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Religious Involvement and Volunteering: Implications for Civil Society

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This paper examines the role of congregations in civil society by examining the relationship between religious involvement and volunteering. We draw on a survey and interviews with respondents from upstate New York to analyze a set of inter-related questions: how does congregational involvement lead people into volunteering and influence the meaning of volunteer activity? How do church members choose a volunteer site? What role do congregations play in generating civic engagement and social capital? We find no liberal/conservative differences either in the likelihood of volunteering or in choosing between secular and religious volunteer opportunities. Rather, we find that social networks and impressions of organizational identity draw people into volunteering and into particular organizations, and that there is a competition between congregations and other civic groups for members' time. We conclude that congregations foster both "loose" and strong connections to civic life for members at different stages of the life course.

We know that church attendance is associated with increased volunteering, and that religious beliefs can influence the meaning of volunteering in people's lives (Wuthnow 1991; Wilson 2000). We answer three inter-related questions to further explicate the relationship between church attendance and volunteering. What is the relative influence of religious belief versus social networks in explaining the link between church attendance and volunteering? How do religious identity and religious ideology influence the meaning of volunteering in people's lives? And how do church members choose to volunteer for the congregation or for a secular organization?

We use data from a survey of community residents, along with follow-up in-depth interviews and a survey of pastors, from four communities in upstate New

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York to explore the relationship between church attendance and volunteering. We argue that congregations draw members into volunteering through the social networks they generate and through members' understandings of the fit between the congregation's identity and mission and their own beliefs and values. Denominational differences, in particular the liberal/conservative divide, shape both the meaning that volunteering has for church-attenders and how they focus their efforts, but do not influence how much time they spend volunteering. We also find a competition between congregations and other civic groups for members' time that has both positive and negative implications for the role of congregations in civil society.

After a short review of the literature on volunteering and church attendance, we present the findings from our study. In our conclusion, we discuss the implications of these findings for current debates on two related issues: the privatization of religion, and the role of congregations in generating social capital and civic participation in contemporary American society.

RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES ON VOLUNTEERING

Both individual and social factors influence the motivations for and incidence of volunteering (Wilson 2000; see Fischer and Schaffer 1993; Midlarsky and Kahana 1994). Individual factors generally include human capital and civic skills. For instance, the higher one's education and occupational status, the more likely one volunteers (Amato and Booth 1997, Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995; Wilson and Musick 1997).

Social networks influence both instrumental and emotional motives for volunteering. Instrumental motives refer to rational choices people make in weighing the costs and benefits of volunteering for a particular organization (Herzog, House and Morgan 1991). Emotional commitments pertain to one's sense of oneself as a certain type of person (Hart, Atkins and Ford 1996; Schervish and Havens 1997; Teske 1997) and attachments to others (Rochon 1998). For example, network ties may foster volunteering through increasing trust and knowledge about specific voluntary organizations or through a sense of responsibility to the organizations for which one's friends volunteer (McAdam and Paulsen 1993; Wilson and Musick 1997; Wilson 2000). A notable social connection that encourages volunteering is family relations, especially if parents have children at home (Wilson and Musick 1997).

In specifying the personal-level relationship between religion and volunteering, previous research has focused on the role of beliefs and values. The strength and content of religious beliefs can motivate volunteering behavior (Hoge, Zech, McNamara and Donahue 1998; Ladd 1999; Smith 1998:39; Wuthnow 1991). Recent studies have begun to question the relevance of the intensity of one's beliefs to volunteering (Cnaan, Kasternakis and Wineburg 1993; Greeley 1999; Park and Smith 2000; Wilson and Janoski 1995), although

beliefs are still considered influential for those heavily involved in their congregations (Wilson and Musick 1999).

Church attendance may also influence volunteering through the formation of social networks and sense of community (Park and Smith 2000). For example, someone volunteering for an activity that benefits her children may volunteer in the church because she is motivated by both an emotional attachment to those of the same faith and friendship ties to congregation members whom she trusts to make a real commitment to the particular volunteer activity in which she is interested.

Liberal-conservative differences influence the meaning volunteering has for individuals (Wilson 2000; Wuthnow 1998) but not the amount of volunteering (Greeley 1999; Hoge *et al.* 1998; Ladd 1999; Smith 1998; Wilson and Janoski 1995). This is not surprising in light of other work that emphasizes the rising *de facto* congregationalism in American religious life (Carroll and Roof 1993). Although most congregations foster informal helping behaviors, they vary dramatically, within and across denominations, in the degree to which they emphasize the importance of more formal kinds of civic involvement (Ammerman 1997; Becker 1999; Roozen, McKinney and Carroll 1984). How congregations vary in the degree to which they foster volunteering by their members, as well as the role of congregation-level factors in emphasizing specific religious beliefs linked to volunteering behavior, has remained unexamined.

