

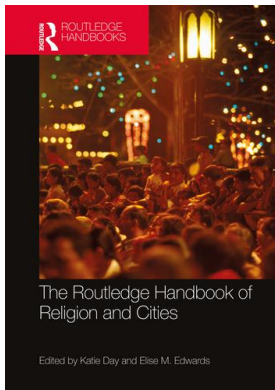
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

On: 22 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



## The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Cities

Katie Day, Elise M. Edwards

### Praying with our feet

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429351181-23>

Linda Noonan

**Published online on: 31 Dec 2020**

**How to cite :-** Linda Noonan. 31 Dec 2020, *Praying with our feet from: The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Cities* Routledge

Accessed on: 22 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429351181-23>

**PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT**

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

## 20

## PRAYING WITH OUR FEET

## Interfaith rituals of disruption and sanctification in the public square

*Linda Noonan*

Jews and Christians holding up purple paper crosses at a Good Friday vigil at a gun shop on a busy Philadelphia street. Muslim, Christian, and Jewish clergy silently processing through the Philadelphia International Airport during Holy Week. A Maundy Thursday foot-washing ceremony unfolding on the plaza of the city's largest utility company. These are people from different traditions being religious together in public. What is going on here? What is the relationship between the practice of ritual and the production of meaning in urban space? What happens when interfaith social change organizations engage in both traditional and newly constructed ritual practices at sites of violation and opportunity? What does it mean for people of multiple faith traditions to move beyond their congregational walls and converge in ritual ways in the public square?

This chapter explores the intersections of activism, social change, religion, ritual, city space, and the ways in which they are navigated, constructed, and interpreted by three faith-based community organizations on which I have done ethnographic research. All three were formed between 2009 and 2011 in Philadelphia. All three organizations place a significant emphasis on liturgical and ritual actions performed in public as one of the strategies for pursuing changes in culture and policy. Their goals differ but their means are resonant: they are Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence, POWER (Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower, and Rebuild), and EQAT (Earth Quaker Action Team). The public, liturgically oriented, ritual actions explored here took place during Holy Weeks on the Christian calendar between 2011 and 2018. All the rituals examined here represent a commitment to liturgical activism.

Here I propose two things. First, that the interfaith organizing culture in Philadelphia suggests a rise in religious ritual practice in public space that leverages faith, builds on both the nonviolent direct action of the Southern Civil Rights Movement and traditional community organizing practices, incorporates influences from Christian and Jewish feminism, is uniquely multi-faith/interfaith, and is anchored in a culture of "holy envy." Second, that the public ritual actions of these organizations can be understood through a framework that goes beyond traditional understandings of ritual as restorative instruments which function to reproduce social structures, power, and norms. Here, instead, ritual functions as a disruption of that order while also having a sanctifying dimension, i.e., an affirmation of the essential sacredness or holiness of

aspects of life and lives that are, in many cases, marginalized, erased, overlooked, or undervalued. Here, the profane in urban space becomes sacred through public ritual.

These rituals and the work of these three Philadelphia organizations are happening against the backdrop of change in religious affiliation in this country. Americans have left the church in unprecedented numbers. White Christians, once the dominant religious group, now account for less than half of the public. The numbers of non-Christians, as well as the unaffiliated, are growing. America is no longer a majority Christian nation.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, faith-based community organizing is on the rise.<sup>2</sup> There is an increasing amount of scholarship examining not only the sociological and political impact of faith-based community organizing but also its ethical and theological significance.<sup>3</sup>

Philadelphia appears to reflect and perhaps exceed broader national trends of growth in faith-based community organizing.<sup>4</sup> The city has also witnessed a noticeable rise in the practice of interfaith ritual in public space. Interestingly, Philadelphia was the key city in William Penn's "holy experiment"—a colony built on religious liberty that would welcome people of different faiths—yet has a history as "an inherently parochial city," a place where "ecumenism has always struggled."<sup>5</sup> Despite the ultimate failure of the holy experiment, in its first 100 years Philadelphia had the highest national concentration of immigrants who brought with them their religious traditions. Today, more than one-quarter of all Philadelphians are immigrants or have immigrant parents.<sup>6</sup> "The City of Brotherly Love" is home to American Quakerism, with its high concentration of Quaker schools, colleges, and other institutions, and is the birthplace of religious denominations such as the African Methodist Episcopal Church and Reconstructionist Judaism.

On the one hand, the city was a place of refuge for religious minorities and the only place under British rule where Catholics could legally worship in public. On the other hand, it was a place where abolitionists were in conflict with slave owners, pacifists were defeated by those who wanted to raise a militia, and attempts at co-existing with the Lenni-Lenape peoples resulted in their being driven off the land. Religious commitments to diversity and justice were complicated by the structures and trappings of white supremacy and colonialism. Philadelphia, it could be said, both benefits from the holy experiment, and continues to be challenged by parochialism.

Often referred to as "Killadelphia" because of its high murder rate, Philadelphia has been ranked as the deadliest big city in America.<sup>7</sup> It is also the poorest big city,<sup>8</sup> the 4th most segregated big city,<sup>9</sup> and is ranked among the 25 worst cities for ozone and particle-pollution.<sup>10</sup> These entrenched and complex social problems, along with a religious culture of both diversity and parochialism, create both challenges and opportunities for interfaith organizing. Limited resources, historic patterns of victimization and violence, and ineffective political systems make mobilization difficult. Yet, the strong presence of Quakers, Jews, Muslims, Unitarians, and Black churches in interfaith coalitions interrupts the white Christian hegemony often found in faith-based community organizing. Here we find not only the time-honored tradition of street preaching or church groups demonstrating for a particular cause, but people from different faiths being intentionally religious and ritually expressive together in new ways in public.

