

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL BETWEEN
HISPANIC CATHOLICS AND HISPANIC EVANGELICALS
IN LOS ANGELES

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ABSTRACT

Hispanics constitute approximately 16% of the total United States population, forming the largest ethnic minority group in the country. The Hispanic population in America is 70% Catholic, 20% Protestant and the rest are alternative Christians, non-Christians and non-believers Hispanics. This reveals that Hispanic Protestants are a large minority within their ethnic enclave. However, there is an increasing trend among Hispanic Catholics to convert to Evangelical churches. The differences that this transformation creates have rarely been addressed by sociologists. This dissertation addresses this gap in the literature by using the concept of social capital.

This study examines the role of social capital in the life of the Hispanic community with a division of Hispanic Catholics and Hispanic Evangelicals in the United States. Using Robert Putnam's definition and classification of social capital, I explore how differently these two groups of Hispanics accumulate social capital. I consider the likelihood that Hispanics with dissimilar denominations utilizes social capital differently and also how social capital itself is perceived differently. Most social capital researches have studied one population and the participatory outcome of their network resources.

This study used a qualitative research design that subscribes to the theoretical tradition of grounded theory to examine the differences of social capital in two Southern California Hispanic Churches. The sample consisted of two Evangelical priests and nineteen church members from both churches who were mostly members of different ministries in their church. Data was collected from semi-structured interviews with church members, observation sessions, and archival materials.

The data showed that on the congregational level, there is not a distinctive difference between the two communities in terms of their attitude towards trust, networking, volunteering and reciprocity. However, there are some factors that highly influence the

ways church members are led to acquire social capital, such as theology, religious conversion, and racial debate.

This research contributes to the literature on Hispanic Catholics and Evangelicals and more importantly to the literature on social capital by defining the categories that impact the creation of social capital in a community, specifically religious communities. The findings from this study contribute to our understanding of the variables important for transforming the forms of social capital. The comparative approach in this study, which is overlooked in most studies of social capital and religion, demonstrates that the same ethnic group with a different theological orientation encounters different resources and constraints in social capital formation.

To my parents who helped me keep the courage and strength in finding my life path and
stood by me in pursuing my dreams

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND FOR THE STUDY

Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993) and the following work *Bowling Alone* (2001) received both substantial praise and criticism from academic circles. His research on the decline of social capital, civic engagement and the negative implications it bears for American society, opened a new way for academics to study political and social behavior in the US (Edwards and Foley 1998a). His work had characteristics that aroused very controversial feelings; first, he is unique in attempting to reveal the apathetic side of American society. Second, social capital as a concept is a long popular term with conceptual complexities itself; so it can be assumed that the concept is more than anything else at the forefront of critical thought. However, the lack of attention to the diversities of related issues to social capital and the ways social capital may operate differently according to its social, ethnic and racial context is a legitimate criticism that is not unique to Putnam's work (Edward and Foley 2001). Moreover, social capital as a concept reveals distinct function when studied in different disciplines. After all, Putnam has provided an interesting theoretical framework through which one can test social and political behavior in a community.

Social capital is becoming a core concept in today's civil society and democratization debate circles. It is considered to be very critical to the existence of civil society, which is itself a requirement for modern democracy. Social capital focuses on social relations that have productive benefits for the members involved. Social capital is highly context specific which enhances the complexity of its conceptualization and operationalization. Based on different aspects of the social capital definition, one can presume that social capital is about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity (Dekker and Uslaner 2001).

Despite the contextual nature of religion, and the utility of social contexts on predicting individual and collective behavior, relatively few studies have explored the impact that social and religious contexts have on civic involvement. A larger number of researches in the fields of sociology, education and political science have studied the role of social capital in the mobility of a community and their prospects. Yet, very few scholarly researches have been dedicated specifically to the influence of religion on aspects of social capital; while, it is highly believed that the involvement in religious communities is recognized as an important source of social capital (Putnam 2001).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The involvement in faith institutions is considered to be one of the most important sources of social capital and adherence to religious rituals are shown to improve social ties among the members of a religious group (Putnam 2001). However, limited scholarly research has focused on the connection between religious institutions' denominational variance and their potential influence on social capital. This research provides a rare opportunity to gain greater understanding of the role of different religious denominations in the formation of social capital. The results of this project could help various religious leaders to gain insight on their policies and find awareness to the patterns and functions of their market rivals. This research is also timely, as it provides an insight to the lives of minority groups in the US, which is critical due to the waves of immigration of Hispanics and their religious conversion in the US.

It is expected that there are differences in the ways Hispanic Catholics and Hispanic Evangelicals accumulate social capital; hence, the intent of this design was to study social capital between Hispanic Evangelicals and Hispanic Catholics in Los Angeles and to compare how differently social capital is acquired in different religious communities within one ethnic minority. Studying the same minority group in the same neighborhood with comparable social and economic status in a similarly sized congregation allows me to comprehend the differences in the social networks of these two denominations.

Drawing on congregational and community levels, this research tries to study how and in what ways religious contexts influence the existence and formation of social capital. Previous research has proved that there is a robust link between congregational participation and civic engagement at the individual level (Wuthnow 1999). For example, attendance at religious services and participation in congregational activities is correlated with civic engagements such as political involvement, volunteerism, and membership in voluntary associations which are clear examples of social capital (Putnam 2001). Faith communities are believed to own an enormous repository of social capital, implanted specifically in the ministries that support the whole mission of their related religious communities.

One can discuss that congregations serve as places for the practice of social and civic engagements, where an individual's experience to develop important skills can be transferred into other social contexts (like holding a meeting, serving on the church board, or organizing charity programs). The most common explanation for the connection between religious participation and civic activity is that local religious organizations function as important sources of social capital; valuable resources linking individuals and groups in a community (Putnam 2001).

Robert Putnam, who popularized the term "social capital", has described it as a lubricant that, "greases the wheels," of civil society (Putnam 2001:288). When people interact with one another on a regular basis and develop affective ties, they may be more likely to work together to accomplish common goals and solve community problems. Since congregations are the places where friendships naturally occur and bonds of trust are formed, they serve as important sources of social capital. Consequently, participation in a congregation is likely to increase the chances that someone will become civically engaged. However, one should always remember that not all forms of social capital are necessarily beneficial for civic life. For example, exclusive and extremist forms of social ties that Putnam called "bonding social capital", such as those that exist within organizations like the Ku Klux Klan or some fundamentalist congregations, may deter

their members from becoming engaged with others in the larger community and loosen the chance of “bridging social capital” formation.

The major interest of this study lies in the existing social capital between Hispanic Catholics and Hispanic Evangelicals. First, it seeks to study the influence of religion on the existing social capital of Hispanics in Catholic and Evangelical churches. To pursue it, the role of church ministries is very important. Furthermore, it tries to understand the perception of the church members from their own benefits as a result of social engagement in their community. Third, this project observes the ways in which social relations are motivated and reinforced in the church. It also tries to probe the reasons for the members’ volunteerism in their church activities to see what differences they expose as a result of dissimilar religious beliefs and practices.

Social capital, as a challenging sociological concept, Hispanics, as the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the US, and Evangelicals, as a highly influential denomination and the most rapidly growing religious movement in the US, have all received increased attention from the social and political science circles in the past decades. Hispanics now comprise the largest minority group in the United States; based on the 2010 census, about 16% of the whole US population today are Hispanic (US Census 2010). The Census Bureau also estimates that by 2050 the American population will be 23% Hispanic, 16% black and 10% Asian-American (US Census 2008). One should also pay attention to the growing rate of illegal Hispanics in the US.

Samuel Huntington (1998) stated his concern over the huge number of Hispanic immigrants residing in the US. He believes that “this is the first time in our history that we have had a majority of the immigrants coming into this country speaking a single non-English”. He fears that the Hispanics will not be assimilated into American society as previous immigrants did and he enumerates various reasons for it. Beyond their demography, language, culture and political activism, it is Hispanics’ faith that has been elaborated in Huntington’s *Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* as a

source of problem. In Huntington's view, Hispanics' Catholic religion would threaten the Protestant culture of America and will challenge American cultural values.

Parallel to the wave of Catholics' immigration to the US, there is a lesser-known fact that can modify the challenges posed by Hispanic Catholic immigrants. The rate of conversion from Catholicism to Evangelicalism is rising drastically in recent years in the Hispanic community in the US. According to the Pew Research Center report (Economist 2009), some 68% of Hispanics in America are still Catholics, and their numbers continue to grow. Yet, about 15% are now born-again Evangelicals who have converted. Gaston Espinosa, a professor of religion at Claremont McKenna College, estimates that about 3.9 million Latino Catholics have converted and that "for every one who comes back to the Catholic Church (in the US), four leave it" (Economist 2009). Such being the case, it is important to conceptualize Hispanics' social structure, networks and activities within their faith communities. Therefore, the concept of social capital enables me to observe personal, social, public, institutional and congregational resources that these groups of Hispanics possess in their communities.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

Understanding how social capital in general is engendered and how it functions in different faith institutions can lead to better understanding of the role religious rituals and theology play in the formation of social capital and the differences it may bear based on various religious beliefs. The basic theories posed to investigate this inquiry reflect theories of religion, theories of social networks and connections and the social capital constructs.

Some believe that social capital is a new cover for the classic sociological debate on social order and community life. Furthermore, the indiscriminate use of social capital may reduce the weight of the concept by making it less meaningful and reform it to a concept from which many possible perceptions are allowed (Fine 1999). Although, it sounds unfair for scholarly efforts of the social capital inventors and scholars to be labeled as “a cover” for an old issue; but, one has to notice that the exploration of the resources embedded in social networks (that is called “social capital”) enable us to explore issues regarding community development and empowerment more deeply.

Robert Wuthnow (1996) believes that the concept of social capital is specifically concerned with both the extent and quality of social interactions a community maintains, as well as the kinds of relationship that help build and sustain moral commitments and characters in a community. The theory of social capital can be summed up in two words: “relationships matter” (Field 2003). By constituting connections with one another, and making them function over time within their community, people will form a series of networks and then tend to grow common values with other members of these networks, which finally will produce a resource that can provide members of the community with one of the forms of capital.

The importance of social capital is laid in its capacity to bind together autonomous individuals into communal relationships. It transforms individuals, not necessarily with high social conscience, into members of a community perceiving shared interests and a sense of common good, and consequently as Putnam would say “spontaneous cooperation is facilitated by social capital” (Putnam 1993:167). Beyond the community building effect of social capital, it is a source of economic and social benefits for the members of its circle too.

It is commonly known that people are empowered not only by their financial and physical assets or by the “human capital” gained through their skills and personal qualifications; but also, by their social relationships, interactions and membership in social networks which help them find relational resources for the betterment of their community. Furbey and his colleague reveal more tangible results of social capital. They classify social capital as a contributing factor to several areas of ones’ personal and social life, like better educational achievements, lower crime levels, health, more active citizenship, more functioning labor markets and higher economic growth (Furbey and Rowntree 2006: 1).

Reviewing the major conceptualizations of the term, this chapter continues with the theories of religion, social networks and social support, and the theory of social capital that will grant a framework for understanding the influence of different religious denominations on social capital. Further, various assumptions about trends of social connection based on different religious beliefs will be discussed.

Theoretical Framework

The cultural, behavioral, social and even environmental well-being of a community is upheld by the amount of civic activism available in the community. To study the relation of religious beliefs and the civic engagement that is produced as a result of it (or promoted by being in that religious community), I am convinced that studying social capital between varying religious communities (namely Catholics and Evangelicals) with different rituals and teachings in a unique social and ethnic context is paramount. People

in different faith communities are expected to accumulate social capital and perceive its functions differently which would automatically influence the ways, they, as individuals, and their religious group, as a collective entity, live. Thus, finding the trends that impact the formation of social capital in a religious community seems essential. Faith communities are the oldest community-based institutions that provide for social networks and support the influences on lifestyle (Putnam 2001). Religious values and rituals play a considerable role in the social behavior of individuals and communities. The theories of religion, social networks, and social capital have practical and theoretical implications for the proposed research question.

Theory of Religion

Throughout human history, the primary function of religion was to provide shape and meaning to one's perception of the universe. Religion protects people from the challenge of non-explicable events and nihilistic views (Anhern 1989). The investigation about the origin of religion throughout human history has generated different schools of thought and a large number of diverse substantive theories. The four major theories that studying religion produced are: 1) Origin Theories of Religion, including the rationalist, sociological and psychological approaches, 2) Functionalist Theories of Religion, 3) History and the Phenomenology of Religion, and 4) Structural Theories of Religion (Anhern 1989). However, with the complexity of the concept of religion in modern pluralistic societies, no single theoretical approach is sufficient in explicating the role of religion.

In the study of religion, one of the persisting problems is the question regarding the definition of religion. For this research, religion is defined from the substantive and functionalist perspective; since this study is concerned with both perspectives: the essence of religion and the influence of religion on social changes. The substantive definitions focus on what religion is. From this viewpoint, religion is a philosophy that regulates one's relation with oneself, with its community and the transcendent power in

the universe (Ahern 1999). Religion is a social institution with a system of beliefs, rituals and practices trying to facilitate the divine and social relations of the individuals.

On the other hand, the functionalist approach to religion deals with what religion does and the role it plays in society and the social changes it causes. The roles religion play are giving emotional comfort, fostering social changes, offering life guidelines, improving social cohesion and answering questions regarding eternity (Henslin 2004). To this end, religion is a major factor in human life and guarantees the survival of individual prosperity and community existence. The theory of religion with substantive and functionalist approaches is used to determine the factors that make individuals involved in religious engagements; these factors can range from religious duties to altruistic values. Religious theory is also used to explore how these factors, values and norms can influence the members of the faith institution and their social behavior toward each other which can potentially bear social benefit for them.

Theory of Social Networks

Several research studies conducted suggest that the extent and the quality of one's attendance in a faith community enhance their social networks and their sense of responsibility in more civic engagements (Putnam 2001, Wuthnow 2002, Smidt 2003). However, there is currently no single model or theory that sufficiently explains the connection between denominational differences and social networks in a community. To this end, a number of conceptual models have guided researchers with empirical evidence of social networks and its metrics. Social networks are basically characterized by several constructs, some of which are more important to the concept of social capital. Social networks are characterized by the following constructs relevant to social capital (Wasserman & Faust 1994, Moody & White 2003):

- Reciprocity: The extent to which resources (physical or emotional) and support are exchanged in a mutual relationship

- Intensity/Closeness: The degree of closeness in an association, the level an individual is connected (directly or indirectly)
- Density: The extent to which the members know and relate mutually
- Cohesion: The degree to which each individual is connected directly to each other by strong bonds

Social networks are expected to provide its members with social support. Members of an association benefit from the resources that are produced as a result of different constructs of social networks. Social support refers to the assistance exchanged through social relations and interpersonal communication which can be categorized in three levels of support: emotional, instrumental, and informational support. Definitions of these constructs are as follows, suggested by some researchers in the field of public policy (Glanz, Lewis, & Rimer 1997):

- Emotional Support: The provision of love, sympathy, trust and care in the relationship
- Instrumental Support: Tangible physical services and assistance that directly aids the person in need of support
- Informational Support: The support given via the provision of information, advice, and/or suggestions that help a person extend its networks, find jobs, or address a problem.

The theories of social networking are utilized as a framework in examining the perception of religious leaders and the members of a faith community regarding their willingness to help one another, and the perception of the interpersonal relationships among members and participants. It also explores the factors influencing the individual's involvement in the social faith-based activities in the church. These factors can include spiritual and emotional support, general sense of helping others, trust, and religious responsibility which is more relevant in the proposed research. The members' reflection

on their reasons for participation can give better insight into the intensity and density of the relationships in a religious community.

Social Capital Theory

The theory of social capital is a multidimensional framework, consisting of multiple networks of social relations, characterized by networking, trust, and norms of reciprocity. This framework of analysis emphasizes the socialization of individuals through social links, which instill shared interests and promote cooperation among them. These associations happen because of daily face-to-face encounters, and it is presupposed that individuals who interact regularly will happen to grow faith in each other, act collectively and develop norms of trust and reciprocity (Smidt 2003).

The concept of social capital has evolved through the scholarly work of Pierre Bourdieu (1986), James Coleman (1990), Alejandro Portes (1998), Francis Fukuyama (1995), and Robert Putnam (1993, 2001). However, social capital theory is primarily based on the speculation of two major scholars: Robert Putnam and James Coleman. Their works are considered to be complementary to each other's perspective on social capital. Putnam's work was compatible with Coleman's theory; Coleman views a broad theoretical definition of social capital and Putnam expands the theory specifically to civic and political life.

As noted previously, scholars in a wide range of disciplines have utilized different interpretations and definitions of social capital. Social capital, as defined by sociologist James Coleman in 1988, is a source for action within an individual's social structure. Social structures, like communities and networks, enable actions within the social structure that facilitates achieving certain goals that seem impossible in its absence (Coleman 1988). Coleman (1988) names three basic features that characterize social capital: convertibility, reciprocity and community. Social capital is about nourishing a sense of community and group membership.

Convertibility as a key feature of social capital implies that social capital can be transformed into other forms of capital, like physical capital (financial interests) and human capital. The norm of reciprocity is also an expectation of the community members from each other to contribute in one way or another to each others' needs and help enhance the group resources. And finally, community is the institution that benefits from the individual's actions as it is the individual's experience and knowledge that become shared sources of community. The three features are perceived differently by scientists in sociology, political science and economics. Sociologists seek social capital's manifestation in social realms, namely educational achievements (Palgi and Moore 2004, Coleman 1988). Political scientists have studied the role social capital plays in the formation of political behavior, democracy promotion and voting trends (Putnam 2001) and economists have examined the transformation of social capital into financial capital through social networks and marketing methods (Fine 1999).

Robert Putnam describes social capital as the social networks among community members. The existence of social capital among individuals improves community qualifications. Accumulation of social capital embedded in individuals serves to create a strong responsible community. Naturally, these social networks can transform skills, experiences and connectedness into an active political trend. Putnam argues that the level of political participation and the range of political activism are highly influenced by the extent of social capital accumulated in a community (Putnam 2001).

Putnam figures five dimensions of social capital: community and organizational involvement, engagement in public affairs, volunteerism, informal sociability and social trust. It is the combination of these dimensions that bonds individuals to their community members and society. Social capital deals with the above mentioned characteristics that exist among members of a civic, political or religious society. It functions as the glue that joins citizens together to form a bigger community, and provides a "lubricant" for the improvement of a democratic society (Putnam 1995, Putnam 2001).

The primary ways in which an individual acquires social capital is through social contacts, networks, and engagements. Expectation and trust born through these channels smooth the reciprocal nature of social capital. Assessment of social capital accumulation by the five social capital rubrics (organizational involvement, social trust, volunteerism, engagement in public affairs and informal sociability) in an ethnic context determine how much social capital exists in an ethnic and religious population.

Putnam identified two operational levels for social capital: the bonding and bridging social capital; while, the other sociologists differentiate them on macro and micro levels (North 1990). Bonding social capital is the solidarity observed in closely-knit communities like ethnic, racial, social or religious enclaves. Bonding refers to the connections inside a community which targets the needs and interests of the group members (Putnam 2001). In contrast, bridging focuses on the connection of people who are dissimilar in demographic scales. Bridging social capital is usually shaped in the organizational (macro) level in pursuit of a commonly defined goal. The communities that possess bridging social capital benefit from the implementation of timely supportive strategies which would greatly influence the well-being and the health of their community. Therefore, the groups and societies who are concerned over the safety of their community should undertake strategies to strengthen the trust and collaboration beyond their own social circles and improve their capacity to be able to cooperate collectively in a heterogeneous community, which is difficult to attain and sustain.

Social Capital Theory: Constructs

The analysis of associational life has largely been associated with “social capital” investigation; it is a framework of analysis that refers to features of social organization (e.g., networks, norms, and social trust) that facilitate cooperation for everyone’s benefit. Accordingly, there are some prominent constructs that can be utilized for the analysis of social capital in a community. Going through the indicators used by different scholars,

one can induce that “trust, reciprocity, networking and volunteerism” are the basic indicators for the evaluation of social capital in a community.

- Trust: Trust is the lubricant that guarantees the efficiency of any group. It is produced when people believe that their group members act on their behalf and not against them (Smidt 2003)
- Reciprocity: This is the perception that one’s good deeds serve as an investment which will not be in vain and will be returned in the future and not necessarily by the same person (Putnam 2001)
- Networking: The quantity of connections (direct or indirect) that the members of a group hold and are channeled for a specific purpose (Putnam 1993)
- Volunteerism: The practice of working for a particular cause without payment for their time and services.

James Coleman (1988) lists several elements of social relations that are part of social capital indicators, too. First, there are social obligations and expectations. Such expectations help to forge the potential element of social trust/reciprocity that can exist in interpersonal relationships where “if A does something for B and trusts B to reciprocate in the future, this establishes an expectation in A and an obligation on the part of B”(Coleman 1988:102). Furthermore, these obligations and expectations are often enforced by a second element of social capital- norms and sanctions.

For Coleman, one important form of social capital found within a community is the “prescriptive norms that one should forego self-interest to act in the interest of the collectivity” (1990: 311). Third, social relations support these norms and apply sanctions if the norms are not followed: “this social capital ... not only facilitates certain actions but also constrains others” (1990: 311). Finally, social capital is tied to social volunteerism because such group involvement tends to generate expectations as well as encourage social trust to see others’ interests ahead of yours. Volunteerism, as an

indicator of social capital, has two facets; one is the number of voluntary associations in a community and the other is the voluntary participation rates in those organizations.

Within the framework of social capital, it is understandable to assume that associational life (networking) and interpersonal trust are interrelated. Trust and reciprocity, as the two other features of social capital, are closely interrelated, too. So, there is a tight inter-dependency among the features of social capital. Putnam (1995: 665), illustrating the inter-dependency of social capital indicators, puts it like this: “the more we connect with other people, the more we trust them, and vice versa”. He then continues that “trust constitutes an essential component of social capital”. Trust expedites cooperation in a sense that increased trust leads to the likelihood of increased cooperation. Actually, one can also claim that trust is a theme here which can be both a cause and a consequence of social capital. On the one hand, existing trust motivates the formation and further development of networks. On the other hand, trust grows where networks are shaped and people sense that they are developing some common understanding and shared values.

Putnam continues with an emphasis on the importance of reciprocity in the formation of group cooperation, because it lubricates collective action through the belief that actors will ultimately benefit from their cooperation with others or will incur sanctions if they do not cooperate (1993b:123). He identifies two ways in which reciprocity generates group cooperation; first, "balanced reciprocity", a process in which a "simultaneous exchange of items of equivalent value" takes place among actors; therefore, it nurtures group cooperation among actors. Second is "generalized reciprocity" which indicates that an alliance among cooperators involves a "continuing relationship of exchange that is at any given time unrequited or un-balanced, but involves mutual expectation that a benefit granted now should be repaid in the future" (1993b:123).

In this proposed research, for cooperators with the common belief structure in which the belief exists that one is promised rewards or punishment in the hereafter, these expectations of rewards may provide a stronger source of reciprocity than secular

sources. The pattern is that as networks of reciprocity are formed among church-goers, they become more civic-minded and “that civic-mindedness, in turn, leads to a willingness to engage in voluntary activity” (Campbell and Yonish 2003: 105).

Approximately fifty percent of America’s social capital is produced in religious communities (Putnam & Feldstein 2003). In this research, the theory of social capital is used to examine the social relationships and the way they are fostered among the Hispanic members of a Catholic and an Evangelical church in Los Angeles, especially to the extent that they are characterized by trust, networking, reciprocity and volunteering. This theory is used to see how differently churches would benefit from their social relationships and what kinds of efforts construct their social capital.

Religious Social Capital

Adding to the importance of social capital as a general concept which is crucial for American society, there is consensus among the social theorists that faith communities are the single most important sources of social capital in America, and a key component in addressing America’s social challenges (Putnam 2001). Robert Putnam believes that churches have a unique importance in American civil society and have been robust social institutions over the century. Public polls suggests that 62 percent of Americans belong to a religious institution (church, synagogue, etc.) and more than six in ten claim that religion plays a very important role in their lives (Rogers 2002). Reverend Craig McMullen, the activist co-pastor of the Dorchester Temple Baptist church in Boston says that “church is not a building; it’s not an institution, even. It is the relationship between the one person and the next” (Putnam 2001:66). To this cause, understanding the role of faith communities and their function provide significant insights into the influence of religious practices on social capital formation and consequently the community’s general well-being.

Churches and all other faith institutions in religious societies, namely the United States, play a very important role in motivating civil skills, civic norms, community life and

interests. Regular worshipers and church-goers are more in contact with people and friends to entertain, attend meetings, and do professional activities together than the ones who do not attend any religious service regularly. The 1996 national election study shows that among 22 different types of voluntary associations, from lobby groups to professional associations, membership in religious groups was associated more closely with civic involvement like charity works, voting, political meetings, etc. (Williams 2007).

Putnam (2001) further expands his discussion of religion and social capital to African Americans. Faith-based organizations are central to social capital and civic engagement in the African American community. He continues, “The church is the oldest and most resilient social institution in black America” (2001:68). African Americans in all social levels are socially and religiously observant. The black religious tradition distinctively encourages mixing religion and community affairs and energizes civic activism. Here, it is interesting to investigate whether Hispanic religious culture at any level resembles the one from African Americans. However, being a minority group is a generating force for Hispanics to take civic engagement seriously and rely upon the power of community work to address their needs. Putnam also stresses on the role that the Catholic Church will play due to the increase in immigration from Latin America: “The Catholic Church is once again playing an important role in connecting immigrants to the broader American society, and in that sense continuing to contribute to social capital formation” (2001:76).

It is also important to observe the shift within the broad family of the Protestant denomination. Evangelical groups are growing rapidly, trying to overshadow the mainline Protestant denominations. From one perspective, this development reinvigorates religion and creates vibrant social capital within the new Evangelical churches. Evangelicals have tried to create energetic religious communities and are widely admired by religious leaders for their contribution to American religious life. Evangelicals are more likely to be involved in activities within their religious community, both

individually and congregationally. Here, it is interesting to see how these two Hispanic groups accumulate social capital and how much their religious orientation affects their social networking in the church.

There are several realms of one's life that not only influence the formation of social capital, but also are considered as contexts in which social capital may be obtained. There are political, civic, religious and professional areas where one can exercise social capital formation in them. These contexts also constitute sectors that influence social capital for the society. Among these sectors, many scholars think that faith groups are promising sources for social capital formation. For example, Putnam believes that "faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the most single important repository of social capital in America" (2001: 66).

Furthermore, Wood (1997) argues that church-based social organizing in urban settings has proved more successful than other bases for such organizational efforts, due to the demise of other forms of civic associations in urban areas. He continues to discuss that within many urban areas, religious institutions are among the few that are still trusted. He (1997:601) indicates that "those settings that previously generated trust and sustained broad social networks have deteriorated badly: unions, blue-collar workplaces, cultural associations, families and so forth". Yet, despite this recognition, Putnam and others have considered religion basically as one of the many forms of association. And relatively, little attention in the academic circles has been devoted to the unique role of religion in social capital formation.

There are various arguments concerning the importance of religious social capital as one of the forms of social capital. Religious based social capital has played a very crucial role in helping to circulate human capital and financial capital, through communication of cultures, beliefs, skills and knowledge in the religious communities and collective philanthropy. Religious behavior may contribute to social capital formation in voluntarily

charitable contributions. Hence, any distinct acts of mercy can help to provide a safety net for members of society who are at risk.

Beyond this general fact, religious social capital gains importance while it is being discussed in the American context. Miller and Jackman (1998) assert that religion has more potential to contribute to America's social capital than any other institution in American society. Congregational life has always been a major component of associational life in the US. Besides being the most common form of association in American life, faith associations provide important services and resources to their members and others in the community by providing physical care, social support, and social networks. According to Robert Wuthnow "one third of all small groups in the US are related to churches or synagogues" (2003:33) in which all sorts of associational work is promoted. Throughout the United States, "there are 8000 Community Development Corporations and two-third are religiously based" (2003: 24). In times of crisis, except the Red Cross, local religious groups are the first ones to volunteer and usually local crisis meetings are also held either in schools or religious congregations.

Religious congregations are generally expected to serve their community and deal with the social ills of their neighborhood. There are two features of religion that contribute to the formation of social capital; first, religion fosters group cohesion, and second, it has the ability to nurture and sustain reciprocity among actors. Additionally, as Coleman would point out: "churches provide our society with a more participatory, more egalitarian, and more communitarian ethos than would be evident in our society without them" (2003: 36).

Different sociologists have tried to illustrate the relation of religious communities and social behavior. Robert Furbey and his colleagues (2006: 26) in *Faith as Social Capital* have shown how faith communities create social capital. Faith communities have the potential to organize people's associations with each other and bring their members together in relationships, mainly within the framework of an organization at different

local or national levels, like ministries, youth groups, pantries, soup kitchens and childcare centers in the churches. Second, faith communities provide the context for new and diverse associations. They function as the contexts for people to form new social networks. Their communities demonstrate traditions of social engagement, sharing and compassion among its members. (Furbey et al. 2006)

Faith communities encourage trust and confidence through creation of associations inside the community, which is totally formed as a result of the positive attitude people show toward their faith group members. And also, faith communities help their members to overcome power differentials and the distinctions that exist among different faith communities. This provides a platform for bridging social capital. Fourth, faith communities bring people together for developmental and strategic purposes which enhance the extent of social capital in those communities. They try to bridge people together for specific purposes to realize a social developmental objective which can only be done through collective desire and help.

Finally, faith communities can act as non-organizational networks. Faith communities contribute to substantial and distinctive bridging and linking of social capital through several elements: their co-presence in urban areas with other faiths and also secular organizations, their connecting frameworks, the use of their buildings as places of gathering for social and urban purposes, the spaces that their associational networks open up for negotiation and interaction of different people, their engagement in governance, and their work across boundaries with others in the public domain such as food kitchens and homeless shelter support (Furbey et al. 2006: 50).

Having said all the above, there are a couple of issues that should be taken into consideration when studying the relationship between religion and social capital. The most important issue in the study of religiosity and social capital generation is the differentiation between horizontal and vertical relations of religious authority in religious communities. This regulates all internal relations in the church: between the church

authorities and the people, or even between the church members themselves. Another consideration in this regard is the size of the church, as it directly influences the quality of the relationships among church members. As social capital is not a one-dimensional concept and has various functions, it is very crucial that one knows how social capital is perceived and functions in a religious community. Furthermore, generalization of the patterns in the relation between religion and social capital might seem a bit hasty, as most empirical research done on social capital and religion was carried out at the congregational level in different locations. Furthermore, congregations are too small to be able to “project any effect on their surroundings or even be able to demonstrate a complete picture of the whole relation” (Furbey et al. 2006:38).

Scholars, who have done research on different aspects of religion and social capital, were also considerate of the fact that there might be differences while working on different religions or even different denominations. However, all the major faith traditions have core principles that can motivate bonding and bridging social capital through “community service, cooperation, peace-making, pursuit of social justice, and the possibility of respect and tolerance for others” (Furbey et al. 2006b:8). For example, Verba and his colleagues found that American Catholics exhibit less civic participation than Protestants, although in comparison, Catholicism still remains more strongly predictive of civic engagement than secularity (Verba, Scholzman, and Brady 1995: 36). They believe that religious social capital provides stronger ties for community cooperation than the social capital generated from secular sources. Secular forms of group cooperation may encourage collective action but the difference lies in the incentives of group cooperation. Secular forms of social capital may rely on material incentives to induce individuals to cooperate; while in religious groups, it is mainly the belief system and the ambition to do some good work that induces people to cooperate (Verb et al. 1995).

David Campbell and Steven Yonish (2003: 91) have stated that mainline Protestant and Catholics are more likely to volunteer in activities designed explicitly to benefit the

broader community; conversely, the energies of Evangelical Protestants are more likely to be expended within church volunteerism, benefiting only members of their denomination. In other words, Evangelicals have an inward approach to the maintenance of the community. Actually, by going through the literature over the civic activism of different religious denominations, one can observe slightly different results.

Smidt et al. (2003: 169) did their field research in different denominations in the US and Canada and concluded that mainline Protestants tend to be most engaged and Roman Catholics tend to be less engaged than Protestants as a whole. On the other hand, like other religions, there is an emphasis on the social aspects of life among Catholics. They articulate a strong notion of communication among themselves. In *Gaudium et spes*¹, the church asserts that it is only “through [man’s] dealings with others, through reciprocal duties, and through fraternal dialogue he develops all his gifts and is able to rise to his destiny” (Vatican Official Website).

There is a conception that human beings are “persons” and not “individuals”, they are not self-regulated singularities (Warren 2003: 55-6). Although, the Catholic Church has historically emphasized on authority and continues to be more hierarchically structured than most Protestant denominations, since Vatican II, the church has tried to increase lay participation in its parishes. Due to the same construct, it is believed that this change is likely to influence the lower rates of skill acquisition among Latino church members, a majority of whom are Catholic.

Putnam (1993:137) asserts it like this: “some networks are primarily "horizontal", bring together agents of equivalent status and power. Others are primarily "vertical", linking unequal agents in asymmetric relations of hierarchy and dependence”. For example, his experience in Italy shows that horizontal linkages are associated with broader civic

¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, was one of the four Apostolic Constitutions resulting from the Second Vatican Council. The document is an overview of the Catholic Church's teachings about man's relationship to society, especially in reference to economics, poverty, social justice, culture, science and technology, and ecumenism.

competence. Protestant churches are horizontally structured that are organized by congregants themselves rather than through a church hierarchy which can not be applied to any protestant church.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Evolution of the Concept of Social Capital

The literature section of this research consists of two parts; first, the early evolution of the concept of social capital and then, the historical development of the concept which has its roots in early sociology, political science and economics. The concept of social capital was used and analyzed with different titles in the teachings of the scholars of sociology and political science, but it was not until 1980 that the use of the term “social capital” popularized. One of challenges that people working in the field should deal with is the definitional difficulties of the term.

There is not a unique definition of social capital among scholars; hence, one can even assume that the conceptualization of social capital is in its early stages. Different authors and researchers from various perspectives, disciplines and applications have used social capital in their studies and have created a variety of existing conceptual approaches to social capital. Operationalization of social capital seems a much harder task due to the fact that there are various conceptualizations for the term and even these efforts are not well designed; thus, measuring social capital is another basic problem for the researchers.