We examine the individual and social mechanisms that link church attendance and volunteering. We also investigate how these mechanisms inform choices about where to volunteer. Church attendance can motivate volunteering in general, for a wide range of organizations, or it can motivate volunteering that is located within the congregation itself, carried out through congregational ministries, committees, or related activities (Park and Smith 2000). We use in-depth interviews to examine how people choose to volunteer for the congregation or for a secular organization. To complement the interviews, in our statistical analyses we compare whether the mechanisms that link church attendance to volunteering more generally are the same as the mechanisms that link church attendance to volunteering specifically for one's congregation. Through these analyses, we are able to interpret more about the link between the meaning of volunteering in individuals' lives and the choices to allocate volunteer time to the congregation or to some other organization.

RELIGION AND CIVIL SOCIETY

How congregations draw people into volunteering and the meaning of volunteering in people's lives are questions at the heart of two related debates. One debate is over changes in the amount and nature of civic involvement in the United States, and the other debate is about the privatization of American religion.

Some scholars argue that we are in a period of declining civic participation, vitality, and social capital (Putnam 2000, 1995). Others argue that, rather than being in decline, we are seeing a period of restructuring in civic life and forms of civic participation, with new kinds of voluntary organizations replacing older forms, but overall high levels of volunteering, social capital, and civic engagement (Greeley 1997; Skocpol 1996; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1996).

Even those who do not think civic life is in decline feel that people's style of commitment to social institutions has changed and, as a result, institutions themselves have become restructured. Robert Wuthnow (1998) argues that over the last 40 years a new style of individual commitment to civil society has evolved, a style of "loose connections." Loose connections do not spring from a broader, disinterested service ethic, but rather are formed on the basis of meeting instrumental needs or expressing emotional attachments (cf., Lichterman 1996). They involve intermittent time commitments and do not necessarily root people in local communities of place. The debate about civic life, then, is not only about whether people are more or less connected to civic life and institutions than they were in the past. It is also a debate about the qualitative nature of people's connections and the resulting strength and vitality of civic institutions.

There is also a debate about the degree to which religious belief in the United States is becoming more privatized. Privatization is said to be signaled by a variety of individual-level beliefs and behaviors, including a shift in the locus of religious authority from sacred texts and religious officials to one's own individual judgment and conscience, religious "switching," the increasing emphasis on spiritual practices that take place outside of traditional religious institutional settings, and a decline of religion's political and civic influence (see Becker 1999; Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler and Tipton 1985; Roof 1993).

Most agree that these post-War trends in American religion are real but, as with the larger debate about civic society, there is disagreement about the resulting implications. Are the growing number of evangelical churches more privatized, withdrawn into their own subculture and less likely to motivate volunteering that reaches beyond the congregation's own four walls? Are privatized religious discourses undermining the rationale for religious participation or the capacity of religious institutions to draw people into broader civic connections?

In our discussion we address some of the implications of our findings for these broader debates about civic life in general and religious institutions' role within it. We find that congregations foster, to a large extent, the strong connections that Wuthnow (1998) believes are necessary for a vital civic life. Congregations create social ties between attenders, leading to increased volunteering. And we find little evidence for privatization, with congregations not only drawing members into volunteering for secular organizations but also fostering in their own ministry opportunities for members to connect with other community members and organizations. But we also find congregations in

competition with other community organizations for members' volunteering time, and a preference for the shorter-term, more intermittent volunteer activity Wuthnow (1998) describes. We suggest a new way to think about the implications of these changes and how they affect civil society.

DATA AND METHODS

Study Design

Data for this study are taken from the Religion and Family Project. Over a two-year period, data were gathered on the congregations and on individuals in four upstate New York communities:

Liverpool, a metropolitan, white, professional/middle-class suburb outside of Syracuse.
Northside, a metropolitan, working-class neighborhood in Syracuse.
Seneca County, a non-metropolitan county with a stable agricultural base and a largely working-class population.
Tompkins County, a non-metropolitan county with a large central town that is economically prosperous and a largely middle-class, professional population.

For this paper, we use data from a survey of community residents (N = 1006), and from follow-up in-depth interviews (N = 38) with survey respondents. We also use a survey of pastors in these same four communities, serving as key informants about their congregations.

For the community resident survey, respondents were sampled randomly within each community, with some over-sampling of areas to yield a good "target population" of working-class and single parent respondents. Our response rate was 60 percent, and our analyses[1] demonstrated no systematic non-response bias beyond those patterns that are usual for random-digit-dial telephone surveys; we have more women than men, and our sample is of a slightly higher socio-economic status than the community average, according to 1990 census data. Bias was introduced by our over-sampling, and to correct this bias sample weights were constructed using 1990 Census data.

