Foundational Social Ritual Practices of Parish Life

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Eating, Worshipping, and Hanging Out Together

By

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FOREWORD

This book is about parish life but it is not about how to populate and organize parish councils and commissions, or how to organize an adult education ministry, a youth ministry, Christian service ministries, an evangelization ministry or any other parish ministry for that matter. Rather, it is about what comes before the development of such ministries. It is, as the title of the book suggests, about those foundational aspects of parish life that precede implementing any such ministries or programs a parish might undertake. Foundational therefore in the sense that people must come together first, interact with one another, socially connect with one another, form a sense of community before such ministerial efforts can really flourish throughout the parish and beyond. The foundational question then is how does the parish develop hospitality or welcoming ministries, that is, go about socially connecting parishioners with one another? Body to body social connections must precede the organization, development, and implementation of parish ministries, but it is our experience that many parishes take these preliminary actions, efforts, and energies for granted. We propose, much along the lines of what Pope Francis has suggested, that parishes need radical hospitality ministries populated by people who have the charism for inviting, welcoming, and engaging others so as to begin processes of socially connecting parishioners and non-parishioners much like the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults suggests for the pre-evangelization period. Professional paid parish staff play a vital role in pre-evangelization or pre-communal experiences but rarely recognize the importance of this role. That is why we tend to blame parish staff for non-robust parish life even though it is obviously not all their fault. Yet we chide parish staff for *not* having a greater sensibility for ritual or social ritual practices and how, moreover, to imaginatively start such ritual practices for these are foundational to building strong robust parishes. We suggest then that parish staff form a greater awareness context about ritual practices and their foundational necessity for building community. Eating together and initiating small groups in the parish, named special purpose groups (SPGs) throughout the book, are foundational for building community and developing, sustaining, and implementing a host of parish ministries. We suggest, foundationally speaking, therefore, that parish staff and parishioners alike sink efforts into building large kitchens and having weekly meals

together to which the whole parish as well as seekers are invited to simply *be* with one another, hang-out together. It is in such moments of gathering, especially around food (and perhaps music), that the Holy Spirit, the Holy Trinity, can inspire, motivate, and energize people of various backgrounds to form strong social connections so as to go out and spread the gospel. Sociologically, examining parish *foundational doings* as well as offering practical pastoral suggestions for enhancing such doings is the aim of this book.

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I would like to acknowledge first and foremost John Ligas, a good friend and companion with whom I have discussed and hashed out ideas about Catholicism and parish life for many years now. John and I have conducted research on youth ministry and the Catholic Mass and have written journal articles on both these areas of parish life. John kindly read this entire book and made many fine-tuned editorial suggestions that have improved the book immensely. John also has a keen eye for detail and consequently has helped me at every stage of getting this book ready for print. Moreover, chapter six is based on findings from our research together on the Catholic Mass. So in many ways, John is the co-author of this book. I am deeply grateful to John for not only his efforts in helping me finally finish this book but also for his enduring patience, even temperedness, and graceful comments containing alternative points of view. Simply put, this book would not exist if not for John—I am deeply grateful John. Of course, all errors are my own.

I wish to thank my wife Cathy and my son Kevin for putting up with me during this writing process and for the many and varied messes I created and left for them to straighten-up (I'm busy). A lame excuse from a lame guy whom they have endured in love. Kevin in particular has discussed several of the ideas herein with me over the last two years as we prodded each other about the meaning of the pandemic and its impact on social connections in general. Indeed, we published an article on social media (see bibliography) together based on our conversations; granted, most of the ideas were his. We both believe, in the long term, that social media has a negative impact on social connections. Social media is a key reason why I emphasized over and again in the book that face to face or body to body contact is necessary for genuine community. Thank you Kevin for these discussions and hopefully many more.

I also want to thank the guys at the *Handsome Men's Club* (believe it or not I qualified for membership) for their unswerving and unrelenting jabs and candid talk—*McCallion, what the hell are you talking about*—and for hounding me out of my academic tower and grounding me. To Jim Brock, my brother-in-law and *axis mundi* of the men's club, for his kindness, intelligence, and comedic flair. To John LeDuc, whose garage the club has occupied for as long as I have been a member, for his kindness,

humor, and intelligence, but mostly because he's the club's fashion guru–John shops at Duluth Trading Company after all (a store that has cured plumber's crack for years). To Phil Dupree, for his kindness, intelligence, and humor (he convinced me to eat an olive one evening; it was funny, but I guess you had to be there). Indeed, Phil is perhaps the funniest member but you have to *wait for it*. Finally, to Al Montambo for his overwhelming kindness and sense of good humor. I have come to name him the *scrap ninja* because every time, and I mean *every* time, I mention I need something Al inevitably says "I have one of those, and you can use it." I appreciate each and every one of these men and thank them for their honesty and friendship.