Social capital is itself an old concept, although the term has been newly coined (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993; Putnam 1995). It can be linked to the classic concepts such as social connectedness, social exchange theory and civil society. This concept could also be found in the works of scholars like Durkheim, Marx, Simmel and Weber (Watson and Papamarcos 2002). However, the modern concept of social capital came from the works of Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman and Robert Putnam and many other scholars contributing in different ways to this multidisciplinary theory. The growth in reference to

social capital in academic literature in recent years shows a great acceptance of the concept in different studies and applications, like management, marketing, political participation and democracy, health and education issues, etc.

As mentioned above, the concept of social capital is not new. Its intellectual history and philosophical roots can be traced back to the works of 18th and 19th century scholars. Social capital is linked with the theories of thinkers like Tocqueville, Durkheim, Weber, Locke, Simmel and Rousseau (Brewer 2003, Putnam 1995). To take it further back, Brewer (2003) connected the idea of civic society proposed by Greek philosophers like Aristotle with the current social capital theory. Two sets of claims have also been made on the connection between the current social capital concept and Durkheimian thoughts. Portes (1998) relates Durkheim's theory of group life, working as an antidote of anomie and self-destruction, to the current social capital theory. And, he also has related Durkheim's normative sociology to what James Coleman discussed as social capital. Portes (1998) in his article "Social capital: its origins and applications in modern sociology" goes further and points out Marx's argument of "bounded solidarity" and "class consciousness" as an inspiring source of social capital theory as it is today.

Although there is a general agreement on the root of the social capital concept, there are discussions on the first use of the term. L. J. Hanifan is believed to be the first one who used the term (Putnam 2001). His first use of the term was in the context of educational prospects to explain that community involvement has an important role in enhancing children's school performance. He defines social capital as:

Those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of the people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families whole make up a social unit ... The individual is helpless socially, if left to himself. If he comes into contact with his neighbor, and they with other neighbors, there will be an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs and which may bear a social potentiality sufficient to the substantial improvement of living conditions in the whole community. The community as a whole will benefit by the

cooperation of all its parts, while the individual will find in his associations the advantages of the help, the sympathy, and the fellowship of his neighbors. (Putnam 2001: 19)

Jane Jacobs, an activist and urban theorist, was the next one using the term. She used the term social capital in 1961, regarding a discussion on urban vitality, city planning and community organizations. In her classic book *The death and life of Great American cities*, she emphasizes the necessity of protecting what she later calls “social capital” of the city because it would strengthen the network of human relationships built up over time, provide mutual support in time of need, guarantee the safety of the streets, and foster a sense of civic responsibility. Jacob (1961:139) writes:

If self-government in [a city neighborhood] is to work, underlying any float of population must be a continuity of people who have forged neighborhood networks. These networks are a city’s irreplaceable social capital. Whenever the capital is lost, from whatever cause, the income from it disappears, never to return until and unless new capital is slowly and chancily accumulated ...

There are certainly some other scholars like Loury and Hofstead who at some points worked on social capital. Coleman elaborates Loury’s efforts as such: “In Loury’s usage social capital is the set of resources useful for the cognitive or social development of a child or young person. These resources differ for different persons and can constitute an important advantage for children and adolescents in the development of their human capital” (Coleman 1988).

The contemporary literature of social capital flows from the works of Pierre Bourdieu (1979), James Coleman (1988) and Robert Putnam (1993). Bourdieu is considered as the one who brought the concept into current discussions of social capital. He identified social capital in his book *Distinction* written in French in 1979. He conceptualized social capital as a source for individuals; his view of social capital is egocentric in the broader context of symbolic capital. He compared social capital with two other forms of capital: human capital- a person’s capacity to benefit from the training and education it acquires- and cultural capital- ones’ capacity to benefit from the knowledge of cultural norms

(Bourdieu 1984). As a sociologist, his definition of social capital gained importance within his critical theory of society. He focused on the use of social capital as leverage in power relations (Putnam 1995). For him, social capital was like private property that could be effectively used for unequal power relations. Pierre Bourdieu defines social capital as:

The aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition or in other words, to membership in a group which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital, a credential which entitles them to credit, in the various senses of the word (Bourdieu, 1986)

Bourdieu focuses on the benefits individuals enjoy as a result of participation in groups and construction of sociability to create this resource. According to his definition of social capital, one can say that he emphasizes on the social relationship itself that allows individuals to claim access to resources possessed by their associates and then the amount and quality of those resources.

Bourdieu's legacy of social capital was followed by James Coleman's praxis of social capital. According to Robert Putnam (2002), James Coleman laid "the intellectual foundation of social capital and its effects". Coleman was a sociologist with an economic approach to social phenomena; he combined sociological and economic interpretations in his interpretation of social capital. He first used social capital to shed light on educational achievement in the US school system (Coleman 1988). Analyzing successful performance among private school students in the US, he hypothesized their favorable outcome due to the social structures supporting them which could be part of a social capital those schools benefit from.

Coleman focused more on the structure and function of social capital rather than power relations or resource orientations (Putnam 2002). For him, social capital bears two characteristics: first, it consists of various entities that have some aspects of social

structure. Second, social capital is productive by nature and a source for action which means as a form of capital it facilitates some actions and attains some achievements for its actors (Coleman 1988). Coleman's approach to social capital is more socio-centric in comparison to Bourdieu's egocentric approach to social capital. Based on his works, families, groups, institutions, organizations and societies are the main beneficiaries of social capital.

Unlike Bourdieu, James Coleman was more involved in empirical research and formulation of indicators in the social capital related research. He also extends the analysis scope of the concept from Bourdieu's analysis of the elite groups to embrace the social relationship of non-elite groups (Schuller, Baron, and Field 2000). The fundamental difference between Bourdieu's and Coleman's definitions lies in how the social processes develop. For Bourdieu, social processes are framed by economic organization; while, Coleman believes that social processes are created by the free will of individuals. Bourdieu sees the presence of profit as the very reason for the solidarity that makes group existence possible in the first place. On the other hand, Coleman (1988) sees social capital as a product of rational and purposeful individuals who build social capital to maximize their individual opportunities.

Robert Putnam was responsible for popularizing the concept of social capital in the recent years' academic atmosphere with his study of civic engagement in Italy. Putnam defines social capital as an entity in social structures such as trust, norms and networks that enhance the efficiency of their society by mobilization of coordinated actions. He believes "social capital refers to connections among individuals- social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam 2001: 19). Putnam's unit of measurement is the social network. He redefines the theoretical approach of social capital from the private good (advocated by Bourdieu) to the public good. He aggregates the social capital of individuals to give a description of the collective social capital in contrast with Bourdieu's individualistic view.

Like Coleman, Putnam was involved in empirical research and formulation of social capital indicators. Putnam (1993), in *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, first applied his social capital theory to community development in the study of twenty regional governments in the north and south of Italy. His research examined similar forms of institutions with different social, political and cultural contexts. He was trying to distinguish a variable to explain the success and failure of governments over the course of twenty years. He found that regional governments perform better, considering other factors constant, where there are strong practices of civic engagement.

He found (1993) that ‘horizontal’ social relations in northern Italy, like widespread participation in group activities, social trust and cooperation, resulted in good government and social prosperity; while, ‘vertical’ social relations in the southern region, characterized by a concentration of power by landowners, reveal less social participation and a more individualistic attitude which led to social inequality. This study of civic engagement and its direct link to governmental efficacy and democracy, paved the way for Putnam’s major work on the collapse of civic America. Putnam believed that communities did not become civic because they were rich...they became rich because they were civic (Putnam 2001). In his analysis, he focused on the creation of civic norms, which led to the socio-economic order which is the reverse form of Bourdieu’s description of social relationships. Putnam’s argument is considered to be circular and tautological when he considers social capital as the real property of communities and nations rather than individuals (Portes 1998).

However, *Bowling Alone* provided Putnam with a chance to focus his empirical experience in the US. He investigates the decline of civic engagement in the US over time. He verifies a secular decline in Americans’ social capital that could be realized by their membership in voluntary organizations (Putnam 1995, Putnam 2001). He employed the example of bowling as an activity that is highly associative and also is a source of social interaction, networking and social bonds. In his research, he employed cohort

analysis and studied formal and informal memberships to outline historical changes of social capital. He basically utilized four social indicators such as: trust in people and institutions, norms of reciprocity, and networks and membership in voluntary associations (Adam and Roncevic 2003).

Putnam discusses that American participation in politics, civic groups, religious organizations, trade unions and professional organizations has declined significantly over the last 50 years. He believes that America's older generation was more involved in organizational activities than younger people. Moreover, new organizations replacing old ones do not produce social capital (Putnam 2001). He identifies some factors like watching TV, the changing role of women, economic conditions and two-income households, mobility in work and education, less spare time for socializing, and lowering of values related to civic engagement as the major obstacles for lower social cohesion presently (Putnam 2001).

Robert Putnam focuses on social networks as the unit of measurement of social capital. He identifies two dimensions of social networks and calls them "bonding" and "bridging" social capital. He defines bridging social capital as a bond of connectedness formed across diverse social groups, while bonding social capital is reinforced in a homogenous group. Bonding is an exclusive aspect of a social network; it differentiates "us" from "them". In contrast, bridging is the outreaching and inclusive aspect of a social network. It helps the norms of a social network extend beyond closed homogenous groups. Putnam states that bridging social capital "can generate broader identities and reciprocity" (Putnam 2001: 2).

Reciprocity is what sustains a network. Putnam considers reciprocity as the benchmark of social capital. He typifies two forms of reciprocity: specific and generalized. Specific reciprocity is immediate and transactional like what happens in a marketplace. On the other hand, generalized reciprocity, which is more important for the basis of social capital theory, is described as: "I'll do this for you without expecting anything specific back

from you, in the confident expectation that someone else will do something for me down the road” (Putnam 2001:21).

Trust is another important element in social network analysis besides reciprocity. Putnam does not specifically deal with the discussion whether trust is an outcome of social capital or even an indicator of social capital. He highlights the correlation between social trust and social capital as follows:

Social trust is strongly associated with many other forms of civic engagement and social capital. Other things being equal, people who trust their fellow citizens volunteer more often, contribute more to charity, participate more often in politics and community organizations, serve more readily on juries, give blood more frequently, comply more fully with their tax obligations, are more tolerant of minority views, and display many other forms of civic virtue (Putnam 2001)

Going through all prominent contemporary scholars of social capital, one can find areas of similarity and difference in terms of the level of the theory, application, and measurement. Jane Franklin (2003: 351) best explained these similarities and differences: “Putnam is less concerned with vertical inequalities and more interested in building and preserving the networks of social relations governed by norms and values which underpin the society that Bourdieu criticizes. For Bourdieu, the idea of social capital is a cog in the social wheel, whereas for Putnam social capital is the wheel since it is the driving force behind social, political and economic life“.

By the late 1990s, the number of contributing authors in social capital swelled notably based on the work of the contemporary authors discussed above. Among them are Alejandro Portes, Nan Lin, Michael Foley and Bob Edwards, and Francis Fukuyama. Alejandro Portes defines social capital as “... the ability of actors to secure benefits through membership in networks and other social structures” (Portes 1998: 6). He sees social capital as a benefit attained through social networks. Ironically, through all his work on social capital, he talks about the drawbacks of social capital and criticized the scholars who have just observed the positive side of social capital. Despite his major

concern to mention the downside of social capital, in his recent collaborative work with Patricia Landolt, he studied the role of social capital in social and economic development.

In his work *Social Capital: A Theory of Social Structure and Action*, Nan Lin (2001) contributed to the development of the network measurement of social capital. For him, social capital is defined as resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive actions. He further elaborates that the premise behind social capital is “investment in social relations with expected returns in the marketplace” and it incorporates different levels and units of analysis such as economics, politics, or community life (2001, 20). Information, influence, social credentials, and reinforcement are the main reasons in his discussion for producing social capital.

Michael Foley and Bob Edwards studied the work of authors who did empirical research on social capital. They came to this conclusion that social capital is completely a context-based conceptualization and they rejected all generalizations of social trust as perceived in social capital (Edwards and Foley 1998b). Later in the literature is Francis Fukuyama, the philosopher and political scientist. He used an approach derived from Robert Putnam that focuses mainly on behavioral variables and attitudes: for example, trust, norms, and values (Adam and Roncevic 2003). His equation of social capital with trust was criticized by different scholars for the use of a single indicator as a measure of social capital (Paxton 1999).

Data on Faith Communities and Social Capital

Researchers who studied social capital have generally worked on a number of different approaches to the topic which can be related to this research. First, there are those researchers who deal with the question of how social capital influences a community's prosperity and well-being; it can include economic development, educational progress, social and economic equality, democracy, immigrants' integration and assimilation, physical and mental health, crime rate reduction, poverty elimination, urban growth, community empowerment, and information access (Wood 2002; Malpica 2008; Jeong

2008; Putnam 1993; Putnam 2001, Mooney 2005; Menjivar 2003; Ando 2010; Jacobs 1961; Durlauf 2008; Jordan 2008; Warren 2003; Bacon & Milofski 2003; Wuthnow 2002; Park & Smith 2000; Stone, et al 2003; Cnaan & Boddie 2001). For example, Margarita Mooney (2005) studied religion, social capital and Haitian immigrants' condition in three sites: Miami, Montreal and Paris. She did a comparative study to see how religious institutions (the Catholic Church in particular) generate social capital for Haitian immigrants and which elements of culture influence the impact religion has on Haitians' adaptation.

She believes that social norms promoted by religious communities are necessary for Haitians to form social capital, but there are other important factors that can help these immigrants to overcome structural discriminations like discriminatory policies. She states that besides the social capital promotion that religious institutions do, they should be able to bridge immigrants, state agencies and civil society; so that, they can finish their mission of helping immigrants' adaptation. Although, the methodology of the study is very much like this proposed research, what is important for Mooney is the role that religious institutions can play for the better settlement of Haitian immigrants in three different political contexts and she overlooks the different denominational religious institutions and focuses her attention more on Catholic churches.

The other category which covers other researches about social capital is focused on the relationship between religious life and social capital. The researchers have been trying to demonstrate how faith communities in general and congregational life in particular can enhance social capital and civic engagement. Moreover, it studies the extent this social cohesiveness can help them come into the public arena and be politically active (Polson 2009; Wood 2002; Choi 2004; Williams 2007; Wuthnow 2002; Brown 2003). For example, Polson (2009) demonstrates different ways that the religious contexts influence measures of civic engagement. He bases his argument on the individual, the congregational and the community level and concludes that cultural and structural characteristics of a congregation affect the likelihood that individuals will be civically

engaged. His case studies were mainly chosen from the conservative congregations in the US.

In addition, there is another study with the same framework on the Korean community in the Los Angeles. Hyunsun Choi (2004) explores the role of faith-based organizations in the development of social capital in ethnic communities, specifically Korean-Americans in Southern California. Unlike this project, her research is not a comparative (conducted in Evangelical churches) study and does not consider the possibility of dissimilar forms of social capital in different denominations among Korean Americans.

The other related research area on social capital and religion is a couple of comparative studies conducted in order to compare the role of social capital in faith communities and secular ones, and what kind of social capital usually exists in religious and secular communities/organizations. William Lockhart (2005) worked on the difference between the social capital developed in faith-based and secular poverty-to-work programs. He also tries to explain how social capital is developed in these communities; yet, he did not mention which religious communities he takes into account and if there are any similarities or distinctions between any of the denominations he was focusing on.

Furthermore, there was another study in which the researcher tried to investigate the role that Catholic or Evangelical churches play in the life of Hispanic (Salvadoran) immigrants in the US. Cecilia Menjivar (2003) examined Salvadoran immigrants' views on both their participation in the church (Catholic and Evangelical) and the role the church plays in their lives. She believed that although both churches provide assistance, the approach they take (and the religious teachings that shape how assistance is provided) may influence the immigrants' long-term integration. In contrast to the established literature and the efforts made by more recent scholars, my contribution is to see if religious denominations can differently influence social capital formation and the social network patterns in a single ethnic community.

The findings from the major research conducted about social capital and religion generally suggest that the religious communities hold a range of activities that help produce social bonding in the group and this bond will result in positive social changes, like educational success, employment, communal health, integration for immigrants, etc. However, the activities vary enormously.

The most common and helpful activities offered in the faith groups are related to social and material support of either their members or the needy people in their community, through food distribution, clothes and shoe collections and volunteering in rehabilitation centers. Researchers believe that some of the potential social benefits of the communal activities in the faith groups do not develop to their full capacity (Cnaan 2002) and there is not evidence whether the community themselves, or their leaders, are aware of this.

As the scholars of the field have agreed upon, the faith-based organizations are the major sources of social capital. They provide a venue for social connection to grow and prosper in a trusting environment and these social ties have the potential to change their community into a much stronger group. Congregations are mainly directed to religious services and people's spiritual needs, and in the next step, their social needs. It should be mentioned that the leaders of the congregations at some level tend to communicate with a wider community leadership (from other congregations or even other faith groups) and undertake broader responsibilities for their community. Since the bonding social capital of a congregation is an important factor involved in building the bridges and producing bridging social capital (Park & Smith 2000), faith organization leadership are expected to focus primarily and more earnestly on the extent and level of bonding social capital in their own congregation in order to have a stronger asset for later bridging attempts.

Elements of the theories of social networks, social capital, and religious communities, to a great extent, are applicable to these findings. These findings can somewhat be relevant to this proposed study, as they reveal some information relating to the social outcomes of activities provided by faith communities. This outcome can contribute to the assumption

that faith communities have a major influence on social capital. These theories will be used in this study to examine the mission of ethnically Hispanic Catholic and Evangelical churches and their contribution to the improvement of the cohesion and connectedness among their members.

The specific influence of religiosity, religious identity, socialization and social networks on volunteering patterns in church programs reveals some results. It shows that congregants display a strong sense of community to their local churches. There is a gradual process within faith groups to make people support their congregation and move up to the leadership roles. The religious communities matter greatly, and they strengthen the church-goers to care about their community (Park & Smith 2000). The findings by the other researchers partially support the idea that participation in ministries empowers individuals who will get more involved in community work. However, using these theories, one would assume that a specific set of skills are going to be achieved. This research does not concern that part and is more focused on the social outcomes of those skills gained by the church-goers and is trying to figure out how two different communities would manage their potentials.

The other aspect of social relationship developments in religious communities shows a broader effect in the neighborhood, too. It is important to recognize that the positive impacts of these resources are not limited to a certain number of people involved who invested in maintaining those relationships, and are pervasive (Park & Smith 2000).

Membership in a religious congregation is highly associated with status-bridging social capital² (Wuthnow 2002). Members of a congregation are anticipated to have friends who belong to various kinds of elite power and influence. Wuthnow (2002) believes that congregational members are approximately 1.6 times greater than non-members to have

² Status-bridging social capital is a kind of bridging social capital first identified by Robert Wuthnow in 2002. It believes that membership in a religious congregation and holding a congregational leadership position is most consistently associated with a greater likelihood of having friends and contacts in high social, economic and political positions.

elected public officials as friends, approximately 1.3 times greater for having corporation executives as friends, and approximately 1.24 times greater of having friends who include a wealthy person. It should be taken into consideration that the results of comparisons among members of congregations of varying sizes suggests that there are greater opportunities in larger congregations. A person's professional performance and advancement depend on the ties the person has with the elite powers (Wuthnow 2002).

Overall, the literature review indicates that the theories of religion, social networks, and social capital are consistent with the findings of the researchers. To this end, these theories will be used to guide the framework of this project in exploring the influence of religious denominations on the amount and forms of social capital.

This research is focused on two religious denominations: Catholics and Pentecostal Evangelical (Assemblies of God) in a small city called Whittier situated in Los Angeles County. Although there have been numerous cases of research about Hispanics in the US, especially in the last ten years, most of these studies focused on Hispanics' integration, language acquisition and their political behavior (Hennessy 1984; Pantoja 2001; Lien 1994; Chavez 1992; Levitt 1998; Catanzarite 2000; Vasquez 1999; Betancur 1996; Hunt 2001; Kelly 2005; Jackson 2003; Pantoja and Segura 2003; Aguirre and Saenz 2002; Schildkraut 2005; Hunt 1999).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter elaborates on the methodology used in this research project. As introduced in the previous chapter, this study involves a qualitative inquiry into the social contexts of Hispanics in two different religious denominations. It tries to understand how social capital functions and is accumulated in various ethnic and religious communities. Despite the fact that religious communities have a higher level of social capital (networking, reciprocity, and trust) than the secular communities (Putnam 2001) and that the related literature emphasizes on the role of religion in social capital formation, researchers have barely explored whether the level and the form of social capital varies among faith communities of different religions. Research in this field has mainly focused on the social capital of a single ethnic, racial or religious community to explore the role of this sociological phenomenon in their social, economic and educational development (Jovel 2008; Malpica 2008; Williams 2007).

The objective of this study is to answer the following research questions:

- First, it tries to see how differences in religious beliefs and practices (e.g., prayers, scripture, and other rituals) influence the formation of social capital, both in terms of quality and form. This question involves exploring the religious elements embodied in different church ministries, where church members spend most of their church time beyond the actual service, and how these ministries can contribute to the social capital in their community.
- Secondly, this study attempts to understand the perceptions of congregational members on the process of improving their community and the benefits they will access through their social activism in the church. For this end, the overall mission of the church, the types of the activities in the ministries and the perceived benefits gained via membership in the ministries are discussed.

- The third major question is how social relationships are encouraged and nurtured in church ministries and, as a result, in the whole church. To do this, we need to understand the perception of members' willingness to help others and the interpersonal relationships among church members.
- The last question that this research tries to address is to understand the crucial factors and initiatives in the members' activism in their religious community. It requires an examination of the reasons for their volunteerism and the actual benefits they gain as a result of their involvement.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The intent of this design was to explore the influence of religious communities on the social life of its members in Los Angeles County, California. It describes the function of faith-based groups and their contribution to social capital in their communities. This proposed research is focused on two religions and is limited to one ethnic group: Hispanic Evangelicals and Hispanic Catholics.

The design for this research study is a comparative case study strategy that includes in-depth interviews, participant observation and analysis of two religious denominations' activities. The case studies applied here involve a grounded theory approach: data collection, analysis, continuous comparisons, coding of interviews, observation data and second hand documents (Glaser 1978).

Throughout the data collection process, there was an attempt to find a common theme or denominator that could emerge from the data, using elements of grounded theory by making preliminary interpretations to guide the rest of the data collection. For example, in the beginning of the very first conducted interviews, people were asked how they would define themselves in their city and I was expecting a nationality, ethnicity or religion oriented answer to understand their identity preference; while, in some cases, the interviewee started by enumerating some of their personal characteristics to define themselves. Hence, I decided to elaborate more on this question and limit the extent of

personal interpretation from the question. I sometimes needed to define myself and ask them how they would define themselves in their lives.

These discoveries helped me to modify the research follow-up questions in order to enhance the extent of understanding about Hispanics' acquisition of social capital. The comparative case study approach seemed appropriate for this research in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the differences that exist between the members of the two denominations in terms of their social networking in their religious community. As Robert Stake (2005) stated, case studies are undertaken when a researcher needs a deep understanding of a particular case because of its uniqueness, ordinariness, or because it is representative of a larger number of similar cases. In the case study, the researcher explores single phenomena ("the case"), restricted by time and activity (a program, process, and institution) and gather in-depth information by employing a variety of data collection procedures during a specific period of time (Merriam 1988).

The participants in this study consisted of congregation members and leaders, both male and female, in two different religious communities. A qualitative approach is used in data collection and analysis. The specific methods employed for this research are as follows:

- To identify the members and leaders of religious communities for gathering information regarding the influence of faith institutions on their members' social life in the church and to ask them to describe the function of religious groups on the promotion of social capital in defined communities.
- To conduct semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the congregation members in the same regard that is mentioned above.

In-depth observation and semi-structured interviews were carried out in different ministries of the two middle-sized churches in Whittier, California. Semi-structured interviews of individuals and a number of couple-interviews (two people interviews) from active members in the churches helped me to get closer to the data collection stream. It allows the participants to share their experience of civic participation and their

interpretation of their experiences. The semi-structured interviews are helpful because they enable the researcher to derive some kind of information from the responses that can be used in follow-up questions, since, one can understand the importance given to some specific issues from the participants' responses while asking a broader question. Moreover, some overlooked serious concerns by the respondents can be noticed, too. The participants in the study consisted of adult members and pastors, both male and female, from two different congregations: Catholic and Evangelical. A multi-method approach was employed in the data collection. Data were gathered during long in-depth semi-structured interviews, observation sessions (in different ministries, bible reading, baptism, soup kitchens, youth groups, discipleship courses, choir rehearsals, and the communion ceremonies) and library materials.

Qualitative Research

This dissertation deals with an in-depth inquiry on a social phenomenon in a group of individuals. To perform this and study the targeted communities, a qualitative research design was utilized. In qualitative design, the research is descriptive in a sense that the researcher is primarily interested in the process, the meaning and the understanding of how people make sense of their experiences and structure their world (Merriam 1988).

Qualitative research brings unique and important insights to the research question in its own right and tries to address the apparent weaknesses existing in the quantitative research. Quantitative methods employ standardized questionnaires administered to individuals or families, which are identified through different methods of sampling. Quantitative data help the researcher to establish correlations between specific variables and outcomes. In quantitative research, the researchers keep a distance from the individuals from whom the data has been obtained, and try to understand the relationship between existing variables in the research and offer a concrete and objective result from the collected data. However, many important qualities of people and communities, like

identities, perceptions, and beliefs, cannot be reduced to numbers or are well understood without considering the context in which people live.

In addition, methods of quantitative research are designed according to a fixed set of parameters and there is no place left for possible misunderstandings and preconceptions of the researcher which can happen as the researcher is far from the community and has not experienced the context of the research. Quantitative research usually does not consider any possibility for unexpected findings which qualitative methods can accomplish by including insights from the field (Dudwick, et al. 2006).

Saying all above, there are different reasons why a qualitative method was chosen to conduct this research. First, qualitative research emphasizes on the process and meaning of the phenomena that are not measurable as in a quantitative research; hence, it focuses on the detailed description of a particular phenomenon (Denzin& Lincoln 1994b). Qualitative research tries to answer “how social experience is created” (Denzin& Lincoln 1994a:8), and it is very essential to this research since I am trying to investigate the process in which social capital is formed and accumulated within two religious communities. Qualitative methods typically contain data collection and analysis techniques such as purposive sampling and semi-structured, open-ended interviews. These techniques also allow for more in-depth analysis of social, political, and economic processes (Krishna and Shrader 2000).

Since this research tries to identify the very real experience of Hispanic Catholics and Evangelicals in congregational settings and the way they perceive their own social capital in the context of their community, a qualitative methodology seems to be the most appropriate method for this concern. Furthermore, qualitative research accepts that social phenomena are best understood in their “natural setting” (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b); it is necessary for this research to be conducted in its natural setting since it is concerned with the analysis of social capital with regard to a particular ethnic and religious context. It is crucial for me to observe individuals, groups, and activities in their own context.

Third, certain marginalized groups in a community are either small in number or difficult for outsiders to access (e.g., illegal immigrants among Hispanics), and their views and experiences are unlikely reflected in a survey based on random sampling. In these conditions, qualitative work may be the best research option for assessing social capital. Lastly, qualitative design is appropriate for studying phenomena that are not well understood due to lack of research and theory (Strauss & Corbin 1990). Since social capital is a conceptually complicated phenomenon and there is a very limited number of comparative research conducted in a denominationally different ethnic group, a qualitative approach is appropriate for this research project.

Just like quantitative approaches, qualitative methods do have their limitations, too. Because the samples are small and not selected randomly, it is difficult to generalize the qualitative findings to the wider population and the most theoretical findings in these methods would be substantive theories rather than general sociological theories. However in qualitative research, generalizing is not the goal as it would not be possible to generalize from such a small sample. Second, as focus-groups are usually selected by the decision of the lead researcher or on the recommendation of other participants, it can be difficult for other researchers to replicate, and thus verify, the results of qualitative research (Dudwick, et al. 2006). Finally, since qualitative research needs interpretation from the side of the researcher, there is a high possibility that different researchers may arrive to various results by looking into the same data and one can assume that qualitative methods are more subjective than quantitative methods.

Grounded Theory

My research adopts a grounded theory approach in the data collection and the analysis of qualitative methods. The use of this approach ensures that the resulting theory would reflect the data. Grounded theory was first introduced in 1967 by two sociologists, Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, and was later developed into a systematic

methodology for social research. Grounded theory focuses on the generation of theory from data (Strauss & Corbin 1994).

Grounded theory commonly emphasizes on generating “substantive” theory on specific situations. Substantive theory consists of categories, concepts, and hypothesis which imply that there are plausible relationships among the categories and concepts that have been induced from the data. In other words, concepts and hypothesis are not preconceived in the beginning of the research just to be tested; rather, they are taken out of the data, or if the use of the existing theory seems appropriate, they are modified and explained from the data (Glaser& Strauss 1967).

Grounded theory is based on the idea that our knowledge of a phenomenon highly depends on how it is studied. Therefore, it connects the data collection and theoretical analysis in the later phases of the research and lets the concepts emerge out of the collected data. In this case, the ultimate theory is considered as an interpretation of the researcher’s position and is limited to a particular time and space (Strauss & Corbin 1994). As a grounded theory study, this dissertation tries to develop a provisional substantive theory regarding how social capital is accumulated in Catholic and Evangelical communities.

There are different ways of data collection for grounded theory. It mainly includes interviews and observations, as well as inquiry of written documents, like brochures, pamphlets, newspapers, magazines, research and books. Any resource that may bear the information needed for the researcher is being analyzed and, as Glaser and Strauss mentioned, this material can be coded in the same way as interviews and observation notes (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Codes and concepts extracted from the interviews, documents, and observations are the basic units of analysis.

The researcher will categorize these concepts and incorporate the earlier findings into the newer ones to develop a theory. The data analysis process in the grounded theory method involves coding in three levels: descriptive coding (naming), interpretive coding

(categorizing), and pattern coding (concepts) (Miles & Huberman 1994). Certain theoretical frames occur while coding proceeds and this happens when one can make links between different categories, or one special category to a core category, which is central for the research. As the coding proceeds, the codes and memos accumulate. The researcher should follow theoretical sampling by adding as many samples as possible until the core category and their links are saturated; then, it is time for sorting the codes, memos, and categories to generate a theory (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

THEORETICAL SAMPLING

The method of sampling in this research is based on a non-probability purposive sampling (non-random sampling) among the members of two distinct religious communities. Findings from a non-probability sampling cannot be generalized to their larger community; as such, the findings in this research cannot be attributed to the larger community of Hispanics and are not predicted to be fitting for all Evangelical or Catholic communities. Two sub-categories of non-probability sampling have been used in this research: accidental sampling³ and snow-ball sampling⁴; they were mainly employed due to the research limitations.

On the selection of the case, it is important to mention that several characteristics of Hispanics make them an appropriate case for this project. The word Hispanic is usually used to typify the people of countries being ruled by the Spanish Empire. In American terminology, Hispanic refers to people from Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, South or Central America, regardless of their race; it also excludes Brazilian and Portuguese. Hispanics will be the largest minority group in the US by the end of 2050 and will constitute about 25% of the whole US population⁵ (US Census Bureau). On the other hand, Hispanics are believed to have a high level of religious observance and mainly practice Catholicism.

³ It is a type of non-probability sampling which involves the samples being chosen because of their availability and convenience in access, in terms of both time and geography.

⁴ Snow-ball sampling or referral sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which existing study subjects suggest future subjects from among their acquaintances.

⁵ <http://www.census.gov/population/www/pop-profile/natproj.html>

Catholicism was first introduced to Latin America by Spaniards and it continued to be the predominant faith in that region, even until now. However, a small but growing number of Hispanics are adherents of Protestant denominations.

The Hispanic population is mainly located in the southern states in the US and California. California was the location of this field research. In 2009, California was home to 13.7 million Hispanics, and according to the US Census Bureau, it also experienced the highest Hispanic growth rate among the other states between July 1, 2008 and July 1, 2009.⁶ More importantly, Los Angeles County has the largest percentage of Hispanics of any county in the US. Historically, California has been exposed to European explorers since 1530 and was discovered by Spanish exploring ships as a place of settlement while other forces were more interested in areas with a dense population in the East and Midwest. Since then, California was a favorable immigration destination for Hispanics.

More important than ethnicity are the religious denominations chosen for this research. The Assemblies of God is a Protestant fellowship which was founded in Arkansas with 300 people. Today, Assemblies of God has 12,300 churches in the US with nearly 3 million members and adherents and more than 63 million members worldwide. It is said to be the world's largest and fastest growing Pentecostal denomination. The Assemblies of God was developed as a result of a religious revival during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The revival was characterized by a widespread experience of spiritual manifestations such as speaking in tongues and supernatural healing which paved the way for the Pentecostal movement (Official Website of the Assemblies of God).

The Assemblies of God is classified as Evangelical due to the high priority it attaches to the Scripture and its desire to save the lost and bring them into a relationship with Jesus Christ. It is also identified as Pentecostal which includes speaking in tongues as the initial physical evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit. Doctrinally, the church stresses upon the core beliefs of personal salvation, divine healing, the Second Coming of Christ and

⁶ http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/facts_for_features_special_editions/cb10-ff17.html

the Baptism with the Holy Spirit. In the Assemblies of God structure, each church has the freedom in the choice of pastor, owning property and local businesses, and activities and participation in denominational programs.

Regarding the immigration issues, the Assemblies of God believes in safeguarded borders with an order that respects human dignity. It also supports a sound process for undocumented immigrants to earn legal citizenship. Dr. George Wood, the General Superintendent of the National Association of Evangelicals, mentioned in the Immigration Resolution 2009 speech that:

There must be a sound, equitable process for currently undocumented immigrants who wish to assume the responsibilities and privileges of citizenship to earn legal status.” This is not say that each and every immigrant now residing in the United States, no matter how he or she arrived here, should be given citizenship unconditionally. Nor is it a statement that all immigrants who entered this country improperly should be rounded up and immediately jailed or deported. It is what it says— a call for earned citizenship through a sound and equitable process. (National Association of Evangelicals Website)

The other focus group in this research is Catholics. The Catholic Church is the world’s largest Christian church, claiming more than a billion members.⁷ Its leader is the Pope. Spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ, administrating the sacraments, and doing charity shape the core mission of the church, according to its official statement. The Catholic Church believes in the Holy Trinity, one eternal God who exists as the dwelling for three persons: Father (God), Son (Jesus the Christ), and the Holy Spirit. (Vatican official Website)

Catholic services are very structured and formal; Catholics promote salvation through faith and religious works, and confession to a priest. The Catholic Church in the United States is part of the worldwide Catholic Church and is the largest single religious denomination in the United States, 25% of the whole population (US Census Bureau

⁷ http://www.catholic.org/international/international_story.php?id=36310

2010). Catholicism arrived in America during the early days of European colonization by Spanish missionaries who mainly established their missions in Florida, Texas, New Mexico and California.