In most ways, our sample is very close to national averages (see Table 1). But our sample is different from the national average in some important ways. It is 94 percent White. We have more Catholic respondents than the national average (40 percent, compared with around 29 percent), which reflects well the

[1] We checked for non-response bias by comparing our sample to US. Census (1990) data for our four communities on basic demographic and social class characteristics. Our sample is not significantly different except that it is 94 percent White. Further, we conducted a 119-person survey that was administered to individuals who initially declined to participate in our resident survey. This questionnaire was a much-shortened version of our original survey, and was administered primarily to discover if those initially not responding show some systematic pattern in their religious orientation, religious beliefs, or religious involvement. Means on these measures showed no significant differences between the original and the non-response sample.

population in our four communities. Our sample is more educated than the national average, with almost half (46 percent) reporting they have a college degree or more education. This reflects well the educational distribution in our communities, one of which contains a major university and a smaller college, and another of which is a suburban professional enclave.

We also conducted 38 follow-up in-depth interviews by telephone with residents who had previously answered the survey. The participants all volunteered and attended a congregation in one of these four communities. The interviews were designed to increase our understanding of how congregational membership influences the meaning of volunteering and the choices members make in contributing their volunteer time.

In addition, we administered a survey to the pastor of each congregation in the four-community area. This survey had a 78 percent response rate, for a total of 127 responses out of a population of 165.[2] We also conducted interviews with pastors and fieldwork in congregations. While this data is not featured in the statistical analyses, we will draw upon this information in contextualizing our findings.

Measures

We use data from the survey of community residents to answer two of our research questions. First, what are the relative influences of social networks and religious beliefs in motivating volunteering behavior? Second, are the factors that lead people to volunteer for their congregation different than those that lead them to volunteer in general? Table 1 contains details about the variables used in the statistical analyses, and descriptive data on the sample.

The survey elicited basic demographic information, and information about various forms of community involvement, including volunteering. We distinguish in our analyses between volunteering for a congregation and volunteering for a secular organization.

A series of questions about religious involvement were also asked, including the respondent's frequency of church attendance and the salience of religion. We designated "church attenders" as those who attend more frequently than just

[2] It is difficult to identify a "population" of churches in a given community; we did so by starting with a list from community guides and telephone books, verifying and changing the list through telephone calls and a driving street survey.

at the religious holidays.[3] Denominational family was classified following Smith (1987).[4]

TABLE 1

Variables Used in Analysis

Variable	Coding	Descriptive Statistics
Volunteering Behavior		
Do you volunteer?	Yes	N = 535; 49.5%
	No	N = 546; 50.4%
Volunteer within congregation?	Yes	N = 137; 25.6%
	No	N = 397; 74.4%
Demographics		
Sex	0: Male	N = 470; 43.5%
	1: Female	N=612; 56.5%
Education	No HS degree	N = 40; 3.7%
	HS degree	N = 239; 22.1%
	Some College	N = 297; 27.4%
	College degree	N = 245; 22.6%
	Graduate work	N = 261; 24.1%
Married with Kids	Not married with kids	N = 433; 40%
	Married with kids	N = 649; 60%
Geographic Location	Metropolitan Middle-class	N = 239; 22.1%
	Metropolitan Working-class	N = 280; 25.8%
	Non-Metropolitan Middle-class	N = 369; 34.1%
	Non-Metropolitan Working-class	N = 194; 18.0%
Religious Involvement		
Attender	Attend more than holidays	N = 598; 55.2%
Non-Attender	Never attend/attend on holidays	N = 484; 44.7%

(Continued)

[3] This cutoff was used because people may over-report weekly church attendance, resulting in a skew in the variable at the upper end. To assess whether the results we obtained were influenced by the decision code the variable this way, we repeated our final results using an attendance variable that counted only those who attended "several times a month" or more as attenders. The main finding (that beliefs do not drive volunteering, but instead social networks do) remains true. These results are available by request.

[4] In the body of this paper Smith proposes placing all groups into a 3-category scheme of liberal-moderate- fundamentalist. But the appendix contains a table that proposes a 7-category scheme very similar to the RELTRAD categorization developed in Steensland et al. (2000), except that it divides the "mainline" Protestant category into "liberal Protestant" and "moderate Protestant." We find significant variation among mainline Protestant denominations in mission emphasis and civic orientation more broadly, and so we use the Smith 7-category scheme, which can better account for this variation. We agree with Steensland et al. (2000) that the 3-category scheme proposed in Smith 1990 is not adequate for many analyses of American religious groups because it collapses important historical and cultural variations between religious traditions.

