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Faith in a Changing Planet: The Role of Religious Leaders in the Fight for a Livable Climate

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**Faith in a Changing Planet:
The Role of Religious Leaders in the Fight for a Livable Climate**

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Submitted to Pitzer College in Partial Fulfillment of a
Bachelor of Arts in Environmental Analysis

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Abstract

Progressive religious leaders are playing an increasingly important role in the effort to combat climate change. Through a combination of unstructured in-depth interviews and primary source analysis, this thesis highlights nine U.S. religious leaders from various denominations of Christianity, Judaism and Islam who are actively involved in working on climate issues. Drawing on literature in social movement theory, I explore how clergy are uniquely influential in climate issues because of the organizational advantage and moral authority they hold through their positions as religious leaders, granting them the ability to highlight social justice implications of climate change with distinctive legitimacy. Clergy engage in climate issues through a number of tactics and myriad activities spanning three domains: their congregations, the climate movement, and policy circles. While religious leaders are imbued with moral authority that allows them to speak powerfully on the social justice implications of climate change, they are also limited in a number of ways precisely because they are working within a religious context.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

On June 25, 2014 I stood at the entrance of the California State Capitol building with an unlikely assortment of peers. More than two-dozen religious leaders and congregants of various backgrounds were huddled in groups, poring over the text of two climate bills and practicing their talking points. We were there for a “lobby day,” waiting to speak with our legislators about fracking regulations and transportation emission reduction policies, from the perspective of people of faith. I had tagged along for the ride, attracted by the lure of seeing environmental policymaking in action and intrigued by the concept of religious climate lobbyists. The day that unfolded before me – shadowing priests and rabbis in clergy attire as they sat down with state legislators to talk about climate change – was a powerful one. While at first I was distracted by the scene’s novelty, the dissonance of seeing clergy in the capitol talking about emission concentrations soon gave way to deep admiration and respect.

The organization that planned the lobby day was Interfaith Power & Light (IPL), a coalition of faith groups seeking to mobilize a religious response to climate change. Part of IPL’s work includes promoting public policies having to do with climate change and environmental destruction. That day, the faith leaders enunciated for legislators why they felt a moral obligation to endorse specific policies and oppose others based on their religious values and the social justice implications of climate change. Presented by a priest, the reasons for passing a fracking bill that would decrease natural gas leakage, reduce emissions, and prevent pipeline accidents took on undeniably ethical dimensions. These clergy brought the moral arguments about climate change directly into the halls of

power, where the majority of conversations usually revolve around economic and political considerations.

The IPL lobby day is just one example of religious leaders and communities becoming increasingly involved in the fight against climate change. In recent years, global consciousness and concern around climate issues have grown with incredible speed. Catapulted by a combination of urgent warnings from scientists, extreme weather events, key policy decisions and powerful organizing, climate change is moving to the forefront of domestic and international politics. The grassroots movement that has arisen to take on this challenge is a complex and multifaceted one. It comprises environmental organizations, students, frontline communities, unions, racial and economic justice activists, animal rights organizations, health advocates, and religious groups, among others.

Religious leaders and institutions have a particularly interesting relationship to these efforts and a distinct perspective on the moral implications of climate change. Although religious groups in the United States are often associated with climate denial (and there are indeed some for which this is true), there are also a significant and vocal number of communities that have embraced the fight against climate change as a religious duty. Some people of faith feel an obligation to act as children of God, called to protect the earth and steward creation. Others are especially compelled by the social justice implications of climate change and environmental destruction. For any of these or related reasons, religious values may be part of a felt moral imperative to take action.

Within faith-based climate work, religious leaders are in special positions of influence. However, their activities and impact in climate change issues have thus far

been largely unexamined. Understanding their role in climate work is key from a social movement theory perspective because it enables us to recognize the influence of effective leaders, what motivates people to become involved in climate organizing, and the importance of building communities that that can mobilize for social justice during a time of climate crisis. This thesis contributes an initial exploration in an attempt to begin to answer these understudied questions.

Overview

Drawing on a combination of unstructured in-depth interviews and primary source analysis, this thesis investigates how religious leaders are participating in climate change issues. I found their involvement to fall into three main domains: their own congregations, the climate movement, and local, national or international policy circles. I argue that religious leaders play a unique role as moral authority figures and use this influence in ways that allow them to be especially effective in their climate work. I then delve into a number of ways in which these leaders are limited precisely because they are working within a religious context, and how this prevents them from being able to act in certain circumstances. I conclude with an analysis of how religious leaders can continue to exert influence and offer questions for further study.

In order to contextualize my research, I begin by discussing the complexity of the climate movement, including the multifaceted and diverse collection of groups that create it and the many issues they represent. I examine the approaches taken by the climate justice movement as a contrast to traditional environmentalism, and make the case for a perspective based in moral values, especially social justice, as a framework for future action. I review the past and current involvement of religious communities in climate

movement efforts. I then discuss a number of relevant social movement theories and apply them to Pope Francis' recent climate change encyclical before presenting my findings.

Methods

The main body of this thesis focuses on my primary research conducted with nine religious leaders from Christian, Jewish, and Muslim backgrounds in the United States. These individuals vary in their religious affiliations and levels of influence, but are all active progressive leaders involved in climate issues. Some are ordained clergy who preside over congregations, while others have retired from ministry and work within faith-based political organizations. I chose the participants using a targeted non-random purposive convenience sample, in which informants were determined based on their knowledge, community positions, levels of activism, and my ability to secure an interview with them.

A large percentage of these leaders live in the California Bay Area, including the rabbi of the synagogue I attend, Rabbi David Cooper at Kehilla Community Synagogue. This geographic pattern is influenced both by my personal connections and by the high number of participants in this area who work in congregations where progressive political values and concern about climate change are common. Snowball sampling assisted me in identifying many of the participants, while others I approached without a previous introduction. The existing networks and alliances that some of these clergy work in, primarily Interfaith Power & Light and the Faith Trio, helped me to identify and contact additional participants. This is far from a representative sample of U.S. religious leaders, and cannot do justice to the vast diversity within any of these three religions. Despite

these limitations, the thesis offers an initial exploration of how some religious leaders are participating in climate work and raises questions for further study.

I examined these leaders using a combination of unstructured in-depth interviews, personal observation, and primary source analysis. I spoke with some individuals multiple times, and interviews ranged from twenty minutes to over one hour and were all conducted over the phone. I attended community and organizational events, discussion panels, and religious services at which some of the leaders spoke. Other data comes from primary sources such as sermons, articles, organizational or congregational websites, and videos.

Chapter Two:

The Climate Movement

Climate change emerged as an issue of public concern within the context of the broader environmental movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Climate-related activism began in the 1990s when established environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, and the Natural Resources Defense Council began to address climate issues. In 1992, an international treaty called the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, with the objective to achieve “stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system” (UNFCCC, 1992). Around this time and over the following two decades, myriad climate-specific non-profit organizations and civil society groups were founded including US Climate Action Network in 1989, Energy Action Coalition in 2004, 350.org in 2007, and the Climate Justice Alliance in 2012. The climate movement has since evolved to encompass a diverse collection of causes and campaigns.

Climate Justice

The emergence of a climate justice analysis marked an important turning point in the movement, as it “acknowledges that structural inequalities are perpetuated by the fossil fuel industry and exacerbated by climate change” (Grady-Benson & Sarathy, 2015, p. 5). Climate justice “recognizes the intersectionality of social, economic, and environmental issues” and “takes into account the inequalities of climate change cause and effect” by understanding that historically marginalized communities are least responsible for climate change and yet suffer disproportionately from its impacts (Grady-

Benson, 2014, p. 13). This represents a notable shift away from mainstream climate narratives that have concentrated on climate change as an environmental issue amenable to “scientific and technical solutions such as emissions controls and carbon credits,” without centering the inequality and injustice of the human experience (Pettit, 2004, p. 102).

Especially in developing countries, climate justice has emerged within the context of issues such as global poverty, sustainable development, and anti-globalization that connect climate change with unjust North/South relations. Other climate justice activists have been inspired by the environmental justice framework that emerged in the 1990s to focus on the disproportionate distribution of environmental benefits and burdens on low-income communities and communities of color within the United States (Schlosberg, 2007). These diverse movements and frameworks are more often being analyzed through an intersectional lens and, taken together, are increasingly influential. Not surprisingly, they are also “filled with tensions and contradictions, composed as they are of a variety of groups and individuals who have begun to take political action” (Jamison, 2010, p. 817).

Many advocates and scholars have pointed out that because climate change raises such profound implications for social, racial and economic justice, the moral consequences of inaction or wrong action are severe (Bond, 2011; Adger, 2006). It is in part with this mindset that many religious groups are becoming increasingly involved with climate issues and clergy are using their voices to speak out about climate justice.

Religious Involvement

The alliance between religious communities and environmentalism has had a complex and at times somewhat precarious history since the start of the modern

environmental movement. In the 1960s, many mainstream environmentalists “looked to science, social science, and law as their de facto sources of authority and legitimation and not to religious leaders and religious tradition” (Agliardo, 2011, p. 41). Long seated tensions between the worlds of science and religion contributed to this discordance, as the two were seen – especially by more conservative denominations – as irreconcilable. Although that perspective is still significant in conservative circles, the 1970s saw the emergence of religious responses to the environmental crisis. Recognition of the connections between human rights and environmental degradation, often referred to as eco-justice or ecological consciousness, provided avenues through which religious involvement in climate issues has taken place (Hessel, 2007).

After the first Earth Day in 1970, the Board of National Ministries of the American Baptist Churches adopted the term “eco-justice” to integrate concerns for ecology and justice, and soon after the World Council of Churches (WCC) began to frame environmental destruction as an issue of moral values (Hessel, 2007; Pedersen, 2015, p. 562). In 1987, the United Church of Christ’s Commission for Racial Justice published “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States,” a report that was instrumental in showing that “race was the single most important factor in determining where toxic waste facilities were sited in the United States” (Skelton & Miller, 2016). Pope John Paul II brought his voice to the conversation with the 1990 World Day of Peace message titled *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility*. The decisiveness of his call for religious environmental ethics “ended the debate about whether Catholics should be concerned about the environment, and the discussion shifted to how Catholics should express their care for creation” (Warner, 2011, p. 119).

That same year, 33 scientists from around the globe signed an “Open Letter to the Religious Community,” appealing to the religious community for action on climate change:

Problems of such magnitude [as climate change], and solutions demanding so broad a perspective, must be recognized from the outset as having a religious as well as a scientific dimension. Mindful of our common responsibility, we scientists, many of us long engaged in combating the environmental crisis, urgently appeal to the world religious community to commit, in word and deed, and as boldly as is required, to preserve the environment of the Earth... We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded. Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred. (Sagan et al., 1990)

These scientists recognized that the special authority of religious communities would make them valuable allies in moving beyond a scientific consensus on climate change to also establishing a social one. Their explicit use of the term “sacred” reflects the power of imbuing an issue with moral dimensions as a way to mobilize action.

And indeed, religious communities have continued to respond in the years since, with examples of involvement becoming as diverse as the religious groups themselves. Many are increasingly incorporating climate issues into their institutional priorities and have become important actors in multiple sectors of climate work. Some churches, synagogues, and mosques are engaging with local climate justice issues through fossil fuel infrastructure campaigns, motivated by the direct impacts that refineries or pipelines have on their congregations. Others, such as the organization Interfaith Power & Light, work in coalitions that seek to influence public policy by participating in lobbying or demonstrations. Religious groups are playing an active role in the fossil fuel divestment movement, which calls on colleges and universities, cities, pension funds, foundations, and other institutions to remove their investments in fossil fuel companies. Even some

evangelical groups are adopting more progressive practices on issues such as carbon emission reductions – although often with internal opposition – by connecting religious mandates for creation care with the impacts of climate change.

Religious denominations and figures that deny the existence of climate change have been widely publicized, but less attention has been given to religious actors who consider climate change to be a deeply pressing issue. Many of these have helped dramatically shift the narrative around climate change by highlighting the moral implications of its impacts. The growing involvement of religious organizations and their focus on social justice provide the backdrop against which religious leaders have been able to emerge as key actors in climate work. In the next section, I provide a review of relevant literature to outline the theoretical framework that guides my research and supports my analysis of religious leaders' roles in climate change issues.

Chapter Three:

Theories of Social Movements and Religious Influence

Only limited scholarship currently exists on the activities and influence of religious leaders engaged in climate change. Given the pervasiveness of religion in the United States, the high stakes of the climate crisis, and the importance of leadership within social movements, this is a substantial gap in the scholarly conversation. I therefore situate my research by building upon the work of scholars who have examined how religiosity impacts individuals' opinions about climate change, the importance of moral frameworks, the advantage of structure-based organizing, how collective identity influences social cohesion and movement mobilization, and leadership theories. While a number of relevant schools of social movement theory could be applied, this thesis draws most heavily on political process theory to highlight how the combination of climate narratives framed around social justice, organizational strength of faith-based efforts, and political opportunities of the climate movement create conditions that allow religious leaders to exert a unique level of influence on climate change issues.

Religiosity and Climate Change

Within the United States, survey and ethnographic research has shown that religious affiliation is a key factor that influences a person's views on climate change (Veldman et al., 2012; Morrison et al., 2015). Although generalizations, especially regarding something as multifaceted and diverse as religion, must be employed with caution, religious people are overall less likely to believe that the climate is changing due to human activity and less likely to support enacting policy than their nonreligious counterparts (Hand & Van Liere, 1984; Guth et al., 1995). This perspective manifests

most clearly in conservative Christianity, with religiosity having a stronger influence on climate change attitudes among evangelicals (Arbuckle & Konisky, 2015). Coupled with other social, economic and political dynamics, the strength of climate denial and conservative Christian ideology within the U.S. electorate and political leadership has had a considerable impact on preventing and weakening domestic and international policy change (Morrison et al., 2015; Collumb, 2014).