Description of the Qualitative Samples

Two predominantly Hispanic churches chosen for this study were one Roman Catholic Church and one Evangelical Pentecostal Church. A multi-method approach was employed in the data collection and data analysis process. Descriptive data was gathered during the individual interviews and the observation sessions regarding the function and formation of social capital in the respective churches and the way church engagement encourages their civic engagement and community life. Individual face-to-face, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with 21 participants, two pastors from the Evangelical Church, 12 congregants from the Evangelical church and seven parishioners from the Catholic Church. Almost half of the interviewees were female. The interviews lasted approximately an hour in duration.

To expound upon the information obtained during the individual interviews and from the congregants, two pastors (both from the Evangelical Church) participated in interviews, lasting about two hours each, which gave a broader picture of the church's plans and activities. Almost all of the congregants were long-standing members of the church, with ages ranging from early 20s to early 50s, except the two pastors who are in their 60s. Moreover, many of the participants held leadership and core team member positions in the church groups and are active members in different ministries.

Description of the two congregations

I started my search for the appropriate congregations by looking for two middle-sized churches in the city of Los Angeles. I had gathered a list of fourteen churches, eight Evangelical and six Catholic to attend. Unlike what I had imagined, it is actually very difficult to find a specific Hispanic church. Although there are lots of congregations

consisting of a mainly Hispanic population, church officials prefer that their church not to be labeled as a Hispanic church to keep their doors open for people of all ethnicities and races. Yet, many churches in the populous neighborhoods in Los Angeles with a high percentage of Hispanic population hold several Spanish services and few English ones. I attended all the 14 churches at least once. I tried to introduce myself and my research to the priests or the church's public relation offices without any prior acquaintance. In both Catholic and Evangelical denominations it was difficult to achieve any success. In several cases, it took a couple of sessions to even be introduced to the priest by the church staff. There were also problems regarding the time of the church services. Most of the church services are mainly held in a similar time period: early mornings and evenings on weekdays and Sunday mornings; this made it very time-consuming to attend all church services. Generally, the Catholic churches in Los Angeles are very big churches with more than 10 priests and very few of them show interest in academic research. There were also occasions where associate pastors would agree and welcome me warmly at the first meeting or phone-call and would not respond to any other contacts from me later.

After a while, I sensed that my search for a suitable congregation without prior acquaintance was taking more time than it should. I decided to address the problem through academics in sociology and religion departments who had done similar research. I met Professor Donald Miller, the Executive Director of the Center for Religion and Civic Culture at USC and a professor of religion and sociology at the University of Southern California. He introduced me to a pastor of an Evangelical Church in a small city in east Los Angeles. This pastor completed joint projects with the University of Southern California and was very pleased to hear about my research. After the first long meeting with the pastor, I attended one of their weekday evening services and one bible reading session. I was warmly welcomed by the oldest and two junior pastors. Although this church was located far from the city, I decided to start my research in this congregation and did not take time to find some closer congregations. This congregation is an Evangelical, Pentecostal church affiliated with the General Council of the Assemblies of God.

The next step was to find a Catholic Church. I thought I should find a Catholic Church in the same city or at least somewhere close so that they might nearly have a similar demographic, social and economic status. There were two Roman Catholic churches in the same city with dominantly Hispanic members which could fit my stipulations: Our lady of Perpetual Help Church and St. Mary of the Assumption. I started attending masses in both churches, and felt that I may need to talk to people in both churches to get enough people for my research in the Catholic community. Moreover, there were not enough interested people who were able to speak English.

I tried to meet with the priests and ask them to put me in contact with the people they think would be helpful. In both Catholic Churches, I met with one of the associate pastors very shortly. None of them showed any interest in the research; however, the pastor from the St. Mary of the Assumption introduced me to two people in the church. One of them, who was a Mexican American in his 70s immediately declined to talk and the second one deferred his decision until he could consult with his wife and see if she is also interested to meet me. He declined my request too, yet I found the chance to do my first interview with his wife after two weeks. Meanwhile, I was totally disappointed by the other Catholic Church and decided to focus my efforts on one of these churches. At the same time, I was regularly attending Evangelical services and other programs they had. The first pastor was the first one offered me time for interview. He then introduced me to some key figures in the church, mainly young girls and middle aged men and women. I was warmly welcomed at the first encounter with the church members in the Evangelical Community.

The Settings

The present study was conducted at two congregations in East Los Angeles, in Southern California. Both communities were mainly selected based on their accessibility, geography, their suitable ethnic demography and denominational preference. The names of these congregations are My Friend's House and St. Mary of the Assumption. Both

congregations were chosen for their potential to manifest the phenomenon of interest for this research. Two important criteria were taken into consideration when determining the sites that were most likely to fit this field of research. Primarily, as explained in the previous part, this study was interested in the ways social capital is formed and acquired by Hispanics, both Evangelical and Catholic. Therefore, both of these congregations are located in a city where 65.9 percent of the whole population is Hispanic (Whittier Area Chamber of Commerce, 2009) and both congregations, although not officially stated, are Hispanic churches. Hispanics constitute more than 90 percent of these churches' parishioners. Other than this, My Friend's House and St. Mary of the Assumption had some other similar factors that made them proper choices for this research. Based on my observations, they could provide similar contextual information for this research.

First, this study was concerned with the analysis of the concept of social capital and as mentioned in the literature (Putnam 2001, Burt 2000), the size and density of the community has either a positive or negative correlation with the amount of social capital practiced; hence, choosing two middle-sized congregations would be suitable, since these variables have been controlled for and are similar in both sites. Second, both congregations were situated in a same neighborhood which controls for socio-economic status. People of the two congregations mainly belonged to the middle-lower class of Hispanics. It is very important for this research to be conducted in a similar socio-economic context since education, wealth and social status are factors which influence the formation and acquisition of social capital in a community (Putnam 2001, Coleman 1988). These similarities increased the potential of these two congregations to provide comparable contextual information which is essential to perceive how Hispanics form and use social capital.

Selection of the churches

In the initial search for two middle-sized churches in the city of Los Angeles, I had gathered a list of fourteen churches, eight Evangelical and six Catholic. On the

congregational scale, it is very difficult to find a specific Hispanic Church⁸. Although, there are lots of congregations whose major population consists of Hispanics. Church officials and leaders prefer for their church not to be labeled as a Hispanic Church, so that they can attract more people from different ethnicities and races to join them. Yet, many churches in the populous neighborhoods in Los Angeles with a high percentage of Hispanics hold several Spanish services and very few English ones.

I attended all the candidate churches' services at least once, and tried to approach church leaders without any prior acquaintance. It was very difficult to get involved and start working in both Catholic and Evangelical denominations simultaneously. It was very time-consuming and it usually takes a lot of time to be even introduced to the priest or the church board by the church staff. On the other hand, there were also problems regarding the time of the different church services. The services were mainly held in a similar time period: early morning and evenings on weekdays and Sunday mornings. Therefore, this made the process of sample selection more time-consuming.

Generally, the Catholic churches in the city of Los Angeles are mostly mega-churches with more than 10 priests and very few of them show interest in an academic research project. There were several un-answered calls and contacts during the course of the search for a suitable church sample. Due to the time pressure, I addressed the issue with some academics in the sociology and religion department at the University of Southern California who had done similar research in the city. I was introduced to a pastor of an Evangelical Church in a small city in East Los Angeles. This pastor had completed joint projects with the University of Southern California and was welcoming to me and showed a great excitement about my research project. Having attended a number of their programs, services, bible readings and youth ministries, I decided to start my field research in this congregation, although it was located far away from my place of residence. I was warmly welcomed by the senior pastor and the two junior pastors in the

⁸ A church that is established for the Hispanics and its members are only Hispanics or people from Latino backgrounds.

Evangelical Church. My Friend's House is an Evangelical, Pentecostal congregation affiliated with the General Council of the Assemblies of God.

For the next step, I started looking for a Catholic Church in the same city or at least somewhere close to the Evangelical Church, so that I would be able to control the demographic, social and economic variables in the research. There were two Roman Catholic Churches in the same city with a dominantly Hispanic congregation which could perfectly fit to my measures: Our lady of Perpetual Help Church and St. Mary of the Assumption. However, the former would have been a much better choice due to its similar size to the Evangelical Church.

The early assumption was to attend both parishes and find enough people from both places since there were not enough interested people who would be able to speak in English. After repeated visits, in both Catholic churches, I managed to meet very shortly with one of the associate pastors. None of them showed any interest in the research; however, the pastor from the St. Mary of the Assumption introduced me to two people in the church. One of them, who was a Mexican American in his 70s, immediately declined to talk and the second one deferred his decision until some other time. Shortly after my first interview in the Catholic Church, I focused on one of the churches for the research, St. Mary of the Assumption, to save the research time I had.

Meanwhile, I started my research at the Evangelical services and ministries' programs. The senior pastor was the first person who offered me time for interview. I was later introduced to some key figures in the church, mainly young girls and middle aged men and women who were active members of the church and were mostly the leaders of the ministries' programs. I was warmly welcomed at the first meeting with the church members. On the other hand, in the Catholic Church, it took me a while to find the first participant for my research ever since the official permission was granted to me to carry out my research in the church. I started the research with the first participant among the church staff and continued my quest with a snowball sampling method.

The Evangelical Congregation, My Friend's House: The Evangelical Church, My Friend's House, as stated earlier is a Pentecostal Evangelical Church affiliated with the Assembly of God⁹ which has been in existence since 1971 and has been located at its current address since 1977. There are three pastors in the congregation: first, the senior pastor who founded My Friend's House and is a native of New York City, born of Puerto Rican parents. The second one is the lead pastor who bears 28 years of ministry experience as a Youth Pastor, Assistant Pastor, and Evangelist. He is a native of Whittier, born from Mexican parents. Over the last 12 years, he served as the Senior Pastor of Hope of Glory Christian Fellowship. And, as of November 2009, his congregation Hope of Glory has consolidated its ministry with My Friend's House, and both congregations and their pastors have entered into a ministry partnership under the new name of My "New" Friend's House. The third pastor, who is also a native of Whittier born from Mexican parents, is a Credentialed Minister. He joined My Friend's House with six years of ministry experience in the Storehouse Christian Fellowship in 2009.

This is a medium sized church with 400 registered members, almost 95% of the people are of Hispanic background and more than 50% of them are second and mostly third generation immigrants from Mexico. Every Sunday, usually 200 people attend the services. The Sunday morning service starts at 8 AM with intercessory prayers. Around 9 AM, there is a New Believer's Discipleship Class where young adults who are willing to be an active member in ministry leadership should participate. Around 10 AM, the celebration service and Sunday school starts; and, the Spanish services usually take place at 2 PM. There are also Wednesday night services for worship, adult Bible study, Ground Zero Youth group and Royal Rangers.

Ground Zero instructs a group of kids between seven and 14 years old and occurs when their parents are involved in Bible study and the prayer services. *Royal Rangers* is a

⁹ The Assemblies of God is a Protestant, Trinitarian, Evangelical, Pentecostal fellowship of Christian believers with more than 12,000 congregations, and almost 3 million constituents in all fifty U.S. states. (<http://ag.org/top/About/History/index.cfm>)

newly built groups in the church where college students and youth from 18 to 30 years of age gather together, talk, discuss their problems and desires, worship and play. There is also another ministry in the church called Missionettes, whose meetings are not held regularly, where women of the church create and manage social projects like rehabilitation centers for women and youth and other similar projects. They usually have a big gathering with all its members twice a year. Throughout the week, there are additional prayer meetings, private prayers and also rehearsal and practice sessions for the church's choir.

The services are held in English, yet some people would greet each other in Spanish. I was greeted by congregants and they would usually ask questions enthusiastically about my engagement in the church. I had even met people who said they had heard about me from other church members and were happy to meet and talk to me. Church elders usually asked me to sit in the front row with the church regulars. However, as a new face in an Evangelical community, I was asked several questions about my faith and sometimes the response would overshadow their initial enthusiasm.

During the services, the pastor attempts to cultivate the spirit of praying by emphasizing the element of collective praying. Forming small prayer groups, holding hands, praying for each other's problems, and greeting and hugging after the prayers are the ways through which collective prayer is promoted. The prayers are always followed by the junior pastor's report on the church's projects, asking for financial help, organizational issues, praying for American soldiers in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere, and then time for socializing and breakfast. The afternoon Spanish services are not as popular as the English morning services since most of church members are from the second and third generation of Mexican immigrants.

The church's choir rehearsals and other ministry programs during the week are strictly supervised by the junior pastors, are less formal and involve new ideas and creativity. *Royal Rangers* is a newly-built group designed for college students to congregate in a

group to talk, pray and practice their faith. It is supervised by a junior pastor and is conducted by an Austrian American. As it is a newly established group, the members do not seem to be very connected; however, the enthusiasm for helping the group function is clear in the members' motivation to prepare the room for the group before everybody arrives. One of the agendas this group pursues is to bridge the church's youth center with the college students so that they can go through the transition smoothly and also act as a good role model for younger members of the church; hence, the youth group and Royal Ranger often hold joint sessions. Since this group was in the early stages of its establishment, every group member was asked to suggest a name for the group; however, the final decision was made by the pastors.

Ground Zero is the youth group for kids from eight to fourteen years old. It is held in a very big hall equipped with billiard table, foosball table, three whiteboards, two big speakers, video projector and lots of balls. The core team consists of three parents and five younger people that supervise the youth group. The policies, major decisions and theme selection are made by the lead pastor; yet, the weekly decisions about the programs are made by the core team members. Every kid should register in and out any time they enter and leave the hall, due to safety issues. There are several people in charge of this group: three parents and five younger people from the choir and the Royal Rangers supervise the youth group. The policies and major decisions are made by the lead pastor, yet the weekly decisions about the programs are made by the people in charge which turn out to be a group of five to six people. The whole atmosphere is very positive, happy and full of energy. There is not a specific time for prayer; however, there is always some issues related to faith practices in the games they play. If there is not a religious overtone to their games, one of the core team members tell them stories from the Bible or read them some parts of the Bible.

At the time of this research study, My Friend's House had three major community programs: "Heart of Compassion Distribution", "Treasure Box" and "Stephanie's House". "Heart of Compassion Distribution" was a food distribution program in

cooperation with the Whittier Credit Union and two more churches. With a slogan of “Fighting Hunger- Feeding Hope”, once a week they cook and serve warm food for homeless and poor people. This program is being reported as an act of importance in the Whittier local newspaper and is highly appreciated by the city council. The regular members of the church usually show interest in participating on the distribution day if it fits their work schedule. They also volunteer for packing and cleaning afterwards. It is usually held on Saturdays, from 10 AM to 1 PM.

“Treasure box” is another program inside the church and the church pastors try to promote it on different occasions. This is basically a program for the good of the church member themselves, the pastors assert. They provide a box of 10 meals, consisting of different kinds of food at a reasonable price of \$30. They claim the boxes’ retail price is \$60-\$75. Pastors in the church usually suggest these “Treasure Boxes” for two causes: either for the families’ own consumption and/or gifts to less fortunate neighbors. This is also one of the other occasions where church members volunteer to help pack and sell these boxes.

The other community program which is fairly new and most important to the community is called “Stephanie’s House”. This is a place for recovering of troubled women, girls and single mothers with children. This rehabilitation center is named after a 21 year old mother of two children who was addicted to Methamphetamines, and was brutally murdered in Whittier in 2008. She used to visit My Friend’s House occasionally and was invited to the church several times, yet had never been able to stay in the church and free herself from drugs. Stephanie’s House is located just next to the church. One can say that My Friend’s House is becoming an important civic center in Whittier which is acknowledged by city officials. My Friend’s House was one of the information centers for the 2010 US census. It was basically to target the Hispanic community of Whittier. There were bi-lingual posters all over the place and also Census agents were present in the church every day for any help and information.

Trying to get more involved in the Evangelical community, I would always be in the church early in the morning so that I could see people and also be noticed. Being there early, I could also see the way people would greet each other and observe to what extent they are willing to communicate among themselves. I would be greeted by different people to whom I was not a familiar face. People would ask questions enthusiastically and try to make me feel comfortable. The service was held in English, yet every once in a while one would hear people greeting in Spanish. There were always people inviting me to join them. However, as a new face in their community, I was asked several questions about my faith. I had even met people who said they had heard about me from other church members and were happy to meet and talk to me. I was asked almost in every service to go and sit in front with the church regulars.

The services usually start with celebrating Jesus and the choir performance. It takes almost an hour, and then the senior pastor would preach for an hour. During the sermon, the pastor emphasizes strongly on the collective praying in order to cultivate the spirit of the prayers, ask people to form small groups and pray together holding hands and pray for each other. He always asked people to greet and hug each other after their prayers, and sometimes he specifically asked people to greet people who they did not know, which in many cases would be me. Hugging and holding holds is like a ritual in the church, even in the midst of the prayers.

The Catholic Church, St. Mary of the Assumption: St. Mary of the Assumption was a big church with a capacity for 800 people and every Sunday there are at least 400 people present at every service. St. Mary of the Assumption holds two Masses on Sundays at 6 AM and 10 AM, the earlier one is in Spanish and the later one is in English. On weekdays, there are also several other Masses and Bible reading sessions, both in the morning and in the afternoon. People usually come with their families and the number of young children is more in the Catholic Church than the Evangelical one. Few people greet each other before the Mass starts in comparison to the Evangelical Church. I was not greeted before and after the Mass as a new face in the parish. The expressive form of

socializing is not common in the Catholic Church and the prayer rituals are more individualistic. Few people greet each other before the Mass starts. I was not greeted before and after the Mass as a new face, except the time when the priest would ask everybody to shake hands with the person sitting next to them. The only form of socializing during the service is when the Mass is over and the priest would greet the parishioners. Hugging and holding hands is not as common as it is in the Evangelical Church.

St. Mary of the Assumption has a long history which is also a part of the Catholic history in Whittier. Before there were any churches in the Whittier area, Mass was held for the few Catholics of the neighborhood in the house of a priest-like religious figure at Los Nietos. Sometimes the priest came from the Old Mission at San Gabriel, but most frequently, a priest would come from the Cathedral in Los Angeles and the Mass was occasionally held at a neighborhood school.

In 1891, the first Catholic family, the Volkmors, arrived in Whittier. Seeing the potential of this new town, William Volkmor initiated his goal to bring other Catholics into the community and to arrange for the occasional celebration of Mass. He then purchased a piece of land from the water company and built the first St. Mary of the Assumption. St. Mary's was the third church built in Whittier. The Quakers constructed their meeting place in 1887, and before that the Methodists had built a church building in the city (Official Website of the St. Mary's Church).

This church today benefits from having seven priests, four of whom have Hispanic roots and the three others, though being American with European heritage, speak Spanish and perform the Masses in Spanish. St. Mary's church has four ministries: "Rosary ministry", "Teams of Our Lady", "Adoration", and "St. Mary's youth vision". Among these, the youth ministry is the most active group which meets every Thursday for two hours. There are other ministries which are supposed to be held every day, yet they practically become part of the Mass routine and are not functioning like a ministry with a specific goal.

“Rosary ministry” is the women’s ministry in the church. This ministry prays the rosary six days a week before the 8 AM daily Mass. This is designed for the women to get together and “pray for their community, world peace and an end to abortion”.

“Teams of Our Lady” is designed for married couples who require mutual and supportive praying. They usually meet in each other’s house once a month and share their life experience and their personal and spiritual challenges. This group was basically formed in order for the couples “to grow in the love of God, as a couple through the sacrament of matrimony” (Website of the St. Mary of the Assumption Church). Bible reading is another common activity these couples do while gathering together.

“Adoration” is the name of another ministry in this church; the meetings are held once a month. The goal of the ministry is to have constant and perpetual adoration for Jesus with at least two people. It starts after the 8 AM Mass on Friday and concludes before the 8 AM Mass on Saturday. The first Friday of the month is devoted to the adoration ministry.

St. Mary’s youth ministry is a very lively and dynamic program organized and managed by the church’s young members who have been in the church for more than fifteen years as parishioners and have served different roles in the youth group, either as a member or a volunteer to lead the ministry. Through a variety of programs, events and outreach plans, they draw young people from the age of 14 to 18 to responsible participation among their parish community. As soon as I got to know about the church’s youth group, I attended every session and began my participants’ recruitment from the youth group’s core team members. I spent most of my research period in this group. The youth group has been active for four years and was first initiated by a couple of young members of the church who were willing to do more than normal church attendance. Like any other major decision in the church, their proposal for the group went through to the church priests and started in a few months after the idea was first proposed.

The core team of the youth ministry consists of six young people between the ages of 20 to 28 who are mainly the first or second generation of immigrants to California. The

youth group uses a big room for its activities and is also allowed to hold its meetings in the very large church hall when it needs more space. They have a room furnished with couches and sofas and decorated with the kids' paintings, handicrafts and their photos. Every Thursday evening, around fifteen teenagers attend the class and they usually come in groups and with their friends, whether they know them from their neighborhood, school or family. The core team members usually have a weekly plan for each week like bible reading, movie screening, plays with a religious overtone, drawings, and also different kinds of entertaining activities like foosball, chess or billiards.

They usually watch the latest movies out; the responsible person for the week chooses several movies and asks the teenagers to vote which movie they want to watch. As such, they always vote for minor decision they should make as a group. The youth are required to set up the room before and after the meetings and are asked to collect the trash. Snacks are served if there is anything left from the other church events. If so, one of the team leaders usually prepares it and asks one of the kids to distribute it among the others. The kids mostly make circles of four to five people and create their small groups for any activity. They sometimes plan a picnic day for special occasions. During my visit, the youth group was celebrating its four year anniversary and they celebrated it by having a bonfire at Huntington Beach. Some of the parents joined the group as chaperons and provided their children with transportation and food. In return of this favor, members of the group sent those parents thank you cards with all kids' thank you messages and signatures. As an example of one of their games, they once had a drawing competition based on different characteristics of Jesus. They were asked to draw a picture which symbolized those characters and to explain to others how they relate their drawing with the particular feature they have been assigned to demonstrate about Jesus. These games are always played collaboratively, and every two to three of them are supposed to work together.

The social activities in the church are not limited to the youth. There is a group called "Golden Ages". There are a number of get-togethers for the older parishioners on

Thursday mornings. This is an opportunity to spend some time with their fellow parishioners. They usually have coffee and donuts while they talk, play chess and read newspapers. They also form prayer groups and share their views on life, adulthood and exchange perspectives. Unfortunately, I learned about this group very late and could not find the chance to attend their meetings or even talk to any of its members.

City of Whittier, Los Angeles, California

Whittier is a city located in Los Angeles County about twelve miles southeast of the city of Los Angeles. According to the 2000 census, the city had a total population of 83,680 and was predicted to grow to 90,041 in 2010 census. Whittier experienced rapid population growth in the early 90s which means that a large number of the population was Hispanic, both by waves of immigration and their birth rate in the country. As the city's Chamber of Commerce database suggests, Whittier's racial makeup is 43.2% White, 1.2% African American, 1.3% Native American, 3.3% Asian, 26% from other races, and 5.0% from two or more races. Hispanics and Latinos of any race constitute 65.9% of the population and out of this Hispanic population, 46.09% are Mexican or of Mexican descent (Website of Whittier Chamber of Commerce). The early history of Whittier is traced back to a Mexican Catholic soldier, who in 1784 received a Spanish land grant as a reward for his service in the military and was given the initiative to start a settlement in California.

The Participants

The research participants from the churches were selected according to two methods of theoretical sampling procedures which are used in grounded theory. In general, theoretical sampling is the sampling of individuals, events, or activities based on their potential to contribute to theoretical constructs of the research (Strauss 1987; Glaser 1978; Strauss & Corbin 1990). In theoretical sampling, the units of analysis are concepts, while the individuals provide the means to obtain data (Corbin & Strauss 1990). There were different types of theoretical sampling procedures used during different phases of

the research project. The first theoretical sampling procedure used was open sampling. Strauss and Corbin (1990) describe open sampling as the selection of individuals who can provide the best opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the research topic.

Open sampling can be carried out in a variety of ways; purposeful sampling is one of the open sampling methods and was applied for this research (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Creswell 1998). Purposeful sampling was used to select a group of Hispanic informants who were believed to have the potential to provide data about the social networks in their congregation. Based on my prior experience during the first visit to one of the two congregations, and based on a pilot study that was conducted, the following criteria were initially used as guidelines for choosing the first group of participants:

- 1) Gender and Ethnicity: Women and men who were of Mexican descent
- 2) Education: People with different educational levels, ones with university degrees and ones who did not pursue education after high school
- 3) Family Background: First and second generations of Mexican immigrants in the US, so that they can associate more with Hispanic identity than the third generation of Mexican immigrants
- 4) Church responsibility: Pastors, people in charge of different ministries, and more importantly, normal parishioners who do not hold a responsibility in the congregation
- 5) Age: Parishioners who were 21 years and older

Individuals who fit these criteria were believed to have the most potential to provide data regarding how social capital is practiced among the church members. Despite the fact that these criteria were not very strict and one would estimate a huge number of eligible people for the study, few people were available for interviews taking into consideration these criteria. So, to access more participants, I opened my criteria even more than the initial plan and as a result the criteria extended to the following:

- 1) Gender and Ethnicity: Women and men who can be labeled as Hispanic like Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Guatemalan, etc.
- 2) Educational background was no longer taken into consideration
- 3) Anyone who would define herself/himself as Hispanic and was able to speak both English and Spanish. If not both languages, English was necessary
- 4) Anyone who would attend the church services, regardless of their position and age

The second type of theoretical sampling procedure used in the research was discriminate sampling. This type of sampling requires selecting participants who maximize opportunities for verifying and/or filling in missing gaps in emergent concepts and theory (Strauss & Corbin 1990). This strategy is more deliberate than the other two forms of sampling. Exactly who and what needs to be included are specified (Strauss & Corbin 1990). I used this strategy to identify the participants that play the most crucial role in the formation of social capital among the people of the two different denominations. I nominated three pastors from the Evangelical Church and two priests from the Catholic Church, amongst whom I just had the chance to interview two of the Evangelical pastors from My Friend's House. Based on a snowball sampling method (a non-random sampling, where one interviewee refers another for the study, who refers another, and so on), a number of additional church members from each church agreed to participate in individual interviews. Among the interviewees, there were two couples who preferred to sit in a joint interview and I considered them as two individuals and treated those sessions as two individual interviews; although, they had the chance and did interrupt each other if they felt the necessity.

These new criteria resulted in a total of twenty-one Hispanic participants – fourteen from the Evangelical Church and seven from the Catholic Church who were selected through the two different types of sampling procedures. Table 1 shows a breakdown of the

number of informants obtained from each type of sampling procedure according to congregation.

Table 1- *Number of Informants Obtained through Three Types of Sampling Procedures*

Sampling Procedure	Criteria Used	My Friend's House (Evangelical)	St. Mary of the Assumption (Catholic)	Total
Purposeful sampling	Anyone who identifies herself/himself as Hispanic	12	7	19
Discriminate sampling	Pastors and priests of the congregations	2	0	2

During the course of this field research, I tried to access these participants in different ways. The initial engagement process was based on professional collaboration with individuals who had previously formed academic relations with them. I was introduced to the pastor of one of the churches by a professor at the University of Southern California. Second, while being in the church regularly, the pastors, the church receptionist and the staff would help me recruit some other people they thought would be appropriate for my research and would be willing to participate in the research.

Second, by attending the services regularly and not being recognized as a church member by congregants, people would approach and ask questions and then I would try to encourage them to participate in this study. Finally, I would ask any of the participants to introduce me to their family, friends or acquaintances who attended the same church. This did not work very well in the Catholic Church; even family members of some of the interviewees themselves were hesitant to be a part of this project.

Sample Characteristics

As a result of opening the participants' criteria, there were greater variations in characteristics among the informants than was initially expected. The purpose of this

study was to obtain a thorough description and in-depth understanding of how social capital works among Hispanic Catholics and Hispanic Evangelicals in the two selected congregations. I tried to pursue this with the wider range of participants I could access.

Table 2 and Table 3 review the characteristics of church members from My Friend's House and St. Mary of the Assumption. The interviewees' names¹⁰, age, birthplace, generational status, duration of faith in their current denomination, duration of church membership, and occupation are shown in the tables. The column labeled "generational status" refers to the parishioner's status as an immigrant in the US.

In reference to the congregants' generational status in the US, first generation refers to the people who were born elsewhere and immigrated to the US. The 1.5 generation refers to the individuals who immigrated early in life and began their permanent residency in the U.S. during childhood or in their early teens. These people's parents are considered to be the first generation. The second generation refers to U.S. born and raised children of first generation immigrants. The third generation refers to U.S. born and raised grandchildren of first generation immigrants. Table 2 and Table 3 hold two columns for their denominational and congregational life. One of them refers to the length of time that they are believers in their faith (denomination) and the other one refers to the duration that they have been attending this particular congregation.

¹⁰ The interviewees' real names are not mentioned there; they are denoted by alphabetical codes.

Table 2- Characteristics of interviewees in My Friend's House (Evangelical Church)

Name	Age	Gender	Birthplace	Generational status	Faith duration (years)	Congregation membership duration (years)	Occupation
ME	52	F	Pico Rivera, CA	3rd	27- Convert	14	Phone operator in school district
AN	25	F	Whittier, CA	2nd	13- convert/ Father still Catholic	13	Works in a tax firm company
CG	21	M	CA	2nd	12- Convert	12	Firefighting Academy
CT	24	M	LA	Cajun	Life long	3-4	School district-works with special need kids
BY	24	F	Arcadia, CA	White	Life long	3	Hotel receptionist
GN	45	M	Los Angeles, CA	White	30- convert	6	Public work inspector
MW	25	M	Pico Rivera, CA	3rd	Life long	14	AGVA Performer , The Walt Disney Company
VA	25	F	Los Angeles, CA	2nd	Life Long	8	Kindergarten teacher
EL	33	F	Downey, CA	3rd	15- convert	2	Hairdresser
YE	26	F	Montebello, CA	2nd	12- convert	6	Cashier
JA	41	F	Mexico	1st	20-Convert/ father Catholic	11	Secretary

Table 3- *Characteristics of interviewees in St. Mary of Assumption (Catholic Church)*

Name	Age	Gender	Birthplace	Generational status	Faith duration (years)	Congregation membership duration (years)	Occupation
EC	24	M	Whittier, CA	2nd	Life long	18	Bank officer
DS	27	F	Whittier, CA	2nd	Life long	24	Spanish Catechesis coordinator
AN	42	F	Mexico	1st	Life long	4	Housekeeper
HO	44	M	Mexico	1st	Life long	4	Burger King worker
GA	29	F	Guadalajara, Mexico	1 st , illegal immigrant	Life long	13	Nursing assistant
JA	21	F	Whittier, CA	3rd	Life long	10	Nursing assistant
TM	26	M	Whittier, CA	White	1.5	1.5	Computer Technical support in a school

As stated in the description of sampling procedures, individuals who could play a more important role in the life of church members and their relation to other fellow parishioners were also interviewed. This resulted in two extensive interviews with two pastors from My Friend’s House who served as participants in this study. Table 4 depicts related characteristics of these participants.

Table 4- *Characteristics of the Evangelical Pastors*

Name	Age	Birthplace	Generational status	Faith duration	Congregation membership	Job
Pastor Jim Ortiz	61	NYC, NY	2nd	Life long	39	Senior Pastor
Pastor Ray Telles	47	La Habra, CA	3rd	28- Convert	12	Youth Pastor

DATA COLLECTION

Data collection for this study started when I gained access to the two congregations as the research sites. In order to receive approval for conducting this study, I met with the senior pastor in the Evangelical Church, to whom I was introduced through a friend of his and a professor at the USC. He personally agreed and informed the two other junior pastors about my research activity in the church. In the Catholic Church, the situation was more complicated. Access to this Catholic community is usually granted by permission of the governing board of the church; however, it was a very complicated procedure to start the project while I had the verbal agreement from one of the junior priests in the church. The elected officials (like priests, ministers, etc.) are the ones who present the research subject matter to the governing body of the church. Therefore, I sent a formal introductory letter to the church officials (APPENDIX A). When the permission was granted, arrangements were made with the church leaders and staff to proceed with the research. Once access was gained to the research sites, a qualitative fieldwork approach was used to collect data primarily from three sources: semi-structured interviews, participant observations, and library material. Historical data resources regarding the church's mission, size, demographics (namely race and ethnicity), political and social agenda were studied via the internet (the church's official webpage and the pastor's and the members' Facebook pages), newsletters, and brochures that would provide great insight into their mission and activities. To validate the information on some of the demographic issues, the pastors/priests were requested to confirm the membership size, and the predominant race and ethnicity of their congregants.

To maximize the depth of the information gathered and to get an idea of the leadership viewpoints, the two highest elected leaders (pastors/priests) in each of the congregations were asked to participate in the research. Each one of them was interviewed in a face-to-face, semi-structured, audio-taped interview in an approximately two-hour long session.

No one from the Catholic Church's leadership agreed to the interview; though, their consent for the whole project was granted earlier.

Semi-Structured, In-Depth Interviews

Interviews were the primary source for my data collection. The interview method was important since the aim of the research was to understand the social and religious life of the participants from their own point of view. The individual interviews provided the researcher with an opportunity to explore within the predetermined areas of inquiry. Marvasti (2003) describes interviews as a strategy to "gather descriptive data in the subjects' own words so that the researcher can develop insights on how subjects interpret some piece of the world". More specifically, semi-structured interviews which consisted of some general, predetermined schemes of questions were used.