TABLE 1 *(Continued)*

Variable	Coding	Descriptive Statistics
Religious Involvement		
Salience	Not very or Somewhat important	N = 547; 50.5%
	Very important	N = 526; 48.6%
Denominational Family	Catholic	N = 437; 40.4%
	Jewish	N = 29; 2.6%
	Liberal Protestant	N = 127; 11.7%
	Moderate Protestant	N = 177; 16.3%
	Conservative Protestant	N = 142; 13.1%
	Other	N = 64; 5.9%
	None	N = 106; 9.8%
Social Networks		
Confide in Neighbors	Not at all or Somewhat likely	N = 849; 78.5%
	Very likely	N = 229; 21.1%
Confide in Congregation Members	Not at all or Somewhat likely	N = 636; 63.2%
	Very Likely	N = 116; 11.5%
Church members in Network	No	N = 461; 45.5%
	Yes	N = 551; 54.5%

Church attenders were also asked a series of questions about their congregation, and its mission orientation. We developed these questions using the work of Becker (1999), who designates four different types of local congregations: *family congregations*, which concentrate on providing members with close and supportive interpersonal relationships; *houses of worship*, which do not foster interpersonal intimacy or draw members into activities outside of the main worship service; *community congregations*, which foster a great deal of lay involvement and create a space for debate about political and social issues; and *leader congregations*, which play an active role in local civic life and social activism.

Most people have looked at whether "official" religious culture — denominational culture, liberal or conservative theology — influences volunteering. We use these types to capture variations in *local* religious culture that might influence members' volunteering behavior. Respondents were read a statement characterizing each type of congregation, and asked to say whether the statement was "Just like my congregation," "Somewhat like my congregation," or "Not at all like my congregation." Respondents who said that a given type was "Just like my congregation" were coded as attending that type for the purposes of these analyses; all others were classified as not attending that type of congregation. See Table 2 for details of these variables.

Becker (1999) uses these types to characterize the congregation as a whole, based on extensive fieldwork within each congregation. We cannot draw any conclusions about congregations as a whole based on the response of one

individual. Rather, these responses indicate the person's own perception of the congregation's core mission, or the part of that mission that is most salient for the individual respondent. We will argue that these perceptions of congregational mission make a difference in people's decisions to volunteer, and in their choice to do so through their congregation or through a secular organization.

We also asked people about their social networks. One question had to do with the composition of their friendship network: how many of their good friends were neighbors, how many were family members, how many were met through work, how many were met through community or professional organizations and, for church-goers, how many were met through the congregation? Possible responses for each category were: nearly all, many, some, hardly any, and none. We also asked each respondent how likely they would be to confide in friends from these various realms (neighbors, family, friends from work, friends from professional or community organizations, or friends from church for churchgoers). The possible responses were: very likely, somewhat likely, or not at all likely.

TABLE 2

Congregational Mission

Congregational Mission — For each one, tell us if this sounds "just like my congregation," "somewhat like my congregation," or "not at all like my congregation."

Like a family?	Just like my congregation	N = 293; 49.1%
	Not at all or Somewhat like my congregation	N = 304; 50.9%
A place to worship, and many people choose not to be more involved	Just like my congregation	N = 518; 87.8%
	Not at all or Somewhat like my congregation	N = 72; 12.2%
A place where people debate values and issues they care deeply about	Just like my congregation	N = 359; 61.8%
	Not at all or Somewhat like my congregation	N = 222; 38.2%
Leader in the community	Just like my congregation	N = 286; 49.3%
	Not at all or Somewhat like my congregation	N = 294; 50.7%

Based on Becker 1999.

We use data from the in-depth interviews to answer our third research question, how does religious involvement influence the meaning of volunteering for individuals? We also use this data to shed more light on the choice of volunteering for a congregation versus a secular organization.

Questions on the interview fell into the following categories: the participant's motivations for and attitudes towards civic participation; their history of

volunteering; their religious, spiritual, and moral attitudes towards volunteering; the relationship between their congregation and their local community; their perception of the public vs. private nature of their congregation; the relative importance of the congregation's outreach programs in choosing the church; and how many of their friends volunteer. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes on these questions alone; all background information had already been collected during the original survey. There were 14 men and 24 women interviewed; 24 interviewees were married with children. The quantitative and qualitative design allows for a representative analysis of the factors contributing to volunteering in the 4 chosen communities, and for more in-depth detail on how these factors influence participants.

FINDINGS

Influences on Volunteering

We performed a logistic regression on a binomial measure of volunteering (1 = volunteer, 0 = not a volunteer) for the entire sample, and for a sub-sample of church-attenders only, in order to assess the relative effects of individual and social factors on volunteering (see Table 3).

For the whole sample, church attendance and high religious salience both predict volunteering. Volunteering is more likely for those who have close relationships with neighbors. As well, residential location influences volunteering, with residents of the most rural environment being the most likely to volunteer compared to those in more metropolitan locations. In addition, being married with children and higher education levels[5] both correspond to a higher likelihood of volunteering. One's denomination, however, is not significantly related to volunteering, and neither are differences between liberals and conservatives, even in initial descriptive analyses, and so these measures were not

[5] We use a five-level measure for education because there is a curvilinear relation between educational attainment and volunteering. If we had collapsed education into a single variable, we would lose this relationship. While we wanted to capture this curvilinear relationship for the logistic regression, we also note, using a more simple educational measure, the variation in educational attainment by region, as mentioned in the data section. People in both Liverpool and Tompkins County were significantly more likely to have completed college than not, and people in both Seneca County and Northside were significantly less likely to have done so (table not included). Also, consistent with other literature, we find class differences in the likelihood of volunteering and church attendance. As seen in Table 3, the likelihood of volunteering increases with educational attainment. Whether participants had children living at home or not, those with higher educations were more likely to attend church and to volunteer (table not included).