### Shared approaches to ritual and symbolic action

In keeping with the ways in which grassroots democracy has made space for the sacred in the public square,<sup>11</sup> EQAT (Earth Quaker Action Team), Heeding God's Call, and POWER (Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower, and Rebuild) are conscious about the ways in which they are engaging in education, advocacy, and change by exercising their faith in explicitly public places. While much of the traditional organizing work takes place outside the public view,<sup>12</sup> liturgical and ritual actions are created to be exercised in public, drawing attention to and exposing broken sys-

tems. They also serve to create and reinforce identity within the organization by eliciting emotion, establishing connection, creating solidarity, and intensifying commitment.

While their ritual and symbolic actions differ from one another, all three organizations utilize common elements: gathering at a symbolically significant urban site; expressions of both violation and opportunity; faith reflection (connecting sacred tradition or text to the issue at hand); testimony by someone directly impacted by the issue; singing; and prayer. All three organizations draw on symbols, holy days, practices, and traditions from various religious faiths (for instance, Good Friday, foot-washing, Kaddish prayer for the dead) and material culture (coffins, asthma inhalers, airports) in crafting rituals to explicitly frame particular campaigns or highlight political opportunities.<sup>13</sup> While each group has a particular focus for their campaign and their public ritual actions extend beyond those reviewed in this chapter, it is interesting that all three have chosen one of the most sacred times of the Christian and Jewish calendars—Holy Week and Passover—as the frame for ritual action. EQAT leader Eileen Flanagan notes that Holy Week and Passover are liberation stories. “There are so many themes in that week which can be metaphors for our times in different ways, such as ‘Empire.’”<sup>14</sup>

As we will see, laying the Good Friday symbols of the crucifixion atop the crisis of gun violence, enacting a silent religious procession in a busy airport, praying over spent asthma inhalers in the lobby of an electricity company, or washing feet on a corporate plaza all have the potential to generate new meanings about both the social problems and the sacred rituals. The juxtaposition of traditional and sometimes ancient religious symbols alongside contemporary realities creates cognitive dissonance and highlights the immorality of public policies and practices. The rituals cross-pollinate and create tension; they open up spaces for interpretation, reflection, and, it is hoped, move people to action. They are creative efforts of citizens operating out of deeply held notions of democracy to display and articulate the values, ethics, and standards to which they hold themselves, the public, corporate executives, and elected officials accountable.<sup>15</sup>

### **“Praying with our feet”**

A common reference to this kind of faith-based work by leaders and participants of these actions is Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel’s notion of “praying with our feet.” Heschel, a Polish-born rabbi and theologian, famously joined Martin Luther King, Jr. on the Selma March during the Civil Rights Movement in 1965, which he described as an opportunity to “pray with his feet.” Rabbi Linda Holtzman, Rev. Jarrett Kerbel, and Bishop Dwayne Royster all made reference to “praying with our feet” when describing their engagement in interfaith organizing.

Executive Director of Heeding God’s Call, Bryan Miller asserts that “everything we do at Heeding is an act of worship.”<sup>16</sup> This can be seen as people of faith gathering to witness at the site of recent murders, erecting memorials for the victims of gun violence, or conducting prayer vigils in front of gun shops. Referring to the public actions of Heeding God’s Call as well as POWER actions such as a “Die-In” at the Eagle’s stadium as a response to the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Bishop Dwayne Royster claims:

We’re bringing faith to the public square. It’s all sacred in the sight of God. We are praying with our feet. We bring rituals—liturgy—to the public square. And liturgy is, by definition, the work of the people. It’s the prophetic moment of speaking truth to power while simultaneously speaking truth to the people.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, all three groups have a history of civil disobedience and understand nonviolent direct action to be part of their “toolkit” of social action. Many of those interviewed expressed

strong support for strategic use of civil disobedience as a powerful liturgical, ritual, and political act. They communicated the power of putting one's whole self on the line, "praying with your entire being—praying with your body."<sup>18</sup> Several called it a religious and sacred experience, "a Godly way to move toward justice."<sup>19</sup> In recalling POWER's first consideration of the use of civil disobedience, Rev. Jarrett Kerbel described it as "a threshold moment. Liturgy is full of thresholds. Getting arrested together is new ground of risk and intimacy for us."<sup>20</sup>

### **Communicating messages of violation and opportunity**

"When we do liturgy in public, we are drawing attention to places of violation or opportunity."<sup>21</sup> Speaking about Heeding God's Call and POWER, Rev. Kerbel captures the ritual and liturgical acts of all three of organizations reviewed in this chapter in significant ways. Each of the public actions highlights a practice that privileges profit over the common good and offers an alternative vision. In all cases, as we will see, the public ritual opens spaces where public norms are displayed and debated.<sup>22</sup>

## **POWER: Philadelphians Organized to Witness, Empower, and Rebuild**

### ***History and mission***

PICO (now Faith in Action), a national network of faith-based community organizations, sent an organizer to Philadelphia in 2010 to begin a series of conversations to explore the possibility of launching a new interfaith organization. After hundreds of people participated in trainings and research meetings and had what in organizing parlance are referred to as "one-to-one conversations" sharing pain and hopes, a desire to engage in common work emerged. POWER was formed in 2011 with 40 member congregations of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim affiliations. A five-part, multi-year platform was affirmed—Jobs, Education, Housing, Public Safety, and Healthcare. The first priority would be addressing the issue of jobs.