While climate denial within the U.S. is a complex phenomenon, some have pointed to religious teachings and traditions as one of the contributing sources. In his widely cited article “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis” (1967), medieval historian Lynn White Jr. suggests that the idea of human dominion over the earth and its resulting environmental exploitation has its roots in the Judeo-Christian creation story. However, White’s piece also offers a path forward, concluding that “Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not” (p. 1207). White calls for a reinterpretation of the traditional Christian view of the relationship between humans and nature. He proposes the kind of spiritual revolution put forth by Saint Francis of Assisi, whom he names a “patron saint for ecologists” (p. 1207). White’s call for Christians to reexamine their traditions represents a pivot towards theology based on stewardship instead of domination over nature.

Moral Frameworks and Moral Authority

Over time, modern re-readings of scripture have come to include the stewardship and ecological consciousness in the human relationship with nature of which White spoke. This reinterpretation calls on people of faith to claim environmental destruction –

and now climate change – as issues of key religious significance (Pedersen, 2015).

Across faiths, many argue that religious teachings compel followers to protect the natural world as a gift from God and care for the most vulnerable among us via a narrative of social justice (Boorse, 2008; Waschenfelder, 2014).

In this vein, theologian Mary Evelyn Tucker (2003) argues that many religions are beginning to move into their “ecological phase” (p. 4). She calls for faith communities to reclaim and reconstruct their traditions, claiming that in light of the environmental crisis religion should use its authority to work towards justice for the earth and its peoples rather than for oppression or dominion. Political scientist Paula Posas claims that most major religions include teachings on “other-person centeredness and environmental stewardship... [that] should be able to influence their members to bring an ethical dimension which is sympathetic to climate change policy” (Morrison, 2015, p. 1). Given the prevalence of social justice as a core religious value, faith groups are able to highlight the injustices and inequalities of climate change with particular weight.

Religious groups bring a powerful voice to environmental and climate issues because of their distinctive positions as sources of moral authority. Tucker (2003) argues that because of the particular level of influence held by faith-based institutions, “the efficacy of religions in encouraging individuals and communities to protect the environment is considerable in potentiality and demonstrable in actuality” (p. 43). This authority increases the ability of religious groups to galvanize involvement, while also granting them legitimacy to center climate narratives on the moral imperatives of social, racial, and economic justice.

In addition to the institutional authority of religious groups as a motivating factor for involvement in climate issues, scholars have consistently found that moral values play a central role in mobilizing people into action (Kahan et al., 2010; Toomey, 2013). The reinterpretation of religious traditions to emphasize social justice and moral values is thus both strategic and ethical. Religion is a powerful source of moral guidance, and the culture, ideology, and group norms established through religious communities are often effective avenues through which to affect people's beliefs or behaviors (Feinberg & Willer, 2013; Hoffman, 2012). For this reason, Tucker (2015) asserts that an ethical framework may be necessary to galvanize an adequate response to climate change:

It may be the case that – like the abolitionist movement in the nineteenth century and civil rights in the twentieth century – until climate disruption is seen as a moral challenge, there won't be a sufficient response at the scale and speed that is required. The integration of the moral issues of ecological degradation and climate justice into social consciousness, political legislation, and international negotiations remains to be realized. (p. 950)

According to these analyses, values-based environmental stewardship is an effective orientation through which to appeal to religious individuals, opening up a new role for faith-based organizing.

However, while a moral framework may be needed to rouse a *sufficient* response, it is also necessary to ensure that the urgency of climate change is coupled with frameworks of social justice. The moral implications of climate change must be integrated into public consciousness, climate policies, and climate movement narratives and organizing strategies. Because the choices we make moving forward will have serious ethical consequences, justice must be “intimately intertwined with the institutions and procedures of collective action at different levels of decision making” (Adger, 2006,

p. 3). Religious traditions and their teachings of social justice thus have an important role to play in centering moral values in these conversations.

According to social movement theories that emphasize the importance of organizations, leaders and resources, religious groups provide a unique context through which organizing efforts can create change. Because religious institutions can “shape people’s worldviews, wield moral authority, have the ear of multitudes of adherents, often possess strong financial and institutional assets, and are strong generators of social capital, an asset in community building,” they are equipped in ways that secular or governmental organizations are not (Gardner, 2003, p. 6). However, one particular quality of religious institutions – their established structure as existing organizations – is considered by many social movement scholars to be especially important (Gamson, 1975; Soule & Olzak, 2004).

Structure-Based Organizing

Structure-based organizing is often attributed to Saul Alinsky, who pioneered the model of aligning existing structures such as religious or neighborhood groups with more traditional styles of community organizing. His emphasis on building organizations, not movements, stemmed from an analysis that viewed long-term and sustained commitment as the most effective path for achieving social change. According to Alinsky, working through local centers of power – for example churches, synagogues, and mosques – was central to creating a lasting and influential organizing model (Engler & Engler, 2014).

Historically, the importance of religious groups in social change efforts is most clearly exemplified through black churches in the Civil Rights Movement, but religious communities have been an integral part of the organizing strategy in many social

movements. As grassroots organizations, religious groups provide a recruiting ground for new members, social networks, safety for activists, institutional resources, physical spaces for meetings and trainings, and much more (West, 2015). These practical advantages distinguish them as ideal sites of a structure-based organizing strategy (Gardner, 2003).

Despite Alinsky's theoretical emphasis on local organizations, in practice he also understood the importance of mass mobilization at certain points in the evolution of a social movement. Capitalizing on exceptional moments that arise during periods of social unrest allows organizers to capture the potential of "the moment of the whirlwind" (Engler & Engler, 2014). The integration of structure- and momentum- based organizing combines the sustainability, leadership, and resources of preexisting organizations with the power of peak energy moments to catapult a movement forward.

Collective Identity

Structure-based organizing is so effective in part because of the strong social cohesion among a group's members, particularly those in religious communities. In sociological literature, this dynamic is commonly analyzed through theories of collective identity that describe how social ties and a shared understanding of morals, norms, and behaviors empower those who identify with them and strengthen the power of the group (Durkheim, 1912; Weber, 1922; Jamison, 2010). Collective identity is a valuable lens through which to analyze social movements, specifically to explain collective action and movement mobilization (Melucci, 1995; Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Because religious communities create a sense of belonging, a commitment to common values, and an

investment in shared activities, cultures and traditions, they are often especially powerful groups through which to organize (Lichterman, 2008).

In the United States, scholars have found that individuals consistently cite religious reasons (distinct from moral reasons, as discussed above) as justification for political opinions and civic engagement (Casanova, 1994; Regnerus & Smith, 1998). This result is consistent with collective identity theories, because “a person whose life is intertwined with the group [through friendship, kinship, organizational membership, informal support networks, or shared relations with outsiders]... has a big stake in the group’s fate” (Fireman & Gamson, 1979, p. 22). People of faith have existing relationships with their fellow congregants and clergy, and are sufficiently linked to make “solidaristic” participation in social movement efforts a reasonable expectation (Polletta & Jasper, 2001, p. 289). Behavior may be motivated by the “connections one has to members of a group that oblige one to protest along with or on behalf of them,” and that obligation can be based on myriad types of internal or external pressure including altruism, personal loyalty, obedience to authority, or self-interested reputational concerns (Polletta & Jasper, 2011, p. 290). Regardless of motivation, collective identity is instrumental in inspiring social movement involvement and recruiting participants into action.

Leadership Theories

While leadership theories exist within a number of fields including psychology, behavioral studies, organizational studies, military studies, political science, and education, I focus here on literature that analyzes how leaders operate within organizations and social movements. I discuss the concept of charismatic leadership and

its implications for religious leaders, as well as other models of leadership that sustain efforts for social change over the long term. Political process theory provides a framework to understand how the combination of moral values, structure-based organizing, and collective identity set the stage for the emergence of influential leaders within religious institutions.

Social scientists emphasize varying qualities and functions of leaders, although a common understanding of their importance in social movements runs through the conversation. Introduced by sociologist and political economist Max Weber, the concept of “charisma” highlights the significant role that certain individuals play in history. Karl Marx shared Weber’s opinion that “in times of transition some figures can influence the course of history” (Stutje, 2012, p. 1). Charismatic leaders often act as symbols of a movement, and are distinguished by their ability to inspire and motivate followers. In *An Integrative Theory of Leadership* (1997), social psychologist Martin Chemers articulated a general definition of leadership that has become widely accepted by many U.S. academics and theorists, according to which leadership is “a process of social influence in which a person can enlist the aid and support of others in the accomplishment of a common task” (Chemers, 1997, p. 12).

The mid-twentieth century saw the emergence of a new genre of behavioral leadership theory that focused on how exceptional leaders exert influence on their followers and eventually on social systems (Fleishman et al., 1945). Charismatic leaders demonstrate specific types of behaviors: they communicate through inspirational messages, appeal to ideological values, act as role models for the beliefs and values they want their followers to adopt, appear competent and confident, express high expectations

for self and followers, and arouse motives in followers that may include affiliation, dominance or esteem (Northouse, 2015; Young, 1991; Underdal, 1994). The power of moral values, the psychological instinct to emulate those in power, and the lure of collective identity are all highly effective in influencing followers. In this way, charismatic leaders can unify and mobilize people around social change efforts by “transform[ing] the needs, values, preferences and aspirations of followers from self-interests to collective interests” (Shamir et al., 1993, p. 82). These key individuals are often the most visible members of an organization or movement, and thus are charged with the dual functions of mobilizing popular support and articulating the movement’s interest to the wider society (Gusfield, 1966, p. 141).

Consequently, charismatic leaders are commonly seen as an advantage that can unite a movement and allow followers to rally around a few pivotal individuals. However, as social movement historian Mary Beth Rogers (1990) writes, dependence on charismatic leaders is one of the patterns that create “instability, ineffectiveness, and eventual dissolution” in social movements (p. 95). Far from being a necessity for strong social change efforts, “Movements that depended on charismatic leaders fell apart in the absence of the leader” (Rogers, 1990, p. 95). Before he pursued a political career, President Barack Obama was a community organizer who addressed issues of movement leadership. He described how, in contrast to movements that rely on charismatic leaders, those that develop networks of leaders to “knit together the diverse interests of their local institutions” are often able to create more “long-term power” (Obama, 1990, p. 37).

This strategy is exemplified in the way that clergy work on climate issues in their own congregations while also organizing through a network of religious leadership in the

broader climate movement. Clergy are at the center of many concentric circles, each congregation with its own leader. In turn, the collective strength of each religious community “can support those who act as representatives or spokespersons at any given moment” (Ransby, 2015). Distributing power and influence while maintaining a networked leadership structure doesn’t leave the whole movement dependent on one or two individuals, but still allows it to benefit from a multiplicity of religious leaders. Once such a network has been formed, it can easily mobilize large numbers of people and “holds the power to make politicians, agencies and corporations more responsive to community needs” (Obama, 1990, 37).

Distinct from their secular counterparts, clergy carry with them a moral authority that stems from their status as religious leaders. While the exact sources and implications of this authority vary depending on religion, many clergy are seen as providing connections between God and people of faith, and act as mediators of God’s teachings (Widdows, 2004). People of faith may therefore anoint their religious leaders with added levels of influence due to their special relationship to God. However, this does not apply to clergy in Judaism, Islam, or certain denominations of Christianity.

Despite the secularization of U.S. society and the decreasing role of religion as a basis for moral values, clergy have maintained their status as moral authorities even among many secular people, who respect their wisdom and recognize them as leaders. Studies show that “not only do non-believers hold notions of value, but moral understandings of believers (and believers from different faiths and traditions) and nonbelievers overlap” (Widdows, 2004, p. 202). While this claim certainly does not hold true for every religious moral teaching and for people of all faiths and political

orientations, the legitimacy of religious leaders among both religious and secular people alike allow them to exert leadership beyond the confines of the religious community.

Clergy also have an important role to play in communicating controversial issues – including climate change – to people of faith from a religious perspective. The concept of framing in social movement theory (Benford & Snow, 2000) claims that the way an issue is explained influences how it will be interpreted. Framing an issue through accepted belief systems allows individuals to understand it through familiar templates and in their own relevant context. Similarly, “People are more likely to feel open to consider evidence when it is accepted or, ideally, presented by a knowledgeable member of their cultural community” (Hoffman, 2011; Fisher & Shapiro, 2006; Kahan et al., 2010). Called “climate brokers,” these individuals may come from many facets of society and act as translators by imbuing the issue of climate change with credibility and relevance for their audience. For example, when people hear about climate change from their military leaders, they will understand it as it relates to security. When they hear about climate change from religious leaders, they will connect it to their moral values (Hoffman, 2011). Because the source and method through which people hear about climate change influences their response, religious leaders are in a unique position due to their legitimacy with people of faith and their ability to frame the issue through established belief systems.

This chapter has pulled from a number of social movement theories to explain why clergy can emerge as particularly influential leaders. Against the backdrop of the larger climate movement, religious leaders articulate how social justice values apply to climate justice. They play important roles as sources of moral authority, climate brokers,

and representatives of their congregations. These theories provide a framework through which to analyze the impact of Pope Francis' climate change encyclical *Laudato sí*, as well as my primary research conducted with nine U.S. religious leaders.

Chapter Four:

Pope Francis' *Laudato si'*: On Care For Our Common Home

As the most well known example of a religious leader working on climate issues, Pope Francis' recent encyclical *Laudato si'* fundamentally changed the conversation about climate change within the Catholic Church and beyond. Coming from the highest authority of a religion counting more than 1.2 billion followers, *Laudato si'* has had an unprecedented impact worldwide (DiLeo, 2015; O'Riordan et al., 2015). The Pope's message has also resounded with a wide range of non-Catholic denominations, as well as many policymakers and individuals in civil society (Tilche & Nociti, 2015). This chapter will explore why Pope Francis' *Laudato si'* has been so influential. In the absence of scholarly literature on U.S. religious leaders working on climate change, the existing research on Pope Francis provide a case study to which the theoretical frameworks presented in Chapter Three can be applied.

Although *Laudato si'* was just released in May 2015, scholars from George Mason University and Yale University found that the encyclical has made a significant impact on public opinion in the United States. From Spring to Fall of 2015 (before the Pope's encyclical to after his visit to the U.S.), their study found that a substantial number of U.S. citizens – especially U.S. Catholics – became more engaged in and concerned about climate change. These increases ranged from four to twenty percentage points depending on the question. Their findings included that +4% of Americans and +10% of American Catholics say they now hear about climate change in the media at least once a month or more frequently, +8% and +11% say the Pope's position has made them become more worried about climate change, +6% and +8% have come to see climate change as a moral

issue, +4% and +7% as a religious issue, and +8% of Americans overall now see climate change as a social justice/fairness issue and +5% as a poverty issue (Maibach et al., 2015, pg. 5-6).