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Finally, I dedicate this book to my wife Cathy, my real *axis mundi*. All my love.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AOD – Archdiocese of Detroit
CSL – Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
EG – *Evangelii Gaudium* or The Joy of the Gospel
SC – *Sacrosanctum Concilium* or Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
CCR – Catholic Charismatic Renewal
NE – New Evangelization
RCIA – Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults
SBCC – Small Basic Christian Communities
SPG – Special Purpose Group
Vatican II – Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church, 1960-1964

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Vatican II and its many documents, the sacred scriptures, the traditional sacramental system of the church, and homily after homily speak about, among so many other things, community. Nevertheless, we suggest that many priests, parish staff, and laity are blinded as to what community entails. Hold that thought! First, think about the fundamental liturgical principle of Vatican II in *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (CSL) that changed everything about how Mass was celebrated—full, active, conscious participation.[1] The emphasis and essence of that principle assumes community. It assumes that the more parishioners actively participate in Mass the stronger the community will be—whatever actively participate means. Whatever it means, it is assuming community—either having one or needing one. The sacraments are celebrated communally not individually. Pope Francis has proclaimed over and over that we are saved together not as isolated monads.

I grew up in the suburbs and remember wanting something to happen to bring us all together, which the Tigers winning baseball's World Series in 1968 did for a night (we drove around in the back of Mr. Ryan's pickup truck yelling joyously and flinging graffiti throughout the neighborhood). It was a moment of great collective effervescence—community. I wanted to feel part of a tribe, I wanted solidarity not confrontation, I wanted to fit in not keep roaming, I wanted community not dislocation. The Church and its leadership talk and write about community *ad nausea* but don't seem to understand the ingredients involved in having or building community. Americans in general are clueless about what community entails even though we speak about it endlessly and want it dearly. We know there are many reasons for being unaware about community, but, simply put, the sociological explanation is *mobility*. Granted, many other variables are complicit but upward social mobility is

[1] Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy in *Vatican II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Constello Publishing, 1996), no. 14.

the primary culprit. Again put simply, community requires geographical stability not mobility.

We suggest, in other words, that Americans stop taking for granted that upward social mobility is a good thing and begin thinking of its deleterious consequences. In short, in order to have strong communal connections, Americans need to stay put geographically, physically, bodily, socially, psychologically, and familially. Staying put does not mean you cannot travel, explore, or roam; but this moving and traveling has to be temporary with the conscious intent of always returning home to one's community. Maintaining social connections means tradition. It means having a community of memory.[2] It means staying put and appreciating the friends and community to which you are connected. So why don't Americans, we, appreciate our community, our friends? Yep, you got it, because of upward social mobility or in some cases downward social mobility. Either way one has most likely physically moved away from family and friends. Moving, in other words, is a social laceration to the communal body, a sort of bleeding out. Mobility thins out our social connections, desynchronizes us from each other, makes the social body bleed—a violent and literal tearing apart of communal tissue, organs, and skin. Mobility disperses us, it does not unite us. With mobility we only receive slices of sociality because much of our lives are spent on mobile devices like Iphones, Ipods, Ipads, and laptops. These mobile devices along with upward social mobility move us away from friends, neighborhoods, parishes, schools, and even our own families. We have more rituals of dispersion than solidarity, more rituals of mobility than staying put, more rituals of disembodiedness than rituals celebrating embodied physical proximity. Mobility is destructive to communal bonds while social concentration builds communal bonds.

We argue that the local parish's genius is in creating opportunities for social connectedness. The kinds of social connections occurring in a parish can be numerous, limited only by imagination. Once an opportunity for social connectedness does occur, those connections continue and become stronger if social ritual practices among the connected arise (addressed fully in chapter two). Other local organizations have this potential as well but the parish is uniquely positioned to do just that—get people connected. In doing so, therefore, the parish also allows social ritual practices to arise in and through these connections. They in turn have the potential to create any number of smaller connected groups within the larger

[2] Robert Bellah et al. use this phrase 'community of memory' to articulate what they mean by community. See *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkley CA: University of California Press, 1985).

connected parish. In other words, the parish has unlimited potential to build and maintain community. Moreover, the parish is uniquely capable of producing community because parishes, being religious institutions, already possess a ritual robustness other institutions in society do not possess given these other institutions focus mostly on work and money or less intense forms of social connectedness. Yet this genius is taken for granted, remaining unconscious among, in particular, professional ecclesial ministers—the target audience of this book. Consequently, nudging professional ecclesial ministers toward appreciating the power of ritual is one aim of this book. Arguing for the multiplication and intensification of social ritual practices in parish life is another expression of this aim. Living through a *life of ritual* is to live robustly, indeed, robustly Catholic in that parishes are pre-ordained sites of sacramental ritual practices and non-sacramental social ritual practices, more so than other institutions. Ritualizing social connectedness is, therefore, a more robust way of stating a parish's genius, that is, not just social connectedness but ritualizing those social connections in whatever way possible. Examples abound, from simple greetings that small groups develop to full blown regular ritual prayer or education that larger groups undertake. The concept of ritual will be developed in chapter two.