Compared to the larger population of Philadelphia, POWER has a higher representation of Protestants, Jews, and Muslims, but is racially more or less representative of the city.<sup>23</sup> When compared to national faith-based community organizing trends,<sup>24</sup> POWER has more Jewish and Muslim and fewer Catholic participants than national averages. The goal of POWER is policy change. It seeks to bring a broad-based and prophetic "people's voice" to public decision-making and achieves this by gathering together large numbers of people to hold public officials, and themselves, accountable to make concrete policy changes.<sup>25</sup>

### ***Silent airport vigil***

POWER's first public, liturgically oriented action occurred six months after its founding. Having identified the proposed expansion of the Philadelphia International Airport as an opportunity to address unemployment in the city, POWER decided to focus its first campaign on increasing wages for outsourced airport workers on city contracts.<sup>26</sup> Holy Week/Passover was chosen as the time to liturgically and politically "come out" to the residents and political leaders in Philadelphia. While POWER did not make explicit use of some of the Holy Week or Passover symbols, it intended to leverage the religious energy and attention of this holy time for Jews and Christians to lay claim to the airport as sacred ground. In so doing, it hoped to expose both the injustices of current practices (tipped airport workers making as little as \$4.00 an hour for full-time work with no benefits) and the opportunities for change (potential for the creation of jobs that would lift people out of poverty).

POWER did this by gathering clergy in their full clerical vestments as well as a number of unemployed members wearing t-shirts proclaiming, “Put me to work and our city will work.” After meeting with elected officials at City Hall, they processed through the Philadelphia streets and on public transportation to the airport. After prayer and testimony by those who have struggled with unemployment and poverty, they processed in a single-file line in silent prayer from one end of the airport to the other.

Nothing indicated to the public why dozens of clergy in collars, cassocks, robes, kippahs, thobes, albs, and prayer shawls who seemed to be praying would silently walk through one of the busiest airports in the world. It piqued curiosity and attempted to draw attention to the fact that something was happening at the airport, priming the social pumps for the framing and proposed solutions POWER would then provide. Questioned by the police, Bishop Dwayne Royster, POWER Executive Director at the time, responded, “‘We’re praying.’ We were conveying the notion that the issues of airport expansion, unemployment, and poverty are important to the Divine. God’s people take this seriously and we believe we have something to say about it.”<sup>27</sup>

## **Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT)**

### *History and mission*

Earth Quaker Action Team (EQAT) is a grassroots, nonviolent action group of Quakers and people of diverse beliefs working for a just and sustainable economy. Founded in 2010 in Philadelphia, EQAT’s first successful campaign—a five-year series of sustained, national, non-violent direct actions on local bank branches, shareholder meetings, and corporate headquarters—pressured PNC Bank, a historically Quaker bank and primary financier of mountaintop removal coal mining, to change their investment policy and withdraw funding from corporations involved in extractive practices that were having devastating human and environmental consequences in Appalachia.

This “David and Goliath” victory led to a second campaign launched later the same year. “Power Local Green Jobs” called on Pennsylvania’s largest utility company, PECO, to make a significant shift away from fossil fuels and create opportunities in communities most at risk from “dirty energy” that were most in need of the kinds of jobs that investment in solar energy would provide. This commitment would not only reduce Pennsylvania’s impact on climate change, but would address the unemployment, poverty, and crumbling infrastructure in Philadelphia’s low-income communities and communities of color. EQAT joined with POWER as a partner in this campaign. Drawing on the legacy and strategies of the Civil Rights Movement, the organization’s approach to change was rooted in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s conviction that “nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue.”<sup>28</sup>

### *Rituals of mourning, reckoning, and vision*

Having spent two years attempting to negotiate with the utility company, EQAT determined it was time to “raise the ante.”<sup>29</sup> “Raising the ante” involved consecutive actions over several days during Holy Week 2018. The actions were designed to draw attention to the devastating effects of climate change on human life, make the public aware of PECO’s complicity in “dirty energy” practices and their human consequences, and deepen the organization’s commitment to a campaign that would require increased sacrifice. Drawing on the symbolism of Christian Holy Week, the actions highlighted the themes of mourning and reckoning. The 2-day actions

included 25 people who were prepared to risk arrest. By the end of the actions, all 25 had been arrested.

The “Day of Mourning” involved a silent procession through Philadelphia streets to the utility company, located on one of the city’s busiest thoroughfares. Gathered on the building’s plaza, the “mourning ceremony” began with the rending of a garment (a traditional religious gesture symbolizing death and loss), wailing, and dance. Following speakers and singing, hundreds of spent inhalers from one single elementary school in a city neighborhood that contains numerous “persistently dangerous” schools<sup>30</sup> were dumped onto a coffin. The “Mourner’s Kaddish,” the Jewish prayer for the dead, was recited by a local rabbi.

Those risking arrest—seven Quaker and Mennonite religious leaders as well as Christian clergy—entered the lobby of the utility company, sat in a circle, and began worshipping in the traditional Quaker practice of observing silence as well as a more traditional Christian form of worship that included singing and sharing. One African American pastor in the group shared his “coming to consciousness” about the impacts of the oil refineries and coal and gas plants on poor, Black, and brown Philadelphians while confessing, “I don’t know how to get this message across to my people.” Indicating the lobby of waiting utility customers (all people of color), one leader said, “Why don’t you try telling them?” Meanwhile, the police waited for the group to disperse, reluctant to take action. Upping the “ante,” the group stood, faced the room of customers, and the Black pastor began to “preach.” Initially unresponsive and clearly skeptical, those in the waiting area soon grew animated, responding to his questions about the impact of asthma and lung-related diseases in their families, and began to express outrage. It was at this point that the religious leaders were arrested.<sup>31</sup>