Application of Theory

The encyclical's widespread impact may be due to a number of factors, some of which can be analyzed through the social movement theories discussed in Chapter Three. Pope Francis' influence is undoubtedly due in part to his position in the Catholic Church, which not only has a large worldwide membership but also projects an image of grand and authoritative hierarchy, of which the Pope is the absolute monarch. The papacy is recognized even by many in secular society as a position "held by a wise spiritual leader whose teachings cannot be easily discarded" (DiLeo, 2015, p. 7). Scholars have also contended that the Pope's strong history as a leader with a life-long commitment to social justice contributed to the encyclical's success (O'Riordan et al., 2015; Tilche & Nociti, 2015).

As one of a handful of leaders with such great personal influence and institutional authority, the choice to put his energy and reputation into this document is a major, historical event. DiLeo (2015) articulates this distinction as "*an authority in authority*," or a combination of Pope Francis' individual appeal as a charismatic leader with his position's official credibility (p. 7). In other words, his behaviors grant him integrity in the eyes of the public while his position allows him a unique moral authority. By throwing his influence behind a message that emphasizes religious ethics and teachings, Pope Francis has been able to inject a framework of climate justice into the mainstream

conversation and garner great support from the global religious community (DiLeo, 2015; Eichmeier, 2016).

The encyclical's reliance on moral values and religious teachings also strengthened its appeal for the general public. DiLeo (2015) argues that *Laudato sí* is a model of Catholic public theology, which he explains as,

An attempt to shape public discourse and policy through intelligible communication of church teaching *ad intra* and *ad extra*, that is, to those both within and outside of the Roman Catholic Church. Efforts orientated toward the former explicitly appeal to aspects of the Catholic tradition, while endeavors angled at the latter seek to show how ethical visions of society based on Catholic teaching are congruent with reason, non-Catholic sources of wisdom, and civic commitments. (p. 7)

While *Laudato sí* is based on Catholic principles, it is also relevant in a non-religious context because of its widely applicable moral values. In fact, Pope Francis explicitly addresses not only Catholics, Christians, or “people of good will,” but “every person living on this planet” (Francis, 2015). The encyclical's strong moral framework and inclusive language makes it a widely influential message, as it appeals to both religious and secular individuals alike. It has been invoked by local and world leaders, taught by secular and religious educators, embraced by political organizers trying to bring pragmatic changes, and taken as moral gospel by millions of regular people around the world.

In addition to the encyclical, Pope Francis has taken other action on climate to engage with leaders and officials at every level of decision-making capacity. Before releasing *Laudato sí*, he convened a gathering of about 60 mayors from around the world in an effort to utilize the power of local government officials to implement climate policies and programs (O’Riordan et al., 2015). By encouraging action at the municipal

level, the Pope employed the power of “climate brokers” and distributed leadership, as discussed in Chapter Three. Creating a network of local leaders disseminated his impact through individuals with their own spheres of influence, and contributed to generating global political momentum for climate action.

Efforts like this one and the encyclical may have had both a direct and indirect influence on policy-making. On a national level, President Obama specifically referenced Pope Francis when announcing the Clean Power Plan in August 2015 and called the fight against climate change a “moral obligation” (Stinson, 2015). Pope Francis creates space for politicians like President Obama to apply morality to political decisions, and to push climate policy in the face of a campaign to discredit the existence of the problem.

Similarly, Miami Archbishop Thomas Wenski cited the encyclical in urging Congress to oppose efforts to roadblock the Clean Power Plan (Roewe, 2015). In September 2015, Pope Francis’ visit to Congress led supporters of climate action to hope that his focus on climate change would encourage further action and adoption of the plan. Significantly, just as Pope Francis arrived for his visit in the U.S., Hillary Clinton broke her silence on the controversial Keystone XL pipeline, coming out in opposition to the project and citing concerns about climate impacts. Although the Pope’s visit proved insufficient to squelch all Republican opposition, scholars say his influence has made it increasingly difficult for conservative members of Congress to continue denying the science on climate change (Goldenberg & Roberts, 2015).

Pope Francis’ efforts have highlighted the importance of climate change and its social justice implications within the religious community, general public consciousness and at multiple levels of policy. However, it is “precisely because the Pope writes not as a

politician, but as a spiritual leader who transcends political boundaries, that more people – especially politicians – are listening” (Stinson, 2015, p. 24). Pope Francis’ powerful voice amplifies the human story of climate change, casting him as an influential advocate for climate justice within halls of power.

Pope Francis has been cited by many as highly influential in the adoption of the Paris Agreement (Germanos, 2015; Harrabin, 2015). In the days leading up to COP21, the Pope made a number of strong statements calling for action and commitments from the world’s governments. When asked if the summit would be a turning point, he replied that it must be “now or never... Every year the problems are getting worse. We are at the limits. If I may use a strong word I would say that we are at the limits of suicide” (Feeney, 2015). On the eve of the summit, Pope Francis’ shoes joined thousands of other pairs in an art installation and protest that served as a replacement for the actual march that was called off following the November terrorist attacks (Roewe, 2015). After the Paris Agreement was reached, Pope Francis praised the accord as “historic” and called on governments to uphold their commitments. Speaking in reference to COP21, he urged the international community to “pay special attention to the most vulnerable populations” and “carefully follow the road ahead, and with an ever-growing sense of solidarity” (San Martin, 2015). Dr. Alison Doig from the organization Christian Aid called Pope Francis’ contribution “transformative,” citing *Laudato si* as the kickoff point for greater momentum and support from the wider faith community (Vatican Radio, 2015).

While Pope Francis is the most well known and influential example, religious leaders are working on climate change in myriad ways in communities around the country. This thesis profiles the efforts of nine clergy in the United States, who are

exerting influence through a range of activities and at different scales. In the following chapters, I present my primary research with and about these leaders. The social movement theories discussed in Chapter Three contextualize their influence in climate change issues.

Introduction to Primary Research

This research draws primarily on interviews I conducted with nine progressive religious leaders involved in climate change issues – five Christian, two Muslim, and two Jewish leaders from a range of denominations. I separate my findings into four chapters, beginning in Chapter Five with the roles and experiences of these religious leaders in climate work. I explore what inspired them to get involved in climate change, how they understand their own roles within their communities, whether they are inspired by specific religious texts, and what they do to engage congregants in climate issues. I also analyze the role of religious leaders within the larger climate movement and in local, national and international policy circles.

Chapter Six delves into why these individuals are uniquely effective because they are religious leaders, and how they can mobilize people in ways that secular leaders cannot. In Chapter Seven, I investigate the limitations of religious leadership, exploring how clergy may be bound by responsibilities to their congregations or to other authorities within their denominations. I conclude in Chapter Eight with questions for further study regarding the future of religious leaders in climate change work.

Chapter Five:

“The Role of Clergy is to Stand Up for Justice”

Many religious leaders who work on climate issues juggle multiple roles and operate in a number of different domains. Some are active clergy members – priests, rabbis, or imams who preside over a congregation. Others have retired from active ministry and use their positions to work within advocacy or educational organizations through a religious lens. Each of these positions brings its own challenges and opportunities. While the responsibilities of clergy who preside over congregations vary, those who incorporate a component of political work into their standard responsibilities are adding a substantial new dimension to their role. The decision to take on climate change within a religious institution is not an inconsequential one, and for many leaders it is a choice that transforms how they identify as clergy and impacts their congregations as a whole.

The role of a religious leader is a demanding one that involves a multiplicity of activities and responsibilities. While the exact function of clergy varies widely depending on religion and denomination, a few common factors stand out. Religious leaders interpret scripture and guide their congregations on religious questions of ethical behavior. They serve as role models for followers, who look to them as examples of righteous living. Clergy offer emotional support in times of hardship, and provide counsel to followers in distress. They perform ceremonies and carry out rituals of birth, coming of age, marriage and death. Many religious leaders are responsible for the logistical needs of the congregation, which may involve budgetary as well as organizational work. Clergy

also serve as spokespeople, and are often seen as representatives of their communities to the larger public.

But how do religious leaders operate within the context of climate work? What steps do clergy take to promote awareness and involvement among their congregants? Where does climate work fit into the many demands and obligations – as well as the joys and privileges – that clergy experience as leaders of a religious community? What makes these leaders especially effective in communicating climate change and mobilizing people into action?

I examine nine U.S. religious leaders at three levels of influence with respect to climate change activism: in their congregations, in the climate movement, and in policy circles. While there are many cases in which these three areas overlap and intersect, for the purposes of this thesis I separate them to distinguish how religious leaders take certain kinds of action depending on the kind of work they are doing and the goals of their involvement. I begin with a discussion of how clergy became motivated to work on climate issues, as this question holds important implications for their future involvement and that of other religious leaders.

Inspiration for Involvement

The nine religious leaders I interviewed became involved in climate work through myriad paths. The impetus for their action stemmed from a variety of sources including personal experience or motives, participation in secular environmental organizations, and encouragement from fellow clergy. Many explicitly mentioned feeling an ethical obligation and desire to align their moral values with their religious practices as a major motivation for working on climate change.

Reverend Earl Koteen is a Unitarian Universalist minister in Berkeley, CA and had just left seminary when he went to a lecture on climate change. After learning about the extent of the crisis, he was shocked into action. He explains that he “immediately made the decision to make environmental justice, and then climate justice, my sole ministry” (personal communication, February 15, 2016). This feeling of a responsibility to take action motivated Reverend Koteen into climate work and started him down a path that led to his extensive involvement in climate justice issues. He holds leadership positions in groups including Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth and the Sunflower Alliance, an environmental organization in Richmond, California.

Reverend Ken Chambers, pastor at West Side Missionary Baptist Church in Oakland, California, described his involvement in climate issues as part of an obligation he feels to pursue justice:

The role of clergy is to stand up for justice. Social justice, economic justice, racial justice, climate justice. I think if we're being guided, as most of us are, by the power of God and we're using our voices to speak His words, then I think we must be doing that. So that's why I'm using my role to bring social justice to the climate arena. It is my obligation in order to be true to my calling. (Personal communication, March 22, 2016)

Reverend Chambers is currently working to bring about justice through the No Coal In Oakland campaign that is fighting a proposed coal export terminal in the low-income, largely African American community of West Oakland. As a cancer survivor and father of children who grew up struggling with asthma, Reverend Chambers' personal experience also leads him to fight for clean air and a healthy environment (BondGraham, 2016).

The centrality of social justice was echoed by other religious leaders; many identified it as a fundamental part of what it means for them to be a person of faith.

Ali Sheikholeslami is a leader and founder of the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California, which adheres to the Ja'fari School of Islamic thought. He emphasized the importance of justice as a core tenet of Islam, and identified climate change as “a byproduct of the economic injustice that is going on around the world due to capitalist and consumerist societies” (personal communication, April 5, 2016). For Ali Sheikholeslami and many of the other clergy I interviewed, standing up for principles of justice is intrinsically tied to what it means to be a spiritual leader. Not taking action to address climate change would be failing to fulfill that responsibility.

Reverend Sally Bingham is the president and cofounder of the national organization Interfaith Power & Light (IPL), which aims to mobilize a religious response to climate change. Reverend Bingham described her path from congregant to priest, which was motivated by her effort to include environmental ethics in how she practiced her faith:

I was always devoted to the Episcopal Church and became very devoted to the Environmental Defense Fund, so I had these two organizations that I cared a lot about but there was no crossover between them. They didn't do any prayer at the EDF board meetings and nor did anybody in the church talk about what humans were doing to the planet. We were saying we loved God, loved creation, we prayed for reverence for the Earth and yet we were sitting back and letting it be destroyed. And that reached me very deeply. It's no good to love your neighbor if you're going to pollute your neighbor's air and water.

So I took it upon myself to inform people in our local church that we were hypocrites. I made enough noise about it that the rector of my church finally suggested that I go to seminary and find out where the disconnect was between what we say we believe in and how we behave. I thought that sounded like a fine idea. In 1997, I was ordained to be a priest and I've done nothing but talk about this ever since. (Personal communication, February 17, 2016)

In 2000, Reverend Bingham gave up her parish ministry and helped found California Interfaith Power & Light to engage people of faith and congregations around the ethical

mandate to address climate change. The California model was a success and IPL has now spread to forty states and has 18,000 congregations in its network. Reverend Bingham is a member of President Obama's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and has received numerous distinguished awards and recognitions. She serves on the board of directors of the Environmental Defense Fund, the Environmental Working Group, the U.S. Climate Action Network, and the advisory board for the Union of Concerned Scientists (Interfaith Power & Light, n.d.).

Rabbi David Cooper also named the desire to include moral values in his religious life. In 1984, he helped co-found Kehilla Community Synagogue, a Jewish Renewal community in Piedmont, California. At the time, he wasn't intending to become a rabbi. He just wanted "to be part of a congregation where I could feel ok about raising my children" (personal communication, March 11, 2016). His desire to unite progressive values with Jewish spiritual practices is reflected in Kehilla's explicitly political orientation. Rabbi Cooper began serving as Kehilla's rabbi in 1999, and has continued to help shape the congregation as a "Jewish spiritual home for politically progressive people" (Kehilla Community Synagogue). By basing Kehilla's political involvement in the Jewish mandates of healing the world, compassion for all, and working towards social justice, Rabbi Cooper was able to help create a politically involved community guided by religious values.

Many of the clergy I interviewed named specific religious texts or teachings that inspired their commitment to working on climate change. Reverend Bingham described the universality of religious values that she feels ought to inspire people of faith into action:

Every single mainstream religion calls us to help each other, serve each other, love each other. To do otherwise, for instance to profit off of something that's harming people, is just wrong. I think until recently, folks didn't realize that the fossil fuel industry and too much carbon dioxide was harming the poorest nations of the world before it was hurting developed nations. And that is not justice. We have progressed in the developed world on the backs of poor people. That goes completely against every religious doctrine and every religious faith. (Personal communication, February 17, 2016)

By connecting climate change with the religious mandate to help others, Reverend Bingham articulates the ethical imperative to act based. Because climate change has such widespread ramifications for matters of justice, ignoring the issues becomes morally – and religiously – wrong.

