people could fit in their church — to try to make the children really understand the sheer number of people there were to feed. One could argue that this is an insignificant detail — who cares if it was five or 5,000 people? But by drilling a detail of this story, Mama Regina makes it more vivid and thus memorable for the children. It helps children remember the main point of the story: God can perform miracles if you believe in Him.

This example also demonstrates that no part of a story is insignificant nor can be glossed over. In fact, facts and accuracy are important. At home, when most parents read stories from the Bible to their children, they engage in a question and answer period afterwards (and occasionally
some questions during the reading). Questions are primarily those concerned with fact. These questions do not ask the children for their interpretation, but rather their ability to recall details of the story pertaining to characters, events, etc. In her study of families in the Piedmont Carolinas, Shirley Brice Heath (1983) found that families differed in their emphasis on facts of a story or embellishments of its details. Like the families from Roadville, the families in my study valued the facts, as opposed to an embellished version of the story.

In addition to knowing some or all of the details of a story, children are also encouraged to apply the story to their life and derive a moral lesson. This is often by seeing oneself as the protagonist of the story, identifying their thoughts and actions as one’s own. In the portrait of Mama and Baba Furaha’s family, we see that they have deliberately structured their family Bible reading so that children practice this type of connection (see chapter 2). In selecting the story of Abraham sacrificing his son, Furaha (11) finds a moral lesson: “When god tells you to do something you have to do it even when it sounds crazy or silly. Always trust god because he knows what he is doing for you and you just have to believe him and trust him because its for the good and than at the end god told him that he was testing him.” Likewise in the vignette, Mama Regina connects Adam’s behavior to that of the children — just as he was disobedient so too are children — and further adds the lesson that when one disobeys, one should say, “Sorry.”

Drawing a connection between text and life is a common practice among evangelical Christians (Bielo 2009; Luhrmann 2012). In this case, the use of the text (i.e. the application of the story to one’s life) influences the way these children see themselves, their relationships with others, and with God. For one, it suggests to them that they, like all humans, are fundamentally flawed; they will make mistakes. In consequence, in making a mistake, which is construed as disobedience,
one should acknowledge his or her wrongdoing and apologize, even to God, as illustrated in the vignette.

The Bible is perpetually extrapolated to the lives of those who discuss its stories. Thus even though it is a historical text, it remains ever present (Bielo 2009). The most common protagonist with whom the children are encouraged to identify is Jesus. In Sunday school, Mama Danica announces that the children will “learn about the life of Jesus.” She says they do not have time to read the Bible. Instead, she asks, “What do you know about Jesus?… How did Jesus come to Earth?” Ilana (10) explains that an Angel came to the King and told him that the King of the Jews was coming and the King wanted to kill Jesus. Mama Regina expresses pleasant surprise because she recalls telling her that story a long time ago. Mama Danica acknowledges that an Angel predicted that Mary would have a baby and King Herod did not like that. But God prevented Jesus from being killed. He grew up in Nazareth. One time his parents took a trip to a temple. She explains that the temple is where they could learn about God. Jesus’ parents left the temple and realized later that Jesus was not with them. So they went back to the temple and found him being taught by the elders. Jesus’ parents chided him but Jesus told them not to worry. “I’m in my father’s house,” he explains. In the temple, Jesus learns about the Bible. Mama Danica continues that at church we sing and pray because Jesus came to earth for our sins. Jesus “sets a good example for us” because he “go[es] to church, read[s] the Bible, obey[s] [his] parents, and pray[s].” Mama Danica continues, “So all kids should follow Jesus’ example as a little boy.” She switches to Kiswahili and repeats the same message to Solomon (8), who apparently doesn’t understand English as well. Returning to English, she says we should pray to God so that we will be like Jesus “in wisdom” and so that we will “become strong.” She will also “pray for grace of God to be upon you.” The Bible is full of stories of people doing things
“wrong” or “right,” as deemed by God. Jesus is presented as the model of good and appropriate behavior for children (as well as adults). As Mama Danica clearly articulates, Jesus “‘sets a good example… [for the children because he] go[es] to church, read[s] the Bible, obey[s] [his] parents, and pray[s].” These are critical behaviors parents and teachers are trying to instill in children and oral discussion of the Bible’s stories and its application to their lives is one of the ways they try to teach it.

These ways of engaging with the Bible are certainly not a unique practice at this church, nor within Pentecostalism. In many sects of Christianity, parents and teachers review the life of Jesus as a child, as well as other stories like Adam and Eve, in order to model appropriate behavior. The ubiquity of this story and others and the particular way in which it is used highlights a dominant pattern in the way that Christians engage with the Bible — through repetitive, communal, oral storytelling. Yet these practices are unique in comparison to the ways that children engage with books in school for example. Most often, children are asked to read a book cover to cover. And often times, they read it just once. In contrast, the Bible is rarely read cover to cover (although it is considered virtuous to do so). Instead, parts of it are read, or rather more often discussed in groups, and not necessarily in a particular order (although in some classes they more often follow the birth, life, death, and resurrection as it corresponds to Christian holidays that we celebrate during the calendar year). Thus, parent-teachers in Sunday school classes are really teaching children “how to read” this text in a different way. Emphasis and value is placed on “knowing” particular stories. Knowing entails being able to recall character names and main events, as well as vivid details. It also means being able to apply the story to one’s life and find ways for it to inspire certain thoughts and behaviors as deemed appropriate by God.
Engaging with the Bible through Games and Activities

At about 10:30 one Sunday, Subira (19), an occasional teacher for the younger Sunday school class, gathers the children outside the main church room in the hallway. Seven children sit on chairs and laps and wander around: Furaha (11), Edna (12), Caleb (9), Amaris (4), Gabriel (6), Livia (4), Leah (6). Two other girls join halfway through the class later: Bettina (13) and Libba (12). Subira pulls out her new flash cards: Bible Trivia and Memory Match. She gives the children a choice and they choose Memory Match. Like in other memory match games, she turns the cards face down and the children take turns turning over two cards. If they are the same card (i.e. they “match”), then they get to keep them. One of the cards displays a picture and reads, “Moses and the Ten Commandments.” After several turns, the children have matched all the cards. Subira announces that the next step is to “tell us the story,” based on the cards they have in their hand. If they have multiple sets of matches, they can select one. After the person has told the story, then anyone can ask them questions. Bettina (13) describes a few details of the story of Joseph and his coat. A discussion ensues in the group as to whether parents have favorite children. There is a choral yes in the group. Subira asks, “Does God love all his children equally?” The group leans towards yes but moves on. As the hour for the service approaches, Subira says in closing to her group of children, “It’s good to go back over stories…because we think we know…that’s my challenge to you…I want you to go back [to Bible].” That is their “assignment for next week.”

Since “knowing” a story, including the lesson it illustrates and its application to one’s life, is so important within this community of practice, parent-teachers develop other ways for children to engage with biblical stories besides oral discussion. Games and activities are another
way to engage with stories, particularly for the younger children. As we see in the fieldnote above, Subira makes use of games like trivia and memory match, which are specifically adapted to Christian topics. Likewise, Mama Danica suggests they play an adaptation of the game “Scattergories” to elicit their knowledge of biblical characters specifically. She explains that they will pick a letter of the alphabet and then name people in the Bible whose name begins with that letter. She suggests the letter “J.” The children participate eagerly. Rachel (10) shouts, “John.” Ilana (10) adds, “Joseph.” Mama Danica sometimes offers hints by describing details about them or a story in which they appear. She gives hints, trying to get them to think of the son of God. Rachel remembers, “Jesus.” Ilana says, “Jeremiah.” Simon (9) says, “Joshua.” Someone else shouts, “Judges.” Mama Danica explains that that is not a person, but rather a book of the Bible. Rachel thinks of “James.” Mama Danica hints, “Someone who was swallowed by…” Simon excitedly responds, “Jonah.” Mama Regina gives another hint, “They were twins. Esau and…” Simon again knows the answer, “Jacob.” Mama Danica suggests, “Someone in the Old Testament who got tested by God, and lost his animals, family, [his] body had boils, got sick, very miserable.” Mama Regina questions, “Starting with J?” Simon tries to get more clues, “What’s the next letter?” But Rachel already knows, “Job.”…The game continues for a few more minutes. Cayla (4) announces, “I start with a J.” Her mother, Mama Regina, laughs lightheartedly, “But you’re not in the Bible.” Nevertheless, Mama Danica is impressed with the group of children. She comments that they named more people than she had initially thought of. This little game is a way for parent-teachers to help keep different characters fresh in the children’s mind. They believe that children are often forgetful and easily distracted and thus continual repetition is necessary. Games and activities help to hold their attention and encourage
their participation. And certainly I found that whenever a class was “playing a game,” the children were much more active and engaged.

Beyond a tactic for getting their attention, these games and activities also serve to reinforce the story itself and its details. As we saw earlier in the class discussion about Jesus feeding 5,000 with little food, minute details are important for memory recall. And we see this playing out in the game above. With the suggestion of the slightest detail, like “Someone who was swallowed by…” Mama Danica jogs Simon’s memory of Jonah. The stories in the Bible that are most frequently discussed with children in Sunday school and Bible studies at home are quite vivid and dramatic (arguably traumatic). For example, Jonah is swallowed by a whale in a storm for disobeying God and later regurgitated onto dry land when he repents. Likewise, the story of Job describes how Satan destroys a righteous and prosperous man’s possessions, family, and body so that he will denounce God.

Not all parts of the Bible entail vivid stories. There are some parts that convey important beliefs and ways of being in the world. These wisdoms are also taught in Sunday school through activities that make them more vivid, and thus memorable, for children. In one Sunday school class at Grace Church, the children are split into two groups and work together on a large drawing of the “full armor of God.” On a human sized outline of a person, the children draw, color, and label his “armor” (Figure 6).
Towards the end of class, the parent-teachers, or “Aunties” as they are called at Grace Church, discuss the symbolic meaning of each part of armor. After Auntie Diana asks them to put away all of their markers, they tack both pictures of the soldiers to the opposite wall. She leads a discussion reviewing each part of the armor and its purpose with the children who are now sitting in their chairs. All the boys and girls self-segregate on opposite sides of the room. Auntie Diana
asks each person to raise his or her hand before answering her question about what each part means. The children eagerly raise their hands. The “Belt of Truth” — it is important to tell the truth “everywhere we go” “no matter the situation.” The “Shield of Faith” — “so you can believe in yourself” and Auntie Diana adds, “and God,” and “believe things are possible” and that “we will overcome.” Auntie Diana likens this part to a Roman soldier who needs to believe that they will win at war. She also likens it to taking a test in school and needing to believe that you will pass. Another girl adds that we will overcome our “fears.” The “Sword of the Spirit” is for “defense” and to know that the “spirit lives within us.” The “Breastplate of righteousness” is there “to protect your heart,” “to live in right living,” and “to protect from arrows from the enemy.” The drawing activity in this class serves to reinforce these important wisdoms through the use of symbolic imagery and color. Without an activity to generate a mental picture, it would be hard for these children to remember all of them: to tell the truth, believe in yourself and God, defend the Spirit inside of you, and protect your heart from the Devil. But with images of a belt, a shield, a sword, and a breastplate it is easier for children to remember them.

These games serve to increase their participation and attention and reinforce or create vivid images of stories to help memory recall. Games and activities serve an important function of creating and/or reinforcing sensory detail in these stories.