The “Day of Reckoning,” centered around a public, ritual foot-washing as a symbolic way of preparing for the anticipated sacrifice of campaign intensification. Traditionally associated with Maundy Thursday observances in the Christian tradition, which reenacts the story of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, those gathered washed the feet of the 18 people risking arrest and then, in turn, washed one another’s feet, symbolically expressing belonging and commitment. The ritual is an intimate one. Despite being a traditional Christian practice, many of those participating were Quaker or from other non-Christian traditions, so it was a new experience for them. Many were anxious. While EQAT could quite easily have conducted this ritual in a more private space as preparation for the public encounter with the utility company and the planned civil disobedience, they chose instead to do the ritual on the utility company plaza in a crowded urban area. According to Board Member Walter Sullivan,

I’m going to take off my shoes in public on a street corner and allow someone to wash my feet. It’s a very intimate thing. To do that in public—in front of the community, security guards, the police—it communicated the depth of our commitment and the solemnness of the issue. It mirrored the vulnerability of the whole campaign. In order to have a successful campaign, we need to do things that are outside of our comfort zone—we need to risk arrest, speak powerfully to the powerful, and transcend and transgress social norms.<sup>32</sup>

## Heeding God’s Call to End Gun Violence

### *Good Friday gun shop vigils*

It was Good Friday in Philadelphia. All across the city, Christians were gathering in churches to remember Jesus’ Seven Last Words. But in one neighborhood, several hundred people



processed through the street in the tradition of ancient pilgrimages that recalled the final journey of Jesus to his death on the cross. They carried banners and a large wooden cross, and were accompanied by a drummer. Nearing their destination, flanked by police and TV cameras, they were confronted by counter-protestors sitting atop pickup trucks with NRA (National Rifle Association) decals, waving American flags, drowning out the drumming with air horns. As they taunted the protestors over a bullhorn, some had guns clearly visible, defiantly strapped to their belts.

The cross stopped in front of a local business—a gun shop—whose owner was known to illegally sell guns to straw purchasers.<sup>33</sup> An open-air worship service began. There was singing, prayer, a responsive litany, and a sermon—standard elements of Christian liturgies. But these were not just Christians—there were also Jews and Muslims, including a rabbi who spoke. Each person gathered clutched a purple piece of paper in the shape of a cross, inscribed with the name, age, and date of death of one of the nearly 250 people who had died by gun violence in Philadelphia the previous year. The story of Jesus' death and crucifixion was recounted, and the names of the dead on the crosses were spoken out loud. A woman who lost her son to a shooting shared her pain, and a man paralyzed by a stray bullet from an illegally trafficked gun called on the owner of the gun shop to change his business practices and sign what is known as a "Code of Conduct."<sup>34</sup>

All this was punctuated and interrupted by the taunts and jeers of the protestors. One revved his motorcycle repeatedly during the prayers. Another had arranged for a local ice cream truck to park itself at the perimeter, playing the insipid "Mister Softee Jingle" continuously, drowning out the sermon. The preacher stopped, and the savvy worshippers decided that if you couldn't beat the ice cream truck, you could join it. They took up the refrain from the litany and the sermon, singing the words "Sign the Code, Sign the Code" with passion and a fair amount of volume, to the tune and beat of the music of the ice cream truck.

### ***"Memorial to the Lost"***

Heeding God's Call has also created a traveling exhibit entitled, "Memorial to the Lost." Described by the organization as a "visible education tool,"<sup>35</sup> it is a display of roughly 300 t-shirts with a name, age, and date of death of each person killed by gun violence the previous year. The t-shirts are placed in the front yard of a church, synagogue, mosque, or religious organization. It is a dramatic and graphic representation of violation. The opportunity is the invitation to a raised consciousness which, it is hoped, will lead to action. Rev. Kerbel described it this way:

The memorial is a very powerful, visual way of communicating something that can be very abstract. People drive by, walk through, coming in two, three, or four. It's a rhetorical address in symbolic form. You hope that people integrate it—that it will come out in the wash someplace in their voting habits or the way they relate to their politicians. You can't tell how people voted, but you hope it changes something.<sup>36</sup>

### ***History and mission***

Unlike many interfaith organizations, Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence was not founded or created by local or national organizers. It emerged in 2009 out of a growing awareness of the link between the rise in violence and death in Philadelphia and the sale of illegally trafficked guns. A series of initially impromptu prayer vigils held outside a local gun shop led to the nonviolent civil disobedience of 12 clergy and laypeople who entered the gun shop, kneeled



to pray, and refused to leave until the owner signed the “Code of Conduct,” making the illegal purchase of guns far less likely.

The arrest of the “Heeding Twelve” sparked significant public interest and led to the gun dealer being charged in federal court for the sale of illegal guns, eventually leading to the closure of the store. Noticing that local people from different religious traditions were drawn to public, faith-based, ritual action, and that their engagement in these actions seemed to galvanize and mobilize them in important ways that led to structural change, a decision was made to form an organization that would focus on sustained, multi-faith activism. The “heroic” narrative about the arrests and the closing of Colosimo’s Gun Center has been important to the organization and functions to fuel the movement. As the organization’s origin story, it reminded people of the potential for “wins,” and created a shared identity in the hope that comes out of the history.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike most gun violence prevention efforts, which work on legislative change, Heeding God’s Call focuses primarily on changing culture in the belief that, on the sensitive and divisive issue of gun control in America, a cultural change is a necessary precursor to legislative change. They sense that faith-based, liturgical, ritual action conducted in public is a key element to this change. According to Founder and Executive Director, Bryan Miller, “What we are really about at Heeding God’s Call is trying to prevent gun violence and we do it through worship. I believe that if Jesus were in the flesh today, he would be out at the gun shop.”<sup>38</sup>