We argue further that this ritual genius flourishes best if the parish is imagined as a third place—a location between family and work/occupation where people gather to ritually participate in creating community. The literature on third places, such as pool halls, clubs, bowling alleys, donut shops, restaurants, coffee shops, and parishes indicate that such places are disappearing (Putnam 2000, 2020). Given the importance of third places as spaces for building social connections through ritual practices, the parish should become more consciously aware of its third place status. The problem with doing so, however, is the fact that the parish has lost its sense of being a third place due to multiple cultural forces such as individualism, suburbanization, and upward social mobility. There is a well-known literature in sociology that falls under the heading of the loss of community that we address throughout the book. But for now, we simply want to say that it is important for the parish to become more conscious of its potential to be a third place. And if so imagined, the parish would then be *open* every day and night of the week hosting one or another form of gathering (social connection). Especially in an age of rising social media, where many are tempted to socialize on their phone rather than body to body, can the parish become a needed space for people to socially and spiritually connect. Although social media is not our focus, we believe social media does not create robust communal social connections (McCallion and McCallion, 2021). So, setting that issue aside, our hope is to accentuate, highlight,

describe, and analyze the creation and flourishing of parish social connectedness (community) through social ritual practices. The local parish remarkably creates and sustains community along a continuum of social connections from deep and lasting friendships to interesting acquaintances. And this is all the more likely if professional ecclesial ministers, in particular, imagine the parish as a third place filled with opportunities for social connections that are sustained through social ritual practices.

The parish imagined as a third place saturated with social ritual practices is our intuitive preference, that is, the parish as such seems obvious to us (indeed, parishes used to operate as such during the late 19th and early 20th centuries in America—see Putnam (2020). Yet, given our research in parishes as well as our experiences in our own home parishes, we conclude many parishes are promoting non-dense social ritual practices or weak social connectedness. Weak because, for one thing, parishes are closed most days of the week. Why? Because parish life is taken for granted and community is taken for granted. As straightforward as the idea of the parish as community is (most parishes have this in their mission statement; "St. _____ is a community of . . ."), it is taken for granted, that is, not intentionally thought about or worked on. Taking community for granted does not work because now Catholic parishioners are living non-dense, non-robust, non-thick Catholic parish lives. Why? Again, because the parish is closed more days of the week than it is open, indicating the existence of only a limited number of opportunities for social connections and community building. This is understandable in the sense that parishes exist in American culture and American culture values individualism more than communalism, especially since the 1970s (Bellah *et al.*, 1985; Putnam, 2020). This cultural force can easily orient Catholics, as with all Americans, toward embracing individualism over community. In other words, American Catholics are more American than Catholic. Catholics are not, for the most part, intentionally living counter-culturally by hanging out at their parishes with other Catholics on a more regular basis; that is, more than just on Sunday morning. Intentional parish living, at least by a good number of parishioners, is required or Catholic identity will slip away bit by bit (100 parishes have closed in the Archdiocese of Detroit (AOD) in the past 60 years). We need more persistent intentional parish living especially given these broader cultural forces that are regularly pulling and pushing parishioners away from living robust parish communal lives. The pull and push of consumerism, work, individualism, scientism, entertainment, and social media appear too much to resist or even keep at bay. Yet it is living robust communal lives imbued with social ritual practices that will most help human flourishing. We flourish best in community. Indeed, that is the

thesis of this book in a nutshell. We know this sounds simple, but then why are parishes closed most days of the week? Why are they not rocking with activity? We attempt to answer these kinds of questions theoretically and practically, starting with theoretical explanations in the next chapter. But if abstract theoretical ideas are not your cup of tea then by all means skip chapter two for it is not absolutely necessary in order to understand the remaining chapters.

The genius of parish life as a third place of social connectedness saturated with social ritual practices is often unattainable not just because of external cultural reasons such as individualism and America's anti-ritual bias (Douglas, 1970), but also because of two internal ecclesial reasons: 1) inadequate professional parish staffing and 2) parish staff not having a social ritual practices perspective with respect to their parish pastoral ministry. In an attempt to overcome these internal and external obstacles, we emphasize herein the genius of parish life from a sociological point of view and a non-systematic theological one: the parish being not only a product of divine sources (theological) but also social ones (sociological). The parish is the central arena in and through which, for most Catholics, their faith is lived/enacted. In other words, the best means for understanding ordinary Catholics is to understand how they live their faith in and through their parishes. Living their faith then depends a great deal on the robustness of parish life. And the robustness of parish life depends a great deal on professional ecclesial ministers being capable of starting and maintaining any number of special purpose groups (Chapter Three) imbued with a variety of social ritual practices. And this of course, requires parish staff members to have a social ritual practices perspective which we address in Chapters Two and Three. Moreover, if the parish is imagined as a third place where more than worship and education take place, then any kind of social connection could be viewed as making a contribution to building community. Some examples of social connection are breakfasts and dinners, and even card playing clubs. Third places are disappearing in many urban, suburban, and rural locations yet parishes are present in each of these locales, but unappreciated and underutilized as third places for building community.

We argue vigorously that paid professional leadership is needed if parishes are going to become more robust third places of social ritual practices and social connection. An all volunteer system of building parish community will not work in most parishes today because of the advanced division of labor in society that has moved in the direction of more professionalism (see chapter two). Living in a society with a more advanced division of labor, leaves members depending more and more on one another

for any number of services. Parish life is similar in its own internal division of labor which has become more complex since Vatican II. Therefore, more professional ecclesial ministers are needed to address parishioner specialized concerns, especially by starting small special purpose groups within the parish. But in order for these small special purpose groups to have sustained life, professional parish staff, to be realistic, are needed to keep these special purpose groups up and running. We believe professional ecclesial ministers are essential if a parish is to become a robust third place full of opportunities for social connections that can be enriched with social ritual practices that in turn nurture parish community vitality and growth.