**Engaging with the Bible through Memory Verses**

Teachers do encourage the children to actually read the Bible. However, more commonly, the children and youth engage with the actual text through the memorization of particular passages. These passages are called “memory verses.” Parent-teachers always select the particular verse to memorize and choose one that corresponds with the biblical story or lesson.
that they are teaching. For example, when the children were learning about Jesus as a little boy, as described earlier, Mama Danica selects Luke 2:40 as the memory verse. The class discusses how they can be like Jesus by obeying their parents. Mama Danica summarizes their discussion and presents the memory verse, “That’s how we follow Jesus’ example. By being obedient. Can we repeat after me? Luke Chapter 2 Verse 40.” The children repeat after her, “Luke Chapter 2 Verse 40.” And then they repeat small segments of the verse after her:

And the child grew and became strong  
And was filled with wisdom  
And the favor of God  
Was upon him

Mama Danica explains, “This is a memory verse about Jesus growing up and becoming strong, physically and spiritually. And he was very wise ‘cause he learned about God.” One of the children asks for the location of it in the Bible. Instead, Mama Danica suggests, “Why don’t we say it one more time?” Mama Danica leads two more choral recitations. “Next time we’ll play a game with [the] memory verse. So you need to go home and memorize. So I will see who went and did their homework…When you go home, keep saying it in your head. Next Sunday, we’ll play a quick game so to reinforce it to make it more easier for you to memorize.” The memory verse serves to reinforce the lesson at hand. In this example, the class had just discussed how the children can be more like Jesus by listening to their parents. To remind them of the story of Jesus as a boy and how it applies to their life, Mama Danica gives them Luke 2:40 to memorize. And she makes the meaning clear. Furthermore, she suggests playing a game the following Sunday to help them memorize it. Memorization of biblical scripture is considered integral for children and youth (not to mention adults) to learn, for parents, teachers, and church leaders believe that children will be able to recall it when they are in need of support or guidance.
Frequently when parent-teachers do a memory verse in their class, children point out that the passage was written differently in another Bible. This came up in the class I just described. The class sings a song and the parent-teachers help the children to pray out loud. They repeat the memory verse one more time together. “Very good. You guys already memorized it,” Mama Danica praises. Caleb (9) interjects, “My Bible says it this way.” Mama Danica explains, “Yeah. You see Bibles, there are different ones… They’re gonna — it’s all going to be different. That’s why I picked one version of the Bible for us to memorize ‘cause if everyone memorizes their own different version they are going to get a little confused. But they all mean the same thing. So that’s why it’s more easier when everyone says one uniform thing. So whatever, we just did keep memorizing that. That’s the version I want you to learn. Ok?” There are over 50 different versions, or translations, of the Bible in English even within Christianity. These were written at different times in history and thus tend to have the lexicon and syntax characteristic of that era.

Some of the more popular versions in this community of practice include the King James Version (KJV) and the New International Version (NIV). What’s more, children are often given “Children’s Bibles,” which has text that has been further simplified and updated to more modern speech patterns. They also often only contain some of the most familiar stories in the Bible accompanied by pictures, such as the stories of Jesus as a boy, Joseph, Job, and Jonah. Therefore, when parent-teachers select memory verses, the verse they select is inevitably different from ones that the children may have access to. This includes versions available on smart phones: Ilana (10) once pointed out that the verse on Rachel’s (10) iPhone was different from the verse they were memorizing. Every time this conflict is pointed out, the parent-teachers downplay its significance and do not go into detail about why there are different versions. As Mama Danica explains, different translations are not a big deal because “they all mean the same thing.”
being said, when memorizing the memory verse, parent-teachers always insist that the children memorize the same version. Ironically, Mama Danica says this is so that children do not get “confused,” however by bringing up the fact that there are different versions, the children are signaling their confusion. Notwithstanding the children’s confusion, parent-teachers emphasize the importance of memorizing verses verbatim.

Although children are discouraged from memorizing different versions of the same verse, they are allowed to interpret the meaning of memory verses differently. In one Sunday school class at Spirit Church, Mama Regina leads a discussion about the story of Jesus saving the disciples stranded in a boat in a storm by walking on water and its associated memory verse. She asks them what the memory verse is. Simon (9) says Matthew 14:27: “When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear.” Simon at first says Matthew 14:26, but Mama Regina gives him a look to suggest that that is not right and so he corrects himself. She then asks Ilana to recite it (skipping over little Mireille (1) and Cayla (4)). She then turns to Rachel but Rachel says she does not know it. Mama Regina asks Ilana to repeat the memory verse again but this time not as automatically: she wants her to talk about what that memory verse teaches her. Ilana stops fidgeting with her purse and recites it again a little more slowly. She then says, “This teaches me that when you are with Jesus you shouldn’t be afraid because He is with you.” Mama Regina comes to Rachel, but Rachel again says that she does not know the verse. Mama Regina chides her briefly, urging her to memorize it. She then turns to Simon who recites it and says, “It taught me that when you are in trouble, you should pray and God will help you.” Like discussions of stories, memory verses always include a discussion about how they apply to the children’s lives and what they can learn from it. As we see here, whereas Ilana says she learns that Jesus is always with her, Simon says that it
teaches him to pray to God so that He can help when you are in trouble. Mama Regina does not correct their interpretation of the memory verse, and thus validates that all interpretations are acceptable. (Pastor Elijah once explained to me that actually these are not interpretations but rather “revelations” from God, which is why differences are not curtailed.) On the other hand, Mama Regina is quick to have Simon correct himself when he misattributes the actual verse. Accuracy in the recitation of scripture, including the exact chapter and verse, is important, whereas it does not necessarily apply to meaning of the verse to each person. This means that the meaning derived from the text does not remain stagnant. Rather, the constant encouragement to compare one’s thoughts and behaviors to those presented in the Bible means that meaning can and does change in different circumstances, over a lifespan, and for different people.

Like children, youth are tasked with memorizing verses, and since they are older, they are asked to memorize longer verses and write them down. At Grace Church, in a small square room with yellow painted walls, blue institutional-feeling carpet, and boxes overflowing and stacked high in one corner, Auntie Helen sits at a long desk with a small globe and few papers and binders on it. She manages the young teenagers coming in and out. She sends her daughter, Tamra (12), out of the room to take a “test” that she missed from last week. She says she wants the youth to remember scripture, and the only way to make sure that happens is to test them, she says with a smile and lighthearted laugh. “If they know scripture, it helps them to pray better…[and helps them] in their daily lives.” She continues that memorizing the scripture helps in that it shows you what God wants you to do in a situation. Especially at their age in school, they encounter bullying and feelings of not being wanted. She is talking directly to me now, but in that small room with the teens milling about, they can certainly hear just the same. The scripture will “help them feel stronger,” she emphasizes. To that end, she gave them a test last Sunday for
which they had to write Psalms 91, up to verse 8. After a few minutes, Tamra comes back into
the room handing her mother a piece of paper with the requested scripture written down. Auntie
Helen looks it over, consults her Bible, and announces that she missed part of verse 8. Tamra
quips, “Mommy, your Bible is different from my Bible.” Auntie Helen asks for her daughter’s
Bible and upon consultation, Tamra indeed made a mistake regardless of the fact that her mother
has the St. James version of the Bible. Later, Auntie Helen comments that her Bible is not as
understandable in the way that it is written, as the Bibles that the youth have. The teenagers have
started to gather and sit down in the semi-circle of chairs arranged around the room. She
announces that next they will be memorizing Psalms 91, now from 9 onwards (she does not
mention to what verse). She negotiates with them how much time they want to memorize it.
They settle on one month. She then starts in on her lesson for Sunday school. Accuracy is
important in writing memory verses, just as it is for younger children who memorize and recite
them orally. And similarly as Auntie Helen explains so well, the point of memorizing scripture is
to “help[] them… in their daily lives,” especially at school as they face being ostracized.
Memory verses help children recall biblical stories and thus their lessons, which they hope will
“help them feel stronger” and make the right (as God would deem) decisions. To some degree,
“knowing” the general gist of stories is not enough, memorization is key because the desire for
recall and application to real world scenarios.

**Engaging with the Bible through Homework and Tests**

To support the memorization of verses verbatim, parent-teachers often “assign” children
and youth “homework” and “tests.” As we see above, Auntie Helen tests the youth to write out
word for word Psalm 91: 1-8. Likewise, Mama Danica encourages the children to “keep saying
[the memory verse] in your head” at home. In the vignette at the beginning of the chapter, Mama Regina asks the children who “read” the chapter of Genesis for homework. Since homework and tests are concepts and activities typically associated with actual school, this begs two questions: 1) How are homework and tests in church similar to or different from those in school, and 2) Why do parent-teachers use homework and tests in church?

Sunday school does bear some resemblance to actual school: it is a “class” that is offset from other activities at church; there are “teachers”; and teachers usually prepare a “lesson.” But Sunday school is markedly different from actual school. For one, “teachers” are often parents of the children, which creates different kinds of relationships and power dynamics. Moreover, children are not required to be there and their attendance certainly fluctuates at church. Even when children and youth are late, they are never reprimanded and instead “welcome[d] in the name of Jesus,” as Pastor Elijah once said. Likewise, “homework” in church is similar and different from its kin in school. Most importantly, teachers in both school and Sunday school see the importance of trying to connect school/church to home. This connection is arguably closer between home and church, since it is assumed that children are “reading” the same text at home with parents as they are in church with parent-teachers. Accountability for homework, though, is arguably different in church than it is in school. In school, homework typically involves some sort of written work that is handed in and checked for accuracy, or at least checked that it was “done.” If it is not completed, there are various consequences, like lowering a grade or calling home. In church, however, homework rarely involves some sort of written work to be handed in or accountability for the fact that it was “done.” More so parent-teachers are interested in encouraging the end-goal — that children “know” a particular story or memory verse. This can be “tested” by asking children to repeat the details of a story or a memory verse. And if a child is
not able to repeat it, parent-teachers either further encourage them or mildly chide them. When Mama Danica asks the children to practice Luke 2:40 at home for homework, she warns them that she will “know” if they did not practice since they will not be able to do well in the game that she has planned.

Whereas “tests” are usually oral assessments for younger children, “tests” are more often written assessments for the youth. Memory verses assigned to youth tend to be longer than those assigned to children, who usually memorize just one verse. As was described above at Grace Church one Sunday, Auntie Helen tests the youth in her class to write out verbatim Psalms 91:1-8, which she had had them memorize over the course of a few weeks. In addition to memory verses, youth are also tested on their comprehension of particular concepts or scripture that the class has discussed. Over a series of Sundays at Spirit Church, Imani and the youth in her class discussed the Devil. At the end of the unit, she gave them a test (Figure 7), for which they had to “answer the question[s]”, “give scripture” and “examples to support” their argument and “make the connection to the real world or your experience.” Like the younger children, the youth are expected to be able to apply scripture and stories to their lives. Written tests are used to reinforce those connections.
Like “homework,” “tests” administered in church are similar to and different from those in school. For example, Imani corrects and “grades” the tests she gives the youth. Initially, she graded it using a deductive point system out of a possible 100 points, like many grade school teachers do. In fact, she was a public high school teacher for 5 years. She quickly realized, though, that this type of grading system was not working for the youth because their written English made it difficult to understand their answers. Even when they read their answers out loud on Sunday to review the test, I too had a difficult time understanding them. Therefore, Imani developed a new grading system: instead of deducting points out of a total number, she gave
them points for any “right” answers without a total number of possible points. When she described the system to me, it seemed like a great way to reward them for their “spiritual development,” as she calls it, as opposed to penalizing their English. She tried to explain to the youth, “I don’t want you to fail.” However, this innovative system was not well received; many youth were confused and did not see its value. As Elia (14) questioned, “How do you know if you did good? I don’t get it.” Imani tried to explain using an analogy: it is like salvation, if you are saved you have the opportunity to try it again and again. “The point is that you grow… I know you get grades in school… [but] we’re not operating this like school.” In spite of her efforts to distinguish Sunday school from school the youth had a hard time acting like this test was different from any other they take: when they got their test back many nudged their neighbor asking what they got.

Regardless of the similarities and differences between school and Sunday school, Imani and the other parent-teachers agree that homework and tests, whether informal or formal assessments, are important tools in their classes. They believe that these kinds of activities and assessments help children pay attention and learn the stories and scripture. Again, “knowing” stories and scripture accurately is the most important. As Imani articulates, the test is intended to test whether they “know scripture.” If you don’t know the scriptures, people doubt whether you are “able to act on” them. “Knowing” is assumed to produce change, to inspire more godly thoughts and behavior. Moreover, as Auntie Helen points out, knowing scripture will “help them feel stronger,” especially at their age in school (middle and high school in her case) as they encounter bullying and feelings of not being wanted. In sum, learning memory verses, reinforced through homework and tests, is essentially learning the language of God and thus hearing how He wants you to think and act in the world.
Embodying the Word

The examples presented above show how central the Bible is to Sunday school class. In fact, although called Sunday school, classes at church for children and youth are effectively Bible studies, which is what they are called for adults. Parent-teachers plan their lessons around the study of the characters and events in the Bible in order to inspire thought and behavior in children as God intended. They believe behavioral changes happen by “knowing” particular stories in the Bible — meaning being able to recall the characters, main events, vivid details, and the moral lesson — and “knowing” particular verses in the Bible — meaning being able to orally recall, and in some cases write, verses from memory and the lessons they teach children. Thus, parent-teachers and children engage in a perpetual loop of review through oral re-storytelling, games, activities, memory verses, homework, and tests. These ways are intended to change children’s behavior toward a certain end: To be Christian in thought and action.