Reverend Kim Morrow is the executive director of the Nebraska Interfaith Power & Light program, and until recently was the Minister of Sustainability at First-Plymouth Church in Lincoln where she often preached about climate change through specific Biblical texts and teachings that reflect issues of sustainability, God's love for creation and social justice (personal communication, April 8, 2016). In addition to her role at IPL, she also works on climate change issues at the School of Natural Resources at the University of Nebraska. In 2015, she was recognized at the White House as one of twelve climate faith leaders in the "Champions of Change" initiative, for her work encouraging religious communities to get involved in climate change issues (Nebraska Interfaith Power & Light, n.d.).

Colin Christopher is the executive director of the political organization Green Muslims, which provides a source in the Muslim community for spiritually inspired environmental education, reflection, and action (Green Muslims, About Us). He was drawn to Islam because of its emphasis on conservation and moderation, and follows the Maliki School of Islamic Jurisprudence, one of the four main Sunni Schools. Christopher

identified multiple teachings within Islam that make references to environmental conservation, care for creation, moderate living, and reducing waste that he applies to issues of climate change (personal communication, March 22, 2016). In fact, Christopher felt that drawing connections between Islamic teachings and environmental protection was so important that the organization created an online resource called the Green Scriptures Project, which allows individuals to search for specific verses in the Qur'an and sunnah (the sayings and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad) that refer to water, or waste, or any specific issue they're interested in learning about (Green Muslims, Green Scripture Project).

Rabbi Cooper named multiple Jewish values that guide him in his commitment to climate work and social justice. He cited the Torah mandate to not stand idly by your neighbor, which he understands to mean that we have a responsibility to act when we see somebody or something in jeopardy. Rabbi Cooper also named the Jewish values of *Tikkun Olam* and *Bal Tashchit*, which are translated as healing the world and the prohibition against waste, respectively. These values are important because they call Jews to pursue social justice through action by "requiring us to identify with whatever damage we cause and to not be disconnected from the impacts" (David Cooper, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Rabbi Arthur Waskow, founder and director of The Shalom Center, contributed to developing the framework known as Eco-Judaism. Rabbi Waskow describes Eco-Judaism as "the theology, the practice, the activism of what it means to remake Judaism in an ecological perspective" (personal communication, April 4, 2016). He is the author of multiple books on the subject, and has received numerous awards and recognitions for

his contributions to the movement for Jewish renewal. In 1996, Waskow was named a “Wisdom Keeper” by the United Nations among forty religious and intellectual leaders. He received the Abraham Joshua Heschel Award by the Jewish Peace Fellowship in 2001, and was named one of the fifty most influential American rabbis by Newsweek in 2007 (The Shalom Center, 2015). His work to reinterpret Jewish teachings through a lens of social justice is reminiscent of other faith-based efforts to develop environmental consciousness.

The leaders I interviewed repeatedly drew connections between their moral values and their inspiration for getting involved in climate work. This finding is consistent with the research discussed in Chapter Three regarding the effectiveness of moral values in motivating participation. While values of social justice were central motivators for clergy to become involved, these individuals also employed many of the same values to convey the importance of climate change to their congregants. This section discusses a number of ways that clergy make the connections between religion and climate change explicit and engage with climate issues within their congregations.

In their Congregations

Of the religious leaders I interviewed who actively preside over a congregation, most described their role as a combination of three main tasks: education, setting an example, and providing opportunities for action. These are often carried out in conjunction, although they may also occur through a series of steps. Rabbi Cooper described his role in Kehilla Community Synagogue as “enunciating to the congregation the connection between our spirituality and the environment” (personal communication, March 11, 2016). In his effort to educate congregants about climate change, Rabbi

Cooper first aims to convey the importance of the issues, their connections to Jewish values, and the relevance of bringing climate change into the synagogue before encouraging congregants into action.

Similarly, Reverend Fletcher Harper, director of the national organization GreenFaith, described his process of engaging congregants as a progression that begins with preaching, followed by distributing educational information such as a flyer or church newsletter, and then inviting members to attend a demonstration or event (personal communication, February 17, 2016). Reverend Harper served as a parish priest for ten years and occupied leadership positions in the Episcopal Church before joining GreenFaith. In all of these roles, he has preached extensively on the religious basis for working on climate issues (GreenFaith, n.d.). He is also an Ashoka Fellow and was recognized for his work by Ban Ki-Moon at the Many Faiths, One Earth celebration in 2009 (Our Voices, Project Team).

This preaching element was echoed by other clergy, who also highlighted the usefulness of the pulpit as a place from which to educate congregants about climate change. Through sermons, sometimes called *drash* in Judaism and *khutbah* in Islam, leaders are able to explicitly draw connections between climate and faith. Reverend Chambers emphasized the importance of taking time to fully explain the issues so that people understand, which makes them more likely to respond when he invites them to participate. He engages parishioners by talking about climate change and social justice “every Sunday morning and every bible study and every community meeting” (personal communication, March 22, 2016). This repetition is significant, as witnessing a leader’s

continual commitment to climate change reinforces for congregants the religious importance of these issues.

The second piece that religious leaders named as a central aspect of their role was setting an example, whether for their congregations, organizations, or the general public. Modeling how to live in a way that is respectful of the environment demonstrates a level of personal sacrifice that carries added weight when it comes from a person in a position of influence. Rabbi Cooper explained, “I think most congregants have at one point or another seen me coming to synagogue by bicycle. It's known that even though I live four miles away I bike to synagogue and try to diminish my own carbon footprint” (personal communication, March 11, 2016). Because clergy have so many eyes looking to them for guidance, their everyday actions expand in influence. Similarly, Sheikholeslami explained that congregants look to leaders to “not only to gain knowledge about the faith but also to see someone who is a living example of the teachings of Islam” (personal communication, April 5, 2016). This requires that their behavior illustrate the teachings they are endorsing.

Mobilizing congregants into action is a third main focus of religious leaders within their communities. While some leaders emphasized this aspect of their climate work more than others (many clergy are limited by internal or external forces stemming from political, economic, and structural dynamics, as discussed in Chapter Seven), the individuals I interviewed all incorporate action into their efforts. However, they described myriad ways of mobilizing congregants and expressed differing understandings of what qualifies as an adequate level of involvement.

For some, changing practices within churches, synagogues, and mosques was the main way they engaged members around climate change. Greening religious facilities might include switching to biodegradable or reusable dining utensils, participating in energy and waste audits, or installing solar panels on the roof. Reverend Bingham emphasized the significance of greening a house of worship because it serves as an example of what congregants can do in their own homes:

If you have a priest coming down the aisle saying, ‘We just put solar on our roof, we tightened up energy efficiency, we have sensors on the lights, we’re eating sustainable and locally grown food at our coffee hours and dinners’ and saying ‘We created jobs putting solar on the roof and we’re also saving money,’ people in the parish will realize that if the church facility can do it they can do it too. (Personal communication, February 17, 2016)

In this way, institutional changes can offer opportunities for members to get involved – either by replicating the congregation’s actions in their own lives or by participating in the decision-making and implementation process in the congregation.

Through his work at Green Muslims, Colin Christopher coordinates a yearly event called a “leftar,” which is a play on the word “iftar” or the breaking of the fast at the end of each day of Ramadan. Conducted in a community potluck style, attendees bring leftover dishes to share and reusable plates to avoid wasting food or producing trash. This event brings Muslims from multiple mosques together through spiritual practice while simultaneously acting as a way to promote environmental sustainability. Christopher explicitly connects the Islamic mandates of reducing waste and lowering consumption with the carbon emissions produced by the agricultural and meat industries, explaining to participants why changing these behaviors has important implications for climate change (Colin Christopher, personal communication, March 22, 2016). Green Muslims also offers an annual “Our Deen is Green” Youth Outdoor Education Program, that

Christopher emphasized as an important way to teach young Muslims about environmental and climate issues (personal communication, March 22, 2016).

At Kehilla Community Synagogue, putting solar panels on the roof provided a path for members to get involved in an accessible and concrete way. Rabbi Cooper used his leadership position to move the project forward, but mostly played a supporting role while congregants took the lead:

It was a congregant who found a way we could put solar panels on the roof that wouldn't cost us a tremendous amount of money, but would take some effort to put together. It was not my initiative. But as soon as it started happening, I pushed it and publicized it and participated in the process of disseminating it as a project of the congregation. It's my job as rabbi to hail after them and say, 'Yes that's a great idea. You should know you've got the rabbi's support on it.' (Personal communication, March 11, 2016)

Climate-based projects within a congregation can serve as a training ground for members to gain experience and skills that can then be applied in other situations. Whether or not a religious leader is the one who starts the initiative, receiving encouragement and support from clergy can inspire congregants to take ownership over a project and mobilize them into further action.

However, many of the religious leaders I interviewed commented on the need to push beyond individual lifestyle changes and also engage in organized political action. For example, although Reverend Harper affirmed the importance of greening a house of worship, he firmly believes that “the purpose of the religious environmental movement is not just to make religious institutions green; it's to get society onto a genuinely sustainable path” (personal communication, February 17, 2016). Although educational efforts and lifestyle improvements are helpful, putting solar panels on churches falls short of the systemic changes that are needed to address the climate crisis.

For many of the religious leaders I interviewed, these two modes of involvement are not mutually exclusive. Because religious groups occupy positions of institutional power, they hold the ability to influence both the individual behavior of their congregants while also working to achieve climate action on a systemic level. As the climate crisis continues to grow, clergy are increasingly choosing to move beyond a congregational level and also participate in organized political resistance. Rabbi Cooper summarized the conflict by explaining, “It’s one thing to try to lower your own carbon footprint, but it is actually going to require a movement to lower the carbon footprint of the whole planet” (personal communication, March 11, 2016). Consequently, the next section examines faith leaders’ involvement in the climate movement.

In the Climate Movement

A number of factors may influence how leaders choose to participate in climate work including their politics and the politics of their communities, obligations to their congregations, and pressure from authorities within their denomination. The appropriateness of different types of engagement may shift depending on the context of each congregation, as well as on the leader’s position, influence, seniority, and comfort with taking risks. While some clergy who preside over congregations do find ways to participate in the climate movement, I found that the most intensive involvement stems from religious leaders who have retired from active ministry to work within religious-based political organizations.

Of the individuals I interviewed, Reverend Sally Bingham, Reverend Fletcher Harper, Colin Christopher, Rabbi Arthur Waskow, and Reverend Earl Koteen are leaders of political organizations. For many of them, a large part of their effort involves working

with other congregations and religious leaders to get involved with climate issues. For example, as director of GreenFaith, Reverend Harper works to uphold the organization's mission statement to "inspire, educate and mobilize people of diverse religious backgrounds for environmental leadership" (GreenFaith, Mission and Areas of Focus). Because GreenFaith is an interfaith coalition that works with houses of worship across the country, Reverend Harper plays an important role in the climate movement by coordinating the religious presence in demonstrations or events, framing communications materials for media, and identifying parish leaders whom he can encourage to become involved. He explained his role and GreenFaith's role as "educating members and leaders of diverse faith communities about the nature of the climate crisis and the urgency for action, as well as developing ways of campaigning and mobilizing to create the cultural and political conditions under which change can happen" (personal communication, February 17, 2016).

At Interfaith Power & Light, Reverend Bingham "engages faith communities and individuals in collective action, from education on climate change to energy saving activities to policy advocacy" (Interfaith Power & Light, Fact Sheet). IPL provides resources such as financial guidebooks for putting solar panels on religious facilities, suggestions for how to practice energy efficiency or conduct an energy audit, and sample sermons about climate change for leaders of every religion and denomination. IPL also operates through mechanisms of collective action and community organizing, which allows it to engage with climate change as a movement actor in addition to, but distinct from, the work it does with congregations to encourage members to change individual behaviors.

Similar to IPL and GreenFaith, Green Muslims and The Shalom Center coordinate action among congregations to make it easier for them to get involved in climate work on a movement level. As executive director of Green Muslims, Colin Christopher's work is divided among three main areas: educational programming, community action, and building capacity for Muslim leaders to work on environmental and climate issues. They offer one-on-one consulting specifically to Muslim leaders, aiming to grow the network of clergy who are working on climate change and expand religious leaders' involvement congregation by congregation (Colin Christopher, personal communication, March 22, 2016). In this way, Green Muslims "seeks to serve as a bridge between Muslim communities and environmental organizations in the US" (Green Muslims, About Us).

Rabbi Waskow and the Shalom Center engage in climate issues by seeking to shape a "transformed and transformative Judaism that can help create a world of peace, justice, healing for the earth, and respect for the interconnectedness of all life (The Shalom Center, About). The Shalom Center works with other organizations through strategic partnerships to amplify each group's effectiveness, allowing them to make a larger collective impact. The role that religious leaders play in connecting congregations with larger movement efforts is a critically important one, as it offers avenues through which networks of religious communities can join together in climate movement spaces.

One of the ways that Rabbi Cooper encourages members to get involved in climate movement organizing is through Kehilla Community Synagogue's social action committees, which include the Middle East Peace Committee, the Economic Justice Committee, and the Greening Committee, among others. These committees are

responsible for congregational work related to their respective issue, as well as connecting the congregation to external political organizing. Rabbi Cooper and Kehilla also participate in the Faith Trio, an alliance made up of leaders and members from the Islamic Cultural Center of Northern California and the Montclair Presbyterian Church that organizes cultural, educational and political gatherings. By showing up at these meetings and participating in the Faith Trio's activities, Rabbi David is able to publically support the work being done in larger climate movement spaces.

One way that religious leaders have used the decentralized network of faith-based leadership is by making public statements on the importance of climate change in partnership with other clergy. Launched in 2006, the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI) was one of the first such statements that used the voices of religious leaders to emphasize the need for climate action. As expected, the ECI has been very controversial within the evangelical community and received a large amount of pushback. However, it has now been signed by over 300 leaders, received widespread national media attention, and served as a catalyst for important conversations within the evangelical community. The ECI is framed by a market-based analysis and calls the U.S. to address climate change "in a way that creates jobs, cleans up our environment, and enhances national security by reducing our dependence on foreign oil, thereby creating a safe and a healthy future for our children" (Evangelical Climate Initiative). However, it also references the commitment that evangelicals have to fulfilling Christ's commandments to "love our neighbors, care for 'the least of these,' and be proper stewards of His creation" (Evangelical Climate Initiative).