Given the importance of religion in America, parishes are physical third places in and through which to embody not only one's personal religious faith but also to cultivate community, as argued above. Parishes are the canonical territorial unit in the Church where parishioners gather to worship but also to socially connect and express their faith through Christian service, education, devotions, social activities (play) etc. Even in canon law, the parish's genius is implicit in that it alludes to the parish's character as a social group (Canon 515.1) [3]. Indeed, the term "parish" has its very etymology rooted in the Greek word indicating propinquity, while the Latin term for parish is *parochial*, a stable community of the faithful within a particular church (parish). Hence, both understandings imply a social group of people who gather, an activity easily accomplished if community members live near one another; proximity, again, being a foundational factor of community social connectedness. Although there are formal parish statuses and roles in and through which social connections are made, we focus on the more informal social connections produced through parishioners' interactions with one another outside formal authority relations. We recognize, of course, that the parish lies at the intersection of other social forces than just community, such as, geography and authority (Adler *et al.* 2019), but we do not address them systematically. Yet, in the end, we devote the majority of our efforts to unpacking the social force of community and how the parish is one of the premier physical locations for such community forces. Nevertheless, it should be noted that we support Adler *et al.* in their argument that sociologists need to be more deliberate in studying parishes from an embedded field approach where community, territory/geography, and authority (hierarchy of Catholicism) are equally researched in order to fully understand parish life. Consequently, sociological studies illustrating how territory and authority influence parish life are considered, but, again, most of our time is spent examining the social force

[3] C.J. Neusse and Thomas J. Harte, eds. *The Sociology of the Parish: A Survey of the Parish in Its Constants and Variables* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing, 1951), 6

of social connectedness/community in and through which parishioners make and remake local parish Catholicism. Parishes are comprised of real people, who belong to real local parishes, where they engage in real social interactions that produce real social connections. Nevertheless, we argue the parish is underutilized in this regard.

This does not mean we have forgotten about social conflict in parishes, lest anyone think we believe or anyone believes only cheery social connections make up parish life. We acknowledge social conflict in parishes, but parishes are better equipped to handle such conflicts than most other types of institutions because healing and forgiveness are essential to the gospel. Parishes have tool kits filled with social and sacramental ritual practices for producing healing and reconciliation when conflict arises. Indeed, the gospel regularly reminds parishioners that Jesus' mission was to reconcile us to his father. Reconciliation is at the heart of Jesus' ministry emboldening the Church to raise reconciliation to the level of a sacrament. Nevertheless, parish conflict is not to be taken lightly for reconciliation is not automatic and may not always result, but it is more likely to occur in parishes than other institutional settings such as work, sports, or politics because these institutions for the most part have either/or mentalities—win or get out. What other institution is as prepared as parishes to resolve social conflict? What other institution preaches weekly the beauty and duty of reconciliation? Parishes are remarkable social contexts for connecting and/or re-connecting people or motivating parishioners powerfully and beautifully toward the atoning deed (forgiveness), all of which fortifies communal solidarity. But here too, the role of professional parish staff, perhaps the pastor most of all, is important because they know the theology and tradition of the church with respect to this fundamental gospel message of reconciliation. Consequently, they know best how the atoning deed applies to this specific parish conflict and they know *how* to enact such reconciliation given their sacramental and ritual preparedness.

Reconciliation, particularly because the Catholic church has sacramentalized and ritualized it, reinforces our analysis of parish life from a social ritual practices perspective (without minimizing the embedded field approach mentioned above). In other words, to reiterate, the concept of social connectedness and the potential of ritual in parish life to produce and maintain such connectedness is our dominant theoretical and sociological focus.

The next chapter addresses the reality of social ritual practices theoretically, particularly by relying on the work of a founding father of sociology, Emile Durkheim. Of course, contemporary Durkheimians will be drawn upon as well but mostly to confirm that Durkheim's theoretical work,

now over a century old, is still relevant. This discussion on the sociology of ritual will lead inevitably to anthropological and sociological discussions of individualism, a key nemesis of ritual and community. The erosion of social connectedness, especially via the erosion of ritual practices, is an assumption that runs through the book. And that erosion, we argue, is due in large part to individualism and its many offshoots. Individualism is insidious because it is taken for granted, leaving Catholics like most Americans, seeing the world through the eyes of the autonomous self. This assumption has grave deleterious consequences for community. Durkheim wrote about this loss of the communal as modernity advanced, viewing the deterioration of community as a moral issue because humans are ontologically social beings and community life is essential to human flourishing. His solution to this diminution of the communal was *intermediate associations* existing between the state (macro level) and the individual. These intermediate associations, especially occupational groupings for Durkheim, are not only fundamental to building community but of instilling a social realism perspective. Individualism does not account for fundamental human realities such as embodied human living, including humanity's uniquely relational and interdependent features (social connectedness) as does a social realism perspective. Individualism, consequently, is a short step away from *anomie,* a negative social condition of normlessness or disconnectedness. Parishes, we argue, are key Durkheimian intermediating associations (third place) and, indeed, a near ideal intermediate association for promoting the common good. Nevertheless, today it's obvious that intermediate associations are diminishing as expressive individualism advances. What is to be done? Promoting robust parish communities is what needs to be done with eyes, ears, etc. focused on social ritual practices, especially around food, given food's community building potential (Chapter Five).