Despite the tendency for higher-educated persons to volunteer and the educational attainment variation by region, members of Seneca County were significantly more likely to volunteer than members of the other areas. Class status alone does not determine the likelihood of volunteering. Social networks, as we argue, and volunteering opportunities shape behaviors as well. As Wuthnow (1998) notes, inner-city residents volunteer less than the national average in part due to the lack of voluntary organizations in their neighborhoods and time relative to other populations.

included in our models.[6] We examine liberal/conservative differences later, in our analysis of the meaning of volunteering.

TABLE 3

Logistic Regression — Determinants of Volunteering
Dependent Variable: Do you Volunteer? (1 = yes, 2 = no)
Standardized Beta Coefficients of Factors Influencing Entire Sample and Attenders Only

	Entire Sample		Attenders Only	
Independent Variables	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Demographics				
HS degree	.2489	.6038	1.0731	1.1951
Some College	1.0177**	1.3402**	1.5467*	1.6012*
College Degree	1.2766**	1.6046***	1.9420*	1.9822**
Some Graduate School or more^	1.0979**	1.4099***	1.5877*	1.6722*
Married with Kids	.5679***	.5408***	.7302***	.7215***
Live in Metropolitan Middle-Class area	-.8175***	-.8461***	-1.0646***	-1.0113***
Live in Metropolitan Working-Class area	-.4176*	-.4937*	-.9570**	-.8985**
Live in Non-Metropolitan Middle-Class area^^	-.5909**	-.6523***	-1.1833***	-1.2630***
Social Networks				
Confide in Neighbor		.4439**		.4309
Congregation Members in Network of Friends				.9009**
Religious Commitment				
Attend Congregation	.2863*	.3225*		
Religion is very Important	.3622*	.3236*	.3128	.0748
Congregation Identity				
Your church is like a place of debate			.7181***	.6535**
Constant	-.6742***	-.6394***	-.8480***	-1.0305***
	N = 994	N = 991	N = 534	N = 531

NOTE: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.
^ Reference category is No HS degree.
^^ Reference category is Non-Metropolitan, Working Class area.
Model 1: Entire Sample, without social network variables. **Model 2:** Entire sample with social network variables. **Model 3:** Attenders only, without social network variables. **Model 4:** Attenders only, with social network variables.

In our analysis for church attenders we included variables that pertain only to this sub-sample: having church friends in one's network, and the congre-

[6] Among Protestants, 48 percent of liberals, 57 percent of moderates, and 59 percent of conservatives volunteer, and 47 percent of Catholics volunteer; these differences are not statistically significant.

gational mission variables. We find support for the idea that much of the "church effect" on volunteering operates through friendship networks. The salience of religion does not predict volunteering. Those who consider congregation members among their closest friends are much more likely to volunteer. The relevant reference group for church attenders who volunteer is not neighbors, but congregational friends.

We also find that volunteers are more likely to consider their congregation as a place to debate. Congregations that encourage members to debate important social issues may also encourage active involvement in the community through volunteering. On the other hand, it may be that the kind of person who chooses such a congregation was already more likely to be a volunteer. Again, initial analyses revealed no effect of denomination or religious conservatism on volunteering, and so these variables were not included in the final regression analysis.

Type of Volunteering and Motivations

In the previous two analyses, we looked at factors associated with volunteering in general. We now consider those factors that are correlated with choosing to volunteer within a local congregation, in order to examine how church attenders decide to prioritize their volunteer time. A logistic regression of volunteering within the congregation sheds light on what leads church attenders to volunteer within the congregation as opposed to volunteering for a secular organization.

Table 4 reports the results of this regression. We find that among the personal level variables, the salience of religion does not predict volunteering within the congregation. In fact, no personal level variable significantly corresponds to the dependent variable, after taking into account other factors. In Table 4 we include results only for the final, parsimonious model.

Three social level variables also lose significance: being married with children inside the home, confiding in one's neighbors and having church members within one's network. Yet a similar factor, confiding in fellow congregation members, remains influential, with those who confide in fellow members being more likely to volunteer for congregational activities. It may be that close, confiding friendships within a congregation draw people into volunteering for it; it is also possible that volunteering within a congregation provides more opportunities to develop deeper and closer friendships with other members.

Members' impressions of their congregation's core mission remain significant predictors of volunteering. Those who consider their congregation as a place of worship or as a leader are less likely to volunteer within it. Both types denote congregational cultures that do not emphasize interpersonal connections or intimacy among members. In such contexts, members may be more prone to rely

on paid staff to carry out congregational programming rather than carrying out ministry and programming through volunteer labor (cf. Becker 1999:191-2).