Two months after the release of Pope Francis' encyclical, 60 Muslim leaders from 20 countries signed the Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change. By extensively citing both Islamic teachings and scientific studies on climate change, the leaders come to a relatively radical conclusion about what they felt is needed in the coming transition. Parts of the declaration are addressed to different audiences. One section calls for "well-off nations and oil-producing states" to stay within the 2 degree limit and preferably within the 1.5 degree limit, among other requests. Another section urges "the people of all nations and their leaders" to transition away from fossil fuels as soon as possible, invest in decentralized renewable energy, realize the infeasibility of unlimited economic growth, and prioritize adaptation efforts with "appropriate support to the vulnerable countries with the least ability to adapt." Last, the declaration calls on corporations, finance, and the business sector to shoulder responsibility for the consequences of their profit-making activities, change their business models that rely on unsustainable practices, and divest from the fossil fuel economy (Islamic Declaration on Global Climate Change).

It also includes specific texts from the Qur'an, thereby appealing to the world's 1.6 billion Muslims while also employing moral values that are applicable to all people regardless of religion. By incorporating the historical responsibility of developed nations, the infeasibility of an economy based on continuous growth, and the moral imperative that future action be based on principles of social justice, the declaration sends a strong message about the urgency of climate change and the drastic response that is needed. Coming from Islamic leaders, the declaration's decisive words carry added weight that firmly places moral values and social justice in the center of the conversation.

Through The Shalom Center, Rabbi Waskow initiated what became the Rabbinic Letter on the Climate Crisis that was written by seven leading rabbis and ultimately signed by 425 others. Rabbi Waskow described the letter as a “Jewish analog of the papal encyclical. There's no central figure like the pope in Jewish life, but there are respected and influential rabbis in all sectors from Orthodox through Renewal who people respect and listen to” (personal communication, April 4, 2016). The letter developed after these rabbis learned about Pope Francis’ encyclical and decided it was important for Jewish spiritual leadership to take a public stand on the climate crisis. The letter speaks about impacts of fossil fuel extraction on frontline communities, naming the specific harms that result from natural gas, tar sands, coal, and oil drilling. It suggests a number of avenues to address the climate crisis, one of which is the Move Our Money campaign that urges a transition from “spending that helps modern pharaohs burn our planet to spending that helps to heal it” (The Shalom Center, Rabbinic Letter on Climate). By proposing concrete next steps to create a just transition from an extractive economy based on fossil fuels to a clean energy economy, the rabbis offer practical actions that can be taken by both individuals and institutions.

The Move Our Money campaign proposed by the Rabbinic Letter is reflective of the Fossil Fuel Divestment Movement, which calls on institutions ranging from universities to cities to pension funds or religious groups to remove their investments from fossil fuel companies. Religious organizations have been particularly important leaders in this effort and currently account for 27 percent of fossil fuel divestment commitments, leading all other institutional sectors (Fossil Free). Reverend Harper

named divestment as one of the things that he is most proud of working on over the past few years:

I think we've done a very good job of educating and mobilizing faith communities to make divestment commitments. And even when they haven't been willing to make commitments, to debate the issues seriously and really engage with them to shift the moral dialogue about climate change. It's shifted the traditional role of faith communities and we've been a catalyst for that conversation. (Personal communication, February 17, 2016)

This type of institutional action not only contributes to change on a more systemic level than individual behavior changes, but is also a meaningful way that clergy can leverage their power and the power of their institutions. The high level of participation among religious organizations adds legitimacy to the moral narrative put forth by the fossil fuel divestment movement, helping to define investments in fossil fuel companies as fundamentally unethical.

In addition to their work in national coalitions, a common impetus for clergy involvement is witnessing the harm done to nearby communities. The consequences of local projects such as extraction sites, refineries, pipelines, or other fossil fuel related impacts often inspire religious leaders to form local or regionally based coalitions. The “No Coal in Oakland” is one such effort that has inspired strong interfaith collaboration to fight against a proposed coal export terminal, and that many of the leaders I interviewed are involved with. It has brought together community and climate organizations, labor unions, public health providers, religious leaders, and more. Reverend Chambers is especially involved in this campaign because his congregation, West Side Missionary Baptist Church, is located nearby the proposed terminal. He describes the unjust burden that this project would have on the local community:

West Oakland already bears a disproportionate burden of pollution, of toxic contamination from diesel exhaust spewing from thruways crisscrossing through the community. Life expectancy of West Oakland residents is far below the life expectancy of residents in the Oakland hills, and West Oakland tenants are twice as likely to visit emergency rooms for asthma as the rest of Alameda County. The West Oakland community cannot afford to have any more pollution dumped on us. (Faith Against Coal in Oakland)

By clearly articulating the disproportionate impact of the coal terminal, Reverend Chambers highlighted the inequity of environmental destruction and presents this decision as an undeniably moral one. Reverend Chambers also emphasized the direct connection between projects like this one and global climate change, connecting West Oakland's local struggle with the broader impacts of climate change such as temperature increase and sea level rise (personal communication, April 11, 2016).

Throughout this campaign, religious leaders have repeatedly joined together in interfaith gatherings to oppose the terminal. In 2015, Interfaith Power & Light wrote a letter signed by over 50 people of faith, including religious leaders, urging Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf to reject the plan. In February 2016, leaders from diverse religious communities organized a Faith Leaders Rally to call on the Oakland City Council to stand up to the coal companies. Reverend Koteen was one of the speakers at the event, and Rabbi Cooper also attended. In April 2016, Reverend Chambers organized a meeting at the West Side Missionary Baptist Church bringing together diverse clergy members to “educate them, equip them, and train them to get involved in this political process and this political fight” (Ken Chambers, personal communication, March 22, 2016). By mobilizing his fellow clergy to organize against the export terminal, Reverend Chambers has contributed a powerful collection of leaders and moral weight to the No Coal in Oakland campaign. Because of these religious leaders, the campaign against the export

terminal has powerful spokespeople with distinctive moral authority. This network of organized clergy is also supported by the collective influence of each leader's congregation.

However, not all religious leaders oppose the project. Some local pastors have come out in support of the export terminal because it would provide jobs, reflecting a longstanding debate between economic growth and climate activists. In September 2015 the *East Bay Express* reported that coal company executives met with leaders of environmental organizations and several churches and proposed to pay them money to publically support the terminal. The coal company offered to pay between seven and twelve cents per ton of coal shipped through Oakland that would go into a community fund, which the coal company ironically suggested could be used for a health clinic. With the company hoping to ship approximately 4.2 million tons of coal per year from Utah through the Oakland terminal, environmental and religious groups could generate up to \$500,000 a year by making this deal (BondGraham, 2015).

Both Reverend Chambers and Rabbi Cooper expressed dismay that some clergy have come out in support of the export terminal, and felt strongly about the need for religious leaders to take a stand against the project. Through a narrative of moral and religious values, faith leaders have a particularly strong role to play in framing the export terminal as an issue of social justice that demands it be rejected. Religious leaders are involved in efforts to stop projects like this one in communities all over the country, and together are strengthening the moral authority of the climate movement as it opposes the extractive and destructive practices of the fossil fuel industry.

In this way, religious leaders have been able to plug into existing climate movement efforts, often playing the role of highlighting the moral aspects of a specific campaign. Interfaith collaboration has been a particularly important way that clergy can participate in movement organizing because it allows leaders to highlight the applicability of religious values across denominations. For example, at a demonstration leading up to COP21 called the NorCal Climate Mobilization, Rabbi Cooper and Ali Sheikholeslami led an interfaith worship service as part of the Faith Trio. Participants then joined thousands of others to march through the streets of Oakland and demand meaningful action at COP21. Rabbi Cooper explained the significance of this action:

We went under a banner together as Jews, Christians, and Muslims for peace and justice and planet earth. We worked together as three religious groupings, indicating our unanimity around the issue of our environment, our position on climate change, and our support for the efforts to make the Paris Agreement as strong as possible. (Personal communication, March 11, 2016)

By going to the demonstration, Rabbi Cooper, Ali Sheikholeslami, and the other leaders carried out two of the behaviors discussed in Chapter Two and earlier in Chapter Three – leading by example and inviting congregants to get involved. However, participating in a protest marks a step beyond congregational action and shifts clergy into the movement arena. It sends a clear message to the public about their support for climate action and commitment to interfaith collaboration based on common moral values. Sheikholeslami explained that it was important for interfaith religious leaders to work together because “climate issues are so large and so complicated that no one entity, no one congregation can solve them on their own. We have to join our forces and make an effort together” (personal communication, April 5, 2016).

The 2014 People's Climate March provided another important opportunity for religious leaders to participate in the larger climate movement. The largest climate change march in history, it brought about 400,000 people to the streets of New York. Organized by 350.org along with hundreds of partner groups including unions, community and environmental organizations, schools and religious institutions, the march aimed to send a "strong message to world political leaders, corporate executives, climate change deniers and obstructionists of all stripes, that climate action is demanded now" (Butters, 2014). It coincided with a climate summit of world leaders scheduled to take place in New York City two days later, which was a precursor to COP21 that would take place slightly over one year later in December 2015.

The religious participation in the People's Climate March can be understood as a combination of structure- and momentum-based organizing, as discussed in Chapter Three. About 10,000 people of faith and religious leaders attended the march, taking up a whole city block. Dozens of groups showed up to demonstrate each denomination's commitment to climate action, and also joined together for an interfaith service. Reverend Harper and Reverend Bingham both played important roles in organizing a wide variety of religious leaders and congregations to attend and in coordinating elaborate religious participation during the march. The existing networks of religious leaders and organizational strength from groups like IPL and GreenFaith facilitated the mass religious presence in such an important climate movement moment.

Such extensive participation of religious leaders and people of faith also contributed to legitimizing the People's Climate March for individuals who may have hesitated to support it. Acting as "climate brokers," these leaders encourage people to

consider the validity of an activity that might otherwise seem foreign. Rabbi Waskow highlighted the contribution of the religious contingent:

We built two big pieces of street theatre. One was a kind of portable sanctuary; the other was a portable Noah's Ark that rolled through the streets of Manhattan. That added a lot. And the religious presence was huge; there were 10,000 of us! It was powerful, and the clergy presence strengthened its appeal to the public. (Personal communication, April 4, 2016)

The secular organizations that organized the People's Climate March used a narrative of urgency and moral imperative for governments to take action. Backed by the support of religious leaders, this narrative and the march itself became more attractive to the general public.

In Policy Circles

While defining the “success” of a social movement is problematic in many ways (Gamson, 1975), there are a number of clear instances in which policy decisions have been directly or indirectly influenced by climate organizing. Although a policy-oriented analysis often overlooks the many individual, cultural, and institutional effects of a movement, analyzing these events allows us to examine concrete examples of the climate movement's achievements. This section examines the involvement of religious leaders in three key efforts – the Keystone XL Pipeline, the Clean Power Plan, and COP21 – that demonstrate specific and highly significant climate policy ramifications. While many other examples exist, the clergy I interviewed highlighted these three as particularly important ways they have participated in larger social movement activities that have directly influenced policy decisions.

The different effects of social movements on public policy depend in part on the political context and on the stage of the policy process. Organizations, including religious

groups, can play an important role in shifting public opinion, putting issues on the policy agenda, and elevating issues to a level of greater importance. They can also convey information to elected officials and lobby for or against specific pieces of legislation. Key elections or decisions about major projects such as pipelines, refineries, or extraction sites can provide focal points around which a movement can rally. Many of these campaigns or political processes offer ideal platforms for clergy to exercise leadership on a particular issue and draw connections between moral values and climate change.

While leaders in faith-based political organizations are especially active in policy arenas, congregational leaders have also been involved in numerous policy efforts. Both are categorized as nonpartisan nonprofit 501(c)(3) organizations and cannot endorse specific candidates, but are able to participate in the political process through other avenues. Leaders in congregations often tend to focus on educational work to shift public opinion or activities such as voter registration, while clergy in faith-based political organizations are better equipped to coordinate events involving multiple congregations or other groups. As a staffed organization that is comprised of a coalition of congregations, Interfaith Power & Light combines the strengths of both. Through IPL, clergy and congregants are involved in climate policies at multiple levels of government and at varying stages of the policy process. Their efforts include voter registration, candidate forums, lobby days, petition distribution, and making recommendations on specific pieces of legislation.

Religious leaders have applied these tactics and activities to the defeat of Keystone XL pipeline. The pipeline was called “game over for the climate” by leading NASA scientist James Hansen, because the decision impacts the viability of Canadian tar

sands production that would release a huge amount of carbon dioxide (Hansen, 2012). Mobilization to oppose the pipeline took off in 2011 and encompassed a diverse coalition of constituents including indigenous communities, farmers and ranchers, climate scientists, labor unions, students, environmental justice, and religious groups. Hundreds of marches, rallies, and demonstrations were planned across the country, many of which took place outside the White House or along the proposed path of the pipeline through Montana, South Dakota, and Nebraska. On November 6, 2015, President Obama announced that his administration had rejected the pipeline after more than six years of review.

This battle is a clear example of climate movement organizing directly impacting a policy decision, which was once considered by many – including the Obama administration – to be a done deal. Religious leaders played a key role in the fight against Keystone XL, particularly through their efforts to frame the issue in moral terms. At a protest outside the White House in 2011, more than 60 faith leaders participated in non-violent civil disobedience and risked arrest (Woodiwiss, 2011). United Church of Christ minister Reverend Mari Castellanos (not one of my interviewees) described the stand against tar sands as “basically about protecting God’s creation and God’s people. The process of extraction destroys the boreal forest and wetlands, leaves behind enormous lakes of toxic waste and causes high levels of greenhouse gas pollution. To engage in peaceful protest against it is sacramental” (Environment News Service, 2011). Reverend Castellanos’ explanation of her protest as “sacramental” elevates the injustice of the pipeline to a new level, and defines President Obama’s choice as a moral decision with explicitly ethical implications.