Standing on your head or lying flat on the ground and looking up as small children do is another image that captures this book's viewpoint. In other words, the perspective is not only from the view of the altar or sanctuary or bishop's chair. It is more so from the pew or cry room where ordinary folk are located (Catholicism lives largely in the pews). Chapter Two theoretically argues and justifies why we rely on such a bottom-up approach. Consequently, we rely heavily on qualitative methodologically oriented studies which more clearly illustrate the genius of parish life as a third place filled with social ritual practices. Certainly, we incorporate quantitative studies (statistical), but qualitative methods which are oriented to collect data from the "ground" capture better the nuances and intricacies of parish life. There have been many studies, especially since the early 1990s, using qualitative research methods to study local religiosity that this

body of qualitative research has received its own title of *lived religion* in social science circles (McGuire 2008). Consequently, qualitative methods such as field research, participant observation, and interviews are most relied on because these methods place the researcher in immediate contact with real people in real parishes in real time. Whatever types of people we have studied or whatever types of people we read about in other sociologists' studies, inductive qualitative methods uncovered better than other methodologies the underlying genius of parishes in producing social connectedness. Nevertheless, our research and thinking have revealed this genius to be largely underutilized. This book then, in certain respects, is a *social theology* from the pews and the streets. Qualitative research goes beyond the statistical, the institutional, and the cultural in its analyses. It focuses more specifically on what Catholics *do,* especially what they *do* at the parish level and then tries to determine what this *doing* means more generally. Consequently, broad statistical analyses of Catholic parish trends receive little attention.[4]

One conclusion we make given our qualitative methodological focus on the local parish is a ringing praise for and defense of the ordinary Catholic in the pew. We claim the pew-dweller is *not deficient* spiritually or engaged in mindless ritual which many quantitative studies have implied, or even stated. Rather, we argue, the pew-dwellers are doing the best they can under the various circumstances of their lives. And it is the local parish that energizes their faith by providing opportunities for Catholics to connect with one another and from those connections facilitate a host of activities such as evangelization, faith formation, Christian service, socializing, and re-energized commitments to the Church. When these kinds of connections occur, a collective energy is released producing what Durkheim calls collective effervescence which pulls individuals out of themselves and into community life (a central point we expound on in the next chapter and Chapter Six). But again, we reiterate, parishes are not living up to their potential for doing so. If Catholics are living deficient spiritual lives, then we suggest it has more to do with the parish not living up to its potential of being a third place saturated with social ritual practices that are spread out in and through various special purpose groups (Chapter Three). Again, why is the parish not doing this? Because parishes have weak institutional infrastructures of professional parish staff as well as these same professional parish staff being unaware or unconvinced of the powerful role social ritual practices play in building community.

[4] See Gautier et al. 2017 for contemporary parish trends based mostly on quantitative analyses.

This book does not specifically address the slow decline of Catholics participating in their religion (Chaves 2017), a macro perspective, as much as how robust and active this or that particular parish is, a micro perspective. Put another way, this will be a sociology of the miniature or micro situation, the seemingly meaningless and mundane social interactions of everyday parish life, interactions which of course are not meaningless but producers of collective effervescence. By examining particulars of a situation or a social process, we are better able to determine the conditions under which certain effects occur and to theoretically explain why. Focusing on micro situations of faith embodied and enacted leads to more positive conclusions than what many quantitative studies surmise. Jonathan Smith, a scholar of the miniature, is clear about this perspective:

> We have been attendant to the ordinary, recognizable features of religion as negotiation and application but have rather perceived it to be an extraordinary, exotic category of experience which escapes everyday modes of thought. But human life—or, perhaps more pointedly, humane life—is not a series of burning bushes.[5]

We observed no burning bushes during our research although we witnessed extraordinary times of collective joy as well as seemingly mundane moments of private prayer. We discovered that the parish provided the social conditions under which social solidarity can arise and flourish as well as decline and de-flourish (why clustering parishes or organizing parishes into families could be problematic, which we briefly address in Chapter Two). Indeed, parishes provide many opportunities for various kinds of social solidarity if certain social conditions are present, such as a professional parish staff who view the pew-dwellers positively and not as deficient in their faith and have an appreciation for the positive role social ritual practices play in building community. A robust parish staff facilitates robust parishioner social solidarity. This solidarity then produces any number of other social connections that produce a communal energy in areas of Christian service or education or social community building. A robust, positive, open parish staff is paramount if a parish's genius is to flourish. Studies have shown that "alive parishes" often have many Christian service activities in which parishioners are involved. Ram Cnaan (2006) has provided a statistical accounting of this kind of Christian service in Philadelphia and found local churches had a remarkably positive impact on alleviating poverty. We are certain that if we could replicate Cnaan's

[5] Jonathan Smith, *Map is not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 308.

research in the Archdiocese of Detroit (AOD) we would confirm his findings, that is, local parishes provide resources for the neediest and in so doing protect them from falling through the cracks of society and into absolute destitution. Yet, we argue, more of this could be accomplished in parishes if other factors such as robust parish staffs were a top priority.