A semi-structured interview format was employed since there is a structure to provide a line of argument and consistency across interviews. As such, it was not too structured to rule out any chance of new ideas and new areas of interest. It also provided space for the interviewees to discuss themes that were not covered by the research questions. On the other hand, "in-depth interviewing is founded on the notion that delving into the subject's 'deeper self' produces more authentic data" (Marvasti 2003: 21). Besides, in-depth interviews provide a multi-perspective understanding of the topic. It has the potential to reveal multiple, and sometimes conflicting, attitudes about a given topic. Interview questions were designed based on the research questions.

The interviews were conducted between March 2010 and June 2010. An interview guide (APPENDIX B) was used to address the self-defined religious identity of the participants, the faith community's missions, program questions, levels of social norms, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement and the influence of religious rituals on their religious social capital. These set of questions drew information from the religious leaders and especially the church members about their ministries, goals, and their social concerns. The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the participants. A time frame of

sixty minutes was expected and most of the interviews were conducted in this time frame, with the exception of three interviews which lasted more than ninety minutes. The interviews with the pastors were conducted in their offices in the church, and the interviews with members were conducted in the church, in their homes, or at a nearby coffee shop. These interviews were scheduled at a mutually agreed upon time either in person, by phone, or via email. And, there were times when I went for the interview and the interviewee (in this case from My Friend's House) did not show up. Each interview began with my personal introduction, a description of the research project, and an explanation to ensure the participants of the confidentiality of their information and comments.

All the information collected during the interviews and based on field notes of the observation sessions, are reported anonymously in the research to protect the information gained from the participants about their political agendas, immigration background, their citizenship status and their harsh criticism about government and religious leaders. Names and identifying information were listed in the transcripts, but no identifying information is reflected in any part of the written research. The participants' real names are not mentioned and some fabricated initials are used instead. Participants were all addressed by their first names; therefore, a rapport was established in order to make them feel more comfortable and less formal answering the questions and expressing their beliefs.

They were always given the opportunity to ask any other questions they had about the project, before or even after the interview. All the interviews were recorded with the consent of the person, except a couple of cases where the interviewee preferred to speak off the record. One of them was a Catholic female who was an illegal immigrant and she did not want her immigration story, and the way she managed to find a job and study in the United States to be recorded. The other case occurred during the last part of my interview with the senior Evangelical pastor who was criticizing President Obama's policies and asked me to stop recording.

The interviews usually began with the individual's personal information (such as name, age, job, family and religious background) and ended with thanking the participants for taking part in the interview and asking for permission to contact them at a later date for follow-up questions. The interviews contained some personal questions which in some cases might have aroused emotional discomfort (especially with the illegal immigrants or people who experienced being an illegal immigrant in their past). The questions were phrased in a way to elicit the most genuine views concerning the personal, social and religious background of the interviewees. All data collected are held by the researcher in the strictest confidence.

Interviewer's role

The interviewer plays a very important role during the conduction of the interviews and the way in which they ask the questions or react to the responses may influence the answers the participants provide to him or her. Sax (1979) believes that the participants' responses to the questions in the interviews are influenced by the age, gender, racial, religious and socioeconomic differences of the interviewer. In the individual face-to-face interviews of this research project, all of the participants had visible differences in religion and race from the interviewer. Gender dissimilarity was also true for at least half of the interviewees. Age difference was less relevant and less obvious as the interviewees were mainly from 21 to 50 years old and the interviewer was 28 years old, which is considered a suitable age for gathering interview information (McMillan & Schumacher 1989).

Regarding the religious differences, I (the interviewer) faced the problems of gaining trust, entering the community itself, and getting the people to talk in the first place. Therefore, I made two research trips in two years to get to know the people, give them the chance to know and recognize me and gain their trust gradually. During the first research trip which lasted two months, I just participated in their services, bible readings, a variety of ministries programs, and did all their rituals with them. When I left their

congregation, I kept my contact with them and sent emails to the key contacts in the church on different occasions like Christmas and New Years. During my second trip, I was already a familiar face and it made my interaction with them (as someone with a very different religious and ethnic background) easier and more feasible. Having made efforts to prevent any problem in the process of eliciting data from the participants, I still think there were some religious biases that I assume have affected the participants' responses (which is mentioned in the next chapter in detail). I (as the researcher) was the only interviewer in all the interviews in order to maintain the consistency of the interview techniques and approach.

Coming from a different culture and religion, I made efforts to be non-judgmental and to not reveal any feelings about the responses I received. The field notes were usually taken after every interview was completed which consisted of the main ideas, the researcher's personal thoughts and reflections from the interviews, the description of the facility and the furnishings, any information inferred from the interviews (by taking into account the facial and emotional reactions of the interviewees to any specific question which could not be reflected in the transcripts), and the notes that needed to be considered for the next interview. The goal was to create a complete visual record of the interview setting. All the interviews were recorded by two recording devices to prevent any malfunction and loss of data. Later, all the interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription agency.

Individual interview guidelines

The interview guidelines (APPENDIX B) were constructed to uphold the semi-structured in-depth interviews in this research. The interview questions were each designed based on research questions, the existing literature, the theories of religion, the theories of social networks and, more importantly, the theories of social capital. A general framework for the interviews was developed; but, the interviewer had the liberty to refine, add and change the themes and questions based on the priorities felt in different cases and the

necessary issues that arose during the course of the interview with a particular person and also based on different people from different religious denominations.

The interview guidelines were formatted in a way to start with the general personal information of the interviewees which included their religious and ethnic background and then continue with their perception of social aspects in the church. The majority of the questions were open-ended to motivate respondents to express their views more freely about their church's organizations and its related programs. In this way, the researcher could probe the underlying issues which were too complex, too unclear or too long to be included in straightforward questions.

The interview guidelines consisted of three sections. The first section is allocated to the questions regarding church programs. It entails questions about the different types of ministries in the church, their goals, their target groups, and the reasons for the interviewee's membership in those ministries and how the activities in the church would help their communal relationship with others and social networks.

The second section questioned the benefits (physical, social, and spiritual) associated with membership in faith-based programs and ministries in the church. The last section focused on the interviewees' social relations inside and outside the church to see how much their theoretical sense of belonging to the church and their feeling of connectedness to other church members are actualized in their everyday life inside and outside church. A combination of the three sections with some minor modifications according to the individual cases constitutes the essence of the case study design to explore the influence of religious denominations on the social capital of its members. Overall, the data collected from the interviews helped to develop a theory to explain Hispanic Catholics and Hispanic Evangelicals' civic engagement patterns.

Participant Observation

Data for this research were also collected from other sources which included participant observation. Observation sessions were not the primary sources of data collection for this research; however, it was used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the environment in which social capital was gained. The observations conducted in both congregations were invaluable for understanding the dynamics of the Hispanic community in both denominations. The youth groups in both congregations were the places I spent most of my observation sessions. Both groups were nice and welcoming. However, the core team members of the Catholic congregation's youth group accepted me and my research activities more openly than the Evangelical youth group; the core team members of the Evangelical youth group seemed to be under more pressure from the actual programs in the ministry and would not notice my presence as attentively. This lack of enthusiastic cooperation made me feel less-welcomed in their ministry.

During my research stay, the events I attended the most were the Bible studies and the Masses/Celebrations. It is worth mentioning that unlike my experience with the youth groups, Evangelicals (as a congregation) were more open and welcoming than Catholics during Bible study and the Celebration. Perhaps the fact that I was from a different religion and country was more appalling for the Evangelicals than the Catholics. Nevertheless, personal relationships with several church members from both congregations were established throughout my research trip and are even currently pursued through Facebook.

Archival Materials

Three different types of archival materials were used as sources of data for this study. First, there were weekly pamphlets and special-purpose brochures provided by the congregations. These paper documents consisted of information regarding the congregations' weekly programs, the list of people who need prayers, and also a list of

the congregants birthdays. Special brochures usually ask people to volunteer for church activities and also contain notices about financial help, special events, and formal issues. Second, the city's newspaper, *Whittier Daily News*, is the other source I used for the analysis of social activities among the Catholic and Evangelical churches. *Whittier Daily News* publishes every social event held by the religious communities provides useful information on the civic role of the religious institutions.

Books and academic works published about the social capital among Hispanic Catholics and Evangelicals were also used as resources. Studying the history, the core social beliefs and the activism of Hispanic Catholics and Evangelicals in California (and specifically in Whittier), the cultural history of the city, and the role of the Catholic and Pentecostal churches in the evolution of the city is also part of the themes I utilize for this research.

DATA ANALYSIS

In social research, the researcher examines the data to discover the relational patterns in a project, whether it is a qualitative or quantitative project. Qualitative research explores the broader sociological, economic, or political background of a community/people and starts with general, open-ended questions and ends with more precise and goal oriented questions.

In this research, an ethnographic approach is used to analyze the data. Ethnography is an analytical and in-depth description of the behavior of a group of people or of a culture. This includes an understanding of behavioral patterns, ideas and beliefs, a group's geography and history, the social and political structure and functions, the role of rituals in the culture, and the economic status of the people, etc. The data gathered out of these two cultures (Evangelicals and Catholics) was studied in the context of social capital, and was analyzed to see how their religions influence their community activity.

Data analysis for this study was guided by Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory approach. The analysis process was facilitated during the data collection process by the

writing of field notes, alongside the interview transcripts. The field notes written during the data collection process contained two different types of notes. The notes included were: 1) observational notes that depicted the actions and conversations of participants, with less interpretation on the behalf of the interviewer; 2) theoretical notes that included interpretations and opinions about the meaning of actions, interactions, words, and context the answers were given. The field notes taken were then used in the memo writing that helped in the creation of final interpretations, and were helpful in identifying codes and examining the relationship between these codes to create categories. The field notes and memos provided insight to answer further research questions.

The steps taken for data analysis based on the Grounded Theory start with 1) identifying the major theoretical themes, 2) adding additional themes and concepts from the data (which are not as crucial to the theoretical framework; yet, they play role in the explication of the findings), 3) recognizing how concepts are linked together in a theoretical framework, 4) implementing the final analysis of the themes and categories and proposing a theoretical model (Denzin& Lincoln 1994b).

Coding

In the initial step of data analysis, the data are broken into meaningful components and are coded with words or phrases which signify a category. Coding is the act of identifying the core idea presented in the interview transcripts and field notes. Three types of grounded theory coding procedures guided the analysis of the interviews for this study. The first type was open coding. During open coding, data are read, re-read and studied to allow new ideas to emerge (Charmaz 1983; Strauss & Corbin 1990).

This is done by taking apart the data and giving it a name that represents a phenomenon, discovering categories by grouping concepts that represent the same phenomenon, naming the categories, and developing the categories in terms of their properties (Strauss & Corbin 1990). However, this study deviated from traditional grounded theory analysis procedures by not only using a microscopic approach that was grounded in the data to

develop codes, but also by using a macroscopic approach. This means that data codes were also developed based on the conceptual framework of this study and were conveyed in the data through the questions asked by the researcher during the course of the study (e.g., in the interviews). These codes were used to develop categories that were supported by the data. Both of the code sets, those which emerged from the data and those based on the conceptual framework, were integrated to develop a coding schema.

The second type of coding used was axial coding. This is the process of relating codes (categories and properties) to each other. To simplify this process, grounded theorists emphasize on causal relationships, and fit things into a basic framework consisting of general relationships. This was done by using a coding paradigm that focused on the conditions, contexts, action/interaction strategies, and consequences of the phenomenon represented by each category (Strauss & Corbin 1990).

The third type of coding used was selective coding (or focused coding¹¹), which tries to develop an analytic story line. Selective coding is the process of assigning one category to be the core category, and relating all other categories to that category. This process happens by using the coding paradigm, refining categories, identifying patterns, relating data at a conceptual level, and verifying relationships and emergent theories against the data (Strauss & Corbin 1990). The goal was to shape the narration that relates what happened, how and why (Marvasti 2003). For this project, the data were further analyzed to see if the findings are affirmed by the theories of religion, social network, and social capital. This process explains the experience of individuals in the study of religion and social capital.

Qualitative Software Program

The data for this study were coded using both qualitative software and paper and pencil. The qualitative software program MAXQDA was used during open coding in order to

¹¹ See Amir Marvasti (2004)

examine the presence of predetermined categories and to develop new categories. The use of MAXQDA during the initial stages of data analysis was useful for managing the data and for allowing categories to emerge from the codes. This was a great help in the analysis process that set the foundation for subsequent steps of analysis. Axial and selective coding was done partially by MAXQDA and paper and pencil. The units of data associated with the categories were developed using MAXQDA, while the entire interview transcriptions were coded by hand in the first place.

DATA REPORTING

In reporting the qualitative data, each theme and category was discussed separately and then the story that narrates the whole understanding of the phenomenon is offered. Most of the findings are reported via text and quotations and some of the data and findings were portrayed via figures. I attempted to present quotes from all participants with similar frequency. However, this was not applicable all the time, as some participants are more comfortable sharing their views and could provide more easily the material for my findings.

To ensure anonymity, the names of the participants in the analysis were changed to alphabetical codes.

RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

In this project, research procedures were conducted to promote the reliability and the validity of the data as much as possible. Having a single interviewer doing all the interviews is the most important factor in controlling and minimizing the variability of the interviewing techniques that can impact the understanding of the concepts and naturally the responses to them. All the responses were recorded via audiotape and were transcribed, and even the grammatical mistakes were not corrected or modified during the interviews or transcriptions. The open-ended questions provided an opportunity for the researcher to gather as much information from the respondents as possible, and to not fall

into the straightforward, short answers' trap. The respondents were guaranteed to be quoted anonymously, which can encourage openness and honesty when the information was perceived personal or legally problematic.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

FACILITY STATISTICS

A common element regarding the churches that participated in this research was that both of these facilities were located at the epicenter of an underprivileged and unsafe community with multiple needs and a high crime rate. These churches (and especially the Evangelical Church¹²) have shown that they try to provide some basic needs for the disadvantaged people and families in their church and in their larger community.

Both of the churches have been in existence for a long time; but, obviously in this city the Catholic Church has a longer history than the Evangelical Church which itself has existed in its current location for more than 40 years. Both churches have gone through changes-in terms of structure, people, and leadership over time which was reported by most of the older congregants during their interviews. Both churches are still powerful religious and social pillars for their community. Several of the younger participants in both churches, mainly the ones in their 20s, informed the researcher that they grew up in their church and as adults are still members of the church (EC, GA, DS, and JA from the Catholic Church and ME, CS and AN from the Evangelical Church). Some of these individuals reported that they commute to the church even though they moved. They came back to this church for several reasons, like family bonds, congregational relationships and more importantly because they liked the pastors/priests.

As mentioned before, in this research, the same interviewer conducted all of the interviews with the participants; most of them were conducted in the churches buildings and the rest in cafes or the pastors' offices. I was given a tour of both church facilities

¹² This was very clear in the agendas the Evangelical pastors expressed about the functions of their congregations.

and was provided with several printed materials regarding the churches' missions, activities, ministries and programs. Both churches own some of the facilities next to their buildings like the parking lot, a playground, and a number of houses used for special purposes. The Catholic Church was larger than the Evangelical Church in size which is in accordance with their membership rate in comparison to the Evangelical Church. The Catholic facility had the infrastructure and capacity to house a large number of people and events. There was a feeling of warmth and cooperation in all of the facilities, especially before any program started; yet, people in the Evangelical Church seemed to be more serious and stressed while performing their assigned tasks during the ministries and at the same time more friendly and sociable at their first encounters with one another and with the researcher.

RESULT OF THE DATA SET

The purpose of the study was to explore the influence of religious denominations on the community life of the people in different faith institutions in Southern California, and to assess the function of religious rituals and congregational activities on the formation of social capital in two defined communities. I should also mention that the analysis of the qualitative data started with open coding, followed by selective/focused coding, containing all the outstanding themes emerged from the results and synthesized into a more manageable set of data (Denzin & Lincoln 1994b). The final selected codes are embraced in general conceptual categories that reflect the congregational experience of participants in my research. These codes represent different aspects of religion and social capital in the participants' life. The following major categories extracted out of both communities are the most significant criteria in the communal life of a faith group:

- Childhood and religious background
- Function of the church as a support system
- Motivations to do volunteer community work inside/outside church
- Their friendship network and its relation to their church involvement

- Their ideal view of a church
- The role of church leadership in the congregants' involvement
- Home-like feeling

These categories are all essential to a successful functional church in order to accomplish its missions. The congregants expect the church and, in particular, the ministries to be a place where all of these goals can be achieved and the desired functions can be fulfilled. In studying the participants' responses, some of the initial assumptions about their church engagement were confirmed; however, a number of findings were contrary to my speculations, which were based on the existing literature about social capital. To name one, the official mission of the church, processes, behaviors and the discourses among the participants of both congregations were very similar despite the differences in their rituals and belief system. One of the major differences was that in the Catholic Church (which is a bit larger), more traditional services and supplementary ministries were offered, like couple's ministry, elderly ministry, group prayers, etc. Furthermore, the general environment of the services in the Catholic Church is less friendly than the vibrant atmosphere in the Evangelical Church.

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

For the data analysis, a grounded theory approach was used to examine the primary research question driving this study: "How is social capital acquired among Hispanic Evangelicals and Hispanic Catholics?" Grounded theory procedures were used to examine how these two communities acquire social capital. Initially, I anticipated an analysis that would be documented by one chapter focused on the networks and relationships developed among church members, another chapter that described the information and resources obtained from these networks and relationships, and a final chapter that explained how concepts like trust and reciprocity function in the congregations.

The use of grounded theory procedures, however, provided a less defined understanding of social capital which emerged from the data. Two major insights were gained from the use of grounded theory procedures. First, it was apparent that the nature of (or process of accessing or producing) social capital is different among individuals and groups. This finding makes the analysis of social capital among these church members and the group very difficult. Second, it might be possible to assume that social capital itself is not a cause or even a guaranteed norm of behavior that evolves among the church members; it can be an artifact of other motivations that produce feelings of unity and strength which is assumed as social capital.

All of the participants in the research are, or used to be, active members of the church, and are mostly members of the church's different ministries, especially the youth ministry. Hence, doing volunteer work and being engaged in church's extra activities in addition to the religious services in the church is the most prominent feature of all these people's engagement in the church. However, it is important to mention that several participants from the Catholic Church were the founders of the youth ministry, established four years ago, when they were more involved in the church. Currently, most of the youth ministry founders are very busy with other aspects of their own lives and can allocate less time to the social activities in their place of worship. All of them are seriously engaged in their education and have full time jobs which limit their church activity to a great extent; as such, one can assume that most of their comments about their church activities can mainly be attributed to their previous engagement. However, the participants in the Evangelical Church are more active at the moment since they have not been members in their ministries as long as the Catholic youth have been.

Very much like the Evangelicals, volunteerism trends exemplified in the Catholic participants are mainly focused in the church and their own religious organization. There was only one person who expressed his initial interest to be voluntarily engaged in some civic secular groups beyond the church; yet, he quit because he believed the civic groups' activities are not morally driven and their imperatives are not morally defined.

Analyzing the answers of the interviews and assessing the observation notes taken in the field, it is believed that there are several key concepts that arise which are closely relevant to social capital theories and adhere to the data based on the existing literature. However, some new and unexpected concepts emerged out of the data that challenges the process of analysis writing. Therefore here, the categories and concepts that emerged from the data are all embodied in the form of answers to my aforementioned research questions and will be discussed in the form of their results.

Results for Research Question 1

Research Question 1: “How is social capital perceived and acquired differently between the two religiously different communities?”

Answering this question is the main research focus and the other questions serve to supplement and expand on the different facets of the topic. This question was addressed by investigating the religious elements believed and practiced by church members and the ways these beliefs can influence or *have* influenced their understanding and actualization of social capital. The question originally wants to answer what differences exists in terms of social capital functionality between people of two different religious denominations.

The data used to answer this question was based on a combination of individual interviews and field observations from the Catholic and Evangelical churches. Concerning some of the pre-existing theories of social capital, the results were similar and will be discussed in response to the other research concerns. To address this question regarding the existing differences between Hispanic Catholics and Evangelicals, there are four focal points which influence the formation of social capital and the way the community produces it. These points are conversion trends, religious backgrounds (childhood experiences), congregational attributes and racial issues. The degree to which these areas were addressed varied by both the participants’ ages and particular religious experiences.

Conversion: In any research study on religious activities or religious-based social activities, it is important to know how long a person has been practicing this particular religion they are in and the possibility of experiencing religious conversion.

During the research in the Hispanic Evangelical community, I came across an unexpected number of people who have had the experience of religious conversion, either themselves or in their previous generation. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Gaston Espinosa estimates that about 3.9 million Hispanic Catholics have converted and that “for every one who comes back to the Catholic church, four leave it” (Economist July 2009). Seven out of ten participants in this research had converted from Catholicism to Pentecostalism (Pentecostal Evangelical) in their life time.

With this prior knowledge, there was not a plan to tackle the issue of conversion while studying their social life inside and outside church. The subject was broached only when they would mention it themselves. It gained such importance for this research that a new category in the study of social capital was formed. It was essential to look into different aspects of their social lives. Hearing all these people’s stories, it can be assumed that conversion is a very important and influential incident in their religious life: all became seriously engaged in congregational life and consequently adapted active membership in the church activities after their conversion.

In their first religion (Catholicism) all of the respondents mostly believed that going to church on Sundays was more like a ritual than real purposeful religious or social practice. They even claim that for some of them the existence of God or belief in Jesus was not heartily understood. Pastor Ray Telles would mention the same notion when he described his life before conversion, “... It [Catholic Church] was just a ritual. It was a tradition than anything else...”

For most of them, conversion was a turning point in their lives, which gave them the chance not only to acquire a new religion, but also to be an active and devoted member of

their new religious community. ME, a very active member in this congregation who converted at the age of 27, says,

I was raised Catholic and then when I was on my own, you know, I go to church and not go to church and, it wasn't a big deal, because with Catholicism, the masses are all the same. There's nothing different, you know? But it wasn't until that I became a Christian that I went steady

When investigating the reasons for their choice, one is also able to observe the circumstances that lead to their conversion in their everyday religious life. There were several reasons for religious conversion among the Hispanic Evangelicals. Meta-physical reasons, spiritual transformation, personal incidents (which mainly included encountering a Christian (Pentecostal Evangelical) person in their life), and the experience of being “saved” are the most repeated reasons for their conversion. In most cases, these people encountered a pastor or a very religious person and their interaction with them resulted in their conversion. CG, for example, describes his whole family’s conversion,

I met Pastor Ray through baseball ... I played with his son. And my dad started talking to him about it ... the reason like we started coming was my dad was just talking to him, and the Pastor started talking about he's a Pastor and stuff, so we checked out the church. He [my father] got saved ...

Similarly, the same pastor speaks about his experience of conversion solely initiated by a personal conversation with a family member; he shared,

... prior to about 18 years old, two weeks before my 19th birthday, I was approached and somebody had shared the Gospel with me ... But this night was different because it really went to my heart ... But that night I went to bed, I also felt something in my heart and my spirit ... I tell people it's hard to describe love, but I just felt so loved.

There are some other reasons for conversion among Hispanics, too. Spirit-filled methods of religious expression in the Evangelical Churches, disappointment and particular unpleasant experiences in Catholic Churches, having family/friends in the new religion, the existence of a youth ministry, and the language of the worship are among the other

reasons for conversion. Although these converts express some dissatisfaction with the lack of excitement in a typical Catholic Mass, they hardly express any negative views about Catholic faith when they share the story of their conversion experience. As a matter of fact, in most of the cases, all the reasons for conversion were accompanied by other conditions: some people close to them, either one of the parents, close friends or partners were from the new religion. AN elaborates her reasons as follows:

...My father is Catholic, I didn't like going when you had to stand up and sit down, It was in Spanish and I didn't speak Spanish and I never wanted to go ... My mom is a Christian, My mom went to Calvary Chapel Downey and she would take us to go there ... There was a children's ministry. We got to go into the classroom and be around other kids our age. We did crafts and learned about God and sang Christian songs.

For most of these people, the idea of what religion is and why they are practicing a particular religion becomes crystallized after their conversion. It is worth mentioning that in most cases, the conversion happens as a “family phenomenon”, catalyzed by one of the parents and spread among the other immediate family members.

Regarding the conversion to Catholicism, there was unexpected evidence observed. There was only one convert among the Catholic participants. His conversion story is different from the experiences of the Evangelicals. First, at the time of the interview, he had only converted a year ago (which was little time compared to the Evangelical converts). Secondly, he is not religiously very well-informed. When asked, he even could not remember the name of his previous denomination, he says “but I'm not sure what denomination. Not Baptist but... I'm pretty sure it was straight Christian.” Third, he does not have a strong religious background in his family. In fact, the first time he decided to convert was when he attended a Catholic dancing event with his Catholic girlfriend; in order to be able to attend the event, he pretended to be a Catholic for the night. Fourth, he does not express the passion other converts usually reveal when talking about their conversion experience. He explains his own reason for the conversion as follows:

The story goes, I was a Christian for a while but they just lacked the passion that keeps me inside the Catholic Church. They're pretty much the sit down and fall asleep. In Christian church, you don't interact with the Father; in that case it's the Pastor. They didn't have any real interaction there.

All being said, it is clear that the role his girlfriend played to attract him to the church is indisputable, she is one of the core team members of the youth ministry in the church and tried to introduce TM to the church by taking him to the youth group meetings and giving him responsibilities. As such, what he experienced in the new church was a more active, individual role in the church's programs, which might have been possible in his previous church, but he never found the chance to join. His Catholic girlfriend, with whom he is getting married to in a year, told me that he being a "Christian" made their relationship a very difficult one because of her family. While she did not try to push him, she wished for him to convert. JA says:

I invited him. New people, he doesn't want to meet them. He ended up going, and he end up liking it more and more. I gave him more responsibilities, for just different things, and he ended up getting involved one way or the other ...

Beside this one case of conversion, I heard of another similar case in which the individual had not yet converted, but had been deeply influenced by attending St. Mary's youth group meetings and was taking classes to convert from a Protestant denomination to Catholicism.

Religious Background: Religious identity was one of the most discussed issues during the interviews with the members of both congregations. It is mainly discussed in the beginning part of the interviews when the participants start talking about their religious background and the fact that their religious identity blossomed from their early experiences in the church with their parents. It later reveals that their religious background (namely, childhood experiences) had an important impact on their understanding of religious commitment in the church.

Regarding the religious background in the Evangelical Church, only one of the interviewees - who is now among the converts in the church - claimed that he did not have a very strong religious background, though his whole family was Catholic, and attending the church services was a Sunday ritual. For these Evangelicals, religion has always been part of their life as a child, either in the church or in Christian schools. BY, in this respect, stated, "... I went to Arcadia Christian School in Arcadia ... church has always been a part of my life for a very long time".

Yet, it is absolutely essential to mention that all these people who were exposed to religion through their family and especially in their early years, came to a personal understanding of the religion when they were older. That moment of understanding inspired the rest of their devotion to their religion and consequently their church and its related religious activities. Pastor Jim Ortiz, for example, shared the following about his background:

Well, my religious identity started with my mother in my home, obviously, as a young boy, growing up as a Pentecostal Evangelical Protestant Christian. But I came to a personal faith in Christ Jesus as my Lord and as my savior when I was 12 years old. So my mom was a very solid Christian, committed to her faith, when I came along. So I grew up, yes, in a very committed home, a religious home. I would go to church sometimes five nights a week, and three times on Sunday.

Along with religious identity, many other religious and social traits have been constructed during their early years with their family, teachers or pastors in the church. When asked about the reasons for their active membership in church ministries, like the youth group, a number of them mentioned that their interest as a child to help others motivates them to be active in the church programs, e.g. ministry leaderships, church chore, etc. They learned from their parents, grandparents or pastors that helping others is considered to be a good deed in their faith. CT mentioned that his motivation to help younger children in the church is a legacy from her grandmother;

My grandmother's a school teacher and so she always had kids come over and I would always see her help ... Then my mom she always, if you ran into cousins or girl that she knew from other families she would always help them out ... So, we always had different young people come to our house. So I remember helping them all the time.

The Evangelicals' responses all confirmed that the childhood experiences of adult parishioners function as a backbone for their whole adult identity and the way they perceive themselves as Christians and their role in the church community.

The Catholic Church participants shared their experiences regarding their religious background in their family. The participants' experiences in both churches are quite similar. All of the interviewees in the Catholic Church had a long history of church involvement in their families, except the one new convert. Unlike the Evangelicals, Catholics and their family members usually attend the same church; they mostly started coming to this church as a family and very few of their family members left the church. Young children have been brought to the church by either their parents or their grandparents.

There was a consensus among most of the participants about their family involvement in the church. They mostly share the experience of their parents being active in the church, as Eucharistic ministers, event coordinators, or lectors. Most of them also started in the church as volunteers (for example, as altar servers, ushers and helpers to the religious teachers). EC, a 24 year old, says "At the age of six I became what we call an altar server." LS also recalls his childhood memories in the church as follows: "My earliest memories of this church is the whole family just walking from our house to the church every Sunday; every Sunday we would walk".

It is understood that religious background is immensely reflected in the current feelings of the members in the church. When being asked about their motivation to help in this church, they usually reflect upon their early days of attendance in the church and that they had family members in at least one of the church's other ministries. Interestingly,

that family member is most of the time the mother of the family. Moreover, to confirm what ER said, DS - who has been in the church the longest - recalls her family involvement in St. Mary,

My parents, actually, are very involved. My parents were Eucharistic ministers ... We used to have carnivals, so on and so forth, so he was coordinator for the foods and getting all that organized. Myself and my father were both lecterns. We've always been very involved.

Congregational attributes: The concept of having an ideal place of worship is a recurrent theme expressed at different occasions in the participants' responses. Their attraction to their place of worship, and their decision to devote more time than required, is a direct result of their satisfaction from their membership to an 'ideal' church. To explore how the church members see themselves in this congregation and what their main reasons are in choosing their church, they were asked what the most important characteristics of their church are and what motivated them to stay in their church and get involved.

Regarding the congregational attributes in the Evangelical Church, there are various reasons for the congregants' choices and a variety of qualities their congregation has which can draw them to its activities. Based on the responses from the participants in the Evangelical Church, the role that the pastors play is highly significant; seven out of ten people referred to the pastors as the main reason for their decision to be in this congregation and consider them (the pastors) as significant influences for remaining at the church.

There were other cases in the Evangelical Church in which meeting the pastor or one of the associate pastors outside of church was the sole reason for joining the congregation. Therefore, the pastors in the Evangelical Church play a very determining role in the whole process of attraction and involvement of the congregants. CT, who left his life in Louisiana to join this church in California, after he met the current associate pastor, shared,

... Yeah, about three or four years ago, I moved here, I was living in Phoenix, Arizona and the Pastor's son was my roommate in Phoenix. I moved out around like 18 years old when I moved to Phoenix. So, me and the Pastor hooked up and he told me he was doing some ministry stuff and he would like for me to be part of it and join, so I moved out here ...he's been a real reason why because I'm a very, how do you say, a strong personality. So I need an extremely strong personality to keep me focused and he has a very, very strong personality.

There was one particular pastor in the Evangelical Church whose name was mentioned several times by the participants, especially the youth, and they referred to him as the main reason for their engagement in voluntary activities in the church. He is the person in charge of all ministry activities and programs in the church and all the young leaders of the ministries perform under his supervision. The pastor was a convert himself with a dark past smeared with drinking, drugs, pornography, violence and hatred, whose life was influenced by an incident in his personal life.

A pastor's role is perceived differently in a community. People have different expectations of a pastor. They are considered to be the most trusted ones in the church and people can refer to them with all kinds of problems. The pastors in this congregation are the confidants for the people; moreover, they also have the ability to connect their congregation members to a wider network of people, due to their extensive connections inside and outside church. However, the concern here is not the fact if this potential is turned into practice in this Evangelical congregation. As Ronald Burt discusses (2000), pastors can play the role of a "network bridge" and function as a "broker¹³" in the whole community. They can connect different groups of people and can fill the structural holes that exist among regular church members and the more actively communicating ones.

¹³ A broker is an agent in a network structure that connects different agents from some segmented network structures and meets the definition of a network bridge. If a broker's relationship is broken with other networks than his own, there is no connection between other networks. A broker usually fills the structural holes in a set of networks.

A pastor's personality is significantly determinate in their role as leaders and the persons that people look upon them; for example, when talking about the pastors, JA expresses, "I absolutely adore Pastor Ray. I absolutely adore his heart, I absolutely adore his heart for God ...". Beside their personal conduct, it is very important for the pastors to be available for the members of their church and that people are able to communicate with them easily. AN, for example, believes the reason her mother decided to change her church was the availability of the pastors in this new congregation which became evident for them after an incident happened in their previous church and they could not access their own pastor for their Grandmother's funeral. She states "It [current congregation] was a lot smaller and we could talk to the pastor if we needed him".

A number of other respondents expressed their reasons in choosing this church with a meta-physical justification of some incidents which brought them to this place. There is a consensus among these people: they usually express that God wanted them to join this church and God had a plan for them. CT shared,

So, I had offered to go to this place. I thought it was another, [Pastor Ray offered me to come to his church], then all of a sudden, as soon as he told me that, all of my doors back at home started closing. I was like, "Are you trying to tell me something God?" Then all of a sudden, all the doors for me to come out to California started opening up. Then I was really debating because I didn't want to come out here. This was not my goal dream or even in my mind, so I had it coming.

It is important to add that there are some people who do not express any factor or incident for joining this church which is relevant to the research; having friends in this congregation, having a bad experience in the previous church, and being a close distance to their home are among the other reasons to be in this church.

As shortly mentioned before, for some of the participants the size of the church and the atmosphere around it matters greatly. Being in a rather small church where they can talk to pastors and other people easily is important. This gives them the feeling of "home";

YE expresses, “I like a small church. I like the kind of home feel. I have become really connected to the people here.”

Regarding the congregational attributes, Catholics revealed a very different attitude. It was unanticipated to learn that, except for one participant who is a convert, all of the other participants of the Catholic Church preferred this church in the first place because they had newly moved to the neighborhood and St. Mary’s was the closest church to them. Therefore, geography is the most frequent factor in their initial membership in the church. Yet, these same people continue coming to this church after they have changed their homes and were willing to attend this church regardless of the distance.

Therefore, one can conclude that geography might be the starting point for their religious membership, but what counts more in later years are the other attributes of the church that change the church from a place of worship to a “home” for its members. AN, who is the newest to this parish, says “I just loved the community ... I don’t wanna leave, the point is, we were, for the first time, in a place where you know everybody. Everybody is no stranger.”