Parent-teachers hope that knowledge of biblical stories and scripture will help children act in certain ways in the world. In Grace Church Sunday school’s discussion about the “full armor of God,” Auntie Diana makes this desire explicit. She concludes, “I hope we all put on the full armor of God.” She asks the children, “Why?” One child responds that it’s there “to protect from the Devil’s evil tricks” and another quotes the Ephesians’ memory verse about the “Devil’s schemes.” Auntie Diana encourages the children to “share with someone at home what we learned.” She asks the children to repeat what they have learned about the different parts of God’s armor. Again the “Devil’s schemes” comes up and she asks what these are. The children offer: to lie, steal, swear, kill and destroy, and distract you. Auntie Diana expands on each one. For example, the children may hear swearing in the Mall, Boston, or school, but as “children of
God” they “have to know better.” One girl explains about distraction and how your mother might be calling you but the Devil distracts you with the TV and you choose not to respond. Auntie Diana adds that this could be with TV, computer, friends, video games, or music. One boy says that he has learned from his mother to “memorize scripture” in order “to chase the devil away.” More than just “knowing” scripture (i.e. being able to recount the meaning of it), Auntie Diana intends for scripture to be embodied. As Auntie Diana says, “I hope we all put on the full armor of God.” In so doing, she encourages the children to be a “child of God” and thus not engage in ungodly behavior like swearing, which their peers or other adults may be doing in public places.

As Bielo (2009) has described, scripture is intended to remain ever present in an individual; it is meant to be embodied and thus takes on a “social life” of its own.

Furthermore, the embodiment of text is intended as metaphorical protection against the “Devil’s evil tricks” or “schemes.” As the children articulate, the Devil can manifest in various “distractions,” which could be otherwise benign activities or people. This can then distract you from more godly behavior, like respecting and obeying your parents. In other words, more than just inspiration for Christian-like thought and behavior, the Bible and its words can be used as weapons of attack to “chase the Devil away,” as one boy says. In this case, embodying the Word of God has a physical effect like a weapon, but also an emotional effect in that it can “help them feel stronger,” as Auntie Helen explains. This psychological and physiological aspect echoes Bourdieu’s understanding of habitus as “inscribed in the body and in belief” (1994:58).

Moreover, as Bourdieu explains, habitus can serve as a way to “cope” (1994:61) with the Devil operating in their world.

These parent-teachers also believe that “knowing” biblical stories and scripture helps you to better communicate with God. Since the Bible is considered literally the Word of God,
learning its stories and memorizing scripture is essentially learning to understand and speak the language of God. Reciting the words of God (i.e. memory verses) is like having God speak through you. This is another kind of embodiment. If one is able to recall the Word of God spontaneously in a time of need, it is as if He is speaking directly to you by delivering that particular passage to you. Thus, in “knowing” biblical stories and scripture, you embody the culture so to speak embedded in its language and thus are better able to communicate with Him.

As Luhrmann (2004) has pointed out in her study of American evangelical Christians, learning particular linguistic patterns, including lexicon, syntax, and conversion narrative styles, is important to the development of an intimate relationship with God characteristic of evangelicals. God is someone that can be a friend in a time of need, as opposed to a detached almighty being. Embodiment is a key part of this type of spiritual experience.

Remembering biblical stories is not an easy task. As I describe, parent-teachers focus children’s attention on biblical stories and key details to facilitate the embodiment of the Word. This technique has been shown to influence cognition. In a randomized control trial studying the effect of different prayer styles, Luhrmann and Morgain (2012; see also Luhrmann 2012) demonstrate that by using one’s imagination (not in the sense of make-believe but rather seeing things in one’s head) when praying affects cognition and spiritual experience. I argue that the process she documents and the one I describe here are similar. By dwelling on the details of stories (through discussion, activities, or tests) stories become more vivid and memorable. Luhrmann and Morgain call this inner sense cultivation: drawing attention to and imagining biblical stories cultivates more intense spiritual experiences. There is one important difference in the way Luhrmann and Morgain describe this process and the process I see happening among my participants: whereas Luhrmann and Morgain see inner sense cultivation happening through the
imaginary *embellishment* of key details in prayer (e.g. seeing oneself as Mary nine months pregnant on the long dusty road beneath a hot sun traveling to Bethlehem), my participants focus more on the vividness of *factual* details present in the Bible (e.g. Jesus feeds 5,000 people with five loaves of bread and two fish). Notwithstanding the difference, the purpose and effect remains the same: the embodiment of God and His Word which affects cognition and in turn one’s perception of the world around them — organized in terms of good and evil — and one’s understanding of self — which is never without God.

**Conclusion**

These beliefs and ways with the Word of God demonstrate that literacy in this community of practice is more than the ability to literally read the words on the page, as New Literacy Studies scholars have argued (Street 1984, 1993; see also Barton and Hamilton 1998; Gee 1990; Heath 1983; Street 2005). In other words, engaging with the Bible is not necessarily about actually decoding and encoding printed text, nor reading the text from beginning to end nor even reading the text necessarily. Instead, children begin to engage with particular parts of the Bible by discussing certain stories in the text with parents at home and parent-teachers and church leaders at church. “Knowing” a story includes knowing the sequence of events, characters, minute details, their moral lessons, and how it applies to one’s life. Other forms of engagement with the Bible entail games and activities, homework and tests, and most importantly memorizing particular passages, or “memory verses.” Essentially, children are engaging *orally* with the Bible through a *selection* of its stories and verses.

These forms of engagement are ways for children and youth to be a part of this community of practice. Indeed, their very ability to participate in this community is predicated on their
participation in discussion about these stories, which requires increasing knowledge about the characters, events, and minute details of the stories. Moreover, children are learning that the words — in recitation and in meaning - are meant to be embodied, so that they will think and act in the world in a godly way. Parents, parent-teachers, and church leaders hope that children will learn from these characters’ successes and mistakes and change their thought and behavior accordingly. In effect, through these ways with the Word of God, children are learning to identify as believers — psychologically and socially, implicitly and explicitly. On one level, the hope is that these children will learn from the embedded meanings in stories and scripture and will begin to think and act in the world in ways that reflect the values espoused in the text. Thus, engagement with the text is about *embodiment* of the text and its meanings. These are implicit ways to psychologically identify as a believer. On another level, in addition to embodying the values of the text, children are learning how to socially position themselves as believers. In knowing stories and scripture, they can refer to them explicitly in conversations with others. Referencing a story or particular scriptural passage, or even by saying, “The Bible says…,” is a way to explicitly identify oneself as a believer, or member of this community of practice. To “be” a Christian necessitates this kind of “literacy” in the Bible. Thus, embodiment and literacy are integral parts of the identity work in this community of practice.

In the next chapter, I further discuss ways of engaging with the Bible in order to explore another essential practice in this community: the delineation and defense of one’s faith.
Chapter 6
Learning to Delineate and Defend One’s Faith

One Saturday in October, right before Halloween, I accompany Furaha to a youth group meeting. Youth group is held every Saturday, or every other Saturday, mainly at Spirit Church. Imani has been leading the youth (ages 10-20 years old) since November 2011 after Pastor Elijah called upon her for help. She came to the U.S. in the last five years and started attending services at Spirit Church after two years. Despite the fact that she lives in Boston where she is pursuing a graduate degree, she commutes an hour and a half by bus each way to lead the youth Saturday and Sunday. As the youth gather, Imani asks them to circle the chairs in the church’s inner sanctuary and starts a few minutes after 11am. Today after their meeting they are going to do “service” for Brother Ruben, who shared his testimony two weeks ago about how he came to know and accept Jesus as his personal savior. Imani explains that they will be serving meals in a soup kitchen in order to support his ministry. She asks the youth, who have begun filling in about 15 seats, “Why do we do that?” The youth remain silent. Eventually a tall boy leaning back in his chair answers, “So they can see the love of God in us.” She says that is a good answer and adds that it is about “showing God’s love.” It is about how they can “live in faith” and “practice in faith.” She then poses a challenge: “Why do you believe what you believe?” There is silence. She explains that when they go out to do ministry and service people will ask them this question and she wants them to be able to answer it. She says that it is not enough to say that you believe in “Jesus as Lord.”

About two months later it is nearly Christmas. Adults and children arrive for Sunday Bible study and Sunday school before regular service with coats over their Western-style 3-piece suits and African-style skirt sets. About twenty youths make their way around the Chinese screen
dividing the room in two. Imani recaps the importance of Christmas: it is not about the giving and receiving of gifts, but rather the celebration of Jesus’s birthday because they have “faith” in his death and resurrection. She says that the problem with Christmas these days is that people are taking Christ out of Christmas. “We are living in a time when you can be deceived… [You can] doubt God or question your faith.” The way you “destroy” doubt, she reveals, is to read the Word of God. This will “fuel” your faith. She directs the youth to Matthew 16:13-16, 18, and 22. They take out their Bible and familiarize themselves with the story of Peter, who denies Jesus as the Son of God and then finally proclaims Him as the Messiah. Imani interprets, “Peter is like any one of us… Have you ever denied Jesus? Been ashamed of your faith?” She explains that just as Jesus challenges Peter because his mind was not in the right place, she is challenging them: “I challenge you to put away things that distract you from God.” She pinches her fingers together and thrusts them down to the open Bible in her lap. “Are you focused on what God wants or are you focused on what you want?… Can’t be half and half… [You] cannot fool Jesus.” She periodically asks for comments or questions, but the youth remain silent. She asks, “You all get it?… If I give you a test, you’ll all get it?” There is laughter among the youth but no responses. She continues, “Maybe you are challenged by,” she pauses, “the Internet.” One girl whispers to two others, “Facebook,” but her comment is inaudible to Imani. The other two girls laugh in agreement. Imani continues speaking about belief, commitment, and doubt for a few minutes before asking one of the youth to close in prayer. It is almost 11am and time for the main church service.

These kinds of conversations about belief and doubt are typical in youth group meetings on Saturdays and in Sunday school classes. Continually defining the psychological tenets and social implications of one’s beliefs and overcoming doubt through group discussion and reading the
Word of God are central practices to being a believer. They are defining themes in the socialization of these children and youth into this community of practice.

**Belief, Doubt, and Identity**

In the field of anthropology, “belief is a problem,” Steven Carlisle and Gregory Simon (2012) write, introducing a special edition on belief and subjectivity (“Believing Selves” in the psychological anthropology journal, *Ethos*). Recently, the term belief has come under attack because it is “conceptually misleading and ideologically dubious” (Linquist and Coleman 2008:2). Yet, Carlisle and Simon see that the ambiguity and contention over the term in the discipline reflects the actual struggles of our participants with what belief means and how it plays a role in their lives. Historically in anthropology, whereas Clifford Geertz (1973) asserts that “religious belief involves a prior acceptance of authority which transforms that experience” (109), Talal Asad (1983, 1993) argues that this understanding is a product of liberal, Christian thinking and thus cannot be applied cross-culturally. Asad, and similarly Durkheim (1915[1912]), sees beliefs as “the historical product of discursive processes” (1993:116) and thus may or may not be related to internal psychological convictions. Instead, following Weber (1958), Kirsch (2004), Cannell (2005), Stromberg (1993), Carlisle and Simon blur the distinction between psychological and social conceptualizations in their definition of belief: “We define belief as subjective commitments to truths, by which we mean subjective commitments to those truths as being true.” Beliefs are not definitively associated with doctrine or consciously espoused by subjects. Subjects must negotiate multiple discourses, which may be contradictory or ambiguous and thus can result in multiple truths. As a result, belief is located “in the *cultural and psychological processes* through which individuals work to integrate personal experiences
and socially learned doctrines and discourses — including those concerning what it means to believe — into truths to live through” (2012:223, emphasis added). Belief extends beyond mere acceptance of an idea; it entails continual work. As participants work or struggle through the ambiguity and contention, “they develop particular forms of believing selves” (2012:222). What does this work look like among participants? How do children and youth learn what belief in God means psychologically and socially? What kinds of “believing selves” must youth negotiate? This chapter explores these questions.

An integral part of belief is doubt, particularly in Pentecostalism, which is predicated on a series of dualisms (Robbins 2004). Luhrmann (2012) insightfully explains that even the most devout American Evangelical Christians encounter “darkness”: “the problem of faith is not finding the idea of God plausible but sustaining that belief in the face of disconfirmation” (278). Disconfirmation can manifest in tragic or traumatic experiences, or others’ skepticism about believing in something supernatural. Even one’s own thoughts can turn conviction into doubt. Identifying sources of doubt and overcoming them is a perpetual theme in Christianity, particularly in evangelical branches like Pentecostalism. One participant in Luhrmann’s study likened faith to “a battery that needs to be constantly recharged by ritual.” These rituals can take various forms. Luhrmann focuses on how prayer changes one’s internal senses. Imani and church leaders in this study promote reading and discussion around the Bible (along with prayer) as important rituals for delineating and defending one’s faith. Thus, I examine the processes of learning to perform a certain cultural subject position that identifies an individual as a believer and part of a born again Christian community.