Building on what has been said above, we also assume that local common sense be grasped and understood especially by the pastoral staff if these same ministers are going to be effective in ministering pastoral care and building social connections in the parish. Serious scholarship often regards common sense as infirm or a state of false consciousness at best or at worst, defective. In arguing that ecclesial professionals do not appreciate the reality of the *senses fidelium* we show how this non-acknowledgement only widens the negative behavioral and attitudinal gap that exists between ecclesial professionals (pastoral staff) and rank and file members of the parish. There is a multiplicity of local situations, experiences, and rituals that must be taken seriously because these are part of the hodge-podge of vitalism or collective effervescence that constitute everyday parish life. For example, those who hang out after Mass, those who smoke together after Mass, or belong to the Euchre club are often key to robust communal living in that this hanging out, smoking, and playing cards are important social ritual practices. Understanding and appreciating the *sensus fidelium* is micro sociology at its best, to say nothing of its demonstration of pastoral care. It has been said that Beethoven found inspiration for his most glorious musical phrases among the masses. This book will try to accomplish something similar, that is, to convey the idea of the inherent energy and vital force of ordinary parishioners. It is the parishioners who involve themselves in any number of varied rituals, plays of appearances, collective sensibilities, face rituals, everyday impression management, in short, the Dionysian thematic that makes a parish a place where one wants to be. It is most likely not the magisterium's extra-parish formulation of dogmas and doctrines, as important as these are, that attracts people to the parish.

In the end, this is a positive book about Catholic parishes, but it also advises local bishops and pastors and pastoral staff that much more needs to be implemented and accomplished at the local parish level if Catholicism is to remain robust. Yet, from our perspective, advice about greater implementation of activities at the local parish level has not been heeded. From our point of view, a more intentional radical hospitality is absent. A goal of the New Evangelization is to spur on such robustness but has been woefully short in doing so because of its lack of attention to, we believe, parish life dynamics or social ritual practices in the parish. Nevertheless, we believe, as does Pope Francis, that parishes are *not*

outdated institutions. Indeed, the timing of this book could not be more poignant given that Francis is Pope because he, in many respects, has brought the local parish back into the spotlight, both theologically and sociologically. As he states in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*:

> The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be 'the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughter.' It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach. We must admit though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented.[6]

Granted, sociologically some parishes are not as proficient at developing their genius of social solidarity as others, but ranking parishes accordingly is not our purpose, that is, arguing this parish is better than that parish. Such ranking could be counterproductive especially if we ranked the parishes we have directly researched. Nevertheless, we argue from a theoretical position that parishioners in parishes with more special purpose groups (Chapter Three) are more likely to be living more robust Catholic parish lives than those with fewer such groups. We realize, in saying this, however, that each parish is radically different than another (size, social class, race, e.g.) and, moreover, that each parish is more dynamic than we can describe herein. More dynamic than we can describe herein because we really do not know these parish communities inside and out as we are outsiders. Nevertheless, we do place parishes on the better or worse continuum in terms of social connectedness or social solidarity. Some parishes are just better at creating social solidarity than other parishes. We argue that this is the case because these more robust parishes are more likely to have robust parish staffs who appreciate the role of social ritual practices in building parish community. The caveat herein is that things could change, as often happens when parish staff or pastor leave. Still, parish robustness is hard to pin down scientifically because, admittedly, we have not done extensive fieldwork in parishes to determine better or worse parishes (e.g. Wilkes 2001) or which parishes have more or less social connectedness (although, this would be a worthwhile social science research project).

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[6] Pope Francis. *Evangelii Gaudium* (New York*:* Pauline Books, 2013), no. 28.

Parishes today are different than they were in the past, even the immediate past of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, and in dramatic ways. The socio-cultural context, in particular, has dramatically changed. Today's accelerated and technological saturated social media context is vastly different than the social context of the early 20th century, let alone that of the 18th and 19th centuries, often supporting trends leading toward the diminishment of social solidarity. Parishes, of course, are embedded in this socio-cultural context and in many cases have succumbed to its forces of disconnectedness. Granted, some parishes have resisted this cultural force better than others (Dillon 2015). Why and how? As we mentioned above, and argue more thoroughly in the following chapters, because some parish staff take more seriously their parishes as third places filled with social ritual practices that create and maintain community (pool halls only last for a short while). Parishes can be robust reservoirs of belonging. The big difference today, however, and it is a big difference, is that parishes need to be much more intentional about promoting their genius, that is, being reservoirs of social connectedness.