### Creating a culture of “holy envy”

According to one clergy leader, “the rituals I find the most powerful are those that come out of the particularities of someone else’s religious tradition and use it to move toward justice.”<sup>39</sup> For POWER, EQAT, and Heeding God’s Call, it is faith that fuels the work.<sup>40</sup> Some trace the roots of the word “religion” to the Latin word *religare*, referring to binding or the ligament tissue that connects body parts. Religion has the capacity to bind us, not just to our own traditions, but to one another. One participant at a POWER gathering put it this way, “We are bound together in faith even when our faiths are different.”<sup>41</sup> This is the kind of “bridging social capital” that creates “bridging institutions” that link civic, political, and economic levels of the public sphere and contribute in a unique way to American democracy.<sup>42</sup>

Some faith-based community organizing, such as that associated with Ernesto Cortes and his work with Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) affiliates, takes a more “tradition-neutral” approach to religious traditions—highlighting unity, aiming for language that is more universal, with less of an emphasis on explicitly interfaith, liturgical, ritual action.<sup>43</sup> Others, such as POWER, EQAT, and Heeding God’s Call take a more “tradition-full” approach—attempting to bring the best of a variety of traditions and create new ones in ways that elicit what Krister Stendahl has dubbed, “holy envy”—a deep appreciation and admiration for the traditions of others.<sup>44</sup>

This approach does not flinch from the particular, but embraces difference even when inevitable tensions may arise, believing that the relationships that lie at the foundation of this kind of organizing will create the trust needed to weather such tensions. By confronting and wrestling with difference, those involved develop increased capacity and skills in negotiating difference within the organization, as well as in their own personal lives. Organizing across difference also heightens participants’ awareness of the gifts that individuals and faith traditions have to offer, increasing a sense of interdependence. In these contexts, religion is not simply exploited for its utility, nor is it understood to be just one more identity category. It is, instead, as Melissa Snarr notes, a way of seeing and acting in the world.<sup>45</sup>

Rabbi Linda Holtzman speaks to the impact of the “holy envy” that emerges when the particularities are celebrated. She has spoken at Heeding’s Good Friday Gun Vigil many times.

When I was first asked to speak, I thought they were making a mistake because I’m a rabbi. Metaphorically, Good Friday is the moment when everything is lost, even God. Everything is dead. There is no hope. You don’t know Easter Sunday is coming. That doesn’t mean I have to have exactly the same belief system. But I do get the emotional and symbolic weight of Good Friday. I can stand up and say ‘I’m here as an ally’ and say that when all is lost—everyone has been shot, and gun violence continues, and when we are in mourning for all the names we have called—that we can be together as a community. We can stand up and walk together toward Easter Sunday. I can be who I am as a Jew and stand up at a Good Friday Service and not be dishonest. And that for me has been the best experience I’ve had of understanding that religious confluence. Because when I’m moved, it moves me to do more work and be really present in new ways to these issues.<sup>46</sup>

### **Interfaith prayer—A peculiar and radical act**

Prayer is used by the three organizations in all their public liturgical actions. Eileen Flanagan talks about the ways in which public liturgy and prayer create a needed space to reflect on the millions of lives already lost due to climate change, “Even doing this work, we often don’t pause to remember that we’re talking about life and death.”<sup>47</sup> In the context of interfaith prayer, Rev. Dr. Leslie Callahan adds, “I’m not just praying when I pray. I am also praying when the imam prays, I’m also praying when the rabbi prays.”<sup>48</sup>

Those interviewed experienced prayer as a positive experience. However, several pointed to deeper complexities that arise from the interfaith and racially/culturally diverse nature of, particularly, POWER. Many clergy from the Black church tradition hold dear to the practice of praying “in Jesus’ name.” This is one of the places where affirming difference can be complex. Faith-based groups such as POWER experience tension around the question of prayer. How does an interfaith organization lean fully into the richness of its multiple traditions while cultivating the participation of communities of faith that have traditionally been marginalized and oppressed? What does it mean, in light of the complex histories of white supremacy and Christian hegemony, to both support and affirm elements of the black church tradition, such as praying “in Jesus’ name,” while honoring the ways in which Jews and Muslims have historically been the victims of violence in that name, and their experiences continue to be disregarded or erased by supercessionist Christian theology?

Religious leaders negotiate this in different ways. Interfaith minister and EQAT Board Member, Rev. Rhetta Morgan welcomes people praying out of the fullness of their tradition, even when particular language may not resonate with others. “My voice isn’t the only one needed. Bring your Jesus, bring fully all of who you are. We need that.”<sup>49</sup> POWER leader, Rev. Dr. Leslie Callahan explains that it is her tradition to pray in Jesus’ name, but that when praying in an interfaith context, she attempts to be inclusive in her language. “Praying,” she offers, “is a peculiarly important part of interfaith organizations. It is radical act.”<sup>50</sup>

This peculiar and radical nature of interfaith prayer leads to a rich and complex mix of hesitation, ambivalence, resistance, connection, and breakthroughs. While there is no formal policy in POWER, there has been considerable conversation and reflection on the practice of public prayer. Two unwritten, if somewhat conflicting, guidelines have emerged: people should “pray from their own tradition,” identifying that tradition in advance (for instance, “I will be praying in

the Christian tradition”); and efforts should be made by Christians in particular to end prayers in more inclusive ways. More work and conversation, at least in POWER, would be useful to more deeply explore the uses and meanings of interfaith prayer, and how it might be approached and received for, as one faith leader puts it, “When someone else is praying in POWER, I’m always trying to decide whether I can say “amen.”<sup>51</sup>