To be clear, identities are not features of individuals or groups, but rather features of situations. As Bucholtz and Hall (2006) articulate, “[I]dentity inheres in actions, not in people”.

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Thus, identities are not “given,” but rather “negotiated and achieved” (Kulick and Schieffelin 2006:350). Thus, to achieve these identities, novices must learn how to position themselves in action and speech. As Lave and Wenger (1991) argue, this happens through social co-participation within a particular community of practice, whereby novices develop skills of performance through their participation in conversations and activities. These performances then become important ways for individuals to show that they are either part of a group or outside of it. In this community of practice, performances entail the use of both effective oral communication and written text. In order to position oneself within a particular subject position, you have to know not only what to say but also how to say it and how to back it up. Written texts and images become important “cultural artifacts” in this identity work (Bartlett and Holland 2002; see also Bartlett 2005). We will see that the Bible is used as the primary cultural artifact to create evidence for what belief means and also how to use the text in the delineation and defense of one’s beliefs.

Bible studies, like Sunday school class and youth group on Saturdays, are important spaces from which discourse about belief (and doubt) emerge (Bielo 2009). Discussions explore what it means to believe and how to live as a believer. For evangelicals, living as a believer involves “witnessing,” as Bielo describes it, which involves proclaiming the supremacy of God, claiming Jesus as one’s personal savior, and/or sharing how He has helped you in life. Bielo argues that conversations in Bible studies are in effect “backstage encounters,” a term he borrows from Goffman (1961), for participants to “create a preparatory discourse” for when they meet others outside of church. He explains, “All cultural groups have such ritualized forms of communication; ways of speaking that require a certain competence of what to say, how to say it, and what is expected from the act of saying specific things in specific ways” (2009:115). These
“ritualized forms of communication” develop in youth group and Sunday school and are ones that I analyze in this chapter.

In the following analysis, I examine the discourse surrounding belief and doubt and the use of cultural artifacts in youth group and Sunday school at Spirit Church and Grace Church. I explore what belief means intrapersonally and interpersonally in this community of practice. In other words, I examine 1) the psychological tenets of a “believing self,” and 2) the consequences for social relationships. I want to show the processes through which these children and youth develop a certain accepted subjectivity, or “believing self,” which make them competent members of this community of born again Christians. This is what I call identity work, for it is not easy. This process entails the construction of different subject positions, or identities, the differentiation and valuation of those identities, and the teaching of expert knowledge and performative skills necessary to position oneself within one subject position versus another. Moreover, it involves struggle and negotiation as one encounters conflicting valuations of subject positions in different contexts.

“Where is the evidence?”: Locating and Rereading Scripture

Over pastry and hot chocolate in a small Parisian style café in Boston, Imani explains that she knows the youth will be challenged by their faith. Therefore, she wants them to know “where” pertinent stories and scripture are located in the Bible so that they can delineate and defend their faith for themselves as well as for others. In chapter 5, we see that scripture is used for defense in other ways. Auntie Helen believes that by memorizing scripture the youth will be able to better protect themselves emotionally against bullying, for example. And Auntie Diana talks about how children can protect themselves from the Devil’s distractions by knowing the
“full armor of God.” These are instances when scripture is meant to be embodied so that children and youth can think and act in more godly ways. But the Bible can also be used in other ways to delineate and defend one’s belief in God.

As we see in chapter 5, when children memorize scripture in Sunday school class, it is equally important for them to memorize the specific book, chapter number, and verse number(s) of the passage. For example, in Mama Danica’s class, each time the children repeat the lines, “And the child grew and became strong and was filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him,” they also have to repeat before that, “Luke Chapter 2, Verse 40.” In one sense, it acts like a title to the memory verse. In another sense, it functions more similarly to a citation of a quote, for it attributes authorship and allows one to find the excerpt in the original text, in this case the Bible. Particularly in this community of practice, location matters. Beyond knowing stories and memorizing scripture, children must also be able to locate them in the Bible. This is a skill children learn as they participate in Sunday school classes and one critical to the ongoing maintenance of one’s belief in God against doubt.

Subira (19), who emigrated about 10 years ago and one of the Sunday school teachers at Spirit Church, often leads the younger children in a series of games to reinforce stories and their location in the Bible. Subira takes out her “Bible Hero” flashcards, “Who do you know and not know?” she asks. She reads the names out loud, “Adam and Eve,” “Moses,” “Elisha.” With each name, Edna (12) and Valerie (12) say whether they are familiar with the story that goes along with the name. Then, Subira takes the pile of cards unknown. She explains she is going to say the name out loud and then they are going to find the Hero in the Bible as fast as they can. If they do not have Bibles then they are told to go in to the main sanctuary and bring back one. Subira gives them a hint as to which book of the Bible it is in. For example, for “Stephen,” she says it is in the
book of Acts. Whoever finds it first gets to read the verse and then the group is supposed to discuss “the flow of the story.” Subira asks Caleb (9) to read, even though he did not get to the verse first. He does not protest, but his older sister Furaha (11) tells Subira to only give him one verse (His mother told me that he does not like to read.). Subira pushes back and tells Caleb to read all three verses. She reads over his shoulder and helps him with the difficult words. At the end of the class, Subira explains the purpose of her lesson: she wants them to figure out the placement of the books in the Bible.

Locating a story requires a certain degree of familiarity with the story, as well as the text itself. One has to know which book the story is in and then physically where that book is located in the Old or New Testament. Locating a story is an important skill, because it enables access to the text. Most Bibles contain somewhere between a few hundred to one or two thousand pages. Locating a particular story can be difficult for anybody, not to mention young children, and thus a barrier to participating in the practices central to this community. This skill is also important because it allows one to return to the Bible to reread the actual text. Children, youth, and adults are continually encouraged to return to the Bible to review stories and scripture. That being said, there were only a few instances in the younger Spirit Church classes where I observed teachers and parent-teachers asking children to read out loud from the Bible. This is not to say that reading is not important, but rather that these children are still learning to decode and encode the actual text which makes actual reading of the text more difficult and requires more time. Moreover, unless the Bible is written as a “Children’s Bible,” in which case the lexicon and syntax are simplified and modernized, the language of even the newer versions of the Bible are still difficult to read and understand. Notwithstanding children’s emerging ability to actually read, teachers and parent-teachers are constantly familiarizing the children with the actual
content of the text and its location. This facilitates the accessibility of the text as their cognitive reading skills develop.

In youth classes, teachers and parent-teachers also lead youth in exercises in which they locate scripture, but the significance of the activity is slightly different: locating certain text is about finding evidence. For example, in one class when Pastor Elijah substitutes for Imani one Sunday, he leads the youth in a discussion of “warfare prayer.” Pastor Elijah comes around the room dividers that serve to separate the youth Sunday school class from the adult Bible study in the main sanctuary. The classes are held simultaneously. He is dressed in suit pants and a thin blue argyle-style sweater. When we start, there are only 8 youths there but by the end there are 15. He announces that Imani cannot make it so he is going to fill in. He wants them to understand his change in position: it is “one thing to be Pastor and another thing to be a Sunday school teacher.” He explains that for right now, “I’m not your Pastor.” He encourages them to act the same way they would with Imani in behavior, asking questions, and posture. “Don’t be intimidated by me,” he urges. He reviews that they have been talking about “spiritual warfare” with Imani, who has sent him notes. He asks them to turn to Psalms 109:1-13. We go around the circle each one of us reading one verse, including me:

1 My God, whom I praise, do not remain silent,
2 for people who are wicked and deceitful have opened their mouths against me;
   they have spoken against me with lying tongues.
3 With words of hatred they surround me;
   they attack me without cause.
4 In return for my friendship they accuse me,
   but I am a man of prayer.
5 They repay me evil for good,
   and hatred for my friendship.
6 Appoint someone evil to oppose my enemy;
   let an accuser stand at his right hand.
7 When he is tried, let him be found guilty,
   and may his prayers condemn him.
8 May his days be few;
   may another take his place of leadership.
May his children be fatherless
and his wife a widow.
May his children be wandering beggars;
may they be driven from their ruined homes.
May a creditor seize all he has;
may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor.
May no one extend kindness to him
or take pity on his fatherless children.
May his descendants be cut off,
their names blotted out from the next generation.

Then we are asked to read it again but silently to ourselves. We reread it a third time out loud together. (I realize that it is hard for me to concentrate and understand the text when I read silently but easier to understand when I read it aloud.) Pastor Elijah explains that this Psalm is a “form of prayer.” He asks the youth what it is a prayer for. A hand goes up and says that it is asking God to do something. Pastor Elijah asks, “Where? What is the evidence?” No one responds, which is typical of this group, even with Imani. Pastor Elijah tells them to turn to Matthew 6:9-13, which is the Lord’s Prayer. We read this through and he focuses our attention on verses 12-13:

And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

He asks for the similarity between this and the Psalm we read. Shayna (15) is the only one who tries to answer. He asks her to give him a “specific verse” in Psalms that is similar to Matthew 6:12-13. She tries but it is not what he is looking for. No one answers. (It is actually hard for me to see the similarity too, so I empathize with their reticence to speak.) So Pastor Elijah says that their “homework” will be to compare the two passages. He asks for it to be written and he will collect it. (The following week he does not collect it, though.)

We return to the Psalm. He asks, Who the psalmist is talking about? Again Shayna is the only one to raise her hand. She says that it is about people coming against Him. Another hand goes up to say that it is about the Devil. Another person says that the Psalmist is talking about
himself. It seems that they have not hit upon the point he wants to make, and so Pastor Elijah asks, “What have people done to him?” Shayna says that they have fought against him. Pastor Elijah presses her to point him to a specific verse. She offers up verse 3. Pastor Elijah’s expression suggests that that is not right. He asks, “Who are these people? Good or bad? ... How do we know?” Shayna responds again. Pastor Elijah focuses our attention on a different verse than Shayna’s: “mouth of the wicked...deceitful.” His tongue lingers on the words “wicked,” “deceitful,” and “you.” He urges, “I want you to underline” those words, as well as “lying tongue,” emphasizing each syllable. He asks, “Wickedness is the result of what sin?” A couple of people murmur lying. And Pastor Elijah confirms that deceitful people are liars. This means that you “don’t have to be a murderer to be wicked. You can simply be a liar.” He pauses, as if to let this message sink in. He asks, “How do you know someone hates you?” People suggest by their words; Pastor Elijah adds your look. He demonstrates by shaking a boy’s hand, smiling, and then turning away and making a face of disgust. The youth laugh. Therefore he concludes, “More importantly it is what is in the heart… The Bible says we should protect our hearts more than anything else.”

He points us to verse 4 and asks, “Why is the Psalmist giving himself to prayer?” Shayna responds, “[He] has faith in God.” Again, I get the feeling that this is not what Pastor Elijah is looking for. He continues, “In Bible study,” we read the Bible; we do not rely on “anyone else’s knowledge… The Bible answers the Bible… In order to understand, you have to read it, read it, read it. [And] you have to understand context.” He reads verse 1 again. He says that for their “second assignment” they will answer the question, “Why is he giving himself to prayer?” He makes sure they are listening to him, “Are you getting my assignment?” He tells them to “address the prayer — what kind of prayer?...What does he want God to do to the accusers?” He
reviews both assignments. He rhetorically asks whether the prayer wants to kill them, etc., listing specifics from the verse. A boy offers up that he wants God to “forgive them” and finally Pastor Elijah smiles. We read the whole verse 1-13 out loud together. Afterwards, Pastor Elijah reflects he gains more understanding each time he reads. He “discovers” more. He asks for questions but there are none. He then counts the group at 16 and says that he’ll expect that many papers next Sunday. I quickly count and realize that that number includes me and so I ask if he meant to include me. At first he says no, but then he says with a smile that I should write it up. Everyone clasps hands with one another around the circle and Felix prays.

Several times during this class Pastor Elijah urges the youth to locate specific verses in the text to back up their point. Without being able to refer to a verse, their point becomes invalid. Locating specific verses is about finding “evidence” for interpretation. He explains that in reading the Bible you should not rely on “anyone else’s knowledge”; rather “the Bible answers the Bible.” In other words, only God’s words are valid. In trying to locate scriptural evidence, one has to return to the text and read it over and over again. This cycle of reading, reflecting, locating, and even annotating (i.e. underlining) is a highly valued practice of masters in this community. In almost every adult Bible study that I observed, the Pastor and other church leaders would emphasize the importance of this cycle. Rereading allows errors of fact to be corrected. As Subira said at the end of the younger Sunday school class, “It’s good to go back over stories,…because we think we know…[I] want you to go back [to the Bible].” Most importantly, though, the Bible is considered a text of infinite wisdom, which enables one to “gain[] more understanding,” as even a master, like Pastor Elijah, continues to reread. New meaning can be gleaned from continual rereading and application of story and scripture to one’s
life. Moreover, as Imani explains in the vignette, reading the Word of God is a way to “destroy” doubt and “fuel” your faith.