Although parishes possess this genius, its realization is hampered by that near universal impediment, money. Or, more precisely, the lack of money. Without financial stability parishes close and they have been closing at a fast clip (over 100 parishes have closed in the AOD in the last 30 years). Our American free market capitalistic system in many ways extends into our parishes. Getting the greatest value, or the most bang for the buck is discussed *ad nausea* by parish administration, finance council, and pastor, often at the expense (no pun intended) of implementing more robust parish ministries (youth ministry in particular). It is perhaps cruelly ironic that the many volunteers who work in the trenches at our parishes are exhibiting Christian charity and social communalism in its purest form, while at the same time, finance councils must squeeze all they can from the budget they have in hand, including paying salaries only a notch or two above volunteer compensation. It is easier said than done, but if parishes paid their staffs salaries comparable to those in the corporate sphere, then, we believe, obviously, that productivity and commitment among parish staff would be greater.

If not, as one of our studies show, parish staff members will be constantly looking for another job and will go somewhere else as soon as they find one (McCallion *et al*., 2016). In the meantime, these same parish staff are not totally committed to this parish and promoting its genius because they are on the lookout for a better paying job. Institutional statuses and roles are occupied by people not phantoms. The power for community building rests in people (ministers) staying put and not leaving a parish

community because some other institution will pay them a living wage. In short, we argue parish communities must pay lay and religious leaders a living wage or pastors will find their parish decaying. Most kinds of power, sociologically viewed, are located in institutional structures and institutional statuses and roles and the parish is no different in this respect. The institutional infrastructure of parishes, in other words, is more likely to be maintained and improved (in a capitalistic culture) if competent people are placed in organizational positions that pay a living wage. Otherwise, these same folks will always be moonlighting and leave as soon as another job becomes available. Such mobility does not promote social solidarity. As already stated, social mobility (often financially driven) is one of the most detrimental phenomenon working against community, solidarity, and connectedness, working against a parish's genius. Of course volunteers are important in parish life, but in a capitalistic economic culture paying a living wage to professional ecclesial ministers is the most effective and realistic means toward developing and maintaining social connections in a parish that are long lasting. Given the multitude of options that young people have today to join this or that group, parishes need to be deliberate/intentional about their identity and what they have to offer young people (everyone really), that is, multiple opportunities for socially connecting at multiple levels, all of which requires great leaders and great leadership (and so we are back to money). Moreover, with the Covid pandemic still raging at the time of this writing, maintaining social connections for many in this ambiguous pandemic context is made even more difficult, or even impossible. In such a context, we believe parishes have to be even more conscious, deliberate, and energetic about ramping up their social ritual practices in order to maintain the social connections in the parish and for attracting new members. That is, parishes need to place greater emphasis on radical hospitality/welcoming and in more ritualistic ways. After all, such hospitality is a scriptural mandate. Parishes can be radically hospitable because parishes are perfectly situated to offer multiple opportunities for people to socially connect along a whole spectrum of activities from prayer/worship, Christian service, education, and socializing to various external activities. Worship in particular is the perfect measure of this genius for connecting people with one another, especially in death. Death and grief unite us like nothing else, and local parishes are the institutional contexts in and through which death and grief are managed ritualistically as well as humanely and divinely and in these processes the parish connects us with one another in profound ways that otherwise might be missed.

Focusing on social and ecclesial ritual practices which produce social connectedness, therefore, guides this work. Chapter Two will

theoretically delineate Durkheim's theory of social solidarity as a grounding chapter for the remainder of the book. In particular, we develop his idea of social ritual practices, the heart and soul of social connectedness. Chapter Three goes on to develop Durkheim's theory of social solidarity and ritual practices in discussing special purpose groups because it is in and through special purpose groups that so much social connectedness happens at the parish level. Indeed, we argue, a parish's genius is most on display in its promotion and maintenance of special purpose groups: more special purpose groups in a parish usually means a more robust parish. Chapter Four delves into the extensively researched behavioral and attitudinal gap between the ordinary pew-dweller and professional ecclesial ministers, showing the negative implications this gap can have on parish solidarity. This chapter therefore argues that parish staff should be more appreciative of the *sensum fidelium.* Chapter Five deals with building social connectedness through food. This chapter argues parishes are woefully inept at providing food as a means to build community, a very telling shift in understanding parish life. Chapter Six goes to the heart of parish life; Mass/Eucharist. This is the parish's central social ritual practice that has immeasurable powers for social connectedness. We show that if certain ritual practices within the Mass are radicalized, that is, implemented regularly (ritually), social solidarity and collective effervescence increase. This in turn produces a stronger parish community. This central ritual should not be underestimated or overestimated in terms of social connectedness, that is, the Eucharist is not a series of empty rituals people enact (underestimated) nor the only or most powerful means of gathering (overestimated), given that special purpose groups can accomplish much of the activity of connecting parishioners as well. Chapter Seven provides a short summary of the arguments made throughout the book.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORY OF SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS: SOCIAL RITUAL PRACTICES, THE LOCAL ORDER, AND THE DISPERSION AND CONCENTRATION OF RITUAL PRACTICES