In 2013, Rabbi Waskow was arrested outside the White House as part of a Keystone XL protest with 14 other religious leaders from diverse backgrounds and faiths. Following an interfaith service, the leaders sang songs and chanted as they blocked the sidewalk outside the White House fence. Rabbi Waskow recounted that after the arrests “we heard from people inside the White House that we had indeed been noticed. White House staff could hear us, they could see us, and they knew why we were there. They took into account that if clergy were getting arrested, they'd better start answering the questions we were asking” (personal communication, April 4, 2016). The confrontational nature of non-violent direct action, especially from religious leaders, helped elevate the Keystone XL pipeline to one of national importance. By citing their moral obligation to put their bodies on the line, religious leaders encouraged the public and the media to understand that the pipeline posed “a grave threat to humanity” (Zangas & Meador, 2013).

In Montana, South Dakota, and Nebraska, the tactics adopted against the pipeline emphasized its regional impacts and worked with local religious leaders. For example, IPL coordinated full-page newspaper ads signed by clergy in these states articulating their position against the pipeline. As Reverend Bingham explained, “When you add a moral component to the argument and put clergy in the newspaper, people read it and that has a big impact. And you know, we did win that fight” (personal communication, February 17, 2016). In states that would have been affected by Keystone XL’s route, clergy were able to claim added authority because of their personal relationship to the land and local communities.

In Nebraska, Reverend Morrow's involvement included a range of activities including gathering clergy to sign a letter opposing the project, writing op-eds and letters to the editor, testifying at hearings, and organizing rallies (Kim Morrow, personal communication, April 8, 2016). Upon the announcement of their victory, Reverend Morrow explained that "like the story of David and Goliath, the fight against the Keystone pipeline has shown the world [that] the people who love their land possess the five smooth stones to slay the giant" (Bergin, 2015). She calls the relationship that Nebraskans feel to the land a "quietly sacred connection... that found its voice" in the battle to stop the pipeline (Morrow, 2014). Through a combination of religious leaders' heightened visibility, status as moral authorities, personal link to their communities, and the wide variety of tactics they employ, clergy emerged as important leaders within the fight against the Keystone XL pipeline. Despite being a highly controversial political debate, religious leaders articulated a clear moral imperative to reject the pipeline and contributed to its defeat.

Religious leaders have also participated in important work around President Obama's Clean Power Plan, the first national standards to reduce carbon emissions from power plants. On the eve of the plan's publication, IPL took a strong stand by releasing a press statement in which Reverend Bingham cited the backing of their entire network:

Thousands of clergy and communities of faith representing Interfaith Power & Light's network of 18,000 congregations are prepared to stand in support of EPA's efforts to safeguard our climate, our health, and all of Creation. Global warming is a moral issue that should be of concern to all people, but particularly people of faith. It's really quite simple: if we love our neighbors, we won't pollute their air or water. (Interfaith Power & Light)

Having a figurehead to represent the vast number of people and congregations involved in IPL's network is critical to communicating their position. Because of her leadership

position, Reverend Bingham was able to use her voice to make a strong statement with the collective backing of IPL's entire network.

Local congregational leaders also played a crucial role in encouraging their members to support the Clean Power Plan campaign through IPL's annual "preach in," a day for clergy across the country to conduct sermons about climate change. At the preach ins, congregants signed and sent postcards to legislators identifying themselves as people of faith and asking them to uphold the Clean Power Plan. Because congregations are 501(c)(3) organizations, members have to send in the postcards themselves but religious leaders, operating through IPL, played an essential role in organizing and inspiring large numbers of congregants to act politically. The preach in operates through a powerful three-way dynamic: IPL provides a platform and a network for religious leaders; the leaders amplify the message of IPL; and the congregants give feedback and financial and political support by participating in the actions that leadership asks of them.

Rabbi Waskow and The Shalom Center focused their efforts on applying the Clean Power Plan to Pennsylvania. Rabbi Waskow spoke at hearings held by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, expressing support of the federal plan while calling for the state to adopt and strengthen it through a number of specific policies. He urged state legislators to take the Clean Power Plan further and proposed "an immediate and permanent end to all fracking on public lands in Pennsylvania and on all new permits for fracking on any property within the state" (Waskow, 2015). Other proposals included a seven-year phase out of all coal power plants and a transition program for the workers displaced by these changes.

The recommendations that Rabbi Waskow puts forth would be considered relatively radical for most policy hearings; the changes he suggested are not small ones. But by immediately following these proposals by explaining that they are “grounded in the Bible,” he justifies his claims through the moral authority of Scripture (Waskow, 2015). He named the necessity of uniting “justice and Earth-healing” – that is, incorporating moral values into how we respond to climate change and pursue a just transition away from fossil fuels (Waskow, 2015). As a religious leader, he uses his voice to challenge the fossil fuel companies that profit from harming the planet, and then “use these profits to purchase elections and to fund fake science to prevent the public from acting to heal the wounds” that hurt the poor “first and worst” (Waskow, 2015). Because of his moral credentials, policymakers may be more likely to consider his ideas.

The UN climate summit COP21 offered a key opportunity for religious leaders to get involved at an international policy level. Reverend Harper and GreenFaith helped coordinate Our Voices, an interfaith effort to amplify the call from religious communities around the world for strong action at COP21. The campaign included leadership training for clergy as a way to build on the success of Pope Francis’ encyclical and spread information on climate change to congregations around the country. Going into the summit, Reverend Harper articulated his hope for the religious presence to pressure governments into strong policy commitments. He acknowledged the recent increase of religious groups taking action on climate change, comparing them to “an ocean liner – slow to turn, but generating powerful momentum once they set a new course. This past year, the world’s faiths have locked in their commitment to solving the climate crisis. Governments need to take notice” (Kim, 2015).

Reverend Bingham and IPL also used the narrative of religious leadership on climate to pressure governments to make strong commitments at COP21. Her path to the summit was inspired by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, who challenged leaders to bring bold proposals for lowering carbon emissions to COP21, saying, “I challenge you to bring to the summit bold pledges. Innovate, scale up, cooperate, and deliver concrete action that will close the emissions gap and put us on track for an ambitious legal agreement” (Ki-moon, 2013). Reverend Bingham took his words seriously, and responded by announcing a new IPL program called the Paris Pledge. Created as a way to engage IPL’s 18,000 congregations, the Paris Pledge asks individuals and congregations to reduce their carbon emissions 50 percent by the year 2030 and to be carbon neutral by 2050, which is a stronger commitment than what the United States pledged at COP21. Reverend Bingham explained, “The idea is that if we in the religious community can make this commitment, you countries have to be able to do it too” (personal communication, February 17, 2016).

Reverend Bingham told the executive secretary of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Christiana Figueres, after which Figueres invited her to present it at COP21. Reverend Bingham was granted observer status and listened to the talks from within the conference center, participated in panels with leaders of major secular environmental organizations, and spoke to the press as a representative of the faith community. The day before the Paris Agreement was reached, she presented to U.S. State Department representatives the 11-foot-long scroll of over 4,500 congregations and individuals who took the Paris Pledge. She also delivered a presentation at the U.S. Pavilion, discussing the importance of faith communities in past social movements and

outlining how people of faith are currently engaged in combating climate change. Reverend Bingham's status as a key religious leader backed by a huge network of congregations allowed her to have an important moral influence, while that same status opened doors at COP21 that allowed her to increase her political influence.

Debates around the moral implications of climate change and the level of responsibility held by developed countries – those with the greatest historical responsibility and greatest ability to pay – towards developing countries were especially pronounced at COP21. The agreement that was ultimately reached committed to “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels” (UNFCCC, 2015). It also included measures around climate change adaptation, climate change resilience, and financing for low greenhouse gas emissions development with a call for wealthy countries to raise \$100 billion per year to assist with the needs of developing countries.

Based on the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities,” COP21 intended to reflect issues of equity “in the light of different national circumstances” (UNFCCC, 2015). Religious leaders strongly supported and campaigned around the demand that these principles of climate justice be included in the Paris Agreement. While the success of the agreement relies on countries following through and ratcheting up their commitments, the acknowledgment of the inequalities of climate change and the goal of 1.5 °C instead of 2 °C is a promising starting point for further action, and is an important victory for those who organize through a framework of climate justice.

In an op-ed after the Paris Agreement was reached, Reverend Harper offered his takeaways from the summit. He applauded the agreement, especially the aspiration to limit temperature increases to 1.5 °C instead of 2 °C. He made no effort to soften the implications of this seemingly small distinction, explaining that “this half-degree of difference would lessen climate impacts and prevent over 100 million people from losing their homes and becoming refugees. It would also increase the likelihood that major ice sheets would stay intact, stopping rising seas from destroying some of the world’s largest coastal cities” (Harper, 2015). He also explained the high stakes of action or inaction. Failing to meet these goals would be a death sentence for many inhabitants of low-lying countries, and cause immense suffering for many more. But the way in which goals are met is also critically important for millions of people around the world, especially those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

Reverend Harper equated what is needed in our current situation to the “Industrial Revolution and Marshall Plan rolled into one. Success will require an unprecedented commitment to energy efficiency, renewable energy, reforestation, and more at every level of society. Managed properly, this transition will create huge numbers of jobs and universal access to clean energy, saving millions of lives” (Harper, 2015). However, if this transition is not managed properly, it could result in devastatingly scenarios that are most dangerous for low-income communities, communities of color, and communities that currently rely on the fossil fuel industry (Rising Tide North America & Carbon Trade Watch, 2010). As nations around the world implement the Paris Agreement and move away from a fossil fuel economy, they – and the climate movement – must prioritize a moral framework and justice-based analysis. As Reverend Harper notes, religious leaders

and faith communities have a vital role in this effort to “ensure that this massive transition is done fairly and includes everyone” (Harper, 2015).

Coming out of the energy and mobilization surrounding COP21, leadership and public pressure are more important than ever. Many of the clergy I interviewed noted that in the aftermath of the energy and mobilization surrounding COP21, moral leadership and public pressure are more important than ever. Reverend Harper articulated the necessity of myriad leaders “from all sectors of society who make decisive action on climate change a new normal. Finance leaders who accelerate the growth of efficiency and renewables. Educators, faith leaders and artists who make responsible use of energy a cultural and moral norm, and who mainstream the concept of climate justice” (Harper, 2015). Now, these leaders have the responsibility and role of maintaining political pressure and holding world governments accountable to the promises made at COP21. Religious leaders especially are in a strong position to articulate the moral consequences if we fail to do so.

Examining the ways that religious leaders have been able to influence key decisions around the Keystone XL Pipeline, the Clean Power Plan, and COP21 gives insight into how they can continue to do so moving forward. Clergy have employed a diversity of tactics and their work spans multiple levels of government, allowing them to influence policy through a wide range of strategies. Through their congregational and organizational networks, they are able to effectively and efficiently mobilize large numbers of people across broad geographical areas. They can act as figureheads for their congregations, whose collective power can pressure those in power to make policy changes. By bringing moral arguments into discussions that are often considered to be

strictly technical, political or economic, religious leaders reframe the debate and insist upon a framework of justice.

Chapter Six:

Religious Leaders as Uniquely Effective

The social movement theories discussed in Chapter Three provide a framework through which to understand why certain individuals are able to exert unusually high levels of influence. A number of key factors grant this power to religious leaders: they operate in pre-established organizations with strong collective identities and institutional resources, and they are regarded as moral authorities and granted trust by their congregations and the general public. Combined, these dynamics create contexts that endow religious leaders with unique influence. But how does this affect clergy in their work on climate issues? Why are religious leaders often distinctly influential compared to their secular counterparts? What are specific ways in which this impact is manifested, and what can be learned from these examples? In this chapter, I separate my findings into two main categories to focus on how organizational advantage and moral authority allow religious leaders to be especially effective in their work on climate issues.

Organizational Advantage

The nine individuals I interviewed all explicitly discussed or demonstrated the unique level of influence they are granted as leaders working within a religious context. Unlike in secular organizations, members of religious groups are connected to their congregations and to clergy through deeply moral, emotional, and spiritual ties. Churches, synagogues, and mosques not only have existing structures and substantial institutional resources, but also legitimacy, sustainability, and an unabashedly moral orientation within both public and private spheres. Organizing around climate change issues with these advantages places religious leaders at a powerful helm.

Congregants often build a dependence on their religious leaders and communities over a span of many years, and for many this affiliation is a defining aspect of their identity. Clergy interact with their congregants on a regular basis through organizational practices such as the weekly holy day, but many faith traditions also grant clergy special access to people during extraordinary moments of joy or of crisis. Rabbi Waskow highlighted that the added effectiveness of religious leaders partially stems from their importance in congregants' lives, because clergy "are there for them all the time: when their kids are born, when their old folks die, for major holidays, for years and years of everyday life" (personal communication, April 4, 2016). The integration of members' important life moments with their social networks and spiritual practices means that religious leaders usually have a more sustained and emotionally influential impact than do secular climate leaders.

Clergy also occupy the leadership position in communities that otherwise may not be exposed to information on climate change. Until recently, climate issues were more strictly relegated to political spheres and many congregants did not expect to hear about them at church. As Reverend Bingham explains, bringing climate change into congregations has helped bridge that gap:

People in the pews are probably not members of the Sierra Club. They're going to church because they are people of faith. So when their clergy person says, "We need to be looking after God's creation for the sake of our children and our grandchildren," people listen. I believe hearing that in a church has a stronger influence on the way people think than when the Sierra Club says it, even if they're saying the same thing. (Personal communication, February 17, 2016)

The established clout of religious organizations grants clergy additional legitimacy when making connections between religious teachings and climate change. Affiliating a church,

synagogue, or mosque with climate issues can help religious leaders reach people who might traditionally avoid climate change because of its divisive political connotations.

Leading a religious organization grants clergy access to large numbers of people in systematic and efficient ways. For example, Green Muslims works with Dar Al-Hijrah, one of the largest mosques in the nation that reaches about 20,000 people on an annual basis (Colin Christopher, personal communication, March 22, 2016). When their imam incorporates care for creation into a sermon that will reach hundreds or thousands of people, he is having a widespread impact through relatively little effort on both the part of the leader and the congregants. Colin Christopher has also been helping to connect the mosque with the Environmental Protection Agency's Energy Star Program, which works with houses of worship to adjust congregational practices and green their facilities. The high concentration of people that can be accessed through one organization allows clergy to bring climate issues into the congregation in a cost-effective way.