For the Catholic participants, the most substantial attribute was that their church provided them with a chance to worship God, teach their kids or other youth in the church to worship, and help others. Unlike Evangelicals, Catholics do not mention any particularly important characteristics of their church. They express more general comments about the reason for their connection with the church. They express their concerns over the condition of the younger generation and their own attempts to make use of the opportunities offered at church: to teach them about God and granting them a place to convene, and help others.

Racial issues: When discussing the differences Catholics and Evangelicals have in acquiring social capital, there is one more issue beside the conversion, religious background and congregational attributes that needs close exploration: racial differences. The racial issues gain importance in the discussion of social capital among Hispanics

when one notices that this social and political concern only exists among Hispanic Catholics. The immigrants' assimilation and racial differences are the topics that emerge not only from the field observations, but also are directly expressed by a number of participants and church leaders themselves.

This is largely related to their racial and ethnic identity, how the church members identify themselves as Hispanics, and whether they appreciate being in a community in which most of whom share a common ethnic background. Before reflecting upon the reasons of ethnic identification and the results of it in their congregational life, it is essential to give an account of these communities self-identification, generation of immigration and also the language they prefer to speak in their family and in the church.

The number of first generation immigrants among the Catholics is much higher in comparison with the Evangelicals and also the number of third generation immigrants in the Catholic Community is less than in the Evangelical community; both groups have a fairly similar number of second generation immigrants. Accordingly, the number of bilingual Catholic participants (with a later immigration record in the US) is higher than the Evangelicals, a lot of whom were not able to speak Spanish at all. All the Catholic participants were able to speak Spanish and identified themselves as "Hispanic/Latino" when asked, while there were a number of people in the Evangelical Church who have never even learned Spanish at home and would prefer "American" in response to the identity question. Therefore, it is understandable to notice racial concerns in the Catholic community and the church leaders' attempts to help the assimilation process for the Catholic immigrants.

Furthermore, this concern is also addressed in the youth ministry's mission statement which implies that racial concerns must have existed in the church for a long time but were not openly expressed by church leaders. Yet, when asked if it is important for the youth to meet fellow Hispanics in the church, GA voiced,

No, not anymore, we just want to be Catholic. Actually, that was one of the other points of our mission statement. A long time ago and even still now you kind of see that separation between the white and the Spanish. And you know there's... As far as the church, I like to think that we're trying to kind of erase that barrier. And it's kind of working, where some of these groups are of Hispanic background but they're more like second or third generation. And they're kind of mixing now. Most of the music they're listening to is in English, most of their conversations are in English, but they do have... We wanted that barrier to disappear. And we're seeing more like integrated and that's part of our goal.

She later revealed her own life experience and the extent to which her fellow parishioners helped her assimilate in her new life and tried to fill the void created after leaving Mexico and all her family behind.

When asked about the reasons for his involvement in the church, EC adds

Well, I guess part of it [why he works in the church] is out of respect for him [Brother Don]. And, as well as with the ability to continue his mission. His mission was he wanted to unite the Hispanic community and, for lack of better definition, the white community.

In order to address this concern, the church leaders try to hinder the emphasis on the parishioners' Hispanic identity; even though, the white priests in the church learn Spanish to be able to communicate with the Spanish-speaking community and half of the Masses in the church are held in Spanish. It is essential to mention that this social agenda existing among the leaders of the church is a potential source for further social capital formation among the congregation if it is publicized; but, due to the sensitivity of the racial discourse, the church leadership tries to keep it out of focus.

Summary of Research Question 1

The data indicate that the differences Evangelicals and Catholics have in acquiring social capital among themselves is related to their religious background, conversion experiences, their ideal congregational attributes and the social agendas, like racial

issues, existing among them. Any one of these categories can influence the determinants of social capital in a community and change the patterns of social behavior in a religious community.

Results for Research Question 2

Research Question 2: “How do the church members perceive the community improvement activities in the church through social capital and what kind of benefits do they receive out of their involvement?”

This question was addressed by exploring the perceptions of congregation members on the process of improving their community and the benefits they will access through their social activism in the church. For this end, the types of activities in the church, the perception of the members from the role of the church and also the potential benefits they gain through church membership are investigated. It is important to note that there is an overlap concerning the activities of the church and the other research questions in this research.

To discuss the congregants’ view of their church’s importance and function, different categories surfaced that need to be addressed, such as the supporting role of the church, community safety, and political agendas. They bring to light the importance of the function of church as a support institution for its members. This support institution can extend its influence onto different criteria for its members; yet, the two primary categories that the church influences the most consist of supporting two basic human needs: material and emotional/spiritual support. In general, the participants from both of the congregations (Catholic and Evangelical) shared a common view on the function of the church and the positive impacts it can bear for its members. However, there are minor differences that will be discussed below.

Regarding the supporting role of the church, the participants from the Evangelical Church mentioned that the church gives them a feeling of being supported emotionally

and spiritually. And, they are in the church to support others in any necessary form. They receive enormous spiritual and religious support by being in the church, worshiping, reading the Bible, being loved by God and other members of their congregation, being in different ministries, and helping other people. Clearly, these attitudes are intensified in the Evangelical churches with their ritual norms: they hold hands, pray together, and pray for the problems of their church fellows.

When asked about any particular case in which they as individuals turned to the church for any kind of support or help, only very few of them had personal experiences in which they asked the church for support. Yet, it is very important to mention that the same participants always reserve this right for other congregants to approach the church and also other members for help. On the spiritual, religious and emotional front, they mention the fact that being in the church helped them grow spiritually and made them in a better person. CT says that “I like this church, because it pushes me up”. Meanwhile, these people feel obliged to support each other emotionally in the church and during the services, too. BY recalls the time when her father passed away and received telephone calls from the pastor and his wife for a long time after the incident. She states,

Like I said, I lost my dad in October. Within about maybe an hour and a half of me finding out about it, my mom called Matt because I couldn't, but within maybe an hour and a half, two hours of me finding out I got a call from Pastor Ray. Word traveled all the way to him and he called me to double check on me and to help me talk about funeral services. He was like I know people if you need help ...Pastor Ray's wife, like Arlene, she still does, she'll call me and say, I'm just checking on you to see how you're doing.

However, it is important to add that of all the church members, BY was enormously supported by the pastor and his wife, yet the beam of the support did not go further to other members of the church.

The other form of the support system is material and financial. Beside the spiritual support, financial help is the most repeated kind of support church members and even

pastors talk about in My Friend's House. In regard to the financial or material support, participants in the Evangelical Church expressed a similar view they shared on the spiritual support. In response to my questions on who they would turn to for financial support if an unprecedented incident happens, none of the participants considered their church community, pastors or their church friends as the primary source for support; they either referred to their family, close friends or "God"¹⁴. However, they all gave examples of people who had benefited from financial aid given by the church community and acknowledged the fact that they must support each other and contribute financially, providing that it is needed and they can afford to contribute. ME says that she never turned to the church for financial assistance; although, she happened to be in financial trouble many times. However, there was one occasion where her son turned to the church for financial aid and was helped. She voices,

I'm sure that there has been a couple of cases that people had any problems, and the other members of the congregation will understand, and spread the word, and people get together and help ... My son, one time, did when he going on a trip to New York with his high school group, and he didn't have the money. So he approached the congregation and he asked if they could help him, and they helped him.

CT, the man who left his home in Louisiana to join this church in California, adds,

Like when I was down here, one of my best friends had died. And the church paid for me to go fly back home. And had some spending money while I was down there. I mean, there's a lot of people in this church that like, a prime example ...

He later gives an example of how he reciprocates others' help: he assisted one of his neighbors who needed transportation to the hospital. CT stated that, regardless of financial trouble, he would have given a hand to his neighbor.

¹⁴ It is important here to know that when people mention "God" as the source of help in time of difficulty, is basically their faith they refer to. They pray for their troubles to God, but they scarcely go to their church and plea for help.

It is paramount to mention that he interprets all this support as acts of God's mercy and how God rules his life. When any of their good deeds are returned through a favor by a third person, either inside or outside their community, it never occurs to them to be an example of "generalized reciprocity". The participants mostly interpret good deeds as "God taking care of them" and not directly the person who did them the favor. As such, when they tend to carry out an act of kindness themselves, they rarely consider its social side and mainly perform it as a part of their religious duty - a good step toward being a better Christian.

The participants from the Catholic Church, St. Mary of the Assumption, voice several expectations of the church which are similar to the Evangelical participants. The most prominent concept discussed by the interviewees, beside their own role as volunteers in church community activities, was the function the church can have as a place of worship, and more importantly, as a support institution for its members. For a large number of parishioners, church is their sole place of worship - where they attend every Sunday, pay their tithe and communicate with God. However, it is very interesting to know that even for people who consider the church as a support institution (outside of being a place of worship), the church is a place where they do not necessarily support themselves but rather the needy and less fortunate. Although there have been cases where some of the individuals benefited from the church's support (either financially or spiritually) from church leaders and other members, the church is mainly a place for them to give rather than receive, even for a person of middle-lower class in the community.

By studying the kind of support members attribute to the church, two major categories of material support (consisting of financial support, information resources, and important contacts for indirect benefits), and spiritual/emotional support are identified. The members of this church put an equal emphasis on the financial and spiritual support of each other and the needy in their community. Unlike many other religious congregations, the extent and the quality of caring for both financial and spiritual needs are comparable in this particular church. Furthermore, one should notice that what can be assumed from

the way the concept of “support” is presented, people tend to see the church as place where they can support others financially (directly/indirectly) and be supported emotionally.

The interviewees themselves might not even contribute financially; but, they see that to be able to support those in financial need is a role that the church must embrace. Holding a food pantry, having Fish Fry Day, collecting shoes for needy, having fundraisers, among others, are the ways that financial support is given in the church. And, apparently, there have been cases when some individuals in crisis turned to the church for help and were assisted by the church members.

Only one of the participants remembers her family being helped financially by the women of the church when she was very young and her father was sent back to Mexico due to his un-documented immigration status. She shares, “And I just remember one time some people from church they came over when they had brought groceries and lent my Mom some money”. It is noteworthy to mention that, even church members from a middle-lower class consider it their duty to help others financially, even though they cannot help with money. They view themselves as the “work force” and expect the more affluent to spend money. EC, a young banker, reveals another form of financial help, which might be more of a Mexican approach to such problems rather than a Catholic one. He states,

... it really narrows how you assist someone. If someone is in dire need, say they lose their home. I mean, we as Latinos aren't necessarily wanting to just throw money at the problem. We would invite them to our home.

A vivid example of the church's support system happened during the course of this research. Someone in the church lost her three children and her nephew in a car accident. The whole church came together in support. In fact, the women of the church started selling tacos and spaghetti to raise money for the funeral and other related expenses. All of the activities were carried out in addition to the prayer sessions and the memorials that

the church held for them. People were having small memorials for the lost ones and tried to comfort the affected members of the community even weeks after the accident.

On the spiritual level, like any other faith community, the services, Bible study and the prayers are the basic sources of spiritual support Catholics get from the church; nonetheless, Catholics may not benefit from the ecstatic feeling that other Protestant church members experience due to their ritual norms. Physical contacts are not as popular in the Catholic Church as it is in the Evangelical Church.

There are more cases of individuals having spiritual problems in the St. Mary's Church and a great part of it is caused by the fact that there are more people with immigration issues among Hispanic Catholics than Evangelicals. Apparently their life traumas need more care and support. HO, a first generation immigrant who has recently gained his citizenship remembers the time his father was deported:

Another time, when he was deported to the Peaje, It is a border town in Mexico. One of the older members, who is still friends with my parents, he came over to my mom "I am going to go there, what do you want me to say to him?" He was just going to see that he was OK. I think there was a problem, and I knew it. And, I am very blessed now.

EC, who is from a more affluent family and his family is also highly involved in the church, mentions illegal immigration as a serious issue and indicates that in these cases, people mobilize and put all their efforts into supporting the suffering family and providing them with the necessities. He adds,

We've had friends that, you know, lost a job or, of course, with Latinos in L.A. you have the idea of illegal immigration that's very real, so people that are working undocumented get caught up and get deported. Yes, so when you lose your home, we have extra rooms, you can stay with us. Do you need food? We have food, you can partake with us.

In the Catholic Church, a new form of material support has been introduced which the Evangelical Church certainly lacks. This is a type of material support in which people

with more physical contacts and a greater presence in the church can benefit from extensively. Knowing people in different social and occupational positions provide enormous chances to expand one's network of contacts and enable them to be connected to sources of power, information and opportunities. DS, who is 28 and has spent 24 years of her life in St. Mary's church, shares her experience,

Like right now that I'm doing my Prudential program at school, there's been a lot of things that I've had to do, like work with children, and everybody has offered me their kids to practice assessment, to practice lesson planning, to do all these things. They're like, "Oh, yes, I have a five-year-old. Do you have a five-year-old? I have an eight-year-old. I have a ten-year-old.

Expanding one's social networks is one of the greatest advantages of being in a community and especially in a community which feels bounded to help its members as a religious responsibility. Getting contact support and expanding one's networks are other kinds of support which are not very abundant for all church members; however, there are a number of church members who express their joy about the opportunities they can access while being in the church. DS voices,

... like one of our volunteers [in the church], her teacher, his wife was an ex-teacher, a former teacher, and lot of his kids are grown adults, and I think he has a son that's a principal, and he knows different families, or has a connection in education, so he's told me, "When you're ready to apply, let me know, because I can connect you with people."

There are also other business contacts made in church (like hairdressers, realtors, and tailors) that some of the church members prefer to use their services, instead of going outside the church network. Yet, it is not a general trend with everybody and the majority of the church-goers never refer to a person for business just because they attend the same prayer services. What counts as the most important factor is the quality and the price of the services they receive. All in all, it is clear that to approach the church as a support institution is shared by both Catholics and Evangelicals while the rates and the types of expectations are fairly different.

Community safety was the second recurrent theme emerging from the interviews in the ways that the church and its ministries can benefit its people and the community. As it has already been mentioned, both of the research sites were located in an unsafe neighborhood with high crime rates. Therefore, the stance on community safety is shared by both congregation members as a by-product of their church involvement.

In the Evangelical Church, the pastors and also the regular members agreed upon the fact that the existence of this church and the projects it carries out helps the well-being of the community. Several participants expressed their deepest concern over the community's prospect. One of the pastors posed the church's position on this issue so clearly that he mentioned the objective of the "Royal Rangers"¹⁵ was to embrace people who might be most exposed to social dysfunctions and can in any way be attracted to neighborhood corruption. My Friend's House has instilled several programs as a part of the church's social initiatives: Treasure Box, Royal Rangers, Stephanie's House and Ground Zero. Each of these programs targets a special age group who might be vulnerable to the vices of the city. As revealed by JA:

This is a pretty rough community, where the church is at. A lot of gang members, a lot of shootings. People get killed around here quite often. So I think this place [this church] is in the right place, even though it's dangerous. We have open doors where we can minister to the needs of the community, and there's a lot of needs. I'm just here to love God, to serve Him and to do whatever He wants me to do.

When asked about the programs in the church designed to help community safety, the senior pastor implied that through these social deeds, he is often known to people outside of the church and in the greater Whittier community as "The Pastor" of a place of refuge. It is evident that the church's ultimate goal is not only to help its own congregation but also to establish at the same time its position in the city and continue their activity to a larger scale. In this way, the church serves as the city's sanctuary.

¹⁵ A newly-established ministry for the college students in the church

The participants from the Catholic Church expressed the same concern over the safety of the community and name one of the reasons for their active voluntary involvement in church activities to be to protect the youth from possible threats they may be exposed to. EC expresses, “we'd had moments of, well, many moments when we have been able to give the youth an alternative to these neighborhoods, parts of which are not very safe.” JA, 21 and a life-long Catholic, reaffirms her friends’ responses while expressing her own motives by mentioning the kids who have been through drugs, sexual abuse and family separations.

Political mobilization is another theme that needs further elaboration regarding both congregations. It has been repeated in the literature on social capital that the religious groups which are politically more active and can easily mobilize their forces behind a political stance. Political and social mobilization is an indicator of high social capital in a community. While being true, the participants from both churches believed that there were very few occasions where they have done political activities in the church.

Based on the responses during the course of interviews and the concluding thoughts from both communities, it is inferred that there are two major responses for the lack of political activities in those churches. First of all, the participants were not very interested in politics and did not show any enthusiasm about their political stances. Second, they consider church to be a place of worship and faith. They do not expect to be politically informed and mobilized in the church. Church represents solely a religious and spiritual place. Their usual sources of political information are media, family members and in the work place.

Moreover, if there is any desire to take political action, it deals with issues directly linked to religious concerns like abortion or homosexuality, and not electoral and civil activities. When asked about any political steps taken by the church community for special purposes, DS from the Catholic Church recalls,

... there have been drives to collect signatures depending or representative regarding abortion. Or, a few years ago we had... when they opened up a “planned parenthood” here up in the city of Whittier... all the churches in the area were collecting signatures and petitions and to take Planned Parenthood out, to appointing certain council members because of their stand on that issue, and things like that.

However, these same political steps were not taken by this particular church. It was a collective move by different churches in the whole city. The same story is evident in the Evangelical Church, too. Although the senior pastor of the Evangelical Church is himself very politically informed and he has very strong positions in different aspects of foreign and domestic politics, people of this church did not experience any particular political activism.

One of the most important impacts of a church’s particular groups is that it gives their members the opportunity to practice leadership skills through engagement in extracurricular activities; therefore, they can improve their skills in dealing with people outside of the church and with the members themselves. To explore how leadership expertise is demonstrated among the members of the ministries, it is essential to investigate the decision-making process in the different ministries of these two churches. Examining the ways in which the decisions are made in the ministries, specifically youth ministry in this study, is crucially important for two reasons: First, the decision-making power in a group reveals how much the leadership skills were transformed and were actualized in their daily affairs. Second, one of the characteristics of a group which holds high social capital is that it is more democratic in inter-group relations and major decision making processes.

Observing one of the youth group meetings in the Catholic Church, I noticed the ways in which the team leaders decided which movie to watch for the day, how they distributed the tasks among the kids, and how they taught them a sense of responsibility by giving them simple chores. As revealed by the Catholic participants and the youth ministry leaders, the major decisions for the youth group are always made three months in

advance among the core team members. In the St. Mary of the Assumption Church, the general plans are only overseen by the priests if there are any concerns over the spiritual programs and also the social plans which need financing. Having agreed upon the whole plan for the next month, the Catholic team leaders meet every other week to discuss the detailed plan for the week. Some of the decisions are brought to the group itself and the youth vote on it.

For example, the movie screening sessions usually start with the introduction of five to ten movies and it is the teenagers who vote and choose the movie for the day. Although it was clear that the core team members in the Catholic Church seem to have more freedom to coordinate plans for their group than the ones in the Evangelical Church, it should be mentioned that there were cases where the Catholic priests meddled in the group's democratic decision making process. GA articulated,

There was one thing, when we first started [the youth group], we were Revolution Youth, but we had to change our name. We had to change it because there complaints. Again, a lot of older people were unhappy with that name. What are they "revolutioning" against? So that was where the priest had the final word, we had to change the name. So, then, we came up with a different name. The kids... by then, we had a group and they voted on the name and that how we became Vision Youth. Yeah. And that's really been the only time that Fr. Chavez kind of stepped in and put his foot down. Everything else is what we think the program.

Unlike the existing literature about the Catholic Church, the hierarchical characteristics in all levels (Priest/Pastor toward the team leaders and the team leaders toward the normal group members) were more obvious in the Evangelical Church than the Catholic Church. Interestingly, a similar story happened in the Evangelical Church when the youth ministry was in the process of name selection. Everybody was asked to make their suggestions. After a week, I met one of the girls in the youth group and asked her about the name of the group. She clearly evaded the question by referring me to the pastors. She said, "I don't know yet, I would prefer to keep quiet about these sensitive issues. Ask Pastor Ray about this". This proved that lead members of the youth ministry in the

Evangelical Church did not have the liberty to divulge information about the name selection procedure to outsiders.

Based on the observations and the interview responses, the Evangelical Churches have a much stricter procedure for electing youth group leaders. In the Catholic Church, however, it is not as strict; in fact, it is quite easy for teenagers above seventeen to join among the core team members. The only requirement in order to be a part of the team leadership circle is to prove to others that they are ready to take on such leadership responsibilities and can act seriously in this position. Besides, these candidates are not required to pass any special course and their promotion is based upon the decisions of the other team members. Additionally, the priests have no supervising role, unless a controversial issue happens. On the other hand, any such promotion in the Evangelical Church's youth ministry is overseen by the pastors and the person is required to pass two discipleship training classes held in the church.

Based on the responses in regard to the benefits the members of the religious communities enjoy, the concept of "home" was introduced by the participants from both religious groups. In a number of cases, the word "home" was mentioned in the Evangelical responses to refer to their congregation. They also described their church members as their "church family". It explicates the strong sense of belonging among the members of the Evangelical congregation (or at least among a specific number of people) and in their place of worship.

ME brought this up when talking about the incident that opened her way into this church; she stated, "So I started coming here, and this is my home now." In another occasion, when asked about the people she can trust, she mentioned that "I trust my church family more". Ironically, the same people who referred to the church as their "home" expressed the least amount of connection to the other church members in real life in terms of networking, trust, and reciprocity when they were asked about their relationships with the other members of the congregation.

These people are even the ones that mentioned they would rarely ask the church for any kind of help and that they either trust “God” or “themselves” for the solutions to their problems. They would also first turn to their own families in times of crisis, and it never occurs to them that they can turn to the church for help. It is fair to assume that this sense of belonging does not necessarily mean that these people received, provided or expected the kind of support a family can offer them; but, the church gives them a sense of security and peace of mind that one could find in their homes and grants them the opportunity to practice their life mission there –“serving God”. That is why they think of the church as their home.

Through analyzing the interviews in the Catholic Church, the same concept of “home” was repeated in their responses, too. The concept of “home” is very important when one analyses the level of closeness people feel with one another in their place of worship. Calling a place home shows the highest amount of intimacy and care for the other members of that community. This kind of feeling about the places of worship, namely churches, are normally attributed to Pentecostal Evangelical churches, where the relations of church members are expected to be the closest based on the literature. Therefore, discerning the “home” feeling among Catholics in St. Mary’s church seems somewhat unusual. I should certainly mention that all of the interviewees from all age ranges mentioned the word “home” on several occasions to refer to their church and the word “family” to refer to their friends in the church. Sentences like “well that's kind of our home”, “it's always that brother and sister bond that I have with them”, “It's a close-knit family”, “Yes, it's an extended family per se here”, “we were in a place where you know everybody, and “this is like your home” exist abundantly in the Catholic interviews. The most obvious reason for these sentiments is the period of time these people have known each other; although, people with two year membership in St. Mary’s would express the same feelings. The two words - home and family - were repeated so much in their responses that they outweigh the existence of such sentiments in the Evangelical Church.

Summary of Research Question 2

Research question one communicated that the primary mission of a church for church members is that it serve as a source of support. It provides this support on three levels: material support, emotional and religious support, and networking support. It is obvious that Catholics and Evangelical bear differences in experiencing these forms of support. The church members' concern over the safety of their community and the other political agendas they possess hugely influences the formation of social capital among the Catholics and Evangelicals.

Results for Research Question 3

Research Question 3: “How are social relationships formed, encouraged and fostered in the church and church ministries?”

The data used to respond to this question were taken from the interviews and field observations. Exploring the friendship networks and trust between members of the church in general and members of the church ministries in particular, their willingness to help others, and their own perception of their interpersonal relationships among lead members who volunteer in the ministries address this question. This question holds great importance, since it entails the most important elements of social capital, like trust and friendship networks.

The social connections within the church ministries were evident; however, the form and quality of these relations are to be discussed in the next part. The qualitative data suggest that high levels of social capital exist for those who are involved more actively and participate in specific ministries of the church, as opposed to the congregants who are not active in the ministries and those who only participate in the routine worship services. This pattern is more applicable to the relationship norms in the Catholic Church. The analysis regarding data on participants who are active in faith ministries reflects high social capital and close-knit group structures in both churches.

However, this appears to be particularly true in the larger churches (like the Catholic Church in this research), and shows a functionalist approach to the role of religion in society. Religion is regarded as a system of bonding through which people are controlled and disciplined (Turner 1991). The church ministries provide the congregants with a place to create their networks with specific norms and trust. These norms, in the next phase of their evolution, lead to coordination and cooperation among the ministry members that can result in the accomplishment of the church's mission. Within the ministries, social relationships are fostered and friendships are formed via the constant and multiple face-to-face exchanges regarding the mission of the church and their responsibilities, which enhances communication in the congregants' personal life.

The church ministries have specific agendas that need to be accomplished in order to help the overall mission of the church. The ministries' success depends on various factors which can be determined through the analysis of their relationships. Volunteer participation of the congregants in the ministries' activities is crucial, since it grants the chance for the participants to share their common interest in a particular field regarding the church's mission. The data collected from the interviews and the observation notes disclose that there are high levels of trust between some individual members of a ministry or a committee; while, the overall relationship in the ministry and also the church itself is not based on mutual trust. The level of trust varies depending on different elements which are expressed by the participants. The literature suggests that the existence of norms of reciprocity is inevitable since congregants spend their time, efforts and energy on the church and they are expected to receive something in return. However, it can be assumed from the data that the reciprocal values are perceived differently for the church members and there exist several reasons for the congregants' investment in their church, such as material, spiritual or social incentives.

It was reflected in the investigation that some interpersonal relationships are developed in the church and occasionally these relationships go beyond the boundaries of church activities. Accordingly, a form of friendship networks is shaped out of these church

connections that are essential to the success of a church's mission. In addition, there are levels of social capital among the congregants who do not participate in specific church ministries. The face-to-face interactions that the church members experience have great influence on the growth of social capital among the members. Therefore, the size of the church has a direct relationship to the ratio of general social capital in the church.

Participants were asked to describe their perceptions of the interpersonal relationships between members of the church. In both churches, the participants' responses with regard to friendship networks serving as a construct of social capital were clear and straightforward. Robert Putnam (2001) describes a social network – the connections between individuals – as one of the important elements of social life that enhances the efficiency of a society by mobilization of coordinated actions. In this research, the social network of the participants is studied in two contexts: inside and outside church.

The participants from the Evangelical Church, in response to a set of questions about their social engagements, stated that life inside church and life outside church are two distinct entities for them; however, a lot of them spend most of their time either at work or in church and their whole life revolves around their job and church. The respondents, even the ones who have been in the church all their life, typically do not consider the church as a place for socialization, though they happen to socialize with other congregants.

The Evangelicals generally have small networks of close friends both outside and inside church. The network formed outside of church is composed of friends from school or friends of the family. This group is the most trusted and communicated to, and is important to participants both in times of crisis and leisure.

They spend most of their spare time and special occasions like national holidays (which are not family related) with their network of close friends from outside church. These

friends are mainly Hispanic¹⁶ and of Protestant denominations. The participants claim, however, that this does not convey a preference to bond with people from their own background. The high number of Hispanic people living in the region may explain the participant's tendency to have friends that are similar to themselves. When asked if they have any criteria when choosing their friends, they hardly mentioned any particular criteria, with the exception of one of the participants: AN voiced,

... now that I'm older, I would not really associate and really stand tight with someone who is not of my faith. Because I believe that they have different morals and I believe that if we go out on the weekend, and we do something, they're morals and what they think it's acceptable... It's not acceptable to me, or what I think is acceptable may not be acceptable to them. So the fact that my best friend is Hispanic irrelevant, but the fact that she's a Christian and has the same faith as me is the number one priority to me.

The close friends from outside church are also the ones who will be referred to in times of trouble and despair. It is worth mentioning that among those close friends who go to church, none of them attend the same church or even tried coming to this church. It clearly indicates that for the Evangelical participants social life and church life are two segregated domains.

With regard to the social networks within the church, there are different sets of friendships. There are primarily two types of people in the church. First, there are those who are regular attendees only: they go to church on Sundays and Wednesdays, pay their tithe, and their commitment to church is limited to this. On the other hand, there is the group of church members who have been attending church for a longer period of time and are more engaged. This group is mostly composed of the young men and women who lead the different ministries and they meet each other about three times a week in the church. They usually communicate during the week via email or text messages. Some time is spent socializing together after the church activities are finished. This core group

¹⁶ Interestingly, they do not notice the fact that their network of friends is of a particular ethnic background, but they start thinking about it when they are asked about it.

of people has established a very close friendship network and family-like sentiments to each other. They go to the beach or to restaurants once in a while and also spend a lot of their time together in the church. BY describes her social life as mainly happening in the church;

So I don't hang out with people as much completely outside of church. It's usually; like we have a church function and then we hang out afterwards. It's not that it's necessarily completely separate times out of ...

Among them, there are also people who never socialize, although they are very active members and spend a lot of time in the church with others. ME shares “I cannot afford hanging out with others”. Similarly, one member of the church also has a limited weekly budget and other members of the group will pay if they understand his financial status is preventing him from socializing with them. Even among this group of good friends, although not considered as each others’ best friends, very strong bonds of friendship are formed. YE has known AN in this church for three years and she says, “Other close friends here are AN and CG. AN has become like my sister as well as hanging out with her and that's just in the time that she's been here ...”

The amount of time they spend together is the major reason for their close friendship; these frequent encounters and the fact that they meet in the church three times a week after work makes the friendship forming process feel natural. CG voices,

“There are a lot of people our age, we go out to eat, or go camping, or... that's why we're around them so much. Yeah I feel like I'm blessed to have really good friends at the same place I go to. And they're involved as much as I am.”

It is striking to notice that this group of participants maintains a friendship bond which has the potential to turn into a much broader and stronger set of connections.

In response to the question regarding how they spend their leisure time and special occasions like Christmas, Thanksgiving, Halloween, their birthdays, and national

holidays, the members of the Evangelical Church showed more personal sentiments than a communally religious attitude. For all of them, special occasions are spent with their families; however, the occasions in which they need to attend church is when they may happen to spend some time with their church friends. There is one participant in particular whose family does not live in California and he does not have other family connections nearby. He is treated like a family member by the other church members and usually receives several invitations to join families for special occasions. He mentioned "Oh, yeah. ... Thanksgiving, there's tons...I have to be wise because there's tons of families that invite me to their house, so ...".

This person moved to California to join this church, and the pastor who asked him to make this decision supported him at the beginning of his transition. He stayed in the pastor's house for six months until he was able to afford and find a place of his own. Beyond that, the older members of the church take care of him when necessary, although he fights to move forward on his very own. He is provided with food and services if people feel he is in need. CT enthusiastically expresses his gratitude towards his closer friends and church members:

Oh, they're there...mom is here, when I'm not looking, " Hey, Chris, what's wrong with you? You need to straighten yourself up, " or like the Dad said the other day...they've adopted me as their own son. So they take care of me. They don't let all crazy stuff happen to me. If I need a ride, they'll pick me up. When I go out to eat, there's a lot kinds when we go out to eat and I just got to be wise because I pay all my bills and stuff like that ... [if I say] "Oh, I can't go out to eat and Oh, we got you." So that happens all the time. I mean like this.

In the interviews with the participants from the Catholic Church, different elements of friendship networks (like the regular church members' relations among each other, the bonds of friendship between the active church members, their relation to other regular church members and their individual friends in the church) have been repeatedly mentioned by the church members. Hence, not only is this concept of a friendship

network very important theoretically in the definition of social capital, but also it is one of the most discussed issues among the members of the religious community.

There are two major types of relations between the members of St. Mary's Church: one is based on weekly encounters during Mass, and the second is formed between the active members of the church and the people who usually volunteer for additional activities and ministry involvement. The first category occurs between hundreds of people, while the number of the people who fall into the second category is much smaller. On a related note, DS, who is the Catechesis Coordinator, adds "it's a ton of people [in the St. Mary's church], and sometimes, unfortunately, it's hard to get volunteers to recruit people to help out. It tends to be the same bunch."

Based on the participants' responses in the Catholic Church, the first category of social relations (i.e., based on the interactions between the general members of the church) creates bittersweet relationships. Generally speaking, comparing the Evangelical community with the Catholic community, the general sense of compassion and kindness for whoever attends the same church is much less among the Catholics. The Catholic participants themselves believe that the general feelings among the normal parishioners could be better; while some of them have also mentioned that sometimes people's expectation to be loved by everybody in the church is unacceptable. GA states, "Oh I think it [the relation between church members] can be much better. I think that because it is a church, people think that it should be I love you, you love me, no. This is not the place to love each other." In response to the same question, HO reveals,

One of our things that we see a lot when we work at church, whenever there is a big event, people get very mean, very rude, especially with the parking. And a lot times we kid around, specially my brother. He does this, he is like "Wow, if we weren't good Catholic, we would probably moved." There is people who don't get along and their personalities clash. But again, we are not suppose to, it is impossible to like everybody and impossible for everybody to like you.

Despite these views on love and compassion among church members (which is a little bit different from the idealized image of a church), several people have expressed that these apathetic behaviors happen in normal situations, too. However, if something unpleasant happens to someone (even if they do not know the person), people just “jump on the thing and try to help out”. It is important to remember that comparing the general level of compassion between the two communities might be a bit misleading because St. Mary’s Catholic Church is larger in size and has more parishioners than My Friend’s House. As such, this fact may lead to less familiarity among members and naturally less compassion. However, I assume the emotive rituals in the Evangelical Churches have the most significant influences on its members.

On the other hand, as far as the active members of the church are considered, they hold a very enduring and friendly relationship and almost all of them expressed their emotional and personal attachment to the church itself and the people they have been working with for years. The active members of this church are mostly the core team members of the youth group, sacristans and Eucharistic ministers. They generally have been attending St. Mary’s Church for their whole life and this is the only church in which they have had membership. Starting as young kids working in the church as altar servers or teacher assistants, they grew up to become young adults directing different ministries and programs in the church. They see each other more as members of a family than of a faith community. According to EC, “Since we started so young we developed a bond like family. We go hiking together. One of us just got married. We compare ourselves more as brothers and sisters than really friends.”