“Christianity 101”

So what is “faith”? Imani and the youth often discussed what “belief” entails. One Sunday, she starts Sunday school class by asking the 20 youths gathered to review what they talked about last week. A boy remembers Psalm 109 about “warfare prayer.” Imani asks, what needs to happen before this? He replies that one has to repent. Imani adds that you have to confess first and then repent. Why? Because you “have to be spiritually clean.” And the warfare prayer is “not against flesh and blood” but against “spiritual darkness,” she clarifies. Imani asks for the other Psalm they talked about, Psalm 59. They open their Bibles and turn to the passage. She sum it up, “We shouldn’t be merciful.” Why? Because the Devil’s “ministry” is “to kill, steal, and destroy.” She asks them if they read Psalm 59 at home. Most of them shake their head no, except one or two. She says last week they talked about prayers of thanksgiving. She explains that she wants to review so that they are “strong in word.” She wants to make sure they know “Christianity 101.” She pauses and asks if they know what that means. Elia (14) says yes, the “basics.” Imani continues asking for the meaning of “salvation.” Elia responds, “Giving your life to the Lord.” Imani continues, “Why?” “He’s the savior,” Andrew (13) says. Another adds, “And you should not perish.” Why, she asks again? Because “everyone will die.” Elia adds that you will get “eternal life.” Imani asks her what that means and she describes that you will have a better place in heaven. Imani explains that your “flesh will die” but your “spirit and soul won’t die.” She asks about the meaning of “oil” and one says it means an anointing from God. She reminds them of when Pastor Kadmiel was ordained. The oil represents the spirit and the
container as soul. She asks about the 3 components of us: body, soul, and spirit. Then asks about those of God: Father, Son, Holy Ghost. We are “made in God’s image.” God’s body is his son who came in the flesh to earth. Salvation is important because we will live forever in soul.

She transitions from testing their understanding of “Christianity 101.” She asks, “What don’t you understand in church?” Shayna says, “Speaking in tongues.” I am pleased as this is what I have been wondering about too. Imani explains it is a “gift of Holy Spirit,” for it is the “language of Spirit” and only the “Holy Spirit gives you interpretation.” The “Devil doesn’t understand tongues.” She asks again what they do not understand. I immediately think of “testimony.” I hesitate to ask but then do. She says it is a good question. She says it has two meanings: first, it means that you have been “challenged” or “tested” in some way and then you speak about how you overcame it. “When given, you give power.” The testimony is a “credit to God,” which “undermines the Devil,…because it’s a public declaration.”

Although all Christians rely on the Bible as the Word of God, different denominations of Christianity, and even different churches, emphasize different aspects of what it means to “believe” in God. She explains that man and God are tripartite: man is made of body, soul, and spirit and God is Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. It is essential to “give…your life to the Lord,” as Elia articulates, so that you can be saved and your spirit and soul can achieve “eternal life” after death. Yet, when you are saved, that is when the Devil works against you. Life is a battle against the “Devil’s ministry” to “kill, steal, and destroy.” The Devil can manifest in seemingly benign things like the Internet, as Imani suggests in the opening vignette. She says that God does not want them to be focused on something like the Internet. They should be focused on living lives as articulated in the Bible. That being said, man is flawed and is constantly led to sin, often by the Devil’s tricks. Thus, believers must continually confess their sins and repent in order to be
“spiritually clean.” Only when they are spiritually clean can they engage in the “spiritual warfare” that God demands. Imani encourages them to be “strong in [the] Word,” so that they know what the Bible says. These types of conversations about beliefs are important to the negotiation and establishment of what the valued tenets of “Christianity 101” are in this community of practice, for accepted tenets may vary among churches and denominations of Christianity.

**Negotiating the Delineation and Defense of One’s Faith**

“Why do you believe what you believe?” Imani asks in the opening vignette. Learning aspects of “Christianity 101,” as it is negotiated in this community of practice, is one part of delineating one’s faith. Another important part is being able to distinguish oneself from others, as well as explain and defend that distinction to others. Following her challenging question, Imani launches into a discussion about what it fundamentally means to be a believer. She emphasizes that it is not enough to say that you believe in “Jesus as Lord” as she hands out a piece of paper with the popular bumper sticker “COEXIST” written in different religious symbols (Figure 8):

![Figure 8: “Coexist”](http://uncyclopedia.wikia.com/wiki/File:Coexist.jpg)

Another one of the papers has another slogan “Teach ☪” again with letters representing different religious symbols. The other side of that paper has a circle circumscribed with different religious
symbols and then a message about peace. After asking the youth to identify the referent of each symbol, she asks them for the overall message in these images. They slowly reply: everyone “can live together,” “no one religion,” and “all accepted.” Imani asks, “Is anything wrong with that?” (I expect her and their answer to be no, but I was surprised.)

One youth offers that the message of living in peace and coexisting with all other religions “contradicts” Christianity. It seems to me that the other youths are surprised by this message. Or perhaps it is my own surprise that I am projecting. Without opening a Bible, Imani refers to Matthew 10:34, which says that God did not come to bring peace, but to bring a “sword.” The “problem,” she explains, is that the sign puts Christianity on par with all the other religions and that is wrong. “Only in Christ do we have salvation,” she says. “The Bible says” that we cannot all “coexist.” Imani emphasizes that the purpose of this discussion is to “prepare” them for the conversations they might encounter out there. “The only way you will build a foundation [in Christianity] is by reading the Word of God,” she argues.

Subira (19), who is there to assist Imani during Saturday youth group, raises her hand and challenges Imani’s interpretation. “Why is my belief better?” she asks. Imani defends, “Jesus is the only one who died and rose again… All the other Gods worshiped in other religions never did that.” Subira asks, “What if people are skeptical” when they encounter them? Imani emphasizes that she does not want them to debate. If they disagree, they have a “hardened heart” and God will judge them. Their job is not to “convince” people but to “share the Word.” One boy offers the advice his father gave him — to use his own life as example of the glory of God. Imani agrees and encourages them to give testimony of how He has helped them.

This discussion is about what believing in (a Christian) God means and how one defends one’s belief in God in the face of skepticism. Part of believing in God is about “liv[ing]” and
“practic[ing]” in faith, as Imani explains, which is why the youth do community service projects occasionally on Saturdays. But more than that, one has to know what belief means and why. This happens more or less inadvertently through the construction and valuation of dichotomous subject positions using certain cultural artifacts. In other words, Imani uses and talks about the Bible and the COEXIST image in particular ways to discuss what it means to believe, what evidence there is for such a belief, and how one conveys that message to others. Let’s examine this process further.

Not all Christians believe in God in the same way, and Imani shows the differences among believers and non-believers using the COEXIST image as a “foil” and the Bible as evidence. As Bucholtz and Hall (2006) point out in their articulation of theoretical approaches to language and identity: “The perception of shared identity often requires as its foil a sense of alterity, of an Other who can be positioned against those socially constituted as the same” (371). This “Other” is represented by the collection of symbols representing different faith or belief (broadly defined) traditions embedded in the COEXIST image:

- c - a crescent moon representing Islam,
- o - the peace symbol,
- e - a male/female symbol,
- x - a star of David for Judaism,
- i - the pagan/Wiccan symbol,
- s - the Chinese yin-yang symbol,
- t - a cross representing Christianity

People who believe in other faith and belief traditions, like Islam, Judaism, and paganism, are considered “non-believers.” Interestingly, Christians who are not “born again” are included in this idea of “Other.” As the conversation progresses, Imani identifies and distinguishes between different subject positions within Christianity. These are not ones that emerge from traditional denominations, like Roman Catholic versus. Protestant versus. Eastern Orthodox. Instead, as the Pastor of the church continually emphasized during his sermons, “Either you are a believer or a
non-believer.” When you become born again, “From that moment, you have declared war against the witches.” A non-believer is someone who does not believe in Jesus as Lord and has not accepted Him as his or her personal savior and become born again. If the first subject position that Imani presents is a non-believer, the second subject position is someone who is a Christian and believes in God, but who also believes in the intended message of the COEXIST image: that people of all religions, as the youths said, “can live together,” there is “no one religion,” and so “all [are] accepted.” In other words, you can be Christian, even believe that God is supreme, but that we also must respect all other religious beliefs in order to live in peace. But Imani questions this way of believing. She explains that that is not God’s will, as evident in the Bible. He did not come to bring peace, but to bring a “sword,” and thus we cannot all “coexist.” Thus, the third subject position that Imani introduces is someone who is a Christian and believes in the supremacy of God above all other religions.

In addition to introducing subject positions, she simultaneously values those identities by situating them within a moral framework. By asking, “Is anything wrong with that?” she situates the subject positions within a moral framework and values the second subject position, or a Christian who believes all faith traditions can all coexist, as “wrong” and a “problem.” Valuation, and the attribution of affect, is an important part of identity work, because it shows “how individuals come to desire to inhabit those subject positions, as opposed to others,” as Kulick and Schieffelin (2006:356) explain. In contrast to the second subject position, she presents the third subject position as unproblematic and true. How is this so? According to whom? To some extent, Imani is the locus of authority: she is the leader of the group; she is a well-respected member of the congregation by both adults and youth; she used to be a high school teacher; and now she is pursuing a doctoral degree in Education. From all of these
standpoints, her word bears weight. However, she backs up her word, with the ultimate Word: God’s Word, as articulated in the Bible. Therefore, the Bible, as a second cultural artifact in this literacy event (although note its physical absence in the scene), is used as the ultimate authority in valuing subject positions. She refers to it in order to substantiate her differentiation and valuation of the second and third subject positions: her summary of Matthew 10:34 effectively draws the line between those Christians who believe that we can all live in peace and those who do not. Moreover the Bible is used to reinforce the moral framework that she initially established. The Bible provides the evidence to substantiate that the second subject position is “wrong”/“problem” and the third subject position as right or true, and thus desirable.

While constructing the three subject positions (i.e. 1) a non-believer, 2) a believer who thinks we can all coexist, and 3) a believer who thinks we cannot all coexist) and valuing them as right or wrong (or desirable/undesirable), she also models the expert knowledge of the desired third subject position and the performative skills necessary to position oneself within that subject position versus another. This happens through the use of both cultural artifacts, the COEXIST image and the Bible, and social co-participation, by which I mean a conversation in which meaning is negotiated between two or more people. In other words, Imani is not delivering a lecture without feedback. Instead, her questions elicit answers and thus participation from the youth. In their conversation, they establish the expert knowledge that needs to be displayed in order to position oneself within the third subject position. First, she lays the foundation that “Jesus is Lord.” Next, she asks them what is wrong with the COEXIST message and elicits her desired answer: that it “contradicts” the message in the Bible, which is the ultimate authority. As she continues to provide further expert knowledge of the third subject position, she simultaneously shows them how to defend their faith with the use of the Bible. Further
statements of belief and/or fact (e.g. God came to bring a sword, we cannot all coexist) are paraphrased from the Bible and cited either by referring to a particular scripture passage (e.g. Matthew 10:34) or by saying, “The Bible says…” In other words, she models how to position oneself within the third subject position, not just by articulating what is considered expert knowledge but also showing them how to say it through particular references to and in the Bible. Furthermore, Imani explains to them how they can learn more expert knowledge (i.e. through reading the Word of God) and provides the rationalization which she hopes will shield them from being frustrated, dubious, or rejecting the third subject position. Doubt is a constant part of believing, according to Luhrmann (2012). It is the other side of the same coin. Thus, locating and rereading pertinent parts of the Bible is essential for the ongoing maintenance, or defense, of one’s faith to oneself, as well as to others. As for others, she says that those who are skeptical have a “hardened heart” and will be judged by God. (This actually also bolsters her valuation of the third subject position by further creating desire and fear.) Ultimately in positioning oneself in the third subject position, they are not supposed to “debate” or “convince” but rather to “share the Word.”