### The complex symbolism of clerical vestments

In both *Heeding God’s Call* and *POWER*, there is an emphasis on clergy wearing traditional vestments.<sup>52</sup> This has been expressed through internal communications as well as publicly announced in media advisories that proclaim “VISUALS: Dozens of faith leaders in clerical attire. Many dozens of people faith singing and praying.”<sup>53</sup> The symbolism of vested clergy harkens back to the Southern Civil Rights Movement in which the image of clergy engaging in nonviolent civil disobedience—recognizable by their collars, stoles, and other religious garb—being beaten, sprayed by fire hoses, or attacked by dogs highlighted the violence of law enforcement and conveyed the moral and prophetic role of the clergy in the movement. There is an implicit and explicit understanding by leaders and staff in both organizations that when clergy wear their liturgical vestments to public events, several things will be communicated: first, that the work of the organization is supported by clergy and leaders from multiple faith traditions; second, that having clergy appear in clerical dress in public is visually interesting for media; and third, that donning the religious symbolism of vestments communicates the moral authority that clergy bring to the justice issue.

Religious leaders in both organizations regularly express complex and often conflicting perspectives on vestments, including what may be communicated through these symbols, and the sometimes-problematic message about the moral authority of clergy. For Rev. Kerbel,

When I wear my clerical garb in a public action, I am signaling that something of sacred value is at risk. We’re hallowing secular space by invading it with symbols of the presence of God. The *POWER* calculation is that if we are religious leaders, people will take us more seriously. I don’t know if that’s true or not. At some moments I’ve felt mixed about wearing vestments—are we exploiting symbolism? Is our moral authority contested? Is the symbolism coherent?<sup>54</sup>

Rev. Dr. Callahan relays the complicated nature and complex symbolism of vestments, particularly for a younger generation alienated from religious and cultural institutions:

I don’t want us to overstate the implications of our suiting up. I don’t expect people to do things just because I said they should. In some instances, we are asserting a moral authority that we haven’t actually earned. Sometimes I think we put on our costumes and we look like peacocks, wanting people to look at us. But there’s a reason everybody’s tradition has garments. These are opportunities to have an embodied sense of our purpose and mission. If we thought of these public actions as worshipful activity, then it would help us not to feel like we were in costume. Instead, we would be suiting up. What that looks like is interfaith, intergenerational. That looks like the Kingdom of God . . . We need to lock our arms with younger folks, to say, ‘We failed you. But we’re here with you now.’ If we decide to get arrested, my message to those young people is this: ‘I’m putting on this collar to say your life, your education, is worth more.’ From the synagogue to the mosque, to the cathedral, to the store front, to the masjid—we all agree that this is so. That’s powerful.<sup>55</sup>

## The symbolic significance of space

The site of each gathering for all three organizations is carefully selected. Many social change groups choose a site for public action based primarily on public exposure—the most heavily trafficked intersection in town, for instance. Instead, EQAT, Heeding God’s Call, and POWER locate public actions in urban places where the very space itself is symbolically significant.

The public actions of these groups occur on ground that signifies violation and/or opportunity. POWER, with its wide range of issues and current campaigns has a much wider but no less symbolically significant repertoire of space use than Heeding God’s Call or EQAT. A number of its public actions regarding jobs and the living wage took place both outside and inside the airport. Prayer vigils and actions have been held at City Hall, the governor’s office, the state capital, school district headquarters, and outside the sports arena following a football game—all signifying an opportunity for access to power. Heeding’s public actions have frequently taken place at neighborhood gun shops and sites of recent gun violence. They also have gathered in spaces for public demonstrations such as City Hall, processions up Broad Street during end of day traffic, or the Constitution Center. These spaces are both highly visible as well as significant in their “public square” nature. The annual Good Friday services have been held in front of gun shops, city schools, or neighborhoods with high rates of gun violence. EQAT’s actions have focused on the city’s utility company, processions through neighborhoods hardest hit by pollution and poverty, and the dropping of a banner from one of the city’s tallest buildings. In all these cases, space is not simply chosen for its utilitarian purposes (of public exposure), it is being reclaimed and deemed sacred.

Spaces are sacred, Jonathan Z. Smith would argue, because people make them so. Sacredness is situational and socially constructed.<sup>56</sup> In a similar way, Ronald Grimes argues that places not traditionally associated with ritual become ritual space because the participants deem it so.<sup>57</sup> The convergence of symbols and ritual practices normally associated with particular places and traditions of worship now executed in public spaces calls into question our notion of social space as divided between public and private, secular and religious. By doing worship and liturgy in public, secular space becomes religious space. Through these ritual actions, previously profane spaces of gun shops, impoverished neighborhoods, airports, and even utility companies become sanctified, sacralized. In some cases, this is because communities deem space sacred, and in others, it is because the worshippers or participants themselves may perceive a substantive power and presence of the divine.<sup>58</sup> In either case, religious space is powerful space,<sup>59</sup> space which—as these rituals above remind us—“is not placid,” but contested, controversial, and often the site of threat or conflict.<sup>60</sup>

Describing some of the liturgical acts of these organizations, Rabbi Holtzman captures Durkheim’s “collective effervescence,”<sup>61</sup> as well as Smith’s notion of situational sacredness:

What happens when we pray or do ritual together at the site of a violation? It fuels people, aware that they’re moving something in the world. And that there’s a shift—a larger shift in the universe. I’m not just doing a political act. This is a religious and political act. Saying, ‘This is a sacred act’ makes it so.<sup>62</sup>