TABLE 4

Logistic Regression, Volunteering for a Congregation
Dependent Variable: Volunteering Within One's Congregation (1 = yes, 0 = no)
Standardized Beta Coefficients of Factor Influencing Attenders Only

Independent Variables	Attenders Only
Demographics	
Married with Children	-.2276
Religious Commitment	
Importance of Religion	-.1691
Social Confidants	
Confide in Neighbor	.2496
Confide in fellow church members	1.769***
Congregation Identity	
Your church is like a place of worship	-1.3784*
Your church is like a leader	-.7199**
Constant	-.4947
	N = 300

NOTE: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

The interviews illuminate why people volunteer within their church and within other organizations. Most people in our sample volunteer through a social connection, but being a parent does not lead to volunteering in the congregation vs. another organization. Considering that many social connections arise through one's children, it is not surprising that the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, schools, youth athletic events, and youth cultural activities predominate as the types of volunteering. Other major types of volunteering sites are ones which incorporate friendship ties, such as congregations, nursing homes or a veteran's association, broad non-profit groups such as the Red Cross and March of Dimes, day care centers, and food pantries.

While the findings from the survey test predictions on the likelihood of volunteering, the interviews with volunteers shed considerable light on why people volunteer. When asked what led them to volunteer, more than two-thirds of those with children told us they volunteer for organizations that serve family members. Others volunteered because of connections to friends. Roughly three-quarters of our interviewees volunteer because of a direct connection to another person, either someone within the organization or someone being served by it. Family ties, and children in particular, remain the most important conduit to volunteering. Those who did not mention family, friends, or someone directly

asking them to help, cited caring about people in general, feeling religiously motivated to get involved, wanting to help out people perceived as similar to them, wanting to gain practical experiences in a line of work, and wanting to protect property values.

These findings lend support to the idea that social-level mechanisms are central to understand volunteering. Our interviews, like the survey findings, also suggest that church attenders with children and close friends prioritize these relations in choosing a volunteer site, and they typically do not choose churches.

In our survey, we asked people if they felt that churches are important for the moral education of children. Those who answered this question affirmatively are more likely to volunteer *in general*, but they are no more likely to volunteer within their congregation. This suggests that parents do not see dedication of their time to the congregation as necessary for the moral education of children to take place, even as they find it important. Parents care about what the church offers their family, but still invest time for their family elsewhere.

The interviews also provide further evidence of competition between churches and other civic organizations for volunteer time. Church attenders who volunteer note that should volunteer opportunities decline within their church, they will volunteer elsewhere, if they are not already. Such responses suggest that even those who volunteer within the congregation *primarily* see the congregation as a place of worship and fellowship. This contributes to the competition between the church and other institutions for volunteers.

Finally, the in-depth interviews shed light on how religious belief shapes the meaning of volunteering. Members of evangelical churches told us they volunteer because it expresses a spiritual value. One man told us he volunteers because, "If I am to become more Christ-like, I must serve." This contrasts with the language used by those from liberal Protestant or Catholic traditions. For instance, one member of a liberal congregation says that he volunteers because we "have an obligation to help others as citizens." Another says, "To make society run, you have to put in your time."

This congruence is more than a matter of individual meaning-making, however. Our survey of pastors, who served as key informants about their congregations' programming,[7] shows that congregations provide different kinds of volunteer opportunities for members. Catholic congregations and moderate Protestant congregations are equally likely to foster volunteer activities that maintain the congregation (committees, Sunday School or religious education teacher) and activities that reach out beyond the congregation's own four walls (food pantry, rescue mission, pro-life counseling center). Liberal Protestant congregations provide volunteer activities oriented almost entirely to congregational maintenance. Evangelical congregations have twice as many congre-

[7] Pastors were asked about not only the regular outreach programs run by the congregation but also about which organizations they partner with, both secular and religious, to provide ministry for members and for the community at large.

gational-maintenance activities as they have outreach activities. The social capital generated through volunteering within Catholic, moderate Protestant, and to a lesser extent evangelical churches is not contained solely within the congregation, but is spread throughout the community.[8] National studies also suggest that congregations in different denominational families provide different kinds of volunteering activities for members (Ammerman forthcoming).

These interviews reveal that an important factor that can help congregations win in the competition for members' volunteer time is a perceived fit between the individual's own understanding of the meaning of volunteering and the congregation's mission. Members who feel that volunteering within the congregation expresses their own spirituality or provides the kind of community service they value may choose the congregation over other volunteer venues. Otherwise, the competition for members' time may leave some congregations relying on paid staff or cutting back programming as members volunteer their time elsewhere.