Conversations like this one highlight the ongoing negotiation of what a “believing self” entails in this community of practice. Novices are able to try out what to say and how to say it through instances like these of social co-participation. Moreover, cultural artifacts, like the COEXIST image and the Bible in particular, are critical in the establishment of what the expert knowledge of a “believing self” is and the way in which that knowledge is performed. This enables individuals to inhabit certain subject positions.
“Being Smart” in Declaration, Deed, and Relationships

How children and youth position themselves as believers in different situations is another part of the struggle of a “believing self.” In conversations with friends at school, should one talk about what “the Bible says”? Should one even bring his or her Bible to school? These decisions are difficult, and thus to help guide the youth, teachers and parent-teachers often discuss how to interact with non-believers. In the previous example, in the face of “skeptic[ism],” Imani discourages the youth from “debate” or trying to “convince” others about the supremacy of God. Instead, she encourages them to “share the Word.” Part of being a believer is evangelizing, or witnessing, whereby one pronounces that Jesus is their personal savior and/or that God is the one true God. But the way one makes this kind of pronouncement is tricky. On one Sunday, Imani and the youth discuss it. She asks the youth, “How many of you have led someone to Jesus Christ?” One or two people tentatively raise their hands. Then Yinon (16) asks her what she means. She rephrases, “How many of you have preached with someone?” The majority of hands go up, some shyly. Kenaz (16) says that he once argued with a “Catholic girl” and got so frustrated he wanted to “punch her in the face” (not said with anger). The Catholic girl argued that they can go to heaven through Mary. Another boy adds that he had an argument with other peers about evolution. He says that many people believe that we came from a cell. Regina (16) says that we are in an “atheist movement.” Imani dismisses her comment saying there is always a movement. The energy in the group seems more focused than I have ever seen it. Yinon asks, “Is it good to argue about religion…[especially] if [you’re] not going to change them?” For example, he says that some Muslim girls think they are the only good ones. Imani responds that it is difficult because often Christians do not know the Bible well. In fact, “Some atheists know the Bible better than Christians.” She explains, “debate is one thing, declare is another thing.”
She advises, “Don’t be uncomfortable declaring,” but with debate be “careful that you don’t get frustrated.” Many of the youth reveal that they have discussed and hotly debated, in some cases, religion with their peers. From their increased engagement in this conversation, in comparison with others, it seems that they encounter these situations somewhat frequently; and it also seems that these situations cause confusion, frustration, and contention. On the one hand, “le[ading] someone to Jesus Christ” or “preach[ing] with someone” is an important part of being a believer. Thus, Imani encourages them to “declare” their faith. On the other hand, she cautions them against debate for it can lead to frustration.

These kinds of conversations also emerged at Grace Church. During Sunday school class for youth, Auntie Helen asks everyone to open their Bibles to Matthew 10:16-20. I notice that everyone has his or her own Bible. The cover on one girl’s Bible is pink crocodile. Aron (14) has a small unadorned, but well used pocket copy. Auntie Helen tells them that they will be writing down the scripture at home and studying it. Someone reads the passage:

16 “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves.
17 Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues.
18 On my account you will be brought before governors and kings as witnesses to them and to the Gentiles.
19 But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say,
20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Auntie Helen explains her interpretation of the passage: “You have to stand up for what you believe in.” But, she clarifies, you have to “be smart” because you cannot just go to school, stand up and say Jesus is the one and only true God. Instead, “You can stand up for what you believe in by doing the right thing.” For example, when you see bullying, should you “join in, stand by, or help?” she asks. Zara (13) quickly responds in favor of the latter, “because the other two choices are illegal.” There is a little chuckle around the room. Auntie Helen brings them back to make her point: as Christians, as “children of God,” they should help. She continues that they
may get in trouble for helping because a teacher who shows up at the wrong moment might accuse them of being part of the bullying. But even if they get into trouble, “Let the Holy Spirit guide you, [because] you will always come out?” her voice rises asking for their response. “The winner,” she fills in. Auntie Helen says that for “homework” they should write the usual two paragraphs about what they think the passage is saying. She explains it does not have to be what she said. Instead they should read it, close the Bible, and write what they think. “The Holy Spirit reveals different things to different people,” she says. In contexts like school, where not all the people around you are believers, children and youth must figure out how to act. As Auntie Helen recognizes, they are living in an “anti-Christian” environment, and so they must “be smart” about when to declare oneself as a believer and when to do so only in deed.

Is Auntie Helen’s advice to not always declare oneself as a believer in conflict with Imani’s encouragement to evangelize? Not necessarily. In both cases, they are encouraging youth to act implicitly or explicitly as a believer. Yet in both cases, they are advising youth to “be smart” about when and how to declare themselves. Ultimately, Auntie Helen and Imani are constructing a certain perspective of the world and how to think and act in it. They are presenting a certain kind of “believing self.” It is one that is not necessarily constant, but rather constantly negotiating how to act in different kinds of situations.

It is also one that is constantly negotiating the kinds of relationships that one can have with others. In chapter 3, “Fostering Community,” the youth discuss with Imani their attitudes towards and relationships with others, particularly those who are believers of other faith traditions. Zachary (15) says that he is “scared of Muslims” because they “worship the Devil.” Imani is surprised and tells him, “You don’t need to be scared...[they] won’t do anything to you.” Regina (16) asks if it is “OK to have friends [who] are Buddhist,” or any other religion. Imani
says ultimately no, it is not okay to have “close friends” who follow different religions. She keeps them at a distance. Yinson (16) asks, What if they put faith aside? Imani explains that you “can’t put faith aside,” because ultimately “we see the world differently.” She clarifies that that is not to say that they should not work with others in class or be polite or friendly. But she reminds them of the scripture and how you cannot fraternize with the “spirit of darkness.” From this conversation, it is clear that some youths have already developed strong biases against people of other faiths, whereas others question whether religion matters when it comes to developing a close relationship. In either case, the youth seem to struggle with social relationships. As a believer in this community of practice, faith is not a pair of glasses that one can take on and off, but rather a pair of eyes that see the world from a particular perspective, or “worldview” as Imani describes. They have to “be smart” about with whom they can be close friends and from whom they should keep a distance and simply be friendly.

**Negotiating “Believing Selves”**

*Whether* children and youth think of themselves as believers and position themselves as such in deed and in relationships is another question. Although technically, if one is baptized, then he or she is a believer, being a believer in thought and action at every turn is actually an ongoing decision and negotiation. The examples above are not only windows into the socialization of immigrant children and youth into a particular community of practice, but also a challenge to the other communities of practice into which they are being socialized. In particular, Imani’s messages are challenges to the democratic discourse they encounter in other contexts, particularly in school. In school, they are interacting with people who hold different beliefs than they do; they are reading and being taught curriculum that have largely multicultural, religious
tolerant, yet evolution-pro messages. This democratic discourse is symbolized by the COEXIST image. The image was originally created by a Polish graphic designer, named Piotr Młodozeniec, for an exhibition at the Museum of the Seam for Dialogue, Understanding, and Coexistence in Israel in 2013 (Figure 9):

![Figure 9: Original “Coexist” Image in Belfast](http://www.coexistence.art.museum/coex/images/voyage/belfast1.jpg)

Subsequently as it toured through the U.S. from 2003-2005, it gained popularity and iterated into the image that Imani showed the youth. The band U2 even used the image as a banner in their concert tour and Bono wore the image as a headband. Despite its European origins, it has become an image that represents a largely secular, democratic, and/or American ideal in pop culture. (To be sure, there are Christians and followers of other faith traditions that promote its message as well.)

It is important to think about then: to what extent does religious participation breach democratic citizenship, particularly for these immigrant youth? An answer to this question is
beyond the scope of this research. However, it is important to highlight the potential conflict that immigrant youth who participate in religious communities encounter. As Ek (2005) points out about Central American and Mexican youth at a Pentecostal church in Los Angeles, “The process of socialization for the youth is not neutral or straightforward but is complicated by conflicting messages and values, with unforeseeable results. The church establishes a dichotomy between *el camino* [the path of God] and *el mundo* [the secular world], but it may come to be perceived as a false binary by youths who move back and forth between these worlds and must survive in both” (90). Ultimately the youth are learning the expert knowledge and the performative skills to position themselves as part of both communities of practice — one religious and one democratic/secular. Whether they choose to associate themselves more often as part of one over the other is a question for another study. Moreover, these examples should force us to think about the inclusive and exclusive community boundary making at work here. On the one hand, social ties are being formed across national, ethnic, linguistic, and/or immigrant status distinctions among the youth participating in this situation. Their belief in “Jesus as Lord” is being maximized over any other subject position or identification marker, like ethnicity, nationality, or even pan-nationality. However, in so doing, they are also excluding those immigrant youth, African or not, who do not share the same faith. These youths will continually struggle with belief and doubt and negotiate their position as “believing selves” within these different communities of practice.

**Conclusion**

Belief and doubt are prevalent topics of conversation in youth Bible studies. Parent-teachers and other church leaders are helping these youths to work through what belief (and
doubt) mean in this community of practice. They socialize the youth through talk and text (e.g. the Bible mostly), as well as to use words and text in particular ways to position themselves as members of this group. First, through talk and the use of text, children and youth are learning how to locate biblical stories and reread the Bible in order to find evidence to delineate one’s beliefs. Second, through talk and the use of text, children and youth are learning aspects of doctrine particular to Pentecostalism and/or evangelism to these churches. I do not want to suggest that “Christianity 101” here is universal, nor set in stone. Like a survey course in Anthropology 101, the curriculum can vary. Just as professors select different books to read and topics to discuss in order to emphasize certain points, church leaders in different churches and from different denominations of Christianity interpret and emphasize different parts of the Bible and Christian theology. Discussions like the ones presented above, though, are critical spaces for the delineation of one’s faith, essentially negotiating the truths for these individuals in this community of practice. By referencing these particular truths in subsequent conversation or acting according to these truths, one can then position oneself as a member of this group. And finally, through talk, children and youth are learning what it means socially to be committed to being a believer in this particular community of practice and when to position themselves as a believer in different contexts.

Like scholars, children and youth (and adults) struggle with what belief means psychologically and socially in their lives (Carlisle and Simon 2012). They come to an understanding of what that is through participation in conversations like the ones presented above which also engage with and draw from the Bible in particular ways. Ongoing conversations like these are essentially what Bielo calls “ritualized forms of communication.” Participation in these “ritualized forms of communication” is a means of learning to delineate
and defend one’s faith, or committing to “subjective truths…as being true” (Carlisle and Simon 2012:223). But children and youth are engaged in conversations in multiple contexts, which sometimes contradict or challenge what has been said in another. Therefore, as Carlisle and Simon argue, belief is located “in the cultural and psychological processes through which individuals work to integrate personal experiences and socially learned doctrines and discourses - including those concerning what it means to believe — into truths to live through” (2012:223, emphasis added). As children and youth negotiate the contradictions and challenges, they construct “believing selves,” which will continue to be negotiated and change in different contexts over time.
Conclusion

Becoming and Being a Believer

This ethnography began with questions about why African immigrant and refugee parents hope their children “know God”: what it means; the processes entailed; and the social and psychological implications. I argue that these parents are using religion to find understanding, belonging, and betterment for themselves and their children. They use religion to help them cope with the challenges they face, particularly with the loss of extended family, community, and the difficulties of raising children in a cultural environment different from the one in which they grew up. Thus, religion serves to connect these strangers in a new world, facilitating the development of a community.

Parents are deliberate in the ways they are raising children in and through faith. Religion frames the way they understand their role as parents, which influences their daily interactions and routines with children. Embedded in these interactions and routines are values and practices that socialize children to see themselves as believers as their parents do and connect with other believers. Church is an important site where these self-perceptions and social connections develop, which in turn cultivates a feeling of community and belonging among congregants. Parents, and by proxy parent-teachers and church leaders, are trying to instill certain practices — prayer, “reading” the Bible, and delineating what one believes — in their children. These practices are essential to participating in, and thus being a member of, this community. Parents also consider them essential practices for children to learn so that they can cope with the secular world outside of church. As a pray-er who embodies the Word and can defend one’s faith, they feel a child is psychologically and socially armed with the tools they need to overcome the
challenges that they will face. These ideologies and processes of socialization have important empirical and theoretical implications, which I explore in the rest of this concluding chapter.

**Theoretical and Empirical Implications**

*A Christian Sense of Self*

The processes of socialization affect the way children see themselves, others, and the world around them. Luhrmann (2012; see also 2004) calls the particular sense of self that is developed among evangelical Christians a “Christian theory of mind.” Similarly, Elisha (2008) calls it “radical intersubjectivity”: “Contemporary evangelical conceptions of faith influence the practice of performative rituals and religious disciplines that instill moral ambitions — related to but distinct from doctrinal beliefs — that in turn characterize and constitute evangelical personhood” (56). Based on the research presented here, I argue that children are being socialized to develop this sense of self, whereby God is simultaneously an ontological being who exists independently from oneself, as well as part of one’s sense of self in thought and action. Engagement in practices of prayer, biblical storytelling, and delineating and defending one’s faith are influencing children’s understanding of their own (cap)abilities. Children are learning that He speaks to them from within, particularly in times of trouble, and is responsible for the miracles in their life. And they are learning that they are never alone. Based on the research conducted and presented here, I cannot definitively say that all children in this study are developing a “Christian theory of mind,” but some children, like Absolom (6), who reminds his mother, “Jesus will keep me company,” and Leah (6), whose drawings continually reference God and the Bible, seem to be developing this Christian sense of self. The processes of socialization I describe in this ethnography illustrate that when children are being taught to decipher the voice of God among
their own thoughts and communicate with Him through prayer, these practices can profoundly shape intra/interpersonal development.