The availability of established methods of communication also facilitate clergy in transmitting information to the whole congregation. Many of the religious leaders I interviewed use organizational networks such as email listservs or church newsletters as part of their climate work. This may include educational material, invitations for involvement, or news updates. For example, every two weeks Rabbi Cooper sends out a "Social Action Opportunities" email with a list of different activities going on in the community. These emails include everything from breakfast events to neighborhood canvassing to direct action trainings, as well as information on external climate organizations. Congregants are also encouraged to submit events to Rabbi Cooper to be included in the emails, promoting participation and interaction on the part of members.

Similarly, Bingham, Harper, and Christopher advertise involvement opportunities through their IPL, GreenFaith, and Green Muslims email networks. Announcements for events such as panel discussions, movie screenings, webinars, community meetings, and demonstrations are sent out on a regular basis.

Moral Authority

While the organizational advantage that clergy gain from working within religious institutions adds credibility and long-term sustainability to their efforts, the moral authority of religious leaders is a central reason for their unique effectiveness. As discussed in Chapter Three, the moral authority of leaders stems from a number of sources and is enacted in multiple ways. In this section, I will analyze how moral authority operates in regard to the climate work of the leaders I interviewed. I draw conclusions based on a combination of their own understandings of moral authority, as well as examples that demonstrate the impact of their work and this kind of influence.

While a common understanding of the importance of moral authority was shared among these leaders, the ways in which they explained its sources and impacts differed. Some, such as Reverend Chambers, cited a divine basis for their credibility that stems from a “direct connection to the Lord” (personal communication, March 22, 2016). His relationship with God compels him use his position to work on climate justice issues, but also gives him an advantage that makes people listen. Other leaders voiced different views. In the words of Rabbi Cooper, the “credibility [of clergy] comes from feeling that they are under a mandate to speak truth to power and to be as completely honest as they possibly can” (personal communication, March 11, 2016). Whether this mandate stems from the belief that God is watching them or that a whole congregation is looking to them

for guidance, most clergy take their positions very seriously. Thus, feeling the necessity to pursue justice as a servant of God simultaneously compels religious leaders to take action on climate issues while validating their work in the eyes of followers.

The trust and legitimacy that these individuals are granted through their status as religious leaders also contributes to their moral authority. Notwithstanding numerous scandals such as sexual abuse by Catholic clergy and negative views about religion ranging from skepticism to hostility, clergy are generally considered to be trustworthy, both because of their affiliation with the religious institution that has designated them as leaders and because their positions are associated with a certain level of wisdom. Reverend Bingham has observed this dynamic in her work with hundreds of clergy and congregations working on climate issues. She finds that the moral authority of religious leaders allows them to be especially effective in conveying information about climate change because “we find that people believe their priests and their rabbis and their imams” (personal communication, February 17, 2016). When it comes to conveying the reality and importance of climate change, these attributes make religious leaders more effective in their work.

Religious leaders are not only ascribed wisdom by congregants and the general public, but usually do have a deep understanding of the religion from years of study and the requirements of ordination. Congregants therefore have confidence in their ability to lead the community in a judicious way that is in line with the faith’s traditions. Ali Sheikholeslami explained, “Because of the time and effort that was spent studying the Qur’an and the history of Islam, imams are seen to be more learned and have a better understanding of the religion (personal communication, April 5, 2016). This knowledge

grants religious leaders legitimacy when they draw connections between climate change and faith-based values, as they are considered experts on the religion and its teachings.

Interpreting the historical wisdom of faith traditions contributes to religious leaders' added authority. Rabbi Waskow emphasized the power of inherited knowledge that is embodied in rabbis:

Rabbis have the ability to draw on the perspectives of 3000 years of people who have been struggling for a decent way of living in the world. Rabbis have been discussing that question for thousands of years. There's a sense of accumulated wisdom out of historical struggle. People in the Jewish community, and beyond it, respond to rabbis who have spent their lives trying to understand what good, ethical, sustainable action is. (Personal communication, April 4, 2016)

In this way, drawing on biblical traditions not only legitimizes the relevance of climate issues for people of faith but also “gives religious leaders a perspective on what it would make sense for us to be doing now to address our modern problems” (Arthur Waskow, personal communication, April 4, 2016).

The moral authority of religious leaders allows them to be effective in ways that are distinct from what their secular counterparts are capable of. Reverend Koteen described this as an opportunity:

One thing religious leaders can do, if they have the courage, is bring with them a moral authority that is often palpable. They have an opportunity, without hypocrisy, to put on the mantle of ethical conduct and right livelihood. That sort of thing coming from a politician or even a community organizer might appear even more pompous than it does when I say it. (Personal communication, February 15, 2016)

The difference in how people respond to clergy compared to non-religious leaders has important implications for mobilizing involvement in climate issues. Politicians and community organizers occupy different types of leadership roles, because “people don't look to them for moral guidance” as they do with priests, rabbis, and imams (Ali

Sheikholeslami, personal communication, April 5, 2016). Negative associations with ulterior motives or corruption may prevent secular leaders from being as influential. Reverend Morrow explained that when she shows up at a meeting or hearing, her words “carry a lot of weight because almost everyone else who testifies is there because of an angle that has to do with their own agenda,” whereas she is “speaking from a moral perspective and not trying to make money off the issue or profit from it” (personal communication, April 8, 2016).

As discussed in Chapter Three, people are more likely to consider a foreign idea when it is delivered through a “climate broker,” or a recognized member of their cultural community. When Reverend Bingham preaches about climate change from a religious perspective, she finds that people are able to hear the message in a way they otherwise wouldn’t (personal communication, February 17, 2016). By connecting climate change to specific religious teachings, she offers congregants a familiar, trustworthy, and ethics-based framework through which to understand the issues. Especially in conservative communities, engaging people in the moral aspects of climate change allows clergy to circumvent the political debate. Reverend Morrow explained how this plays out in Nebraska:

So much of the deadlock we’ve had on climate in this country is because it has become a divisive political issue. Where I am, there’s also a cultural hesitancy to get into divisive topics. People tend to shy away from this issue. But when I start to talk about it from a religious or moral perspective, there’s a relief in the room that I’m not going to be talking about politics. (Personal communication, April 8, 2016)

By framing climate change in religious language, Reverend Morrow acts as a sort of translator and allows people to understand the issues. Grounding people in their values

“reminds them of what’s really important. No one can argue with the moral imperative” (Kim Morrow, personal communication, April 8, 2016).

This unique effectiveness also manifests through clergy’s work in the climate movement and in policy circles. Rabbi Cooper noted the added weight that a political activity carries when it is supported by a religious leader, because it becomes imbued with moral relevance. Clergy can elevate an issue from being a purely secular or political activity into something that is a “sacred action” (David Cooper, personal communication, March 11, 2016). For example, having a rabbi show up to a demonstration confirms for people that even if what they are doing is controversial, even if they are afraid, even if they are facing fines or arrest, their actions are supported by their clergy and their community.

Multiple leaders told stories about the distinctive impact that religious leaders have when they show up at public forums and take a stand on climate change. Reverend Bingham recounted how clergy contributed to a community’s effort to shut down a coal plant in Indiana. In a joint effort with labor groups, health representatives, and environmental organizations, Interfaith Power & Light sent religious leaders to speak to the CEO of the coal company. According to Reverend Bingham, the CEO called IPL later that day and told them the company had decided to close down the plant twenty years ahead of time (personal communication, February 17, 2016). By reaching out specifically to IPL leaders, the coal company indicated how convincing the religious argument had been in their decision.

In her work with utility companies in Nebraska, Reverend Morrow has “seen this reaction over and over again when we show up at board meetings. It changes when the

religious leaders start to testify. They'll often look shocked and like they're wondering, 'why are these ministers here and why are they quoting scripture?' People often don't want to have to look at the moral impacts of their work" (personal communication, April 8, 2016). By articulating the connections between a coal plant and religious values, clergy force people to take a moral stand on what they usually might think about only in terms of economic or political terms.

The unique effectiveness of religious leaders is due to a number of qualities and contextual factors. They operate in existing organizations with strong community ties and resources that can be efficiently mobilized, they communicate climate issues through a religious lens and play the role of climate brokers, and their positions as moral authorities allow them trust from congregants and moral influence in political spheres. Combined, these advantages grant clergy distinctive influence when working on climate change issues.

Chapter Seven: Challenges, Limitations and Tensions

While the previous chapter discussed ways in which religious leaders are uniquely effective, clergy also face a substantial number of limitations when participating in climate activism specifically because they are organizing within a religious context. This chapter will analyze how religious leaders are bound by the difficulty of juggling traditional ministry responsibilities with their involvement in climate issues, opposition from congregants or other authorities within the religion, external political forces, and the tendency of clergy to stay within the realm of green consumerism and individual behavioral changes. Some of these challenges may be inherent to the roles of clergy, while others may indicate future potential for religious leaders who are seeking to engage with climate work.

Congregational Limitations

Clergy who actively preside over a parish are responsible for a large number of congregational and organizational duties. Because of these obligations, balancing climate activism with their traditional responsibilities is a common challenge. As president of IPL, Reverend Bingham works with clergy and congregations all over the country. She has often encountered this difficulty, and described the responses she sometimes receives when trying to engage religious leaders in climate issues:

If you're a leader in charge of a congregation, you have so many responsibilities. You have to be there for your parishioners, you have to be there when they're sick, you have to conduct the children's coming of age rituals, you have to manage the books. When someone comes along and says, "Now you've got to take on climate change." You go, "What! With all the things I have to do already you want me to start preaching about climate?" (Personal communication, February 17, 2016)

The many responsibilities that religious leaders hold leave them with understandably limited capacity for taking on other types of work. For clergy who are new to the issues, learning the facts about climate change may be a daunting task on its own. Even religious leaders who are already deeply committed to the issues have to find ways of dealing with this limitation. As Rabbi Cooper explained, “If I were to attend every social action committee meeting at my congregation, I wouldn't have time to do the work I need to do to take care of my congregants in a rabbinical function” (personal communication, March 11, 2016).

One consequence of clergy juggling so many responsibilities is what Reverend Koteen calls “whack-a-mole justice.” A religious leader might try to get involved with political issues but end up in a situation where “if it's Tuesday it's our reproductive justice day and if it's Wednesday we're saving the people in Burma. We can try to fit the climate in on Thursday. Or we're already working on homelessness and poverty and don't have the bandwidth to do climate change too” (personal communication, February 15, 2016). In some cases, parish ministers feel forced to make a choice between presiding over a congregation and working on climate change because they can't do both simultaneously. One such example is Reverend Fred Small (not one of my interviewees), who after years of juggling both roles resigned from ministry to work full time on climate justice issues. In 2015, he founded an organization called the Creation Coalition to engage people of faith in political action around climate change (Creation Coalition, Who We Are).

A common criticism of religious involvement in climate issues, both from within religious groups themselves and from the broader public, is that it too often stops at

surface-level change. Even though clergy are in ideal positions to highlight the social justice implications of climate change through religious values, their work often falls short of adequately addressing climate justice issues in practice. While educating members about climate change and greening houses of worship are undoubtedly important, they may prevent clergy from working on a more systemic level. In this vein, Reverend Koteen expressed frustration that many religious leaders and institutions have yet to become involved in the broader climate movement:

They're patting themselves on the back for green consumerism. Whether it's buying a Prius, putting solar on the roof of the congregation, using recyclable paper cups to drink their coffee, whatever it is. The number of congregations, especially among upper middle class white folk, that are involved in organizing around climate justice issues I find to be very small. (Personal communication, February 15, 2016)

By diverting their attention and resources towards individual behavior changes, religious leaders forego the opportunity to engage congregants in activities that could better address the root causes of climate change. Individual changes based on consumer choices and lifestyle adjustments may be a good first step, but cannot replace the power of collective action and organized political resistance.

That being said, moving beyond this level involvement and into the climate movement or policy arenas opens clergy to increased levels of risk. The climate justice movement seeks to create transformative change that challenges the foundation of many powerful economic and political systems, and participants often encounter resistance or opposition. Depending on the political context of their geographic regions and congregations, religious leaders may make themselves vulnerable by choosing to participate in climate activism.

One source of this opposition may come from within religious leaders' own communities, both from congregants and higher religious authorities. Some leaders experience pushback for bringing political issues into the pulpit at all, even without proposing that congregants get involved in climate movement or policy activities. Reverend Bingham recounted memories of being asked to leave congregations and being called a communist. She was told to "focus on feeding the hungry and leave the climate issues to the scientists" (personal communication, February 17, 2016). Even in communities where political discussion is more accepted, many religious leaders feel pressure to present climate change in a particular way. Reverend Koteen began talking about climate change when the science was less widely accepted and not as discussed within religious communities. However, he refused to water down his language and openly warned congregants that we are "headed towards a massive die-off of humanity, if not extinction. When I started saying that six years ago, people would look at me like, "You're not really a minister are you? You're supposed to bring hope!" (Personal communication, February 15, 2016)

While the unusual degree of political involvement at Kehilla Community Synagogue allows Rabbi Cooper a lot of license to speak his mind, he emphasized that this was not a common experience:

Most rabbis I know operate with a real tension between what they *need* to say and what they feel they *can* say; in a way that's strong enough that it will affect people but not so alarmist that they won't be able to be heard, or in a way that it will negatively affect the cohesiveness of the congregation, or their ability to keep their job, or their ability to be credible clergy when it comes time to support somebody who is in a moment of jeopardy. Say a congregant has lost their mother, and you're the rabbi so you show up to help but they don't trust you anymore because of your political differences. It's very hard. (Personal communication, March 11, 2016)

For many clergy, getting involved in climate issues might have serious implications for the unity of their congregation, or even cause members to leave the church. Reverend Bingham often talks with religious leaders who are hesitant to take on climate issues because they “worry that their parishioners who disagree with the climate movement or who might be climate deniers will leave the parish” (personal communication, February 17, 2016). Rabbi Waskow, though not currently a congregational rabbi himself, noted that “even if a majority of the congregation wants to do something about climate change, a sizable minority or even a small minority who doesn't want [the group] to get involved can paralyze the congregation” (personal communication, April 4, 2016).