Based on the analysis of their different relationship narratives, Catholic interviewees have established lasting relationships with their church friends which even overshadows their friendship networks outside the church (unlike the Evangelicals whose outside church relationships are their priority). DS expresses her great concern and regret over the fact that she will not be able to be in the church as much as she currently is, due to her professional engagements. She states,

“it's an extended family per se here ...Career-wise, I'm probably going to leave in June. So I'm having a very difficult time with leaving because I have, I love it so much here. This is part of my family, part of who I am, and just the fact that I'll be moving away is kind of heart-breaking”.

In this Catholic Church, this kind of close relationship is not just limited to the long-time members of church: people who act as regular volunteers and the ones that do not hold responsibility in any particular group manage to maintain a friendly and close-knit relationships. This is unlike what was observed in the Evangelical Church. DS, who has spent most of the last three years of her involvement in the church organizing the new volunteers, shows her excitement over the fact that the volunteers at St. Mary's have become good friends and how this eventually enhances the extent of their contribution to the group in addition to reinforcing their function as a group. She states,

I know, for example, in religious education, all of our volunteers become very close because we see each other on a weekly basis. So we have, we go to each other's birthday parties, we help plan out things, they've become really cool friends. We have, two that got divorced around the same time. So they were going to divorce ministry together and counseling together. I mean, it's all, they've become really good friends, and help each other. Well, for example just like three weeks ago we had a big conference. It was an educational congress so a lot of our volunteers go ... So we get a room and stay over there ... Nobody sleeps that weekend because we have all day conferences. And then yet in the afternoon we hang out. It's really close to Disneyland so we're at downtown Disney. We're walking here and there and just going everywhere and just hanging out.

With respect to the active members of the church and their social bonds, there are two reasons why people in the ministries (especially the youth group) tend to be so close and friendly to each other. First, they have been exposed to each other frequently for a long period of time (from three to fifteen years) and they spend a lot of time together organizing the youth group programs and attending other voluntary activities in the church, too. Furthermore, due to the nature of their work with the youth, they go on different trips and attend several social occasions together. Yet, most of their time spent

together is on Sundays during Mass and the rest of it is while socializing after the services and planning for the upcoming youth group programs. EC mentions:

We've gone on trips together. We've gone hiking. We've gone camping together. We've gone to Las Vegas together. Well, it depends on the sports season. If it's football, every Sunday, we either go play football at the park or we meet up at a friend's house, have a barbecue. I guess that's really it; we've grown together very strongly.

It is necessary to mention that some of the research assumptions from the Catholic community are based on the fervent answers given by some of the young members of the parish who had spent fifteen years of their life in the church. For example, EC graduated from the social sciences and he was well aware of the research subject, its dimensions and the important concepts for this project. At times, I had the impression that he was exaggerating the extent of his bond with his church fellows and the other core team members of the youth group to impress me. He even once hid a fact about a scandal in the church and would also give very quick, short responses which were on occasion different from the reactions of other members to the same question. However, it is fair to say that among the young volunteers in the church, this person stands out in terms of passion, motivation, and creativity.

In the Catholic community, a lot of these people do not have many friends outside their church network because, first of all, they have spent most of their life in the church and it has been the only socializing place for them beyond their school. Secondly, most of their lives are focused on both their job and church; yet, they have closer friends in the church than in their work places, possibly because they know more people in their church and for a longer period of time.

Members of the Catholic community presented another repeated pattern in their friendship networks. When asked about their best friends, they usually name two people and one of them is always a church member with whom they have been friends for a long time and with whom they spend at least two days a week in church together, either in the

services or in the extra activities. Their non-church friends are all of Hispanic descent, but not necessarily Catholic, and mainly from school. Except for one of the participants, none of them specified any special criteria as the basis for forming their friendships. The only person who stressed upon finding friends inside the church is a middle-aged woman with two teenage sons. Her major concern was to secure her son's spiritual well-being which she assumed she can best guarantee by finding friends from the church who share the same values as she does. AN, wife of a Burger King employee and a maid herself, states, "... I'm looking for friends. I just look to get friends in the church to think the same like me... If we need to pray we just do. It's not controversial."

Like the Evangelical participants, Catholics spend special occasions and holidays with their family. On religious holidays, they first attend Mass and then celebrate it with their family at home. However, in some cases, church friends may join them, too. Among the people who were asked this question, the only people who would spend holidays with other church members are the ones whose parents are also active in the church's extra activities. In addition, there is also another couple who spend the religious or national holidays with friends from the church. This is because they do not have family member in the city to spend the holidays with (their families reside in Mexico).

To learn about the quality of the relations between the parishioners and the group leaders in the church, they were asked to describe their efforts (as the leaders of the ministries) to promote closeness among the younger members of their ministries. The first method was to establish a close relationship between the leaders of a ministry and the members and then try to expand that pattern to the other members. In the Catholic Church, they partially managed to do so: there are fifteen teenagers in the youth group who are very friendly to each other and clearly enjoy spending time together. They tend to share their fun stories, text messages, and photos. Although, like any other group, each of them have their own "church-pals" with whom they are closer, resulting in smaller friendship circles to form within the group at large.

The group leaders try to distribute the members in different smaller groups so that they can all get to know each other and prevent cliques. They constantly ask the members to relate to newcomers and to work together cooperatively. Yet, there is one crucial point which was reflected in Evangelicals group leaders: they believe they should promote closeness and friendship among the kids not only because it helps them gain strength and will help them expand their future relations but also in order to make the youth group a friendlier place for the kids to feel attached and motivated to not leave the church. In this way, their parents would also stay motivated to attend the same church. GA mentions, “if they don't feel close, they're not going to come. If they don't come, they might miss out on something. Again, they might come to youth group, make some friends”.

All of the social capital scholars agree that trust is considered one of the most important constructs of social capital. They give importance to the concept of trust as an indicator of social capital. During the research in both churches, there was not any particular manifestation of the concept of trust. Hence, the participants in the research are addressed directly about their opinion on the concept of trust. The interviewees from both churches were very skeptical about the concept of trust as a pattern of behavior among the church members.

Trust is one of the most important pillars of social capital and yet, ironically, measuring it is a very difficult task since it is such an ambiguous concept. Therefore, based on the data from both churches, the concept of trust is divided into two spheres: trust with regard to material issues and to personal issues. The participants were asked two sets of questions: first, for example, how they would find a car to buy, or who they would first go to if they are planning to buy a house; second, how they would choose a nanny/babysitter for their children, or who they would trust their children with. Although, most of the participants find the questions less relevant to the other topics, they all contributed to this question by providing examples and expressing their own views.

In response to the first set of questions, the participants from the Evangelical Church mainly preferred to deal with someone who offers them the best deal with the lowest cost, regardless of who they are, how they met, and if they feel a sense of honesty in the person. CT voices “I don't see where, ‘Since you're my church member, I going to buy from you.’ If they ain't giving me \$6,000 off on a car, I'm sorry.” And, in response to a more personalized question, they would prefer someone from their family to provide these services, like taking care of their child. However, it is important to say that when I asked them whether they can trust church members to do business with them or babysit for them, they started to contemplate this option, which they had not considered when they were first asked who they trust.

In describing trust between the church members, there are primarily three trends of thinking in the Evangelical Church. First is “individual trust”, it is a kind of trust that exists among some specific individuals, which means a particular person can trust someone else in the church with important tasks due to their prior acquaintance or the type of relationship they generally have. The Evangelical participants all agreed that they can trust their best/closest friend in the church with important tasks, like taking care of their children or tutoring them. BY, who once referred to AN as her “sister” in the church, reconfirms these sentiments: “I would definitely trust her with my kid.” This form of trust is generated as a result of close and frequent contacts among individuals; hence, people working together, for example, in a particular ministry who maintain more frequent interaction feel closer to each other and can grow this kind of trust. However, when exposed to such questions, the Evangelicals all referred to their best friends outside church as their first choices for trustworthiness and closeness.

“Generalized trust” is another form of trust which is most important as an element of social capital. The level of trust is assumed to be very low, when taking into consideration all Evangelical Church members. In fact, one may even think that this form of trust does not exist at all. For example, none of the Evangelical participants named a person with whom they were not very close yet could trust them for their needs, even

material needs, like doing business with them. The absence of such loose bonds of trust is due to the fact that they did not even expect the church - or theoretically speaking, the religious institution - to have such a function that could provide them with networks of trust which they could rely upon. JA shared,

I think I'm very questioning with people because I've seen both sides like people that say they're church people that really aren't church people that kind of play that facade. So I don't think I would just randomly walk up to a church person and trust them with my child.

Yet, at the same time, there were a couple of people who would be willing to turn to other church members for their needs (e.g., to buy a car or to find a house to buy) but would never base their judgment upon the person's involvement in the church. CT added,

I don't see where, "Since you're my church member, I going to buy from you ". If they ain't giving me \$6,000 off on a car, I'm sorry." Marianne would also responded "Oh yeah, yeah, I would" in response to my question "But if there was [somebody who had a car dealership or works in a real states], would you trust them to go to?"

The last form of trust that exists in the Evangelical Church is "institutional trust". By institutional trust, I mean the Evangelical Church members can trust the religious values of their congregation, their fellow congregants and also, more importantly, the leadership of their religious institution (i.e., the pastors). As revealed in the interviews, it is understood that these people can absolutely trust their pastors on important issues, even if they do not trust other church members. They showed a consensus that they would trust their pastor's judgment concerning any person that could potentially help them. BY explicitly mentioned that she deals with the other members in their church if one of the pastors approves them,

I think it's more that I trust Pastor Ray's judgment than necessarily that they're a church person. I think there's a lot of people that say they're church people but that doesn't mean

anything. But I would definitely hold Pastor Ray's opinion of somebody.

This denotes the importance of the role pastors play in the personal and social life of their parishioners. They have this capacity to be fully trusted and be able to spread and nurture this trust among others, too. ME stated,

I think they [pastors] influence people to participate. I think one way that people start to grow trust is through responsibility. If they start to participate and start to come around and start to show that they're responsible, I think that's when trust gets created between people.

It is necessary to mention that there was one participant who expressed that she would first start to look for a babysitter in the church. Her reasoning was religiously based and very personal. In this case, this response does not demonstrate the church's function as a source to help with her social networks; she declared that she would prefer to have somebody religious as her babysitter, and it need not be a specific person from their own congregation. In this way, a Christian is the ideal choice, because a religious person shares the same values and norms as she does. AN articulated,

I would first go to the church members. I would first go to my pastor, or women in the church that I trust. And see if there's anyone in the church first that's looking. Because I feel like I trust my church family more. Because I know where they stand. I know their morals, and I know the way they operate. And I know where their heart is.

To complete the discussion of trust in the Evangelical Church, it is most appropriate to quote one of the Evangelical participants. GN said, "We do not trust everyone on the same level".

Trust in the Catholic Church was described very similarly to the Evangelical Church. There are not any structural differences in the ways the participants of both religious communities grow trust among themselves. Like the basis of analysis in the Evangelical community, I divide the concept of trust into two categories: trust in "material" issues

and “personal” issues; and further, into three levels: “generalized”, “individual” and “institutional” trust. By studying the behavior of the Catholic Church members through observing the Sunday and weekday Masses and Bible reading sessions, very weak ties of trust were noticed. I could even infer that Catholics have less feelings of trust than the Evangelical community, since Evangelicals hold friendlier and closer religious services and seem to bond and interact more during the prayers. However, when asked about specific issues like trusting parishioners on “material” and “personal” issues, Catholics seemed to be able to trust easier than Evangelicals.

Catholics seemed to trust in their fellow parishioners more than Evangelicals when it comes to material issues like business related tasks. Although, this does not mean that they can fully trust someone regardless of the quality of the service or the product they receive. The first and foremost take into consideration the price and the quality of the service. Catholic participants always try to look for services in the church bulletin, so that they can even financially help the church, too. EC said,

... for certain things I guess we can [do business with the church members]. Just because they advertise with us, say in our bulletin or our weekly newsletter. I mean, we'll look at them as an opportunity because it's a part of the church as well so it does partake into it. But it doesn't necessarily mean I will choose them
...

On the other hand, there were some other people who believed they should support businesses in their church because it leads to the general well-being of their community. Furthermore, the people from their church are more trustworthy than other businesses outside the church. AN stated “... I think it's better when it's from that [same] community. You can believe in it. I think so because there are so many businesses from the Catholic communities that they have it. Yeah, probably it ...”.

For some other people in the Catholic community, dealing with the businesses among their own church parishioners is for their own sake, since it is the easiest way to find a service. DS explains,

I want to buy a house, I could, probably [I start] here in church, I know... I know a few real estate agents here from the church, and... That I could go to. Or if I need a hairdresser [laughs] , I know a few hairdressers here from the church. I mean, just... you could go to any person ...But just because I've met them through here and I've seen them practice their faith and live off their faith more than anything. Then that would be a factor.

In addition to material trust, Catholics seem to be fairly hesitant to trust other parishioners on personal issues like referring to someone with personal problems or asking someone to babysit for them. Like the Evangelicals, generalized trust is considerably low with regard to individual issues. Yet, a group of people who have been working in ministries and have known each other for a long time show clear signs of trust. It is important to notice that they still prefer family as the first people to rely on in times of need and despair. Their network of close friends outside church and their fellow church members were the next choices. In the case of the Catholic participants, since most of their close friends were their church friends from childhood, they feel comfortable turning to them after their families. DS shared “ ... if a need were to arise, I know I can count with, almost everybody that I work with. I think they would...”.

Discussing the generalized, personal and institutional levels of trust, Catholics and Evangelicals shared similar experiences and viewpoints. There is not clear evidence on the existence of such sentiments in the church. However, institutional trust (i.e., trust in priest, ministers, the faith, etc.) was the only different element in the Catholic Church due to the existing scandal about one of the senior priests in the church. Based on the analysis of the Catholics' responses, it is evident that the institutional trust in this Catholic parish has faded and has been replaced by a sense of belonging to the community. Catholic parishioners do not have personal relationships like Evangelicals have with their own pastors. Catholics do not turn to the priests in cases of personal strife or need. They ask them for prayers and grace when they face a problem, but they do not see their priests get engaged with them on a personal level.

Like the behavioral patterns among the Evangelicals, there is a direct link between the duration of friendship, the frequency of encounters, the size of the church and the amount of existing trust in the Catholic community. EC, who claims he would immediately refer to his church friends after his family in times of crisis, articulated that “Because of how long, of course, we've known each other and just because we've experienced together, not just in the church, as well as out of the church. The trust developed very strongly.” HO addresses the number of people and size of the group in the church as a determinant factor for trust formation; he stated,

Under the church itself, trust, I mean, trust always develops and always breaks. You have moments when you have people that, oh, they work together for a project and they trust each other completely. But because within the church you have groups that are amongst themselves, very trustful. And you have groups, as it gets bigger, as they know less of each other, of course, the trust lessens.

Reciprocity is similarly important to the evaluation of social capital, in addition to the other constructs such as trust, networking and closeness. Based on personal observations and the individual interviews in the Catholic Church, not one person mentioned anything that could be interpreted as a sign of reciprocity (or at least a conscious awareness of this concept) among friends and members of the church.

None of the forms of reciprocity (either general or individual) are observed among the participants of both communities. The only case among the Catholic participants who even hinted at the concept of individual reciprocity was a Catholic respondent that expressed his appreciation for a religious brother because of what he had done for him and the values he taught him since his childhood. EC contended “Well, a lot of that, I guess part of it is out of respect for him. And as well as with the ability to continue his mission.” He expressed his sense of duty to accomplish Brother Donn’s mission by working for the youth in the church. This sentiment might not directly reveal his desire to reciprocate; yet, it is the closest expression to be interpreted as a sign of reciprocity in this research study. It is worth mentioning that acts of appreciation were practiced in the

youth ministry, when core team members of the youth group expressed their gratitude to the parents who helped them with food and transportation for their short trips and outdoor church programs. Everybody in the group was asked to sign the thank-you letters and write them a thank you note.

Similarly, in the Evangelical Church one of the interviewees introduced the concept of reciprocity with the phrase “give back” when he was asked about his initiative to volunteer in church activities. Yet, his remark was then modified when his fiancée tried to insert a more religious tone to his more socially-toned expression, inserting that their sense of responsibility in their congregation is not out of their appreciation for others doing the same for them, but it is a sign of religious responsibility. He states: “It’s like the love that was shown to us through the teachers that taught me and stuff. I just feel in my heart I want to give back and show and teach like what I’ve been taught”.

In the results of Research Question Two, I discussed the role of the pastors as one of the most significant attributes of the church for the Evangelical participants. However, this was not as significant for the Catholics as it was for Evangelicals because there are more priests in this Catholic Church and more parishioners; therefore, less personal and individual relations are formed. Nevertheless, a priest’s role has another form of significance for Catholics: it influences the formation of “institutional trust” among the members of the church. Like any other community, the Catholics in the Saint Mary’s of the Assumption church frequently mention the role the priests have in their own involvement as a member of their church, in the overall church well-being and the way church members perceive their own presence in the church.

Based on the different responses and comments about the priests in the Catholic Church, it is fair to come to the conclusion that priests can help the members of the church in three areas. Some parishioners consider priests as their major reason for the length of their membership. Their skill in holding the Masses, their personal traits, and their accessibility to normal parishioners are the most important qualities for a priest to have in

order to influence parishioners to stay at the church for a longer period of time and even to come back to the church if/when they change their place of residence.

HO tells us about his experience of commuting to their old church after they moved, and it was just because they loved their priest very much. He was a Mexican priest who could relate to them and help them cope with the new condition in the US. He shared,

“We just got our first house here... It's two blocks from the church. Every single Sunday and Thursday, we just travel to Montebello, We don't like to change. Our priest, our church, we just prefer to be there, no matter the distance, no matter the time. [There was] one priest, he was very glad with us. We loved him, he died.”

For some of the active members and volunteers in the church, their relationship with a special priest, even from their childhood, is influential in their current engagement and sense of responsibility toward the whole parish. EC, who has been a member at St. Mary's for fifteen years stated,

I was strongly mentored by a religious brother here named Brother Donald Annamaria ... Huge influence in my life... He taught me the significance of being Catholic as well as being able to develop in my religion, in my belief and has been very symbolic and emblematic in my life. I guess for me part of it [extra activities in the church] is what, how I was brought up with Brother Don. I can honestly say that the core as to the reason why I am so involved in here has to do with him. He devoted his entire life as a religious brother ... Well, a lot of that, I guess part of it is out of respect for him. And as well as with the ability to continue his mission.

Besides the individual effects they have upon people, priests have the potential to enhance the relationship between the parishioners, too. They can coordinate social interactions among the church members and can act as the axis for the members' relationships. “We started off as alter servers and through the leadership and through Father JE, we were able to coalesce as close friends,” stated JA while emphasizing on the role of a priest in his own life. HO and AN also expressed their gratitude to the priest of

their previous church who took the initiative to bring them to their present church and introduced them to the new priests and the new community.

Understandably, a priest who can establish good relations with the youth and address their concerns by “putting themselves in their shoes” gains a very high popularity among the members of the youth ministry. TM and JA believe they always prefer to talk about their problems (either church-related problems or even their personal problems) with Father SE, as they can connect to him easier; TM added, “he is a kid at heart”. Like the Evangelicals’ responses, the most important advantage of a priest in the parishioner’s view is his availability to them. I have personally observed that the parishioners tried not to miss opportunities where the priest joins people for banquets, dinners, fund-raisers, memorial services, etc.

Considering the two communities in terms of the roles their pastors/priests play, it is important to mention that in the Evangelical community there are two pastors who hold the main responsibilities and supervise a smaller number of people; while, in the Catholic Church, there are six priests and a much larger community to interact with. Hence, the kind of relations people experience in these two communities is different. The relations between the church-members and the pastors in the Evangelical church are more personal; while, the priests in the Catholic Church hold an authoritative and hierarchical position which makes their relations to their parishioners more of an institutional kind.

It is important to be aware of the possible negative influences priests may have on the institutional trust of their whole parish and on the parishioner’s individual faith if they deviate from any of the Catholic requirements of a priest. They can influence the number of parishioners, their growth or decline rate, the relations among members, and more importantly, the extent of trust in each other and also in their faith. St. Mary of the Assumption experienced a scandal several years ago and has suffered a drastic decrease in the number of its parishioners which also has changed the relations among members of the church.

In response to the inquiry about the growth/decline in the number of parishioners, only one Catholic interviewee revealed the story of the scandal and disclosed some details, while the rest of the participants consciously tried to hide this fact. GA, with whom I could establish a very close relationship, believed that the membership rate in the church had declined for this same reason. She revealed,

... I think there was a little scandal ... I don't believe that priests are God. There was a little thing about him, have had fathered a child before ... And oh, my goodness, the uproar ... that priest moved away ... He was replaced by Father Chavez. A lot of things changed since then. Just a different, you could say with different management. Then a lot of the older parishioners, they're used to getting their own way... There was a point when a bunch of people had keys to the church. There were unknown copies everywhere. You could trust almost everyone. But, And [the older parishioners said] we would change the management. And I think some people walked away.

Consequently, a priest's role in the formation of trust, especially generalized trust, is critical in the Catholic Church since they are considered to be the sole sources of divinity and people's connection with God. However, based on the different responses, this kind of sentiment is much stronger among the older parishioners in the church than the younger generation. For the younger generation, a priest's authority is less divine and more bureaucratic. According to GA,

I think so. I think there was a little scandal. We try to think much. I mean again, I don't believe that priests are God ... No, they're... Believe me, I've seen them, because of what I've worked, where I've worked in there, I've seen them in their not-so-formal beings. They're guys and they talk and they kid around and I know they're not saints.

Summary of Research Question 3

Social networks formed among some of the church members (mostly among the active members of the church) are shaped and strengthened due the regular interactions that

they have during their church activities. These people try to establish social contacts with the ones they are more exposed to and to whom they hold a shared responsibility in the framework of their ministry duties. While this is true about the members of particular ministries, no desire or effort of active church members exists to reach to others in the church and form a wider network with regular church members. It is necessary to add that there is more potential for growth of these social networks in both of the churches which is overlooked by the church leaders. This potential can be used for the well-being of the individuals, the congregation and the community this church belongs to.

Results for Research Question 4

Research Question 4: “What are the factors that tend to keep individuals in faith-based initiatives as volunteers and providers of services for their community?”

Through reading the literature on social capital, one notices that community and voluntary involvement are among the most important and basic features of social capital. This question tries to understand the crucial elements and initiatives in a member’s activism in their religious community. The question was addressed by exploring the self-reported factors in the interviews that focused on the reasons why members volunteer their time, effort, and energy in faith ministries. It further addressed the subordinate issues originating from the participants’ volunteer involvement and accomplishments in community work.

The overall responses were fascinating. Analysis of the responses in both Catholic and Evangelical communities revealed significant findings with regard to the participants’ volunteer activities: none of these people are involved in any other form of community or volunteer work except in the church. The church serves as the only place where these people contribute their time to community work. In the Evangelical Church, there was only one person involved in community service outside of the church and she was doing it in order to avoid paying her traffic fines. There was one other person who started doing some secular volunteer work outside church, but he quit because he believed, “it was

more important for me to save my time for the church; if I am needed here as a volunteer, my first priority is church.” The same concepts are repeated in the Catholic Church, where one of the research participants had tried to engage voluntarily in secular groups and stepped aside due to moral reasons.

The participants were initially asked about the reasons for their involvement in voluntary and community work which alludes to their own active membership in different ministries. The general responses in both communities showed that the church participants volunteer their time, energy, and efforts due to the teachings and preaching of their theological doctrine. Participants believed that it is their divine obligation to care for the community and to help the needy. They assumed that it is an act of commitment to God and Christianity. There was a general consensus across the two congregations regarding why members volunteer in the ministries.

In response to the questions about the reasons for their volunteer engagement, the participants in the Evangelical Church referred to several motives among which spiritual, meta-physical and religious reasons outweigh any others. The central idea of the people expressing religious reasons for their activism was that they had learned from their religion to serve people or that they have been “called upon” to step forward for volunteer work. They assumed that their active membership in ministries was the best way to accomplish their religious mission purposefully. This sentiment pertains to the “Christian Brotherhood” and an idea that among Christians, “there are no leaders or followers, only servants of God and each other” (Mark 9:35)¹⁷. For example, BY expressed her love for community work in the church and her special enthusiasm about working with younger children in the youth ministry,

When you grow closer to God and you grow closer to the love of God it's easier for you to spread that love... You want to spread that love to other people... You want to help them ... We've all gone through the ups and downs, the good times and bad times, and the people who have experienced God's love, grace and

¹⁷ (Mark 9:35, King James Version)

mercy, you want to spread that to others, you don't want other people to be miserable. I think that's one of the biggest reasons

Similarly, AN shared,

... he [Jesus] came and he served people. That's what he did. And Jesus was a servant ... I want to be more like him. And I want to serve the way he did". MW stated, "I do volunteer [in the Choir team], because God asked me to. We have divine obligations to take care of our church and we do so by being there for every work.

Alongside the spiritual and religious reasons mentioned by the participants who are all active members of the ministries, there are other social and materialistic reasons for the people to be involved. Their social reasons included the social responsibility they feel to their community, general concerns for the youth, a desire to provide a safety net for the kids, and the influence children can have on their parents' impression about the church. The latter can work as a marketing mechanism for the church. A great deal of these efforts was focused on the financial needs of the community; as the pastor of the church stated, "As I like to say to my congregation: we not only want to give people the bread of life, we want to give them a loaf of bread."

On the other hand, the behavioral concerns they expressed were mostly directed to the younger generation in the neighborhood and in the church itself. CG expressed a sense of responsibility to the children who were in the youth group and wished to provide those kids with a safety net, at least when they were physically in the church. He said,

Because a lot of kids that come through problems and stuff, like, bad family background. A lot of traumatic things happened to them. We just want to create an atmosphere where they feel loved and they feel safe and they kind of have a safety net.

Caring for youth was one of the most important issues that church members were concerned about and had the passion to work for. Yet, the question remains: Are the Evangelical volunteers in the church willing to cooperate with each other for this end or is there a sense of personal responsibility that motivates them to help? In this case, they

only find satisfaction when they feel they have personally contributed and it is not important for them if anything effective has been done for the youth of the community.

Beyond religious responsibility and social concerns, there are two other paramount factors that influence the Evangelicals' extent and quality of volunteer community work in the church: the length of their church membership and their own experience in a particular ministry as a child. Seven out of ten participants were in this particular congregation for more than 15 years and their memories as a child in the church were among the first stories they joyfully recited.

As predicted, the concept of community work which is all taken place voluntarily in the Catholic Church, is the most frequent concept that emerged during the interviews. Except one woman who was not involved in the youth group of the church, all of the other participants interviewed were members of the youth group for more than three years and even some of them were the founders of this youth group. Therefore, most of the examples and references mentioned here deal with the church's youth ministry. It is important to state that the discussions on community activity and volunteer work are highly intermingled because all of the community works in the church are voluntarily performed and also all of the participants' individual voluntary efforts are limited inside the church.

Like the Evangelicals, religious reasons are the most important factors for the Catholic participants to do any community or volunteer work inside the church, besides the routine prayers and Sunday services. Their sense of responsibility is basically formed out of the religious mission they feel they bear as a Catholic and that they are asked by God to help his people. EC, 24, who is a second generation immigrant in Whittier and identifies himself as a "full Latino" articulated, "I believe that just going to church and praying helps you feel better. It gives you communication with God. But, God also gave you the means. If you have the means to help, you should do that as well."

Among the ones who feel the religious duty to do community work, there was one single case who gave a more spiritual and meta-physical tone to her justification; she believed her activity in the church is an act of reciprocity with God and she sensed a “calling” to join the youth ministry of the church (which is a recurrent concept in the Evangelical Church). GA, a first generation immigrant and illegal Mexican in Los Angeles, voiced that,

... And we believe that everything happens for a reason ... I kind of got the urge, got the call, I wanted a youth group ... And there was always that kind of calling, that I know the need, that something need to be done ... I remember listening to a guy once, a long time ago, saying, God told me to take care of his things and he'll take care of mine and then I said fine, you take care of what I need you to take care of, and I'll take care of what you need me to. Because, that's what he was trying to tell me...

Later, she continued about her viewpoint on reciprocity and her expectation that her actions would be reciprocated. But, her concept of reciprocity has no social function and is not community-based. She defined her reciprocal relationship with God and believed that she did not expect to receive any physical/material return for her activities, even in the form of generalized reciprocity from her church community. GA said, “this is my business with someone else [God].” This classification also fits into the same spiritual and religious initiatives of volunteering in a faith community.

For the Catholic participants, the second most repeated reason to join the volunteer activities in the church, especially the youth ministry, is the deep concern over the physical and mental safety of the youth in their community. Many of the interviewees expressed their concern over their community’s well-being in terms of the crime rate, the physical threats young individuals were exposed to, and also the mental and physical abuses and discomfort these youth may experience in their homes. In response to the question about her motives to be in the youth ministry, GA stated,

Especially the kids now, I hear a lot of the stories. I hear what's going on at their home... They are at risk... There's many things they're doing on Monday through, every day other than

Thursday. But on Thursday because of the group, And if there's any little thing in the youth group that they see that may deter them, maybe one time, maybe more than once, maybe guide them a different way.

Based on the analysis of the Catholics' interviews, childhood experiences were also important in the motivation of individuals to volunteer for community work in their faith institution. These childhood experiences can range from pleasant encounters with a priest, religious person, etc. to unpleasant experiences with a staff person in their own childhood youth ministry. EC shared,

Well, I guess part of it is out of respect for him [Brother Donn], and as well as with the ability to continue his mission. His mission was he wanted to unite the Hispanic community and the white community.

Religious teachings from childhood about helping others and “brotherhood” were equally influential, especially when people grow up. The childhood teachings influenced people differently which is reflected in the various ministries available, like youth groups, food distribution programs, fund-raisers, etc.

Concerning the responses of the participants from both churches, there is one more issue left which cannot be considered as a factor in people's motivation to do community work; yet, it was often expressed in different stories about how people first got interested in initiating their engagement in the parish they currently belong to. Based on the participants' stories, having a family/friend/companion in the group was an effective additional factor to their initial tendency to get involved in the church. JA, a 21 year old nursing assistant, mentioned that she first took a friend with her to the youth group so that she would not be alone. Later, she was the reason some of her other friends, and even her own boyfriend, joined the youth group's leadership team.

To conclude, there was consensus across the interviews in both churches regarding why members volunteer in the ministries. Like Evangelicals, the main reason for the Catholics to be actively involved in the church is their sense of religious commitment,

desire, and their willingness to show their religious beliefs beyond their words and prayers. AN, 42 and a first generation immigrant from Mexico, said, “[When I want to help in the church] I'm always thinking what would Christ do in this case, in my position? That is very important for me.” Their engagement makes them think that they are completing their mission as a “good Catholic”.

In addition to non-material volunteering activities, both Catholics and Evangelicals tithe and contribute to the church financially. With regard to the volunteering patterns among the participants of the faith institutions, financial contribution and tithing is another attribute of volunteering. Based on the data from the Catholic Church, the young participants displayed an unexpected attitude about tithing. Except for the Catholic adults who have their whole family in the church and who tithe regularly and donate on any possible occasion, the younger members of the Catholic Church who even had jobs - but still live with their parents - do not tithe as habitually and do not abide by the weekly suggestion donation of 10% of the outcome.

To explain this trend, these younger members typically discussed that they could not afford to tithe regularly (and only when their budget allowed); instead, they showed their support for their parish through their volunteer activity. TM, a computer technician in a school, shared “We try as much as we can to contribute but we have bills and everything else.” Or, DS, who is working in the church as the Spanish catechesis coordinator, defended her irregular tithing. She stated,

With my financial situation, I don't make a whole lot of money here, and I'm not working too many hours. I don't work a whole lot of hours, and with school, and I donate when I can, basically. I'm not doing it on a weekly basis. I do it a few times a month, or when I can.

On the other hand, there are Evangelical youth who showed a very strict and committed sense of obligation when it came to tithing. This commitment existed even in the youth who still lived with their parents and who volunteered their time, energy, and skills on several other occasions. Even the ones whose parents tithe regularly in the church took

enjoyment and pride in paying their own part. However, this comparison might be more reasonable if there was a full account of these people's financial status.

Summary of Research Question 4

Generally, the common themes regarding the reasons for volunteerism among the participants of both Evangelical and Catholic communities were that God demands that people help others, not only in the church, but also in the other areas that can influence social issues and initiatives. It is commonly believed that doing volunteer work in the community is a religious duty and is described as a sense of religious fulfillment for the individuals. The next most prominent concern that results in volunteerism by different congregants is the concern for the youth's mental and physical health in the community.

THE THEMES FROM THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

Based on the data extracted from the interviews, there is a set of ideas expressed by most of the participants from the Evangelical community. In addition to the issue of religious conversion, it is inferred that there is a major reason in the formation of religious identity among the Evangelicals. Their childhood religious experiences and the way they were exposed to the church and their faith community as a child (mostly with their family) were highly significant in their current comprehension of themselves and their role in their church.

For Evangelical participants, it was important to be in the right place of worship. They had a very clear image of what they expected from a church and what variables shaped their full membership; as one may call it "qualified membership". There are some qualities a church must have that make the members feel a sense of belonging to their community. This level of analysis lies below the social capital level; it works as the bedrock for the awareness of social cohesion among the church members in further levels of analysis. The most eminent factor in the "qualified membership" for the congregants was the pastor and the role he plays in different church functions. The

pastors' accessibility, sociability and the way they present themselves to different people are the most influential factors for being perfect for their role.

Furthermore, the size of the church and the interpersonal relationships among the congregants adds to the measures of "qualified membership". Next, an ideal church should be a venue for its members to actualize their care for others and the desire to help others - a sentiment which they inherited as Christians. This idea can be complementary to Robert Wuthnow's (1996) statement about the church's role as a place to instruct the spiritual dimension of caring. In addition, the church should function as the members' "home"; it does not need to supply them with any kind of material services, it just needs to secure its congregants' feelings about being able to accomplish their life mission in this church. Therefore, "qualified membership" is formed when a church can meet all the mentioned requirements by a congregant, when full-hearted members grow in numbers excessively, and when the sense of belonging flourishes with the least amount of effort at the church leaders' side.

Regarding social capital among the Hispanic Evangelicals in My Friend's House, I need to base my analysis on some general findings. Based on the participants' responses, the meaning of the group bond was different to various people. There are two concerns that should be addressed while considering the social bonds in the religious community; first, how they understand the group bond as a concept, and second, why it is important for them to shape these bonds. Generally, there were some indicators of social capital observed among the members of this congregation, like considering the church as a support institution for the people in need and also their passion to work as volunteers in different community projects carried out by the church.