**Negotiating “Believing Selves” Psychologically and Socially**

Although children and youth are learning how psychologically and socially to identify as believers, we see that indeed “belief is [still] a problem” (Carlisle and Simon 2012): being a believer, or “liv[ing] in faith,” is an ongoing struggle with oneself and with others. Some may argue that if one reads the Bible, the meaning of belief is clear, or that if one is baptized, one will always be a believer. However, understanding, accepting, and living what belief in God means psychologically and socially is difficult and situated work. Children, youth, and adults perpetually face ambiguity, hardship, and uncertainty in their lives. Through participation in Bible studies at church and at home, they are learning and negotiating what “Christianity 101” entails in this community of practice. They are learning the “whats” (“In the life of a Christian, what do you have to do?”; “What do you pray for?”), but also the “hows” (“How do you pray?”), the “wheres” (“Where is the evidence in the Bible?”) and the “whys” (“Why do you believe what you believe?”, “Why is my belief better?”). Some answers to these questions are more ambiguous than others, particularly the “hows” and the “whys.” We see that living as a believer can be fraught with ambiguity and anxiety for adults and children. Even at the age of 6, Leah wonders when and where she will pray in school. The youth question whether they can be close friends with Catholics and Muslims. Even adults struggle with friendships. Auntie Helen tries to maintain friendships with those who question why she will not offer alcohol to them even if they accept that she does not drink. As Auntie Helen explains to her youth class, “You have to stand up for what you believe in.” Yet she emphasizes that you have to “be smart,” because you cannot
go to school, stand up, and say Jesus is the one and only true God. These parents feel they are living in an “anti-Christian environment” and thus must figure out whether and when to be “out” as a believer. What one believes and how one lives as a believer is a constant negotiation and struggle across the lifespan, for belief is about sacred tenets and practices as much as it is about socially positioning oneself in different situations.

Thus, psychological and social tension and conflict are not entirely absent from their lives. By identifying as a believer, new boundaries are created. Although they can reach out and connect to other believers, even native-born Americans who worship at other churches, some struggle in their relationships with those who do not identify as believers. These struggles can be self-imposed if they believe that similar worldviews are fundamental to close personal relationships with others. Alternatively, these struggles can be imposed by others, who challenge their faith and worldview, and distance themselves. Adults and children encounter competing discourses within different communities of practice about who one should be friends with and why.

*Can We All Coexist?*

Many Americans tend to think of immigrants and refugees (as well as their children) as a homogeneous group, particularly those from the same part of the world. It is assumed that they will develop close personal relationships because of the similarity in their experiences and background. It is easy to look at the congregations of Spirit Church and Grace Church and conclude that, of course, they have chosen to worship where they do, because African adults and children want to worship with other Africans who speak, for example, Kiswahili (in the case of Spirit Church) or Luganda (in the case of Grace Church). To some extent, these reasons are true.
However, if we look more carefully, the degree of closeness among them is surprising in some cases. Indeed, there is tremendous diversity among congregants owing to different nationalities, races, ethnicities, languages, education levels, and immigration statuses. Some are immigrants, others refugees; some are from Kenya, others from the DRC; some are Hutus, others Tutsis; some grew up in cosmopolitan urban areas, others in rural isolated areas; some have completed university, others just a few years of primary school; and many speak several languages with different degrees of fluency. These characteristics and experiences can be potentially divisive. And yet, these Africans have minimized differences by recognizing their pan-African heritage and their belief in Jesus as their personal savior. Moreover, the practices of faith, particularly those of Pentecostalism, bring people even closer together. As they cultivate their relationship with God through praying and reading the Bible, they also cultivate relationships with one another. These practices are fundamentally social. Thus, religion as a system of meaning and as an institution (Alba et al. 2008) is key to cohesion among these participants. More than just coexist, these participants see the collective as a “community” or “family.”

It is important to look at the ways children are being socialized, because it affects how they integrate into American society. Other studies of children of immigrants who engage in religious organizations show some children are socialized toward ethnic identities (Baquedano-López 1997, 2000, 2002), whereas others are socialized toward religious identities, which minimize ethnic differences (Ek 2002, 2005). In this community, religious identification is emphasized. This is important, because whether children are socialized more towards ethnic or religious identifications affects the way they see themselves and the world, and thus with whom they build relationships. On the one hand, learning to pray and know the Word of God enables children to connect with others who also believe and practice in these ways. They are learning to position
themselves as believers: 1) by speaking a certain language that incorporates God, prayer, and biblical stories and scripture, and 2) by acting in certain ways, like praying regularly and behaving in godly ways. As a result, they are able to create bridging and bonding relationships (Dryden-Petersen 2009) within and across racial, ethnic, linguistic, immigrant status, and other lines with other believers. The close relationships developing among the youth at Spirit Church are testament to the power of this socialization. Despite the fact that they spend less time with their church peers, they feel closer to them than their school peers. Likewise, the involvement of Auntie Helen’s two eldest children in a Bible study with multiethnic (non-African) children at another church shows that religion enables the potential development of close relationships with born again Christians across ethnic and immigrant lines.

However, in learning to think and act as born again Christians, children also are learning that not everyone knows Jesus or is a believer. During one Sunday school class, Caleb (9) turns to parent-teacher Mama Regina and says, “You know if you ask them [the children at school] who created the world, they say science.” Mama Regina laughs, “I ask too,” and then explains that others just do not know that what they are saying is false. Caleb adds that if you ask the other children who created science, they do not say God. Mama Regina counsels him to keep trying to spread the word about God because eventually on judgment day that “blood will not be on your head.” The fact that not everyone is a believer creates dilemmas that children must navigate. If they want to “practice in faith,” as teacher Imani puts it, they have to find places and times to pray even if no one around them is doing the same; they have to decide when to stand up for what they believe in when a teacher denigrates the Bible; they have to figure out whether to pursue close relationships with non-believers; and they have to continually decide whether to be
(and thus act) as a believer or not. Essentially, they have to learn to position themselves as similar to, or different from the individuals, groups, and situations they encounter.

As more immigrants and refugees find a home in this country, we must continue to study how they and their children are being socialized, for it affects this country’s pluralism. We must continually ponder, “Can we all coexist?”

For Future Study

Although this ethnography answers some questions, it raises more interesting questions that suggest areas for future research. First, socialization is never a completed process; it is ongoing and subject to resistance. Thus, I further query: what is the impact of these processes of socialization on these children over time? Heath’s (2012a) follow up study 30 years later on the language socialization of black and white working class children from the Piedmont Carolinas is an excellent example of the powerful insights we can glean from longitudinal fieldwork. Relevant to this research, she found that there was a decrease in religious participation, which she saw supporting reading and relationship building. Instead, religion had been replaced by other forms of entertainment, such as the Internet, video games, and extracurricular activities, impacting their cognitive abilities, language use, and social relationships (Heath 2012b). It would be interesting to study the role religion plays in these children’s lives and the effect on their sense of self and interpersonal relationships 30 years from now.

Second, a comparative study of the processes of socialization for immigrant children participating in different religious communities would contribute to further understanding of the role religion plays in the intra/interpersonal development and identity work of children. Do fundamentalist denominations have similar processes of socialization and impacts?
Third, there is a need for further research on African immigrants and refugees who do not use religion to help raise their children. How do they cope with this challenge and others in their lives? Where do they find a feeling of belonging and community? Relatedly, what are the processes of socialization and impact on intra/interpersonal development for African immigrant and refugee children (or children of African immigrants and refugees) who attend public versus parochial schools, like the Christian fundamentalist high school Peshkin (1986) studied in Illinois? During my research, mothers debated in Bible study whether parochial schools would in fact be better for their children, since they would be interacting with other believers. But many of the mothers pointed out that there is no guarantee that children in Christian schools would be in fact better influences on their children. It would be fruitful to actually compare the behavior and relationships among children in public and parochial schools.

I hope that this study will inspire further research on these questions and others having to do with immigration, religion, and socialization. For other researchers looking into these areas, I offer the following counsel: Like many scholars before me who study immigrants and refugees in the U.S., I initially ignored the religious dimension of their lives. Indeed, I saw it as just one dimension of their lives — like a minor social activity or worse, a hobby. But, in point of fact, I came to realize that it is not just one dimension in their lives, it is the dimension through which they see and interpret the world and raise their children. As Alba et al. articulate, “[R]eligion has become a cultural scheme that they can use to interpret their experiences and guide their actions” (2008:2). One cannot say anything meaningful about their lives without understanding the way their belief in God affects how they think and act. Carlisle and Simon (2012 put it best: “When anthropologists focus on understanding how the problems of belief matter in the lives of subjects, and how subjects connect themselves to truths, the ethnographic work they produce can
lead to a deep engagement with what subjects value, what they think or worry about in everyday life, and how they connect with the social and spiritual worlds they see around them” (224-225).

Humans are continually on the move, being pushed from and pulled to new destinations owing to conflict and opportunity. As people move they encounter people and places foreign to them. They encounter a new world that is unfamiliar, ambiguous, confusing, and threatening, but also a new world for which they have hope. With these emotions and experiences, they try to make sense of the world and organize the new diversity around them (Wallace 2003). To that end, some people turn to faith traditions and religious institutions to help understand, organize, and orient the world for themselves and for their children. This ethnography is a testament to this ongoing phenomenon. These African immigrants and refugees are socializing their children to “know God” — praying and reading his Word in particular ways — in order to help them navigate the obstacles they encounter in their new world.
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Bucholtz, Mary, and Kira Hall

Burdelski, Matthew

Cadge, W., and Elaine Howard Ecklund

Cannell, Fenella
Carlisle, Steven, and Gregory M. Simon

Casino, J.J.

Clancy, Patricia M.

Cochran-Smith, Marilyn

Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff, eds.

Cremin, Lawrence A.

Department of State, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration

Dewdney, Anna

Dryden-Peterson, Sarah Elizabeth

Duranti, Alessandro, Elinor Ochs, and Elia K. Ta’ase
Durkheim, Emile

Ebaugh, H.R., and Fenggang Yang

Ebaugh, Helen Rose, and Janet Saltzman Chafetz

Ek, Lucila Del Carmen

Elisha, Omri

Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw

Engelke, Matthew

Evans-Pritchard, E. E.

Fader, Ayala

Foley, Michael W., and Dean R. Hoge


Herberg, Will

Hirschman, Charles

Hirschman, Charles, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind

Holifield, E. Brooks

Kattan, Shlomy

Kinney, Jeff

Kirsch, Thomas G.

Kulick, Don, and Bambi B. Schieffelin

Lave, Jean, and Etienne Wenger

Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara
Lawrence-Lightfoot, Sara, and Jessica Hoffmann Davis

Leitch, Cliff


Lindquist, Galina, and Simon Coleman

Luhrmann, T. M.

Luhrmann, T. M., and Rachel Morgain

Maddox, Bryan

Mead, Margaret

Migration Policy Institute

Min, Pyong Gap

Needham, Rodney
Nida, Worku

Ochs, Elinor

Ochs, Elinor, and Alessandro Duranti

Ochs, Elinor, and Bambi B. Schieffelin

Olupona, Jacob Obafemi Kehinde, and Regina Gemignani, eds.

Omartian, Stormie

Paugh, Amy
Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life

Portes, Alejandro, and Rubén G. Rumbaut

Pouillon, Jean

Robbins, Joel

Rowling, J. K

Ruel, Malcolm

Schieffelin, Bambi B.

Schieffelin, Bambi B., and Elinor Ochs

Scollon, Ronald, and Suzanne B. K. Scollon

Scribner, Sylvia, and Michael Cole

Shoaps, Robin A.
Smith, Timothy L.  

Sterponi, Laura  

Street, Brian V.  

Stromberg, Peter G  

Teale, William H., and Elizabeth Sulzby  

Varenne, Hervé  

Wallace, Anthony F. C  

Warner, R. Stephen  

Warner, R. Stephen, and Judith G. Wittner  

Weber, Max  
Weisner, Thomas, Lucinda Bernheimer, and Jennifer Coots  

Weisner, Thomas S.  

Whiting, Beatrice Blyth, and Carolyn Pope Edwards  

Whiting, Beatrice Blyth, John Wesley Mayhew Whiting, and Richard Longabaugh  

Whiting, John Wesley Mayhew  
1941 Becoming a Kwoma: Teaching and Learning in a New Guinea Tribe. New Haven: Published for the Institute for Human Relations by Yale University Press.  