## Rituals of disruption and sanctification

I propose that the ritualizing<sup>63</sup> and traditioning<sup>64</sup> practices of Heeding God’s Call, EQAT, and POWER can be held by a larger framework of both disruption and sanctification. This is a departure from the traditional ritual theory in which these concepts are contrasted. From

Durkheim to Turner, ritual has been understood to anticipate and preempt the disruption to society and individuals caused, for instance, by changes associated with individual lifecycle and social status.<sup>65</sup> The emphasis on stability and continuity, and the rule-governed character of this classic way of understanding ritual serves to, according to Van Gennep, “cushion the disturbance”<sup>66</sup> caused by changes in social states. This leaves little room for improvisation or adaptation, either over time or by individuals or communities who consciously or unconsciously use ritual to create new roles, alter the distribution of power, or create new forms of community or experiences of spirituality. In this approach, worship, as the act of affirmation and sanctification of collective identity, is placed in opposition to disruption, which is in turn associated with secular civil life. In the public actions of all three organizations, the goal of ritual is not to confirm the dominant order, but to problematize and interrogate it, to disturb it, and to offer alternative visions and narratives. It does this not by precluding disruption but inciting or creating it; not separating the sacred from the profane, but holding them in creative and transformative tension. This offers the possibility that rituals can be instruments, not just of social cohesion and replication, but change.<sup>67</sup>

The public ritual actions undertaken by these Philadelphia organizations have roots in the Southern Civil Rights Movement and practices and traditions of Alinsky-based community organizing.<sup>68</sup> They have also been influenced by Christian and Jewish feminism as well as Reconstructionist Rabbinical Judaism, which all have histories of creative ritual practice. The actions are intended to disrupt the consciousness of anyone walking or driving down the street and to invite them into moral outrage by communicating that a violation is taking place in our public and shared lives—the high rate of gun violence, poverty wages for city workers, or climate change. They are designed to create, not cushion, disturbance. In addition to disruption, I would suggest that much of the public ritual actions of these groups also serve to “sanctify” or make sacred or holy a space, a person or groups of people, an institution, or an issue. In all the rituals described here, those most affected by the policies, or public or corporate practices that result in poverty, violence, environmental racism, and climate change, are the poor and Black and brown communities. Raising up the names and lives of those who are disproportionately affected by gun violence, poverty wages, and environmentally related diseases such as cancer and asthma disrupts the narrative that these lives and these communities do not matter.

Gathering a religiously diverse group of people to do obviously religious things in public urban space during the holiest days in the Christian tradition at a gun shop, airport, or a utility company is a disruption. It disrupts people’s understanding of the religious meaning of Holy Week. It displaces Jesus from the center of the traditional Good Friday narrative and overlays onto the cross the names and bodies of over 200 other people slain by illegal guns. It reinterprets the commitment and sacrifice associated with Maundy Thursday foot-washing when those whose feet have been washed offer themselves for arrest at the company which profits from “dirty energy.” And it creates confusion and interest when clergy snake through airport corridors in silence.

These are acts of disruption, and disruption is a form of worship. There’s a disruption that comes, shakes things up and causes things to be different. But they are not just a ‘one-off’ disruption. We have to disrupt the systems that oppress us over and over again until justice reigns.<sup>69</sup>

This form of disruption creates potential for change at two levels. First, by intervening in the everyday routine of people’s lives and suspending the normal flow of their actions, it creates a temporary, liminal moment in which people ask “What is wrong?” and “What is going on?”

This liminality creates conditions for critical self-awareness that can become building blocks for transformation, seen in the spontaneous preaching in the utility company lobby. Second, disruption pushes back at dominant narratives—“the way things are.” It opens a space for other visions and possibilities. Third, disruption provides opportunities for self-reflexivity among those participating in the ritual. It raises awareness of the relationship of self to society as well modeling democratic modes of action in the prosecution of the ritual itself. All three organizations utilize the disruptive power of public worship to call into question dominant narratives and status quo. For POWER, the notions of “politics-as-usual” are called into question, for Heeding and EQAT, the notions of “business-as-usual” are disrupted. All three testify to the holiness of the lives who suffer in the grab for power and profit. All three are attempting to “shine a light on broken systems.”<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

Rituals serve to not only confirm or upend the social order, they also reveal, create, and express how our knowledge is developed, and what we imagine for ourselves and our world. Ritual shapes us. Many carry vestiges of colonization and domination in bodies and psyches and spirits; it is internalized. Then it is replicated unknowingly or unwittingly. Rituals and liturgies such as the Airport Vigil, PECO Holy Week Actions, and Good Friday Gun Shop Vigils have the potential to invite individual and organizational reflexivity by challenging dominant social and religious narratives, interrupting privilege,<sup>71</sup> opening observers and participants to collaboration and vulnerability,<sup>72</sup> accessing the “insurrection of subjugated knowledges,”<sup>73</sup> and moving us closer to a more just and democratic world.<sup>74</sup>

All three organizations negotiate and develop language, ritual, and symbol in an attempt to express common values, honor multiple faith traditions, express grievances, communicate moral urgency, propose solutions, galvanize support, and seek to create change. They also creatively weave together symbol and space—joining familiar symbols and familiar spaces in unexpected ways, creating disruption, new meaning, and sanctification—as well as surfacing issues of power, knowledge, change, authority, and citizenship.