Our interviewees do not talk about a social responsibility to others in their local environment, a hallmark of the older "strong connections" style (Wuthnow 1998). Many people's belief in "giving back" is expressed through participation in large non-profit organizations like the Red Cross, March of Dimes, and American Cancer Society, and through institutions in which family and friends participate. Volunteers told us that they want to give back what they have received, that they volunteer because they care, because friends need help, because their church needs help, because someone asked them to, and because they grew up volunteering. These pragmatic giving-back motives may lead people to participation in local community organizations, but are also compatible with the kinds of intermittent attachment to trans-local institutions of which Wuthnow (1998) writes.

Social Networks, Loose Connections, and the Privatization of Religion

How congregations draw people into volunteering sheds light on both the kinds of connections they are fostering between members and their capacity to be locations for generating social capital and civic involvement. Social networks, rather than beliefs, dominate as the mechanism leading to volunteering, and it is the social networks formed within congregations that make congregation members more likely to volunteer. As Park and Smith (2000) find, having friends within one's denomination and participating in church activities increases one's chances of volunteering for a congregation and in general; the

[8] Liberal Protestant congregations are more likely to rely on the pastor to be the main one working on outreach or activism beyond the congregation's own four walls, or to donate time or money to secular organizations rather than to run such activities themselves.

importance of religious beliefs plays little role in church attenders' decisions to volunteer.

The survey data demonstrates that social ties to congregation members encourage volunteering in the congregation versus a secular organization. Through in-depth interviews, men and women told us about deciding to volunteer for their congregation after being asked to do so by congregational friends and fellow members, and they talked about their feelings of connection or belonging in their church leading them to decide to volunteer for it. Volunteering by church attenders depends on their social networks, not on their denominational membership or their liberal or conservative identity. Both liberals and conservatives volunteer to the same extent.

But our in-depth interviews show that liberal and conservative church attenders interpret the meaning of their volunteer activity in different ways. Liberals consider their volunteering as a civic duty and as helping others around them, while conservatives consider their volunteering as a spiritual act expressing their religious beliefs. Likewise, our survey of local pastors reveals that congregations which are embedded within different denominational traditions provide a variety of volunteer opportunities linked in part to the civic life of local communities (cf., Ammerman forthcoming).

Given the fact that our study only sampled four upstate New York areas, further research is needed to determine how generalizable these findings are to the rest of the U.S. Other work on civic involvement suggests that differences between rural, small-town, and urban areas in volunteering can be accounted for by controlling for demographic factors, as we have done here. However, our sample is largely White, and so our findings may not translate to other ethnic and racial groups, since there are differences in both the style and the forms of civic involvement across ethnic and racial boundaries (Wilson 2000; Wuthnow 1998).

What are the implications of these volunteering patterns for the role of congregations in civil society? Our finding that social networks influence volunteering conflicts with Wuthnow's (1998) argument that commitments to volunteering have become "looser" over the past few decades. Wuthnow argues that the newer style of "loose connections" means that people decide to volunteer on their own, to meet their personal needs, and that social institutions are not so central in fostering volunteering as they were in the past. But we find that congregations create networks both inside and outside of the church which foster the kind of strong connections that directly encourage volunteering.

Another central element of Wuthnow's argument is that people's motivations to volunteer have become more individualistic. Wuthnow argues that the sense of social responsibility which guided 1950s volunteering has been replaced today by individualistic instrumental and emotional motives that contribute to loose connections. But we believe that the instrumental and emotional motives

also steered previous forms of volunteering, including the older "strong connections" style characteristic of the post-WWII era.

In the 1950s, instrumental and emotional attachments typically overlapped with membership in a local community of place. Emotional ties to family and neighbors translated into an instrumental concern for property values and the well-being of one's own family (cf., Hammond 1988). Wuthnow does not discuss this overlap; rather he "naturalizes" the local orientation of 1950s volunteering. But we believe it is this overlap between community of place and the instrumental and emotional motives for volunteering that drove the older style of volunteering about which Wuthnow writes.

In contrast, the loose connections Wuthnow finds in contemporary society stem partly from this lack of overlap between individuals' instrumental and emotional concerns and a local community of residence (cf. Hammond 1988). People volunteer now primarily based on either an emotional or an instrumental motive, but not both equally and simultaneously. Currently, these motivations overlap less frequently because the social changes that Wuthnow describes have weakened long-term attachments to local communities of place.

Our findings give some evidence to this separation of motives. Volunteering based on emotions may lead to loose connections since the attachment is to a person or an emotional issue, not to a cause or an institution. For instance, volunteering for the local hospital or nursing home because of an emotional concern for an ill or elderly friend dissipates if the friend passes away or no longer needs attention. Similarly, volunteering driven by purely instrumental motives does not encourage strong connections since the person weighs the costs and benefits, and may drop out when the equation is no longer favorable. With less emotional attachment to one's community, volunteering for the local neighborhood is primarily about property upkeep. Because people's emotional investments may not be in the local community, where their interests are, volunteering in the traditional fashion is less likely, and the volunteering that does take place may lack sufficient motivation to sustain it.