Zentella, Ana Celia  

Zinsser, C.  
APPENDIX 1

Ecocultural Family Interview (EFI) Protocol

Overall Family Daily Routine

Predictable routine/schedule
Specific Days (Weekdays/Weekend / Vacations / Holidays)

Walk me through your day with your child
Pick up/Drop off from school
After school activities - Sports, Arts, Tutoring
Homework routine - parent involvement, when
Bedtime routine
TV routine - rules, learning
Similar / Different to other families
Major changes in past year

Child’s activities
Mostly with parents, siblings, or friends
Monitor activities and playmates
Most important

Reading and Writing

Reading with children
Types of books - Favorite book?
Who reads
Language
How often and for how long
Where
When did you start & Why

What do you hope the children will get out of being read to?

Drawing / Writing activities
Library? Other reading programs?
Major changes in past year
Family History and Stories

3 stories about important events in your life
Have you told your children? How have they reacted?

Migration experience

Childhood Experiences and Family in Africa

Other kinds of conversations
  Religion
  School
  Avoided topics

Other kinds of stories - Who tells? How often? Why?
  Biblical
  Riddles (kitendawili)
  Proverbs (methali)
  Fairytales
  Fables
  Made up stories

Give example of story told most often or most enjoyed

Religion

Faith
  Have you always believed in God? How did you come to have faith?
  How does God speak to you?

Impact on Children’s Daily Life
  Church groups and attendance - why, notes and later purpose
  Interactions with Pastor, Sunday school teacher
  When (in which kinds of situations) do you talk about God and biblical stories
  Prayer - how often? about what? language?
  Singing - how often? language?
  Reading / Meditating on the Bible - How often? With children?
  What do you hope your kids will know about God and learn from reading the Bible?
  Other books

Hard Times and Bad Events
  Does God help you through hard/bad times? How - Example?
  How do you talk to your children about bad events?

Other

Worries

Best times with children

Expectations & Hopes
APPENDIX 2

Focus Group

DISCUSSION GUIDE
(10 min.) Intro

- **Welcome and thank you**
  - Welcome everyone
  - Thank you so much for your time and help with my research

- **Introduction**
  - I’m Louise and I’ll be helping to moderate our discussion today. I’m a student working on a larger research project for school.
  - This is my assistant and she will be helping to take notes during our discussion.
  - In addition, we will be recording our conversation to make sure that our notes are accurate. We won’t be sharing the recording with anyone else. Is that okay with everyone? **Please speak loudly.**

- **Focus Group and Purpose**
  - So I’ve gathered you together to do what’s called a focus group, which just means a group interview.
  - For this particular focus group, I’m interested in your opinions and experiences about what you’re involved with at church, including reading the Bible, and how it affects your faith and relationships with others.
  - So in the next hour to hour and a half, I will be asking you a series of questions about this topic.
  - I’ll be asking questions but if you want to follow up on something that someone has said, you want to agree, or disagree, or give an example, feel free to do that. Don’t feel like you have to respond to me all the time. Feel free to have a conversation with one another about these questions.
  - I am here to ask questions, listen, and make sure everyone has a chance to share. We’re interested in hearing from you. So if you’re talking a lot, I may ask you to give others a chance to share. And if you aren’t saying much, I may call on you. We just want to make sure we hear from all of you.

- **Confidentiality for you**
  - All that you say in this room will be kept private, which means that no names will be included in any of the final papers I write. The comments made will be used to help me with my research but I won’t be sharing any of your specific comments with your peers, parents, church elders, or any other person. In other words, each comment is treated as if it came from an anonymous person in this group.
    - For example, I won’t say X said that they like school, or A said they didn’t like school. Rather I would say in general, the majority of people interviewed said they liked school or the majority of people interviewed said they didn’t like school.

- **Confidentiality for others**
  - It’s also important to keep the confidentiality of the people in this room. This means, please do not talk about what people said in this room with people outside of this room.
• This is a safe space for everyone to share their experiences and opinions.

• **No judgment and Honesty**
  o This is a safe space. It’s important for you to be as honest as you can.
  o No right or wrong answers. Each individual’s response is important, including repeated responses and responses that don’t agree. Keep in mind that I’m just as interested in negative comments as positive comments, and sometimes the negative comments are the most helpful.
  o No judgment from me.
  o Again, I’m interested in your experiences and opinions about what you’re involved with at church, including reading the Bible, and how it affects your faith and relationships with others.

• **Questions?**

(5 min.) *Opening*
1. (in circle)
   • Name
   • When did you first start coming to the International Gospel Church?

(5-10 min.) *Introductory*
2. What are some things that **you enjoy reading about** in the Bible?
3. What **motivates** you to read the Bible?
4. What do you find **challenging** about reading the Bible?
   a. If you read something in the Bible and want to understand it better, **who do you ask?**

*Key*
15 min.
5. (List on flip chart)
   What are some of the things **you like to do** when you come to church or youth group?
   a. What **other kinds of things do you do** in church and youth group on Saturdays?
6. From your experiences in church and youth group, **what have you learned?**
7. Which experiences have been the **more meaningful or life changing** for you?

(45 min.)
(10 min.)
8. How have your experiences in church and in youth group **affected your relationships** with
   a. your peers in church
   b. children younger than you
   c. your parents
   d. the church elders
   e. other adults in church
   f. Do you ever **reference the Bible or quote a passage** from the Bible when you talk to them? **Why or why not?**

(10 min.)
9. How have your experiences in church and in youth group **affected your relationships** with
a. friends at school
   i. Do you ever reference the Bible or quote a passage from the Bible when you talk to them? Why or why not?
   ii. For those of you who go to school with your peers from church, how do your relationships with them change when you’re at school?
      (teachers at school)
      (other people outside of church)

(10 min.)
10. How have your experiences in church and in youth group helped you to cope with problems outside of church, maybe at school?
    (Are there any problems that have emerged?)
    (What happens when there’s a quarrel, how have you dealt with it?)
    Conflicts about interpreting the Bible?

(10 min.)
11. How have your experiences in church and in youth group affected your connection to God and understanding of your own faith?
   a. Have there been other experiences outside of church and youth group that have affected your connection to God and understanding of your own faith?

(10 min.) Ending
12. Summary of 3 key points raised
   a. Did I correctly summarize what was said?
   b. Is there anything that should be added to those key points?
   c. Is there anything we didn’t talk about but should that’s important for me to learn about….. church activities, reading the Bible, faith, and relationships with others?

*Remember - important to keep what was said in this room to yourself. Please don’t discuss it with anyone else. If your parents ask, you may speak in general terms about what we talked about but please do not say specifically what someone said.

***
GENERAL INFORMATION SHEET

Background Information
1. How old are you? _____

2. Where were you born? ________________

3. Have you ever lived in a refugee camp? _____
   If yes, for how long? _____________

4. If you weren't born in the U.S., how many years have you lived in the U.S.? (CIRCLE one)
   Less than 1 year  1-3 years  4-6 years  7-9 years  10+ years

5. List all the languages that you can at least have a general conversation in (more than a few words).

6. Which language do your parents speak to you in? ______________________________

7. Which language do you respond in to your parents? ______________________________
8. Which language do you primarily read the Bible in? ______________________________

9. Do you believe in God? (CIRCLE one)
   Yes          Kind of          No          Unsure

10. What do you characterize yourself as?
    • Check (✓) all that apply
    • If you check more than one, star ( *) the primary one
      ___Christian (in general, no denomination)
      ___Born again Christian
      ___Evangelical
      ___Pentecostal
      ___Other ____________

11. Have you been baptized? (CIRCLE one)    Yes    No
    If yes, at what age? ____________

12. Do you believe that someone can speak in tongues?
    Yes          Kind of          No          Unsure

Technology
1. Do you read Bible passages using your phone, e-reader (like a Kindle), iPad, or other hand-held technology devise? Why or why not?

2. Do you talk about religion, Christianity, or God on Facebook, Twitter, Instant Message, or other online site? Why or why not?

3. Do you directly quote or reference the Bible on Facebook, Twitter, Instant Message, or other online site? Why or why not?

4. Are there other online sites where you talk about religion, Christianity, God, or the Bible? Please list them.

The Bible
1. When do you read the Bible? (CIRCLE all that apply)
   Daily         When I have a Problem/Issue/Need Guidance
   Holidays/Special Occasions   Rarely/Never

2. How often do you read the Bible by yourself? (CIRCLE one)
   More than once a day   Once a day   2-3 days a week   4-6 days a week
   A few days a month    A few days a year    Rarely/Never

3. How often do you read the Bible with at least one member of your family? (CIRCLE one)
   More than once a day   Once a day   2-3 days a week   4-6 days a week
   A few days a month    A few days a year    Rarely/Never

4. How often do you read the Bible with a friend? (CIRCLE one)
   More than once a day   Once a day   2-3 days a week   4-6 days a week
   A few days a month    A few days a year    Rarely/Never

5. Think back to when you were younger than 10 years old, how often did you read the Bible with at least one member of your family? (CIRCLE one)
More than once a day  Once a day  2-3 days a week  4-6 days a week
A few days a month  A few days a year  Rarely/Never

6. How old were you when you started reading the Bible with at least one member of your family? ________

Relationships
1. Why do you feel close to the other youth at church?
   (Rank categories below 1-6, 1 = most important reason, 6 = least important reason)
   ___ see/hang out with them a lot
   ___ spiritual/faith connection
   ___ child of immigrant
   ___ African culture
   ___ other interests (for example: TV, movies, sports, clothes)
   ___ similar personalities

2. If there is another reason you feel close to the other youth at church that was NOT listed above, please explain the reason here.

3. Do you feel closer to...(CIRCLE one) friends at church  friends at school
   Why? (Please explain your answer)

Other
1. Is there anything you'd like to add that you think is important for me to know about your background, your faith, or your relationships with peers that I haven't asked about?
## APPENDIX 3

### Research Study Statistics

**Table 1: Participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relevance to Thesis and Data Presented</th>
<th>Total # Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers’ Bible study</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit Church youth Sunday school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit Church child Sunday school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewees (semi-structured)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mama and Baba Furaha’s family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier 2</strong></td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers’ Bible study (1x attendance)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Church youth Sunday school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Church child Sunday school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children and Spouses of interviewees</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit Church child/youth visitor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit Church attendant/role close to children</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier 3</strong></td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit Church attendant/visitor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit Church child or youth not in Sunday school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Church child or youth not in Sunday school</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Church attendant/visitor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s Bible study groups at other churches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tier 4</strong></td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social workers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewee families (not Spirit/Grace affiliated)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant withdrawals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Estimate of participants for whom data were recorded and were relevant to the thesis of this dissertation.

(NOTE: There were attendants at Spirit Church and Grace Church for whom little data were recorded. Also I interviewed school teachers and observed four school classes for parents and children, two catholic church services, two conference/ministry events, a wedding, and other smaller activities with other people for whom little data were recorded and/or were not central to thesis presented in dissertation.)*

**Table 2: Church Affiliation (of Participants)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church Type</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grace Church</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit Church</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit Church (guest)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other church/religion/unaffiliated/unknown</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3: Countries of Birth*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR Congo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*In order from most numerous to least. Based on Tier 1 and Tier 2 participants.

### Table 4: Family Size*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average # of children</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on Tier 1 and Tier 2 participants.

### Table 5: Entry Visa Types*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visa Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visitor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Per IRB stipulations, I was not allowed to ask about the immigration status of participants. Thus, this table is not arranged in any particular order, as the dataset is incomplete.*
Table 6: Semi-structured Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews using adapted EFI Protocol</th>
<th>15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With mother or father separately</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With mother AND father together</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of mothers</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total # of fathers</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit Church affiliation</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace Church affiliation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other church affiliation</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interviews for other purposes (With Sunday school teacher or Church leader) 7

Table 7: Children’s Sunday school at Spirit Church

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total # Children Observed*</th>
<th>31</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Under 1 year old</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 years old</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6 years old</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9 years old</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-13 years old</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*This number is only a subset of the total number of children who were affiliated with this study. It refers to the number of children whom I observed the most often since they attended Spirit Church’s children’s Sunday school.
### Table 8: Youth Group at Spirit Church*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total # of Youths</th>
<th>19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-11 years old</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12-14 years old</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-17 years old</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-20 years old</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in the U.S.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Born in Africa</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanzania</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DR Congo</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unspecified (Africa)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived 1-3 years in U.S.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived 4-6 years in U.S.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lived 7-9 years in U.S.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on data collected during a focus group