Regarding the support for the congregants, the church's responsibility as a supporting institution is to embrace its members with their spiritual/religious needs and uphold them financially in times of hardship. The financial aspect of help was the most salient form of assistance church members described; but, they mostly consider this form of help for

other members of the church and do not project any specific benefit they may use out of the church's support system. They see themselves more as "support givers" than "support receivers" - which was their ultimate desire. However, in practice, they all in a way benefited from the advantages of being in the church community. They mainly consider themselves a part of the whole "support" framework and explain their dominant discourse regarding the church support system for the other congregants.

Regarding their volunteerism in the church, spiritual and religious reasons preceded financial reasons for their active membership in the church's volunteer activities; however, the difference is not very distinctive. The main argument is that they did volunteer in the church projects because they were "asked to", "called upon", "chosen for", "saved for" and "living for". The most obvious form of their cooperation involved helping the ones in need financially and in the next step to protect the younger generation of the community from social ills. While volunteering in the church community projects, the Evangelicals were making efforts to accomplish their life mission. Pastor Jim Ortiz articulated, "As I like to say to my congregation: we not only want to give people the bread of life, we want to give them a loaf of bread".

Trust and friendship networks are other constructs of social capital. As explained thoroughly in the previous part, there was a very scarce form of "generalized trust" among the members of this congregation; while, the two other forms of trust - "individual trust" and "institutional trust" - were relatively noticeable, especially among people who work in one ministry in the church. It is also essential to notice the potential existing in this Evangelical congregation for "generalized trust" to grow. Since the pastors have huge influence on their parishioners, this is solely the responsibility of the pastors to expand the thin bonds of trust to thick bonds of trust that benefit the congregation, the congregants and also the whole community. Evangelical priests could play the role of a broker to link different groups of people together. To this end, they can introduce small scale joint projects for the "not very active" members of the

congregation and recruit them to work together. Evidently, effective bonds of friendship and trust grow out of these frequent meetings and encounters.

Based on Putnam (1993a) democracy is one of the products of social capital and group cohesion. He believed the higher the amount of social capital, the more democratic the society will be. This theory is also applicable to smaller societies, like religious groups. To examine this, the participants in the ministries were asked how they usually come up with new decisions for the ministry programs and who makes the decisions. All of the participants involved agreed on the fact that as the leaders of the group, they could make suggestions, but all the decisions went through the pastors - they had the last word on everything. Though, all the other members seemed happy with the way it worked.

It is ironic, considering that Evangelical churches are assumed to have a “horizontal” structure, which would be more democratic. The structure of the relations was not fully “vertical”; yet, in a group of eight adult leaders that can decide upon a special program for the youth group, all decisions should be approved by the pastors, even the ones which do not require any financial considerations. Similarly, a very important issue in the newly established ministry called “Royal Rangers” occurred over the name selection for the congregation; although there was a voting procedure, the pastors had the last say on this decision. In this same vein, the leaders and members of the ministries did not stand at the same level and did not hold an equal share of power.

To take the level of analysis a bit further, it is essential to notice that on the specific concept of social capital, there was not a clear conclusion to be made. Some of the very important concepts in the study of social capital were not apparent in this congregation and at the same time, it is not correct to assume that social capital – in any form – does not exist in this community. There were traces of other important elements of social capital in this congregation, like volunteerism and community work. For example, caring for the youth was the single most important issue where church members were collectively concerned about and agreed upon as an area where more planning and

energy was needed. Yet, there was still the question of whether these people were willing to cooperate with each other in this regard or if it was simply that their contributions fulfilled them individually. Based on the observations and the responses, a very limited number of people (a closed circle) in this church cared about each other, but did not feel the obligation to work “with” each other to address the needs of the community.

In this context, there was another approach in how people related to one another in the church. Based on some elements of social capital, a relative understanding of social cohesion existed; yet, it is an artifact of other motivations among the congregants, namely religious and financial reasons. The congregants who revealed some levels of social capital did not engage purposefully in the church social activities because they were not aware of the positive implications of social capital for them and their community. Whatever they offered as a member to their community originated from their sense of religious responsibility and some kind of spiritual/meta-physical justification.

They were engaged in volunteer work, food distribution programs, youth ministry, and women’s rehabilitation centers; they believed these were the only ways they could be good Christians and followers of Jesus. Hence, social capital emerged as an artifact of this trait and way of thinking. Based on this finding, the church leadership could focus on this element and accumulate the human resources for community work, and consequently a noticeable amount of social capital would be reproduced.

THE THEMES FROM THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

According to the previous findings, there are some similar facts about the voluntary engagements of Catholics and Evangelicals. Participants from both churches mentioned that religious reasons were the major motivations for their involvement. While being true, there was a difference between the Evangelicals and Catholics. Although the main reasons are religious in the Evangelical community, there were more traces of meta-physical justification for their involvement, like the concept of a “calling”. In the

Evangelical mindset, a “calling” plays a very important role and specific incidents, like meeting a special person, were among the occasions that changed the person’s perspective on religious commitment and their sense of responsibility. Meanwhile, there was only one example among the Catholics who believed there were reasons beyond everyday material reasons for her engagement in the church. She shared, “And we believe that everything happens for a reason.”

For the Catholics, engagement in church activities fulfils their religiosity and provides them with an opportunity to accomplish their mission. In addition to their sense of religious responsibility, their major concern is the physical and mental health of the younger generation in their community; therefore, they feel a responsibility to protect them from possible threats. It is also important to mention that childhood experiences play an important role in their current commitment to the church. All of the interviewees have attended church services with their parents and have started coming to this church together as a family. Moreover, there was a clear trend that people who were active in the church had parents who were active in the voluntary activities of the church, too.

Based on the categories drawn from the Catholic Church’s support system, there were several types of support that churches give to their members: financial support, spiritual support and network support. Catholics pay an equal amount of attention to financial and spiritual support in the church. They revealed their own quest for spiritual reinforcement in the church and also their own readiness to assist financially in the church through volunteering and fund-raising events. Extending ones network of friends and important contacts was another form of support which people accessed more in this Catholic Church than the Evangelical Church. Whilst this advantage was not conceived by everyone and many did not grasp the significance of such opportunities, some of the Catholics tended to recognize its existence.

On the friendship and social relations front, three levels of social relations existed: general relations, individual relations and group-based relations. For the Evangelicals, the

relations with the normal church members stayed at a very distant level and one could even say that there was almost no relationship. Although this finding is both relevant in normal conditions and in some special cases like tragedies, the general level of sympathy obviously grows. On the other hand, on the individual and group-based levels, Catholics (especially the active ones) established very close and sincere relationships with their church fellows to an extent that these relationships overshadowed their social life outside church and most of them defined their best friends (or at least one of their best friends) as someone in their church. The key to this strong friendship is the length of friendship and the frequent exposure of ministry members to each other. Nevertheless, norms of good friendship have spread among the new volunteers and short term helpers, too.

Like any other church, priests were the gate-keepers of the Catholic Church. They were valued by the members of the community and could attract more parishioners if they possessed the three following characteristics: friendly personality traits, accessibility to parishioners, and skills to hold impressive Masses. Unfortunately, besides the formal preaching of “brotherhood” in their sermons from the Bible, the priests did not play a constructive role regarding building/enhancing social relations between their church members. This could also be due to the higher number of parishioners in St. Mary’s in comparison to My Friend’s House. On the other hand, the Catholic priests have a very crucial role in the formation of “generalized” and “institutionalized” trust in the church and among the parish members since they are seen as the intermediaries between humans and God.

As revealed by the observations and the interview responses, Catholics seemed to demonstrate more trust in their church fellows when it comes to material issues (e.g., business transactions); although, this trust could easily fade away in the face of incomplete and unsatisfying service. However, these same people would not easily trust their church fellows for more personal tasks like babysitting or tutoring their kids. They would first prefer a family member for help and would only refer to their fellow-parishioners in order to introduce them to a reliable person for the task.

On the generalized level, Catholic participants did not show great amounts of trust towards each other; but, they show a more positive attitude towards the church regulars and the ones they mostly spend their time with (like the core team members of the youth group, members of the Golden Age Group and the volunteers). In the Catholic Church, institutionalized trust is the most important form of trust in terms of religiosity because the priest is the representative of God and people can be connected to God through him. In St. Mary's church, the institutionalized trust cracked after a scandal broke out in the church. It is safe to say that the existing institutionalized trust in the church transformed into a sense of belonging to the community among its parishioners - a community which could diverge from God's holy laws. Overall, the level of trust corresponded with the duration of friendships, the number of frequent encounters, and the size of the parish.

Unlike Evangelicals, who named several reasons (physical and meta-physical) why they chose this church as their place of worship, Catholics mainly started attending this church by way of geography (or proximity to their homes) and then started to find their expected attributes in this church. In addition, Catholics expected their church to be like their "home". Home can be defined as a place where they take comfort, hold bonds of trust with other members, and find solace whenever necessary. This also confirms that they believed in the support system the church provides for its members. However, this home was too big for its members to sense this family-like feeling with everyone; hence, the feeling was shared between small circles of people with longer friendship backgrounds.

Based on close observation and the interviewees' responses, the decision-making process was democratic, or at least more democratic than is stated in the literature about the hierarchical system in the Catholic Church. The ministry members hold a major share in the decision-making process. However, if a controversy happens, the priests have the last say in both churches.

Since conversion in the Evangelical Church was discussed in details, the one rare instance of conversion in the Catholic community should also be discussed. It is not

because it is a regular trend or an ever-spreading attitude, but to understand the reasons and the influences St. Mary's church has on some people to convert. First, the reasons for the person's conversion were not religious at all. The convert attended the services of this church and was impressed by the activities of the youth group and their welcoming attitude (and notably, his girlfriend was one of the leaders). Second, the major difference between the convert in this church and the others in the Evangelical community is that the extent of religiosity has not changed in this individual. His knowledge of his previous religion was as low as his current religion and the only condition that changed was his engagement in the youth group. More importantly, he lacked the passion new converts usually show. He even did not tithe regularly, which is expected on a habitual basis from a new convert. What stands out most in this analysis is the very constructive role the youth ministry in the Catholic Church plays in attracting new people and changing their lives. Because, as he described himself and from what was observed during the services at St. Mary, the services he used to attend in the Protestant church were not very different from the ones in the new church; what changed in his life was his introduction to and engagement with a dynamic group of youth who interact on a regular basis.

One last topic that needs consideration is the racial issues in the Catholic community. The church leadership has an agenda to remove the racial barriers between Hispanics and whites. Although the majority of the church members are Hispanic, the church tries to integrate them with the white minority of the church and also tries to help the immigrants to assimilate into American society easier. This is potentially a good driving force behind collective political actions that took place in the church; yet, this agenda did not move beyond inside-church activities. The church leadership did not intend to be politically proactive and believed in inside reforms. However, existence of such agendas can be very helpful in the formation of greater social capital in any community.

SUMMARY OF QUALITATIVE RESULTS: OBSERVATION AND INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS

The research participants discussed their perceptions on how activities in their specific church influence social capital. They addressed the mission of the church and its ministries, their goals in the church, the reasons for and processes of becoming involved in the various ministries, the benefits and advantages of participating in church activities, the trust between church members, the interpersonal relationships among the members, and their religious background. Not all of the participants could articulate the dimensions of their various internal and external church associations; therefore, some participants were quoted more than others.

Themes that arose from the interviews were: a) religious background and conversion experiences are important in the formation of social capital; b) the ministries target the spiritual, social and material needs of congregants and the community; c) three different levels of trust (from very low to very high) exist among the people depending on the ministries they are involved in and the length of their membership; d) there are strong interpersonal relationships between the ministry members; e) the major reason for congregants' involvement is religious and spiritual; f) community safety has a high priority for the congregants and the role it plays in their social engagements. As such, the theories of religion and social capital were applicable to this study.

Results of the interviews reflect that membership in church ministries have major influence on the formation of bonds of trust and close interpersonal relationships which leads to high social capital. Furthermore, the results reveal that the participating churches have a huge potential for social capital and more material benefits for the whole community. There is a clear distinction between types and levels of social capital depending on the size of the church and their demographic characteristics. However, it is important to mention that ethnicity did not have a significant impact on the outcome of the study, except the issues regarding immigration and illegal immigrants in the church.

In carrying out the mission of the church, participants of both Catholic and Evangelical churches adhere to their religious beliefs. There are also different levels of social capital lodged within the church. The activities within the ministries influence the level of social capital acquisition. Beyond the general similarities that exist in both religious groups, there are some specific qualities and relations unique to each of these groups. The differences in acquiring social capital in the two communities are mostly related to the background of the participants, the religious structures of the church, and church relations themselves, rather than the differences in the social capital constructs.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This is the one of the rare studies of the Hispanic community that focuses on the influence their religious contexts have on the ways they acquire and practice social capital in their church. The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, it was meant to discover the meaning and the function of social capital among Hispanic Catholics and Evangelicals. Next, grounded theory was employed for the analysis of the gathered data to develop a theory of Hispanic civic engagement in respect to the influences of their religion and their interaction inside and outside their congregations. Two Hispanic Churches, one Catholic and one Evangelical, participated in this study to explore the impact religious denominations have on the social capital of an ethnic community. The participating churches were chosen based on a convenience sample and were located in one zip code area. Descriptive data were gathered via field observations and interviews, with a major focus on members of the ministries in the churches.

Findings from this study suggest that Hispanics understand civic engagement as community involvement. Participants in both communities in this research study engaged in their church-related activities for two major reasons: 1) to accomplish their mission as a religious person and 2) to help those who are in need which is itself learned through their religious teaching. However, the priorities and the preferences were different for both of the two religious denominations. The common theme across this research was that the practices of the congregants are based on two sets of effects: the beliefs and rituals practiced in the church to facilitate their relationship to God and their religious socialization and spiritual background. It was proclaimed that God is the center of their lives - a guiding force in their everyday living - and rules on everything they do.

Based on the collected information, it is perceived that the ministries of the church influence the community and its members from spiritual, religious, material and social perspectives. The framework in which ministries are designed and administered in some specific programs relates directly to the core elements of social capital. Members of the

ministries share a common interest in specific areas with a defined goal. Social interactions between church members take place in a friendly atmosphere and the responsibilities carried by them are based on the norms and regulations of the church. There are certainly some beneficial effects of their interactions and relationships that sometimes go beyond the church boundaries. Overall, congregants reveal a connectedness to their respective church and to the ministries in which they were involved. They learned a common belief in the teachings of their religion which is considered a guiding force in their daily life.

APPLICATION TO THE THEORY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Regarding the concept of social capital, there was not a clear answer concerning which denomination acquired a higher amount of social capital -- this research is qualitative in nature and thus the focus is on the *process* of social capital formation and differences in existing social connectedness. The results were fairly surprising. The themes that emerged from the participants' responses throughout the project regarding the structure and function of the ministries reflected the core constructs of social capital mentioned in the literature.

Robert Putnam (2002) maintains that approximately 50 percent of the social capital in America is embedded in religious institutions or is religiously affiliated. The official mission of both churches tries to address and target these elements of social capital; however, the design was not properly accomplished in both communities. It is customary for faith institutions to intentionally plan, design, and/or administer ministries based on the common interests of a number of its members; the goal is to grow trust and reciprocity among the members. It is understood from the responses (both by church members and the church leaders) that the activities within the ministries are natural occurrences based on religious missions and social needs rather than informed attempts based on theories of social capital.

Most participants, and also the church leaders, were not familiar with the terminology of social capital; however, some of the concepts they described paralleled the concept of social capital. The congregants mainly expressed words such as duty, responsibility, mission, commitment, support, bond, and closeness to convey their understanding of their social relations. Therefore, it was essential to revisit the theory of social capital and study the infrastructure of the churches and their activities.

“The theory of social capital is a framework including multiple aspects of social relations, marked by norms, trust, and reciprocity” (Williams 2007). The outcome of this study suggests that the theory of social capital is partially relevant to the process in which social capital is demonstrated in faith institutions. In the qualitative phase, both congregations were reported to have an equally average level of social capital; although, different facets of social capital and its formation processes differ in the two congregations. The organizational structure of both congregations is comprised of ministries: smaller units of congregants who have specific goals that are part of the overall mission of the church. Members join particular ministries based on their interests or by necessity. The duties carried out are rooted in church norms, which implant shared interests and encourage cooperative actions. However, church norms vary from congregation to congregation, based on the church structure, denominational rules, and personal attitudes of the church leaders and the congregants.

The members have grown to have faith in one another, solve collective problems, and develop trust with less effort in the ministry levels than with the general congregation. In particular, for long standing members of the church, a level of trust already exists based on the longevity of their relationships and that they have several opportunities to meet and work collectively. The ministries have specific goals, members work closely together with interactions that are face-to-face and frequent, and individuals get to know one another on a personal level. Trust is enhanced via this structure. The data collected in this study revealed that there are different levels of trust between members. Mindful reciprocity rarely exists and members clearly articulated that it is not important if their

good deeds are rewarded since they are doing it all because of God and their sense of religious responsibility.

If any form of social capital is exhibited, it is bonding social capital. Bonding social capital is the interpersonal connectedness observed in closely-knit communities, which is formed over an extended period (Putnam 2002). It is a dimension of social capital that focuses on the needs and interests of the group members to the extent that it provides emotional support and empowerment. Very few cases of bridging social capital and status-bridging social capital is exhibited in both denominations and even those scarce cases were limited to the Catholics.

APPLICATION TO THE THEORY OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

The Social Networks Model refers to a person-centered entanglement of social relationships. It is characterized by the following constructs: reciprocity, intensity, cohesion, and density (Wasserman & Faust 1994, Moody & White 2003). The social network models did not fully correlate to the organizational structure of either of the researched congregations, and especially the Evangelical Church. This research showed that the interpersonal relationships in the church ministries are unyielding. Since the congregants' membership and participation is all voluntary, members of the church ministries come together based on common interests and work closely together on different goals in order to accomplish the mission of the church. The relationships are nourished because of this and therefore it allows people to get to know each other on a more personal basis. Relationships that are formed in the ministries and on interpersonal levels are mutual and characterized more by emotional closeness and trust than the relationships in the congregation as a whole. These relationships were to some extent strong, which supports a natural exchange between congregants and how they interact with one another. In terms of reciprocity, church members volunteer their time, effort, and energy to faith ministries; however, the magnitude to which resources and support are exchanged in a relationship is undefined. The theory of social networks was

applicable to this research; although, not all of the constructs of the theory were clearly articulated and supported, like density and reciprocity.

APPLICATION TO THE THEORY OF RELIGION

It is necessary to note that the primary mission of the church is to meet the spiritual needs of its congregants. Spirituality and religious ideology were two of the important factors expressed by participants in this study. Religion is a concept that promotes an understanding of oneself and the world around it and establishes the balance of one's relationship to oneself, other people and God.

In this study, one Catholic and one Evangelical church were the social institutions under study. Based on the common themes, it can be assumed that a set of beliefs and rituals facilitate the understanding and relations of the congregants with God. The analysis of the responses revealed that the church is a system of bonding through which congregants are channeled. Bible study, Sunday school, discipleship classes, and women and youth ministries were all designed to educate the participants about Christianity and being the ideal Christian. The extent to which the congregants' behaviors were influenced by religion was not the purpose of this study.

Providing emotional comfort, social solidarity, guidance in daily life, and spiritual bliss are the attributes congregants desire in both Evangelical and Catholic churches. These constructs were demonstrated throughout the study in both congregations with some minor differences in their distribution. Participants discussed the social connections within the church and its impact on their life inside and outside church. Participants believed that their conduct should not be limited to the borders of the church, and should transcend into other aspect of their life. However, it is not well-perceived how much they have tried to accomplish the same agenda and to what extent they were successful.

A major Christian conviction expressed during the interviews is caring for the needy. Based on the responses, it shaped the major share of the initiatives for the congregants'

volunteer and community work. This theoretical construct displayed itself through various church programs and community service. Therefore, both churches function beyond their primary mission as a place of worship and spiritual reflection. Churches, especially the Evangelical Church, happen to be an integral source of social stability and support in their defined communities.

ANALYSIS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL CONSTRUCTS

Besides the general findings -- which are relatively similar in both communities and are repeated in the literature -- there are several categories that need comparative analysis because there are notable differences between the two congregations' perception and practice of those categories. Here, the constructs of social capital are argued as follows: networks, volunteering, and trust.

Networks

Robert Putnam (2001:19) in his definition of social capital mentions that "social capital refers to connections among individuals- social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" and he explicitly considered the social network as his unit of measurement. In studying the social networks of the Evangelical and Catholic communities, a line between people's outside and inside church social networks should be drawn. Although, these two criteria in each of the congregations may share some common areas, it is better to analyze the different spheres of social relations separately.

For Evangelicals, life inside and outside church are two separate entities. The friendship bonds formed outside of church (who are always referred to as best friends) are very strong and exist just among a small number of people. These friendships were initiated at school or family engagements. These friends are mainly Hispanic and from one of the Protestant denominations. While being very small, this is a group which is referred to in times of crisis and leisure. This group holds a very important position for the participants.

On the other hand, for Catholics the social network formed outside of church is smaller than the Evangelicals and it shares a larger space with their social networks inside church. Catholics referred to few people who belonged to their “outside” church social networks that they considered their best friends. Almost all of the participants mentioned some of their church fellows as their best friends with whom they can trust most in times of trouble. Unlike Evangelicals, whose best friends came from outside church, for Catholics at least one of their best friends was among their church friends. For Catholics, the circle of close friends was mainly dominated by their church friends. Additionally, their friendship network outside of church was also dominated by Hispanics who were not Catholics and were also from school, like the Evangelicals.

Focusing on the friendship networks of Evangelicals and Catholics formed inside the church, Catholics had a wider social network than the Evangelicals. However, their social network should be discussed on three levels; first, the core team members relations (active members of the church), second, volunteer relations to regular church members, and third, regular church members relations and the extent of general communication in the church. In both communities, their social network model was an ascending triangle, with the most connected and most active on the top and least active and least connected on the bottom. The active people in both communities held very strong and family-like relations, as depicted in Figures 1 and 2. While the same trend was true among the usual volunteers in the Catholic Church, the Evangelical volunteers did not reveal a family-like bond with their fellow volunteers.

Figure 1. Social Networks of Evangelicals

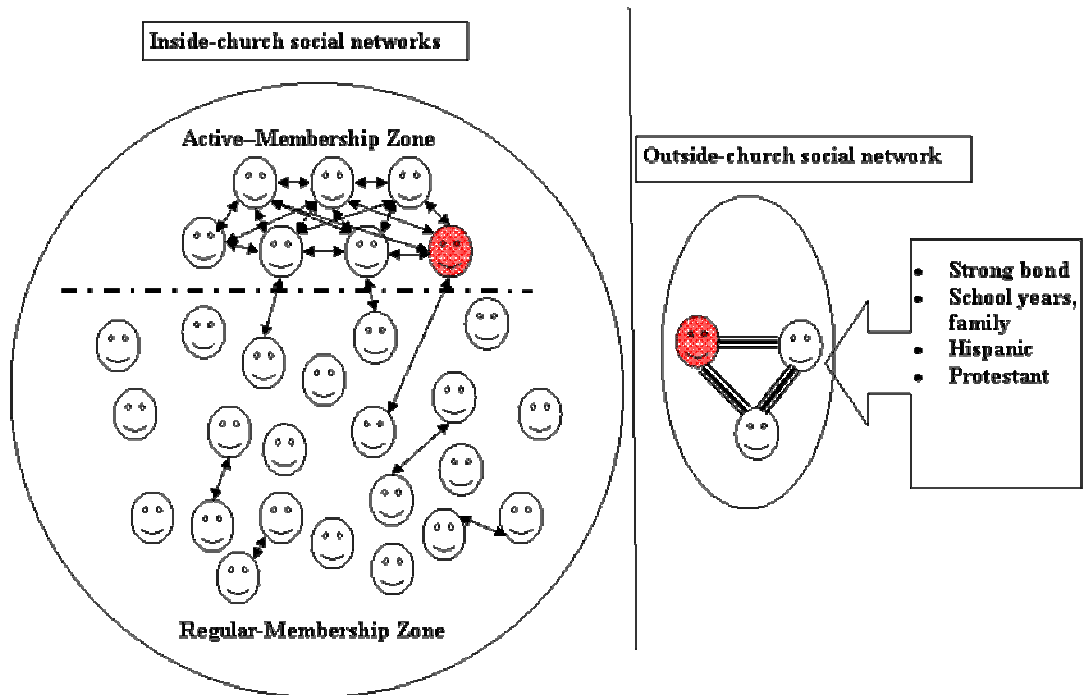
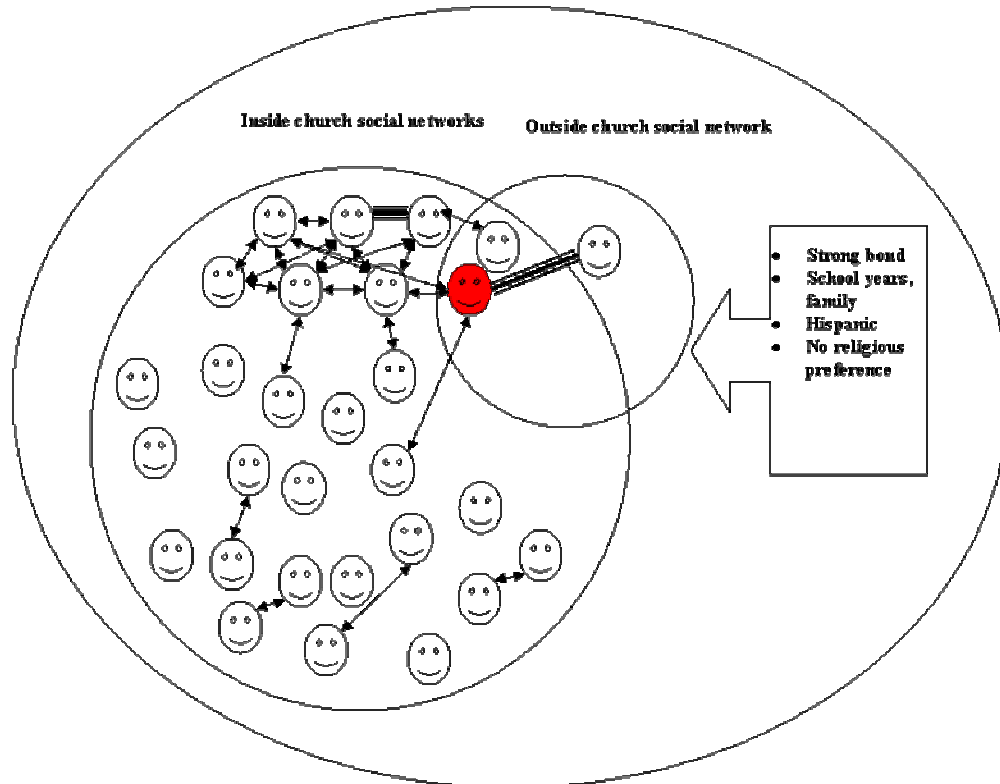


Figure 2. Social Networks of Catholics



On the second level, the church volunteers happen to meet the regular members in two contexts: first, during the weekly services and second, in the youth ministries when the volunteers engage with their children. They see each other frequently and talk to each other about their children's issues. Naturally, a "relationship" is somewhat formed, which is neither strong nor long term. In social capital analysis, the most important level of analysis is the social network among the regular church members. Both communities lack a consistent, equally distributed and noticeable network among its regular members. There were very weak ties that basically existed on the verbal level rather than practiced in their everyday encounters with each other. Yet, to put these all together, I assume that the extent of general social networking (level three) is equally weak in both communities while active member social networking (level one) is stronger in the Catholic community.

Evangelicals revealed slightly better general relations with their fellow congregants due to the expressive form of services and rituals. They hold hands, they hug each other, they form prayer circles together, they greet each other several times during the service, they sing together, they dance together, they hear about each other's problems during the service, they pray for each other's problems and embrace each other as a fellow Christians during the service; therefore, positive sentiments grow among the members of the congregation. The size of the church is also very important in the formation of friendship networks among the congregants.

On the first network level, as mentioned, Catholics function more positively in comparison with the Evangelicals. The youth ministry in the Catholic Church is a productive group with a huge potential for social capital building in the church. The core team members of this group were the founders of the youth ministry in the church and considered themselves as the owners of the youth group; therefore, they had more liberty to make some specific set of decisions in the group. Consequently, they needed to closely cooperate with each other and it led to their spending a lot of time together.

Trust

Three levels of trust emerged from the analysis of the field notes and interviews: individual trust, generalized trust and institutional trust. Individual trust describes the trust that exists among the individuals in a religious community and is mainly formed due to long term friendships and frequent meetings. Generalized trust is a level of trust existing on the public level of congregation/parish and is significantly important in the estimation of social capital. Last, but not least, is institutional trust which is a form of trust in the official element of religious communities, like the trust in the *role* of the priest (not the individual priests or pastors), the ministries or the faith itself.

Both churches were not fundamentally very different regarding the concept of trust on all their levels. They showed a high amount of individual trust among their members who were long-time volunteers and people who had known each other for a long period of time. However, members of the youth ministry in the Catholic Church reveal a higher degree of individual trust than their counterparts in the Evangelical community: the Evangelicals' life outside and inside church are two different entities and Evangelicals do not invest as much as Catholics invest in their relations inside the church. On the level of generalized trust, both Catholics and Evangelicals exposed a disappointing amount of generalized trust. Evangelicals and Catholics exhibited different levels of institutionalized trust, though. Evangelicals showed a great deal of trust in their pastors and entrusted them with their personal problems; while the Catholics (which in essence were expected to have a higher level of institutional trust) lack this trust. This is influenced by a scandal that happened in this particular church in recent years. It is important to notice that the institutional trust in religious communities can influence the formation of generalized trust. Institutional trust, whose major promoters are pastors/priests, encourages the generalized trust among the people; the church and the pastor's/priest's judgment are fully credited by their congregants and their opinion on other people and issues are well received by their congregants/parishioners.

Volunteering

Based on Putnam's five dimensions of social capital (community and organizational involvement, engagement in public affairs, volunteerism, informal sociability and social trust), several comparative conclusions based on the research in both communities were made during the data collection and analysis process. The congregants in both communities did not have the conscious understanding of the concept of social capital. The general sense of brotherhood and helping others during times of hardship is seen as the most valuable for them because God asked them to do so and it is considered a virtue in their religion. Furthermore, it is very important to look into the patterns of community work and voluntary activism since it is one of the most important characteristics of social capital existence. First, based on the responses in both churches, community work is more important for the Catholics than their perception of their church as a support institution. In the Evangelical congregation, on the other hand, the church's role as an institution of support prevails over their own community work in the church.

Unlike what Putnam (2001) said - that people who are more involved in their faith communities tend to be more civically involved and do other forms of volunteerism outside the church more - people in both of these communities (Evangelical and Catholic) spent all their free time volunteering in the church and rarely even considered doing other volunteer work outside their church. Church was the only place for volunteer activities. They preferred to spend all their extra time for the benefit of their church, as it was the only institution they sincerely cared about after their family. The rare example of civic engagement by the members of both of the churches was either forcefully done or was quit due to the lack of moral imperatives in their implementation.

Evangelicals and Catholics were also similar in terms of their basic reasons for helping their churches via their extra activities. The major reason for them to do volunteer work in the church originated from their religious beliefs - the desire to fulfill their religion's demands of being a servant to God by helping others. They primarily believe that the

more they serve people, the more they are serving God. The slightest difference was evident in the Evangelicals' perception of the concept of "calling". Their desire to do volunteer work in the church was based on the spiritual and meta-physical experience that occurred to them and made them believe in the cause and pursuit of such activities. Such a concept did not exist among Catholics, except in a rare case with a very different interpretation. Besides the religious reasons, there were social reasons for community work in both communities. Both groups went to great lengths to secure the safety of the teenagers in the groups and expressed major concerns over the dangers youth were exposed to in their neighborhood. They believed churches could replace the streets as a place for the teenagers to spend their spare time. Church not only got them off streets, it also educated them to be better human beings and less harmful citizens in the dangerous heart of their city.

On the other hand, there was another side to the Evangelicals' story which was not reported to such an extent among the Catholics. The group leaders in the Evangelical community share opinions about the function of the church's different ministries; they assumed the more pleased the youth were in the church, the more their parents would invest in the church, in terms of financial assistance and attendance.

The way volunteers in the ministries interact in church activities is a determining factor in influencing the quality of social capital in these two communities. Because both churches possess a number of volunteers that will help for any occasion in the church, judging social capital solely based on the number of volunteers does not reflect its full extent in the churches and thus does not fit into this qualitative research. Putnam (1993) in his study of regional governments in Italy found that horizontal relations (representation of high social capital) culminated in good government and social prosperity, while vertical relations (representation of low social capital) led to social inequality. Putnam (1993:137) asserts it like this: "some networks are primarily "horizontal", bring together agents of equivalent status and power. Others are primarily "vertical", linking unequal agents in asymmetric relations of hierarchy and dependence".

Regarding the social relations in the church ministries and among the volunteers, Catholics and Evangelicals revealed different models. The Evangelicals' model of relations in the church ministries is "vertical-vertical" and the Catholics' is "horizontal-vertical". Volunteers in the ministries in the Evangelical church are single units who have a vertical relation (hierarchical) with the pastors and group leaders. They individually undertake responsibility in the group and try to perform their best, regardless of a need for cooperation with other volunteers. As such, they are individual volunteers under the authority of the pastors and the group leaders. The group leaders are in a vertical position to the pastors and these volunteers' relation with each other is formed through the pastors. The success of the project is not the concern of the members; rather, the major issue for the members is to perform their own part and be accomplished volunteers individually (Figure 3).

On the other hand, Catholic volunteers in St. Mary's Church revealed a different model. These volunteers are single units with more connections between themselves in one hierarchical level (horizontal) and in a vertical relation with the priests. In the Catholic Church, the parishioners have less personal and more institutional relations with the priests. In such cases, the priest is the one who makes the guidelines for the whole church (Figure 4). In this community, the results of the volunteer work are more important than the individuals' sense of responsibility being met. Moreover, all the volunteers are involved in the decision-making process (because they all hold the same position hierarchically) whereas in My Friend's House, it is the pastor and two other members who make the decisions and the rest usually administer them.