This chapter is long and theoretical and is not absolutely necessary to read in order to understand the remaining chapters. However, reading it will help in understanding our point of view, and the theoretical basis for the ideas herein. This chapter unpacks some of sociology's foundational theories. The assertions we make, the criticisms offered and the recommendations proposed are derived almost exclusively from sociology. We encourage readers, steeped in theological training and perspective, to resist the temptation to reflexively object to our assertions and recommendations entirely from a theological viewpoint. The briefest summary of this book's thesis from a sociological viewpoint rests on Durkheim's 1912 work on society, culture, and religion. He answers the question 'what came first, the chicken or the egg," in the context of religion by stating that the shared social ritual practices of a group came first then religious beliefs and doctrines followed. It would be helpful for the reader to keep in mind that according to Durkheim post-modern persons do not participate in sufficient shared ritual practices to experience moral force, that is, communal norms. Shared social ritual practices create moral force, which is an external force (and hence a social force) enabling the individual to transcend himself or herself and enter more deeply into the group, its collective effervescence, and consequently the community's continued life. Ritual is key and social ritual practices are paramount. Durkheim's theory is the basis of our recommendation that Catholic parishes focus on special purpose groups (SPGs) and all opportunities to establish and strengthen social ritual practices of parishioners generally and within SPGs specifically. Theology and catechesis can then more easily follow. This may seem counterintuitive, backwards, or upside down from a theological viewpoint, but actually it is rock solid theologically as well as sociologically.

Theologically it is known as *lex orandi, lex credendi* (the law of worship determines the law of belief) or as mystagogical catechesis (catechesis after receiving the sacraments of initiation) or Pope Francis himself because he leads by example. John Cornwell has noted that Pope Francis engages in a similar progression: "Francis's ability to lead by example rather than changing any creed, dogma, or theology" is his way of embracing and acknowledging "that theology follows practice." [7] We ask that you try to position yourself from that vantage point when reading this chapter and the rest of the book.

Durkheim's theory of social connectedness is foundational to his thought, particularly how social connections changed in the transition from pre-modern to modern society. Consequently, Durkheim's central question was, "what is the optimal level of social connectedness?" Too much or too little social connectedness can lead to anomie or a state of non-solidarity or immorality. Durkheim claimed then that if social connectedness changes, everything else in society will change as well. Therefore, it is understandable that Durkheim's sociological theory rests on social solidarity. Given this is his master concept, Durkheim then asks, "Where does this social solidarity or social connectedness come from?" His answer is in moments of collective effervescence, that is, a collective moment of emotional excitement which is created when people gather body to body. So collective effervescence occurs because people are locally gathering and engaging in local constitutive practices, meaning face to face and body to body. It is from such bodily emotional gatherings that collective effervescence arises as well as the desire to experience such again and again. When that happens, the gatherings begin to produce something stable which we name social ritual practices. Simply put, these are similar practices at the local level repeated over and again or ritually. Finally, it is social ritual practices that produce social facts, or a social reality external to the individual and coercive (explained further below). These concepts then are intermeshed and sometimes used interchangeably in the following discussion. But it is important to realize all of these concepts refer to the local level; that is, they are generated at the local level or from below, via people interacting with one another. They are not pre-given. Three areas therefore need explanation in relation to social connectedness: (1) the local order and social connectedness; (2) local order social ritual practices and social connectedness; and (3) the dispersion or concentration of social ritual practices in the local order and social connectedness.

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[7] John Cornwell, *Church, Interrupted: Havoc and Hop; The Tender Revolt of Pope Francis* (San Francisco, California: Chronicle Prism, 2021), 51.

The first section of this chapter argues that social order no longer derives from traditional 'on high' authoritarian dictates but from below, the local order level of social practices and social interaction; raising the local order to a new level of importance. The next section argues this local order from below is created and manifested in and through people's interactions or social ritual practices. Here, at the local community level, bodily practices are preeminent with cognitive/rational processes secondary. Bodily, face to face interactions and practices not only effect and express local social order but also produce what Durkheim calls social facts (Durkheim 1893). Social facts such as equality or individuality (ideas) are produced from below through social ritual practices, not from above through the church or state mandating law and producing social facts as was the case in pre-modern society. The final section focuses on the concentration and dispersion of social ritual practices at the local level of the parish. Parish life is a reservoir of social connectedness or at least has the potential to be if the concentration and dispersion of social ritual practices are adequately balanced. To illustrate the importance of the concentration and dispersion of social ritual practices, the new *Family of Parishes* model in Detroit will be discussed briefly. The flow of the chapter then moves from the importance of social connectedness at the local order level (the parish), to the importance of social ritual practices or constitutive practices enacted at the local order level (parish), to analyzing the dispersion and concentration of these social ritual practices at the local order level (parish). Central to all of this for parishes is whether or not social connections are changing.

The Local Order: Durkheim's Division of Labor (DOL) and the Shift to Modern Society

Although he died in 1917, Durkheim's work has contemporary import, especially in arguing that the transition to modernity increased diversity and differentiation of social connectedness, changing the conditions for making social facts (Durkheim 1893). Durkheim argued, if social connections or social solidarity alters, then all dimensions of society will change. Durkheim, in other words, raised social connectedness to the level of utmost importance, especially given it is in and through the interactions transacted within those social connections that social facts emerge. Moreover, given social connections are different in pre-modern and modern societies, these societies will produce different social facts. The question then is what are social facts and how do they work? Social facts are external and coercive realities produced through people interacting with one another body to body. External because they are socially, not