External Forces

Some religious leaders also have to contend with external political factors such as local fossil fuel companies or climate-denying politicians. This may introduce potential consequences not only for themselves, but also for their congregants. For example, if clergy in oil-producing areas speak out about climate change or the harm being caused by local fossil fuel companies, they can put congregants who work for these companies at risk. Reverend Koteen discussed his experience with this dynamic in Richmond, California:

The fact that I don't have a congregation means I can say my best truth without fear that my congregants will suffer the consequences. This also allows me the opportunity to meet with ministers in private, where they will say for example, “Chevron is the very devil, and we know it's poisoning our air and our land and our water and it's killing our people prematurely.” But they aren't necessarily able to say that in public. The consequences for the congregation or for members of the congregation who work for Chevron puts many religious leaders in a very difficult bind. (Personal communication, February 15, 2016)

Religious leaders often have to negotiate conflicts between understanding the damage being done to the climate and their own community, and simultaneously being obligated

to protect parishioners. Feeling pulled in multiple directions is a “source of pain” for many clergy without an easy solution (David Cooper, personal communication, March 11, 2016).

Some clergy may be more hesitant to engage in climate issues because of other priorities in their communities. As Ali Sheikholeslami explained, “because of issues like Islamophobia, right now the Muslim community is distracted by other challenges and not as concerned with climate change” (personal communication, April 5, 2016). More pressing concerns with immediate consequences are thus understandably the priority for congregations facing harm from the many prejudices that run rampant in U.S. society. Colin Christopher also noted that many Muslims he works with are recent immigrants, which presents another set of challenges (personal communication, April 8, 2016).

Some of the leaders I interviewed revealed the emotional difficulty they experience because of their involvement. For some clergy, taking a stand on climate is more of a risk and may require personal sacrifice. In Nebraska, Reverend Morrow has few allies, and says that the fight against climate change can be “really demoralizing” (personal communication, April 8, 2016). In many locations, the influence of fossil fuel companies and rightwing groups like the Koch Brothers and the prevalence of climate denial in the state legislature make it challenging to engage people in climate issues. For Reverend Morrow, the general political conservatism in Nebraska makes it “difficult to find funding for Interfaith Power & Light and difficult to find employment at the university. The whole thing is just an uphill climb” (personal communication, April 8, 2016). Reverend Koteen echoed this sentiment, expressing the emotional toll of working on climate change: “This kind of work is almost an invitation to burnout. It's so

challenging, there are so many losses along the way” (personal communication, February 15, 2016).

The challenges that religious leaders face when working on climate change issues are many, and can at times substantially limit the ways they are able to engage. These include juggling their existing responsibilities as clergy with climate activism, opposition from congregants, external political forces such as local fossil fuel companies, and the tendency of clergy – especially those who preside over a congregation – to stay within the realm of individual behavior changes instead of collective action or political organizing. The following chapter offers concluding remarks, notes areas of future potential, and suggests a number of ways that clergy can address some of these challenges moving forward.

Chapter Eight:

Conclusions and Questions for Further Study

While some conservative religious leaders continue to deny or ignore the climate crisis, many progressive clergy are becoming increasingly involved in combating climate change through a wide variety of activities and across a range of domains. Those who preside over congregations play an important role in educating congregants and changing practices in their houses of worship, often by connecting climate change to specific religious texts and teachings. Others work through political organizations to educate and mobilize their constituents.

Clergy participate in the climate movement in multiple ways, including through existing campaigns and by initiating coalitions or networks. In policy circles, religious leaders are involved with specific pieces of legislation at multiple levels of government, some of the most notable being the Keystone XL Pipeline, President Obama's Clean Power Plan, and the international Paris Agreement that came out of the COP21 summit.

Although a number of factors contribute to their effectiveness, the moral authority of religious leaders coupled with their organizational affiliation and resources allows them to be uniquely influential in their climate work, and sets them apart from their non-religious counterparts. However, clergy also encounter certain limitations that stem directly from their leadership positions in religious spaces. Juggling their climate activism with responsibilities to their congregations, the political opinions of their parishioners, and external pressure from fossil fuel companies or other actors that may threaten their positions all pose additional challenges.

Through interviews with nine religious leaders and analysis of primary sources, this thesis has presented a sample of perspectives that provide insight on clergy working on climate change. Although limited in scope, these stories and experiences offer an initial exploration of how clergy are engaging with climate issues. Many leaders have engaged in successful interfaith collaboration, partnership with secular climate organizations, and mobilization within their congregations and communities. While the articulation of the role, advantages, limitations, and future of religious leaders' involvement in climate issues varied among participants, they were united in their commitment to framing the climate crisis through moral values and belief in the power of religion as a foundation from which to organize around climate change and social justice.

The work of these individuals shows great promise for future involvement of religious leaders in climate change issues. Through continued internal efforts in congregations, as well as participation in the climate movement and in policy circles, clergy have potential to increase their effectiveness to educate, change attitudes, and further mobilize people into action. This chapter offers a number of steps and strategies for clergy's future involvement, while acknowledging additional challenges that must be addressed. I incorporate the perspectives of religious leaders I interviewed, some of whom offered key insights about how clergy can best participate in climate work moving forward.

More of Them, Especially Conservative

Because of the effectiveness of religious leaders and faith-based organizing more broadly, simply getting *more* clergy involved in climate issues could make a big difference in growing political support for climate action. Around the country, these

leaders encompass a wide array of political affiliations, geographic locations, and religious identifications. They represent a network of congregations and communities, each with its own potential for participating in the fight against climate change. The more leaders who are involved in working on climate change, the greater the collective impact in shifting public opinion, encouraging political mobilization, and influencing climate policy.

Multiple leaders among those I interviewed voiced a desire for more involvement of clergy in climate work, especially conservative religious leadership. Reverend Bingham laid out a goal of doubling IPL's current membership of 18,000 congregations, which would result in around ten percent of the United States' 300,000 houses of worship being involved in climate issues (personal communication, February 17, 2016). The IPL network already represents a significant proportion of U.S. congregations and clergy, and such an increase could make a big difference. Bringing more clergy into faith-based political groups such as IPL, GreenFaith, and Green Muslims creates avenues for involvement through the preexisting networks in these organizations. A stronger and larger network also grants the organizations more powerful leverage when pushing for specific climate policies or demands. These organizations all have resources, mentorship, and training opportunities available for clergy to get involved in climate work. Continuing these efforts holds great potential for increasing their effectiveness.

Additional participation from conservative religious leaders holds the potential of reaching a segment of the U.S. population that tends to be less inclined to acknowledge the urgency of climate change or get involved in climate issues. The clear connections between climate change and many traditional religious texts offer a pathway through

which clergy from conservative segments of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism can relate. Particularly for people in orthodox or evangelical denominations, religious leaders can offer a bridge and act as climate brokers. Conservative leaders especially may be in need of added support when engaging in climate work, which more progressive organizations such as IPL, GreenFaith, Green Muslims, and The Shalom Center may not be able to provide because of their differences in political opinion and cultural beliefs. Conservative leaders may be more inclined to create their own organizations or networks of support to address this need.

Changing Light Bulbs vs. Changing the System

Another area of greater potential contribution by religious leaders lies in broadening the scope and deepening the political analysis of their efforts. The work that clergy are doing to educate people through sermons, promote behavior changes, and green religious facilities is a useful means to engage their congregants in climate issues. However, this focus on individual and congregational practices leaves significant room for improvement. If clergy seek to confront the root causes and main sources of climate change, then their participation must also address the issues on a more systemic level, as indeed the progressive clergy who I interviewed do. Passing their systemic and justice-based analysis to other religious leaders would be a valuable way for those who are already committed and informed to bring more clergy into the climate movement.

Legislation is another area in which religious leaders can expand their influence and work to change the policies that keep climate deniers and fossil fuel companies in power. Through collective action and political organizing, clergy can mobilize the broader religious community across the country to lobby for local, state, and federal

legislation. Regardless of where they focus their energy, transitioning into more active participation in the climate movement would amplify the influence of religious leaders beyond the scope of their congregations.

Some clergy operate in or near communities that are directly experiencing the more extreme impacts of climate change and the fossil fuel industry. By building relationships with frontline communities and local organizers, clergy can play a powerful role in these struggles by increasing access to resources, elevating the voices of those being directly impacted, attracting media attention, and imbuing the effort with a moral imperative. When clergy use the full force their standing and resources, their message has the potential to be heard far beyond their local community. A strongly connected and committed network of religious leaders would create a moral force that could push people to listen and demand that elected officials take action on behalf of their constituents. This type of participation would further align espoused moral values into religious leaders' work, and intrinsically link climate action and social justice.

Involvement in the broader climate movement requires a long-term commitment from clergy and congregations to organizing work. To reach their full capacity to initiate change, a critical mass of deeply committed, well-educated clergy and organizations across the country is needed. Groups such as IPL, GreenFaith, The Shalom Center, and Green Muslims that create pathways for increased participation have that commitment and that knowledge. They are playing important roles in encouraging their religious peers to commit a greater focus on climate organizing and systemic political analysis. But their path to enlisting others and growing their networks is not easy. In GreenFaith's efforts to engage religious groups and leaders, Reverend Harper has found that "a lot of

congregations are probably not going to join the movement right off the bat, but we can help them climb up a ladder of engagement so that over time they'll grow to have a greater understanding of that kind of organizing and grow in their own willingness to participate in it" (personal communication, February 17, 2016).

Further collaboration between religious groups and secular climate organizations would facilitate greater incorporation of moral values into the climate movement. Religious leaders' can play an important role in creating a just transition away from fossil fuels based on principles of social justice and creation care. Secular and religious organizations each bring their own set of advantages and limitations, allowing them to be effective in one area where an ally organization may not be. Having clergy and congregations "move into more meaningful leadership roles in multi-sector coalitions, so that religious strategy is not an add-on but rather an integral part of the organizing, will make the movement stronger as a whole" (Fletcher Harper, personal communication, February 17, 2016). More partnerships and deeper relationships between secular and religious partners would allow for an increase and integration of resources, political clout, and mobilizing capacity.

However, coalition organizing presents its own set of challenges including disagreement and misalignment in values, vision, or strategy. These partnerships must be established with critical intentionality and careful communication if they are to be successful. At times, coalition organizing can dramatically weaken the effectiveness of an organization or movement or dilute its message. Because congregations and clergy are first and foremost religious entities before sources of political activism, this dynamic could certainly arise within faith-based climate work.

In spite of these challenges, there are important avenues through which religious and secular groups can work together. Many of the leaders I interviewed are already engaged in coalition organizing with great success. Reverend Chambers noted that even though each group may have “its own expertise and priorities, for the most part we are able to come together through our common goals” (personal communication, March 22, 2016). The alliance that Reverend Chambers has helped form around the No Coal In Oakland campaign is a powerful example of what clergy can accomplish through climate movement coalitions and lead the way with principles of social justice.

Lines of Further Inquiry

Clergy’s increased involvement in the climate movement holds great potential, but it also raises a number of questions about its effect on the larger movement’s existing dynamics, strategies, and politics. Religious leaders can make important contributions to the fight against climate change, but the ways in which they engage can have significant ramifications. For example, Rabbi Cooper and Reverend Koteen both affirmed their vision of religious leadership in the climate movement but also voiced concerns about clergy overshadowing the work of frontline organizers and communities. In the words of Rabbi Cooper, “If we get too used to being in the pulpit and start to think that that’s our job everywhere we go, we lose the opportunity to learn from the people we’re hoping to serve. We need to be able to follow, not just lead” (personal communication, March 11, 2016). Especially when working with communities that have been directly impacted by climate change or the fossil fuel industry, religious leaders can make a meaningful contribution by listening to the needs of the community, learning from people already

doing the work, and offering their skills and resources (Earl Koteen, personal communication, February 15, 2016).

Determining how and where religious leaders fit into the greater movement ecology – both on the local level with frontline communities, among national climate and political organizations, and in global negotiations – will be an important conversation moving forward. For example, as we begin the transition away from fossil fuels, clergy can be a powerful component of the struggle to secure jobs for the workers and communities who will be most affected. Religious leaders can support the development of community-led solutions that rely on democratic control of resources, such as the cooperatively owned solar projects that The Shalom Center is piloting with churches, synagogues and mosques in neighborhoods around the country (Arthur Waskow, personal communication, April 4, 2016).

Many questions remain that warrant further study. Important lines of inquiry include research into the possibilities of conservative religious leadership, growing national networks of religious leadership, increased participation in systemic-level change, the role of clergy in promoting community-led solutions, and their future involvement in creating a transition to a just and sustainable future. It will be important to understand how the institutional capital, organizational legitimacy and moral authority that religious leaders carry with them can best be employed to insert moral values into the crucial political and economic decisions that will define the coming transition. As we continue to fight for a livable climate, I am confident that religious leaders have a powerful role to play in centering frameworks of social justice and look forward to further exploring their involvement.

Appendix:**Sample Interview Questions**

How would you describe your role as a religious leader working on climate change?

How did you get involved in climate issues?

Are you inspired to do this work by any specific religious texts or teachings?

What do you do to engage your congregation around climate issues? What strategies have you found to be most effective?

What kind of work does your organization do? How does it work with congregations?

How do you incorporate moral values and principles of social justice into your climate work?

Do you participate in the climate movement or political organizing around climate change?

Have you worked with any other congregations or organizations on climate issues?

Were you involved in COP21? What was the nature of your participation?

Have you been involved in working on climate policy? If so, how?

Do you think religious leaders are effective in working on climate change issues? If so, why might that be?

What role do you think religious leaders play, or ought to play, in the fight against climate change?

What are some of the challenges you've encountered when doing this work? Have there been any limitations that specifically resulted from you being a religious leader compared to a secular leader?

Do you think there is potential for more involvement of religious leaders in climate change issues? If so, what would that look like?

Is there anything you wanted to talk about that you didn't get a chance to? Is there anything I should have asked you that I didn't ask?

Are there any religious leaders who you would recommend that I talk to, or any who you could connect me with?

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