Figure 3– Vertical– Vertical Pattern

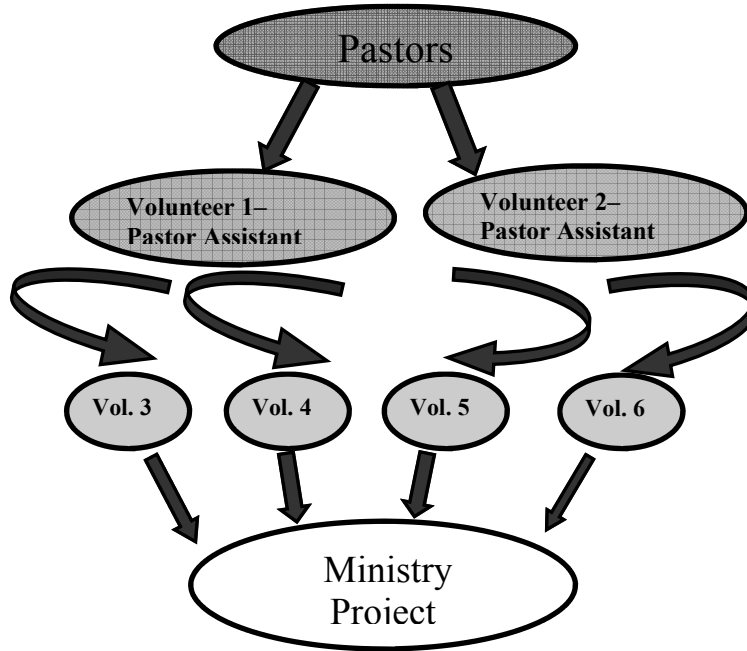
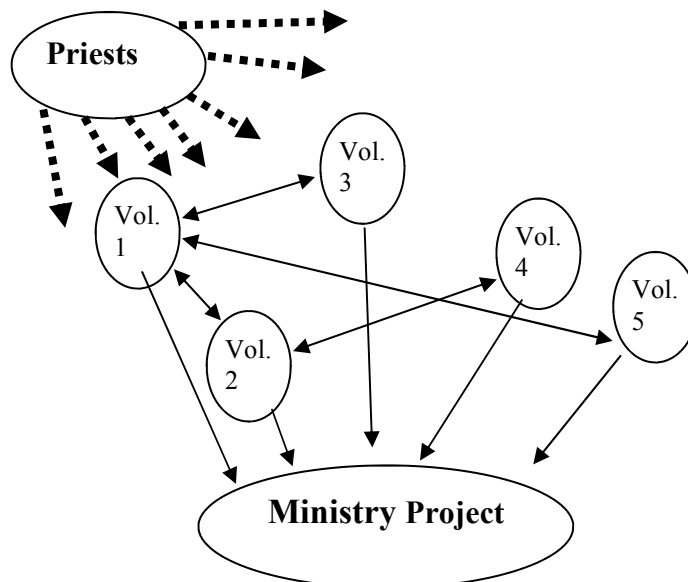


Figure 4– Horizontal– Vertical Pattern



The forms of authority, either horizontal or vertical, in a faith community certainly have great influence on the creation of social capital, especially in times of decision making in different ministries of the church. Based on the literature, Catholics with a more hierarchical structure should reveal a less amounts of social capital than the Protestant denominations where there is less institutional hierarchy and naturally more tangible forms of social capital. Yet, the reverse results are observed. As explained in more detail in the previous chapter, on the level of church leadership (priests/pastors) and the volunteers, the Evangelical Church has a more hierarchical authoritative structure than the Catholic Church where individual volunteers and ministry members can vote and offer suggestions for important decisions.

Taking into consideration all of the above concerning the reasons and patterns of volunteerism, Campbell and Yonish's (2003) claim that the relationship between volunteerism and civic engagement seemed not to be perfectly applicable for these two case studies. They believed that the networks of reciprocity are formed among church members, it makes them more civic-minded, and "that civic-mindedness, in turn, leads to a willingness to engage in voluntary activity". While in this research, the sequence of civic engagement started with the church-goers desire to be voluntarily active and the longer they spent time in the church, the more civic minded they got and this long engagement led them to reciprocal feelings.

In addition to the reasons mentioned, there were two factors that influenced the willingness to become more engaged in different ministries; first, is the length of the membership, and second, is the congregants' childhood experiences, either positive or negative, in church. Having a companion in the church is a very determining factor in the continuation of church involvement, which is related to the concept that the Catholic's devotion to the church is more of a habitual act than the Evangelicals whose dedication is more religious. As such, Evangelicals' attendance or participation is not necessarily

accompanied by a friend or family member; while, for Catholics, someone is more often accompanying them in the church and also in the volunteer activities.

Based on the responses from both communities, a peer's company is a very important factor in the participation and volunteerism of congregants and especially for active members in the ministries. The volunteers, specifically in the Catholic Church, volunteer with their friends or in a group of friends. Participants reported that they enjoyed their experiences because they were able to spend time with their friends while engaging in church activities.

A CRITIC TO THE SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY

One of the major findings of this research criticizes the formal theories of social capital and their depiction of social capital constructs as inter-dependant indicators which have an "either all/or none"¹⁸ position in a community. Although I confirm the general finding that religious attendance has been found in other studies to be positively associated with major measures of social capital, such as volunteering, participating in civic activities, showing trust and close friendship and participating in small support groups, I skeptically question the homogeneity between the different important elements of social capital based on the responses.

In this research, the participants do not hold similar positions when addressed about different measures of social capital, like networking, trust, reciprocity, volunteerism, etc. They have shown disparate responses to theoretically related concepts in the social capital framework, like networking and trust. For example, some of the congregants claim to hold very good relations with others and have an extensive network of friends in the church; yet, in their responses about the people they can most trust to share their problems, they would rarely refer to any of their church members as a confidant. In

¹⁸ This means that a community should have all of the social capital factors to be considered as a community with high social capital; otherwise, it is not a community with a considerable amount of social capital.

addition, none of the congregants, without any difference in their levels of networking and relationships, felt the emergence of reciprocity, especially generalized reciprocity, as a social or moral requirement in their community due to their relationship with their church-fellows. There was only one case in both communities, who expressed a concept similar to generalized reciprocity but they were not aware of the social consequences it bears for them. They did good acts to each other in the hopes of being good Christians; they did it because Jesus Christ did it.

Furthermore, the existence of vast and very strong relations among the church members did not lead to any material use that they could benefit from. This is not an attempt to undermine the importance of social network in the creation of material benefits (e.g., job opportunities, mental and physical health, better neighborhoods, etc) which has been proven by scholars of social capital, both in the field of sociology and in political science; however, based on the analysis, there are two major findings. First, there was no consistency between the elements of social capital. These elements did not correlate with each other even in one single group of people; for example, groups that showed high levels of social networking among themselves did not necessarily have a high amount of trust between each other. This can all be understood when church members have different motivations to attend certain church activities; none of them were initially in the church to grow trust with others and they were not even aware of the fact that such sensations could grow among themselves as a result of long and repetitive encounters. Therefore, when they were exposed to such questions about trust and reciprocity, they tended to ignore and not acknowledge the existence of it.

Second, the indicators of social capital are not collectively obtained and perceived by both of the communities. For instance, groups that were proven to have high social capital did not meet all requirements for the existence of social capital on the theoretical levels like networking, trust, and norms of reciprocity. In addition, James Coleman's

three basic features of social capital, especially convertibility¹⁹, were only partially true for the church members in either of the communities and very few people with official positions in the church - like secretaries and public relation staff - confirmed the convertibility aspect of social capital.

THE SOCIAL CAPITAL DEBATE: CATHOLICS AND EVANGELICALS

Church as a Support System

Church members in both congregations consider their church as a support institution for themselves and their church fellows. Catholics and Evangelicals expressed fairly similar expectations of their church and the characteristics they attribute to their church. For both communities with a comparable social and economic class, church is primarily a place for supporting others rather than receiving support -- the majority of the participants were the active members of the church or volunteers who allocate some extra time in their life to the church for helping others materially or spiritually. In both churches, support comes in two forms: material support and spiritual support. Material support includes money offerings, time donation as volunteers, and the contact and networking support that a community can provide its members with. Yet, there is one difference between the general attitudes of church members; in the Catholic Church, the contact and networking form of material support exists more than in the Evangelical church. Actually, in both churches, contact and networking forms of support for the members seemed necessary; however, if one assumes such a support system existed, the Catholics benefit from this trend more practically.

In contrast to the theories of group cooperation which insist on material incentives as the major force to compel individuals to cooperate with others, religious worldviews and

¹⁹ Convertibility as a key feature of social capital implies that social capital can be transformed to other forms of capital, like economic and cultural capital (James Coleman, 1988)

practices—in any denominational context—have the capacity to diminish the need for material incentives when group cooperation is rooted in religious beliefs. Therefore, very few church members verified the query over their material benefits in the church, as well as the spiritual interests they receive in the church -- a church members' initial motivation to attend church voluntarily is not related to the material benefits they can access out of their involvement. Unlike the secular groups, religion-based cooperation induces collective action through nonmaterial incentives -- such as a desire to do good work -- that are often traced to the beliefs of religious communities. This is because in religious groups, rewards and sanctions are promised in the hereafter where the long-term benefits of cooperation outweigh the short-term material and personal costs of activism.

Qualified Membership

When a congregation meets the requirements of one's ideal place of worship, it may become the perfect place for congregants to remain as members. In this research, the length of membership was also related to the parishioners/congregants' initial reason to join their churches in the first place. For Evangelicals, pastors played the most important role in the congregants' attraction to the church. The participants mostly mentioned the pastors as the most important characteristic of their church. Their expectations of their pastor fall into two categories: their personal characteristics and their availability to everyone, which My Friend's House pastors mastered in both criteria. Providing a place for salvation is the second important characteristic of the Evangelical Church for its members.

For Catholics, on the other hand, geography is the major reason for joining this church in the first place; unlike Evangelicals who came to this church because of an incident happening in their life (meeting the pastor or conversion) and later found their main reasons to stay in the church. They admired a church that granted them the chance to get closer to God and gave them the opportunity to help others and practice being a good Catholic. Besides, for both groups, the idealized form of the church is the one that

functions as “home” for its members and gives them the peace and security they seek in religion. Ironically, there are very limited efforts made by any of the participants to create this family-like feeling in their church. These forms of close relations only exist among a very small number of people.

Racial Debate

One of the major differences in comparing these two communities is the issue of racial and ethnic concerns among the church members and the church leaders. In the Evangelical Church, although they mostly identify themselves as Hispanics, being a member of a minority group, who needs to be assimilated in order to push his/her own life forward, was never raised. At the same time, there is a much higher percentage of first generation immigrants (legal and illegal) among the Catholics who are in the process of assimilation in their new country.

For the Catholic participants, there are some concerns over their racial identity, the process of assimilation and their desire to overcome that barrier. That is why one can assume that the Hispanic Catholic Church can play a role more similar to the one the church used to play for African Americans, according to Robert Putnam. He believes (2001) the church was always inspiring for African Americans to mix their religion with civic activism. The Evangelical Church did not share this view because they do not have a large number of new immigrants; their major demographic characteristic is being the second or third generation of immigrants for whom racial issues have never been a concern. In the Catholic Church, some church leaders and even some parishioners expressed their interest and intention to mingle the social and the religious, but there exists some kind of hesitancy to express it explicitly in the community. Yet, both communities show very low interest in any social or political activism and they do not consider this issue as a church priority.

Class Debate

Pierre Bourdieu (1984) focused on the use of social capital as leverage in power relations and considered it private property that could be effectively used for unequal power relations. At the same time, it allows individuals to enjoy their access to their fellow congregants' resources. While being true generally, based on the responses in this research the leverage that a community gains over others as a result of their high social capital is an unauthorized and unconscious power whose owners do not utilize it in their encounters with others. Or at least, they do not recognize it. They even find the materialistic viewpoint of social relations in the church irrelevant to their own main reasons for church membership. Unlike the types of social capital produced by religious ideology, such as caring for the poor or taking responsibility for the common good, status-bridging social capital and Burt's notions of "brokerage" and "closure" in social network theory run in more materialistic directions.

As stated by James Coleman (2003) about the egalitarian ethos of the faith communities in society, it is hard to distinguish signs of social class divisions among the congregants in both churches. Both communities openly mentioned that it does not matter which class one belongs to and just being part of the congregation is the most important factor. However, there was a pattern of volunteering in the Catholic Church which underlined the class issues in the parish, despite the parishioners' emphasis on the non-existence of class issues. The more affluent people pay money and the less affluent do the actual volunteer work. It blurs the egalitarian vision that is expected as a result of norms encouraged by religious beliefs.

Sense of Commitment

The most important issue that needs to be addressed in any social study in a religious community is to probe into the religious background of the participants of the research. As articulated by the participants in this research and based on field observations, religious experiences stood out drastically in comparison with other qualities of the

participants. In this field of research and among these two specific communities (My Friend's House and St. Mary of the Assumption), it was not easy to study the religious background of the church members since there were conversion trends in both communities and it made the pursuit of their religious lineage a little more challenging. Therefore, these two categories of analysis (conversion and religious background) are discussed as one category in the religious and family background of the participants. For most of the cases, these two categories are inter-twined and cannot be taken into consideration separately.

Comparing the St. Mary of the Assumption Church and My Friend's House, the biggest difference in their sense of commitment to their church and church-related activities lies in the "formation process" of their sense of commitment. This means that Evangelicals and Catholics do not get committed to their church through a similar process; they undergo different ways to reach a common feeling of kinship in their church. Evangelicals' sense of commitment to their church is more rooted inside the individuals and is born from and revitalized by their own experiences of conversion or their parents' experiences and their exposure to it. For Evangelicals, their dedication -- attending the church, volunteering and active membership -- is more like fervor than a rational choice to enhance their social bonds and cohesion in the community. This is a pure religion-based desire to communicate with other people of your faith and help them which was invoked by finding a different form of God in their new religion after conversion. And even, for the non-converts this feeling was prompted by their long-life exposure to an expressive form of religion that pushed them to regular and active membership in church activities. For them, the devotion to the church (personally and financially) happened immediately after they converted to their new religion or perceived their religion "fully" (being "saved"), which does not take a long time for Evangelicals after conversion. For Evangelicals, the "habit of conversion" was built-up to their social activities which helped the formation of social capital in a longer process.

On the other hand, there are Catholics whose sense of commitment to their church is a gradual, self-constructed commitment. Church commitment was constructed by the Catholic parishioners themselves and was like a lesson which they practiced and learned throughout the years of their membership in the church. This feeling expanded and deepened the longer they were involved in the church. Their desire to be present and help was not necessarily a conscious act by individuals who discovered this desire via religious inception or worldview changes, but; it was acquired and practiced so frequently in the church, either by their parents or other parishioners, that it became a “habit of heart” for the other long-term and active members of this church.

Unlike the Evangelicals whose conversion made a huge difference in their perception of their role as a religious person, the cases of conversion in the Catholic Church worked reversely and conversion happened after people were initially attracted to the communal activities of the church. All this did not mean that there was no awareness about the blessing of helping others or church commitment among the Catholics; but it is important to notice that the origin and the procedures leading to their attitude and their sense of commitment to the church is different from the Evangelicals. To summarize, the sense of commitment to church activities is a less divine issue for Catholics than for Evangelicals, for whom commitment to the church is a purely religious dedication.

Theological Impacts

There are institutional differences between the Catholic churches and the Evangelical churches when it comes to the concept of salvation and redemption and how these two relate to the concept of social capital. In Catholicism, there is a common belief that the means for salvation exist only in the Catholic Church; although it admits that the Holy Spirit can bring people to salvation in other Christian communities. Catholicism basically teaches that whoever is redeemed is saved indirectly through the Church, referring to the fact that Jesus has provided the Church with all the means for salvation, like sacramental life, complete confession of faith, and an ordained ministry.

Therefore, considering Catholic individuals in search of life salvation, they are not individually responsible for their own religious salvation and it is the church who takes up this responsibility for its members. The Catholic churches have an institutional setup with some specific people who establish religious disciplines and individual Catholics do not play a role in defining religious vice and virtue. So, it is not unexpected for Catholics to be more prone to acquiring higher social capital since the Catholic churches' function itself (taking responsibility for its members' salvation) increases their social capital and the concept of brotherhood becomes a priority for the individual Catholics. Moreover, social capital is cultivated as a result of fully trusting their church authorities.

This confidence in church authorities -- institutional trust -- results in the concept of influence, in which people are not necessarily commanded by the church to bond with each other and to be voluntarily active but rather they are influenced due to the superiority that the Catholic Church has over its people. However, it is important to remember that trust is only relatively more important in the Catholic Church and obviously breaching that trust is more disastrous and can influence all aspects of social capital in the community. Because mistrust in the Catholic Church cannot be healed individually, the church should initiate a self-healing process, and wait for the general trust of the members to resurface again.

On the other hand, there are Evangelicals whose conception of salvation is different from that of Catholics. They encourage individualism and spiritual rebirth as a means of salvation. Peter Wehner (2007), states that Evangelicals in their worship tend to be informal, individualistic, and far less inclined than Catholics to rely on church doctrine. And, there is nothing within Evangelicalism like the richness and texture of Catholic social thought. They individually accept God's invitation for salvation and personally identify themselves with Christ. This clearly revealed that Evangelicals have an individualistic religious life and through all their religious life they try solely to get saved and reach the promised salvation. There is no institutional support from the church that can guarantee their salvation. Church is mainly a place where they can channel their

attempts for religious prosperity. There is not a unique approved pattern among the Evangelicals which can guarantee their future. Therefore, brotherliness is not a priority for the Evangelicals; it can only be one of the means to reach salvation. Volunteers in the Evangelical Church want to help individuals “person to person” and do not engage in a collective manner. This might be out of a biblically informed sense of compassion, their attempt to accomplish one of the requirements for salvation, or only because it feels good to help other people.

This result is relevant to the finding about these two communities’ volunteering patterns. Evangelicals do volunteer work and volunteer for community service, but they have no concern whether it is performed in other people’s company. For Evangelicals, it is important to perform their religious duty and meet the requirements for salvation; while, the pattern of collective action in volunteer work, which is the manifestation of social capital, is more perceived among Catholics.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

A grounded theory method research was conducted in two churches, one Catholic and one Evangelical, located in southeast Los Angeles. The qualitative methods employed in the study included archival research, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with the church members. In this chapter, I will highlight the key findings from the qualitative components of the study, integrating relevant literature on faith-based social capital. Study limitations and implications for future research will also be discussed.

The purpose of this study was to understand how differently Hispanics with dissimilar religious denominations act in terms of acquiring social capital within their faith communities. My primary aim was to shed light on what occurs within the different faith communities, in this case Catholics and Evangelicals, that change the way Hispanics interact among themselves and make use of their companionship with their fellow church members. Although measuring the extent and the quality of social relations is not a definite task due to the complexity of the social capital concept, the purpose of this research was to learn from these cases the potential differences between the religious denominations from the social capital perspective and evaluate their attitude toward social engagements and its consequences for their communities. These findings can contribute to the discussions of policy making among the religious leaders aimed at improving the social capital status in their communities. There are also theoretical implications for the researchers working on social capital and religion; specifically the research dealing with the differences existing in various religious denominations and institutions.

The research highlights that there are not distinct measurable differences among the Hispanic Catholics and Evangelicals when social capital indicators (trust, networking, volunteering, etc.) are examined; the major difference refers to the processes of social

capital formation and the way it influences the quality of social relations in a religious community. The concept of social capital is important for several reasons. The study of social capital provides insight as to how people construct networks among themselves. It also provides understanding of how the existence of social capital can influence a member's professional, social, economic, and political upward mobility and empower their community to be more civically responsible and democratically managed.

This research proceeded in two parts, one part theoretical and one part methodological. In the theoretical part, the literature of social capital and its evolution was reviewed, and the theory was presented to guide the measurement of social capital with the social capital constructs. The measures of social capital borrowed from Putnam (2001, 1995a) and Coleman (1988) were tested. Coleman's definition of social capital is as follows: "social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspects of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure" (Coleman 1990: 302). Further, Putnam defines social capital as "features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit" (1995a: 67).

Beyond social capital, theories of religion and social networks have been discussed to test the level of social capital in the mentioned communities in order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The second part was largely methodological, and examined the relational information and network analysis as they related to the measurement and analysis of social capital. A comprehensive theoretical and empirical framework was presented.

Several dimensions of social capital were found to exist within the two churches in varying degrees and based on various accounts. In this next section, these themes that emerged as representations of these dimensions are presented.

Trust: Literature on social capital underscores that one of the major components of social capital is trust (Coleman 1988, Fukuyama 2001, Putnam 1995a, Putnam 1995b, Putnam 2001). Both interviews with members and participant observations of activities within both communities revealed that most members felt a slight, if any, sense of trust with some specific people in their church. Those who expressed a strong sense of trust reported that it occurred mostly between board members and active volunteers and it happens on an individual level. However, minor differences existed in the Catholic and Evangelical churches in terms of their trust circles.

One's role in the church and the kind of activities they are assigned to do seem to have an impact on trust. Members in church ministries indicated higher levels of trust relative to general church members. The literature on organizational trust supports this association between trust and one's role in an organization (Kramer 1999). In addition, the length of membership in a faith community influences trust. There are three levels of trust identified in the case studies: individual trust, generalized trust and institutional trust.

Networking: The other dimension of social capital is networking. It appears to exist especially between members of the church ministries and volunteers in both churches. This finding suggests that volunteers and ministry members have developed strong connections through their working relationships. It was clear through participant observations that decision-making was based on shared goals and concerns regarding the organization and social issues addressed. However, decisions in the Catholic Church were made more democratically and were less imposed by the priests. While in the Evangelical Church, all the decisions were made by the pastors regarding the ministry activities.

Volunteering: The data from the qualitative interviews reveal that there are trends of volunteering in both communities; however, the number of volunteers is limited. The major difference between the two communities is the reason for their volunteerism. For Evangelicals, it is a more spiritual concept than for Catholics; there is always a meta-

physical explanation for Evangelicals' motivation to volunteer in church-related activities. The model of volunteer relations in the two communities is different, too. Evangelical volunteers' relations with the other volunteers and the church leadership in the church ministries is "vertical-vertical" and the Catholics' relations are "horizontal-vertical". This indicates a less hierarchical structure in the ministries of this Catholic Church.

Besides the analysis of social capital dimensions, there are more important findings that highlight the major differences between the Catholics and Evangelicals. The use of a grounded theory approach in the data analysis process led me to one of the most important findings of this dissertation: social capital constructs lack the consistency they were expected to expose according to the literature on social capital. This study challenges the previous conceptualizations of social capital. In other words, social capital constructs do not necessarily reveal a correlation when examined in a particular case. Moreover, based on the findings, one can claim that social capital in these religious communities is not produced for its own sake. Social capital in religious communities is an artifact of other motivations like religious responsibilities or a general outlook on helping others.

The third finding of this dissertation is that the reasons why people belong in the church shapes the way social capital is formed, practiced, and intensified in these communities. For most of the part, it is the theological impact. The Evangelicals' individual responsibility to guarantee their position as good Christians changes their priority from collective work to individual attempts to perform their religious duty. Meanwhile, Catholics do not personally feel obliged to secure their position to be "saved" and the Catholic Church provides them with a clear path to their salvation. Hence, Catholics are bound to have a higher sense of community life and give more importance to collective actions.

The next major finding of this research is to highlight how religious conversion among some religious denominations can influence the formation of social capital. Being committed to one's place of worship is among one of the basic requirements for social capital growth. Religious conversion in any community is the starting point for a serious commitment to the new religion and also to the new congregation. The sense of commitment to the church among the Evangelicals is mostly revitalized by their conversion experiences; while, Catholics enter into this realm due to their long exposure to the church by their family and their religious background.

There are still two points that are worth underlining. First, the major incentives of the church members to choose and stay in their congregation are fundamentally different in the two cases. For Evangelicals, an incident (or "calling") played the major role for their joining a congregation. Establishing a personal relationship with the pastors and the pastors' accessibility to them are the most important reasons for their long-term membership. On the other hand, geography is the most prominent reason for Catholics to join their parish. There are few cases of drifting away from the Catholic Church; unless however, a trust-shaking incident happens and influences (decreases) the number of church members.

The second point is the importance of ethnic issues for the Hispanic members of the church. Immigration is a constant issue. The Hispanic Catholic participants are mainly among the first generation immigrants; while, the Evangelicals are mostly from the second and third generation of immigrants to the US. The later the immigrants enter the US, the more they have concerns and needs over their social and economic status. This leads to an urgent need for connectedness and collective support. At the same time, it pushes the churches to a position for helping their parishioners to assimilate and adjust to life in America and take political and social steps to support their people.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Prior to the study, potential limitations of the research were identified and I tried to minimize them, except the ones that seemed inevitable for such a research study.

Methodological limitations. A major part of the limitations was associated with the qualitative research designs. This project explored the influence of different religious denominations on community life and social capital in Southern California and among the Hispanic community. This study was focused on two contrasting religious groups within one particular ethnic community. Therefore, this research (due to its qualitative design, the theoretical sampling and the innate difference of religions) cannot be generalized to other religious groups or other ethnic communities.

Study sample. One limitation of this study was the study samples. For interview administration, I began with the priests and the pastors and followed the rest of the interviews with snow-ball sampling. I could only find 13 people in the Evangelical Church and seven people in the Catholic Church who were ready to attend an interview session. One of the other limitations is that the interviewees are mainly the active members of the church who have experienced volunteering in the church; it would have been ideal if the perspectives of general church members could be included more widely.

Limited participant observations. Finally, due to the time limitations, organizational scheduling, and long distances in California, I was not able to observe some meetings and events that could have added to my knowledge of social capital among the church members. During the four months of my data collection, the Women's Ministry in the Catholic Church never met, and the New College Student Ministry in the Evangelical church met only twice. I believe these meetings might have provided additional insights about social capital that is developed among the members of the communities.

Time and Geography. In addition, the two research sites were located 25 miles away from my place of residence and were believed to be unsafe neighborhoods. It greatly

influenced the amount of time I could spend in the two churches, both for observation and interviews. Moreover, the overall length of my stay for the research was limited due to financial problems and it restricted my ability to naturalize in the community.

The role of the researcher as a participant and a researcher. From the beginning, I approached both churches as a researcher interested in knowing the culture of the groups and was willing to attend all the events and even volunteer on some occasions; however, it was clear that I was never completely an “insider” in the those communities. While members were trying to be warm and welcoming, I think awareness of the fact that I was collecting information about their church and their activities may have limited the information they chose to share with me. This condition was more complicated in the Catholic Churches, where there is generally a lower interest to share and contribute to academic research.

The other important limitation of the research was my ethnic and religious background. Being Muslim and coming from Iran, whose relation with the United States is hostile, I had a difficult time getting into both communities and more importantly to gain the trust of the individuals to open up to me. Some of the church members were hesitant to disclose details of their belief and even church activities. Transforming my position from a strange outsider to a researcher interested in their culture took a long time. Perhaps participating as a volunteer for a period of time prior to data collection would have allowed me to create a stronger atmosphere of trust among members and consequently would have led to more in-depth details regarding members’ opinions and experiences.

Instrumental limitations. One of the other limitations of this research was my limited knowledge of Spanish. In English, one cannot adequately describe all of the expressed ideas and behaviors, specifically in the Catholic Church, where there is a large number of people whose only language is Spanish. I had the ability to communicate with them in Spanish on informal occasions in the church; but, to grasp the details and the deeper meaning of the responses, I needed to conduct the interviews in English.

Despite these limitations, this research design and its samples provided the most effective way to gain an in-depth understanding of the influence of different religious denominations on the formation of social capital and the ways congregational members perceive social capital.

DIRECTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study might serve as a springboard for further investigation. For example, the question of whether trust and reciprocity, as constructs of social capital, must be present in order for people to produce social capital or attain higher social capital has been called into question by the results of this study. Trust was not present excessively among the participants as a necessary item in their efforts for collective action, and reciprocity was the last requirement in their agendas. Therefore, feelings of trust and reciprocity as two essential ingredients to social capital creation have been called into question and deserve further exploration.

Another potentially fruitful area for further research is to study the potentials of bridging social capital between the two different religious denominations of Hispanic churches; like the chances of bridging social capital between Hispanic Catholics and Hispanic Evangelicals. With the current research and the knowledge we have from the religious and social properties of each community, investigating the odds of bridging social capital in order to stage social and political demands on the local and national level is beneficial.

Another area of further inquiry might be to examine in more depth the conversion trends among religious communities and the way conversion changes the converts' perspective and attitude toward communal life and social engagement. This research can be applicable to all different religions and ethnic communities to understand if there is a general pattern of social behavior in post-conversion life.

Another potential area for further discovery highlighted by the current study is to employ the same research design in other religious and ethnic communities, where there has been

little research done, like Muslim Americans (between Sunnis and Shias) and also Iranian Americans (between individuals from different immigration generations). Furthermore, further research on this topic would enrich the social capital literature and the information on other religious and ethnic backgrounds. To present a more comprehensive picture of the social relations in these communities, it is better to use both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

In addition, some of the findings from this research have very important implications for community organizing and development. Many of the motivations described here for becoming involved in community activities should be examined further.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

Name of Faith-community Leader

Title

Name of Faith Community

Address

Whittier, CA. (ZIP)

Dear Reverend, Evangelist, etc:

This is Azadeh Ghahghaie and I am a doctoral student of American Studies at the Freie University of Berlin, Germany. For my PhD project, I am conducting research to explore the influence of different religious denominations on the formation of social capital among their members and assess the functions of social capital among different religious groups. Social capital refers to the social networks among the members of a group that strengthen them to work together for a common objective. This in-depth study examines the following concerns: (1) The perception of church members from their contribution to community, (2) The reasons for the church members' activity in different ministries, (3) How social relations are formed and fostered in a religious community. I believe this

research gives insight to the church leaders about how to empower their community and mobilized them for special purposes.

I would appreciate if I can have the opportunity to discuss this project with you personally and ask for your participation in this project. Additionally, I am seeking the permission to interview the members of your parish/congregation. I should also mention that all the information I receive from the interviews will be kept in the strictest confidence. I appreciate your consideration for this request. Your contribution can provide insight into the social life of Catholics/Evangelicals and portray a real picture of their experience.

I thank you in advance for your consideration and participation.

Sincerely,

Azadeh Ghahghaie

Freie Universität Berlin

John F. Kennedy Institute

APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDELINE

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me and I do appreciate your interest in this project. As I said earlier, I am interested in the social activities engaged by Hispanic Catholics/Evangelicals in the churches and I would like to investigate their experiences regarding their relations with their church-fellows. I am trying to gather information regarding your perspective of this congregation's contribution to social capital and community life. I am most interested in your experiences and your understanding of civic engagement inside and outside the church. I am interested in factors that encourage your participation in this congregation and the activities associated with it. So as much as you can say, I would like to learn about your (civic) activities that you believe are related to your church membership.

Nothing you share will ever be identified as you personally. You can skip any question you do not wish to answer and feel free to interrupt me whenever you need an explanation of why a particular question is asked, or you need clarification. If you need a break during our interview, please let me know. Now, do you have any questions before we start with the interview?

Part I: Background questions

First, I would like to know to whom I am talking to and what religious, social and family background is feeding my research.

- a. Name, age, job
- b. Duration of faith
- c. Convert/non-convert
- d. Duration of congregation membership
- e. Reason to choose this church
- f. Most important characteristic of this church

Part II: Reasons for participation/ influence of religion on civic engagement

In this part, I need to know how active the participant is in church affairs; whether they are regular church members or they are active members and the reasons for their answer.

- a. Days of church attendance
- b. Membership in any of the church ministries (or volunteer work)
- c. The reasons for their active membership (volunteering)/ the reasons for their inactive membership (having friends or families?)
- d. Their responsibilities in the ministry

- e. The goals they pursue in the ministry/ why would they volunteer for community work?
- f. Benefits they get out of their membership
- g. Outside church volunteering
- h. How do you think you are different from others who are not involved in social and volunteer activities of the church?

Part III: Social relations inside and outside the church

Here, I try to investigate the social relations of the interviewees to see if they are connected with the other congregants

A) General friendship patterns of the individual

- a. Who is your best friend? If there is a further question, I will specify inside church and outside church?
- b. Does your outside friends ever come to your church?
- c. How do you spend your free time?
- d. How do you spend special occasions like Christmas, Easter, 4th of July, New Years Eve?

B) Bonds among the church members

- a. How are the relations with church members in general?

b. How are the relations with other volunteer and active members of the ministries?

c. How are the relations of the volunteers with the church leaders and also the regular church members?

C) General networking

a. How do leaders of the ministries or core team members communicate among themselves?

b. Do you spend some spare time with your church friends after the services or the ministry meetings?

c. Where do you usually get your news?

Part IV: Trust

Trust is one of the important factors in the evaluation of social capital and it is very difficult to measure, since it is a very complicated concept. Here, I will address some important aspects of their lives and see who they trust most in their lives.

A) Non-material important issues

a. Do you have kids?

b. Who takes care of them when you are in the church?

c. Do you have a babysitter? If yes, who is it?

d. Who can you trust most to take care of your baby?

e. If cannot answer about church members, can you trust anyone in the church to take care of your baby?

f. Where do you find for a babysitter? family? church? newspaper? websites? friends?

g. Is religion and ethnicity important?

h. who is your family doctor?

B) Material important issues

a. What do you do if you want to buy a new car or house?

b. Do you try the church bulletin?

c. Do you make a deal with a car dealer or a realtor if they are in your church?

d. Do you deal with someone if they are members of your church?

e. Is religion and ethnicity important?

C) Final Question

a. How would you describe trust between the members of this church?

Part V: Cooperation

I am trying to figure out the patterns of support, help and cooperation among the members of the community.

a. Has it ever happened that someone needs help? What happened and what was the church's response?

- b. Have you ever been helped by church or the church members?
- c. What is your perception of members' willingness to help one another? (e.g., support for celebration or personal accomplishment, support during crisis and personal tragedies, etc)

Part VI: Conclusion and exit question

- a. How to you see your membership in this church in future?
- b. Finally, is there anything else you would like to add that we did not have the time to discuss but would be important for me to know?

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