However, we also show that a pronounced exception to the "loose connections" argument is volunteering for one's family. Such volunteering evinces the tight link between emotional motives, instrumental motives, and a local community of residence that Wuthnow finds characteristic of 1950s volunteering. We find that this type of volunteering continues as children progress from toddlers to teenagers, regardless of parents' employment status, sex, and other human capital and demographic variables.

Busy parents take the time to become engaged in civic life for the sake of their children, and this leads to embeddedness in local institutions, such as schools, sports' leagues, scouts, and local congregations. The fact that this volunteering stems equally from instrumental and emotional motives strengthens parents' commitment to civic involvement. Parenting is a good example of how

formal and informal social ties can lead to civic engagement, and demonstrates the centrality of the private realm in inducing public action.

We also find that religious beliefs give people a broader rationale for service that goes beyond meeting their own instrumental and emotional needs of the moment. And yet beliefs, measured here as both the salience of religion and as an evangelical or liberal orientation, do not predict volunteering, even for those religiously involved. Congregations, therefore, cannot rely on beliefs alone to generate volunteering, and a religiously-based rhetoric of service, while describing the motives for volunteering, may not predict actual time spent volunteering.

The fact that social connections, in particular to one's family, lead members to contribute to civil society, raises the question of whether congregations are sites for such strong bonds. From the survey we find that church attenders choose to volunteer for the congregation if they have strong ties to fellow members and find the congregational identity a good fit with their expectations. Otherwise members choose to volunteer for a secular organization and see their congregation as a place for worship.

Yet, ties to family and friends, perhaps the most important in motivating volunteering, do not encourage strong connections to the congregation. The survey and interview findings show that parents who attend congregations are no more likely to volunteer within the congregation than outside of it. Ties to one's family and friends more frequently lead to volunteering in other organizations central to the social integration of children. This creates a competition between congregations and secular organizations for members' time, especially for parents' time. People do volunteer in the church for their family, donating time to teach Sunday School or lead the children's choir. People also attend church as a family and for their family. But time is a real issue for families, and parents choose between institutions for their volunteer hours.

This leads to a kind of irony in how congregations foster civic participation. We find that the connections that congregations foster, while "loose" in one sense, are also quite strong in two other ways. Congregations foster volunteering through emotional attachments to friends and family, and through the emotional satisfaction of "giving back" or expressing one's spirituality. This is a "loose," emotional connection.

On the other hand, congregations are where individuals come together and form close ties of friendship and support. These connections create social capital by drawing people into networks that influence them to volunteer their time to a variety of causes, both within the congregation and beyond it. This is a "strong" connection, in Wuthnow's terms.

Congregational connections are also "strong" in the sense that they reveal none of the privatization of religion that many scholars consider to be on the rise. The connections people form in congregations influence other areas of their lives and other decisions about how to spend their time. When people volunteer

within a congregation, they do so not only to maintain the congregation, but also use the congregation as a vehicle to accomplish outreach and service beyond the congregation's own four walls. To use Putnam's (2000) terms, congregations are sites of both "bonding" and "bridging" social capital (cf. Ammerman forthcoming).

Choosing to volunteer in a congregation also depends on the congregation's local identity. Volunteering is largely a matter of "fit" between one's own priorities and those of the organization. Volunteers within liberal Protestant, moderate Protestant, and Catholic churches consider their church to be well grounded in its environment, so that their contributions to the church spread to the society outside of its doors. Volunteers within evangelical churches take pride in the spiritual nature of their local congregation. Evangelical congregations offer volunteers a space within a secular environment where they can express their spirituality and form ties with other members. This makes them distinctive from other organizations, and may make them more competitive in attracting members' time vis-à-vis competing community organizations. A spiritual component strengthens people's connections to the organization since it provides a motivation to volunteer for it versus other groups.

This raises interesting issues. Although the rhetoric that evangelicals use to describe their volunteer activity is more privatized than that used by religious liberals, their behavior is just as public-oriented. The volunteer activities of evangelical congregations are "bridging" activities (Putnam 2000), involving outreach to others in the local community and not simply congregational maintenance. A strong evangelical identity, while rooted in a language of personal salvation, nevertheless is consistent with a congregational mission that leads to the formation of social capital and to a public role for religion (cf. Smith 1998).

These findings suggest that congregations, like other volunteer sites, need to consider carefully the message they give their members when they ask them to contribute volunteer time. This message needs to fit with their own members' motives for volunteering, but it also needs to remind members that the organization is a distinctive place to volunteer and can express needs and preferences that are not expressed through volunteering elsewhere. For congregations to recruit volunteers, they must not only offer unique programs but also make members feel connected, since social bonds encourage stronger connections. Commitments to congregations based on both social bonds and spiritual expression create a confluence of emotional and instrumental motives for volunteering.

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