Post-colonial liturgical theologian, Cláudio Carvalhaes writes about the ways in which liturgy and ritual interpret the life of the individual and their group, as well as the world itself.<sup>75</sup> These ritual public actions aimed at raising the crisis of gun violence, the need for living wage jobs, and the human cost of dirty energy policies not only disrupt “business as usual” in the public square, but they surface questions about who is present and who is absent, who speaks and who is silent, how bodies are honored or shunned, whose lives matter, and whose do not. Church people participate in displacing Christian hegemony by working alongside people of other faiths, practicing “holy envy,” ceding space and assumed leadership, challenged to be aware of language and symbols, leveraging some of the most central religious symbols in new ways, and crafting rituals and liturgies together that speak to the pain and suffering in our shared worlds. White people practice honoring Black and brown lives not just from the comfort and safety of their own communities and sanctuaries, but by worshipping in vulnerable and contested urban spaces, engaging in nonviolent direct action, risking arrest, and speaking the names of those who have died—proclaiming: “This death is morally unacceptable. This life is holy. This place is sacred.”

Creating and engaging these and similar rituals of faith-based organizations gives people the opportunity to not only *imagine a new world*, but to *practice being the new world*. Eileen Flanagan of EQAT reflects, “Collectively, we’ve remembered that what we do makes a difference.”<sup>76</sup> POWER, EQAT, and Heeding God’s Call to End Gun Violence are building their work around the ways ritual public action can, and sometimes does, “carry the seeds for this possible world.”<sup>77</sup>



## Notes

- 1 The decline in religious affiliation and the shifting religious landscape in America are well-documented. See Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2016); Pew Research Center, "'Nones' on the Rise," *Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project*, October 9, 2012, [www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/](http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/); and Daniel Cox, Robert P. Jones, Ph.D., "America's Changing Religious Identity," September 6, 2017, [www.prii.org/research/american-religious-landscape-christian-religiously-unaffiliated/](http://www.prii.org/research/american-religious-landscape-christian-religiously-unaffiliated/).
- 2 Brad Fulton and Richard L. Wood, "Interfaith Community Organizing: Emerging Theological and Organizational Challenges," in *Yours the Power: Faith-Based Organizing in the USA*, eds, Katie Day, Esther McIntosh, and William Storrar (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 17–39.
- 3 For more on faith-based community organizing and bridging social capital, see Richard L. Wood and Mark R. Warren, "A Different Face of Faith-based Politics: Social Capital and Community Organizing in the Public Arena," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 22, No. 9/10 (October 2002). For broader treatment of the theological and political significance of faith-based community organizing, see C. Melissa Snarr, *All You That Labor: Religion and Ethics in the Living Wage Movement*, Religion and Social Transformation (New York: New York University Press, 2011); Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (Chichester, West Sussex, UK; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013); Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Marcia W. Mount Shoop, *A Body Broken, a Body Betrayed: Race, Memory, and Eucharist in White-Dominant Churches* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2015); and Katie Day, Esther McIntosh, and William Storrar, eds, *Yours the Power: Faith-Based Organizing in the USA* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).
- 4 While more work needs to be done on the statistics of faith-based participation in Philadelphia, the presence of at least four faith-based organizations using community organizing approaches for policy change (POWER, EQAT, Heeding God's Call, and New Sanctuary Movement) suggests that Philadelphia reflects or exceeds national trends. Further, since their founding, all four organizations have regularly employed liturgically based ritual in public actions.
- 5 Katie Day, "Church-based Community Organizing: Philadelphia Perspectives." (Revised Discussion Paper Presented at the 1997 Annual Meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion and in 1998 Volume 4 on COMM-ORG: The On-Line Conference on Community Organizing and Development, <https://comm-org.wisc.edu/papers98/warren/faith/day.html>). For more on the community organizing done in the 1990s in Philadelphia, particularly among Black clergy, see Katie Day, *Prelude to Struggle* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002).
- 6 Pew Charitable Trust, "Philadelphia's Immigrants," <https://pew.org/2swfWPw>.
- 7 "The Five Most Surprisingly Dangerous Big Cities in America," October 9, 2019, [www.safety.com/dangerous-cities/](http://www.safety.com/dangerous-cities/).
- 8 Darryl C. Murphy, "Poverty Still Plaguing Philadelphia, Poorest Big City in the Country," *WHYY*, September 14, 2018, <https://whyy.org/articles/poverty-still-plaguing-philadelphia-poorest-big-city-in-the-country/>.
- 9 Holly Otterbein, "Philly is the 4th Most Segregated Big City in the Country," *Philadelphia*, September 22, 2015, [www.phillymag.com/citified/2015/09/22/philadelphia-segregated-big-city/](http://www.phillymag.com/citified/2015/09/22/philadelphia-segregated-big-city/).
- 10 "Air Quality in Philadelphia Metro Area Again Worsened for Ozone Smog," April 24, 2019, [www.lung.org/local-content/\\_content-items/about-us/media/press-releases/air-quality-in-philadelphia.html](http://www.lung.org/local-content/_content-items/about-us/media/press-releases/air-quality-in-philadelphia.html).
- 11 Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), p. 217.
- 12 In addition to the public actions, all three organizations utilize traditional organizing techniques such as phone-banking, letter-writing, research, relationship-building, and meetings with public and religious officials.
- 13 For more on political opportunity theory, see Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency 1930–1970* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press), 1982.
- 14 Eileen Flanagan (EQAT Member and former Board Member), interview with author October 8, 2019.
- 15 Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, New Forum Books (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 4–7.
- 16 Bryan Miller (Executive Director of Heeding God's Call), interview with author October 29, 2014.



- 17 Bishop Dwayne Royster (Former Executive Director of POWER and clergy leader in Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence), interview with author September 17, 2014.
- 18 Rabbi Linda Holtzman (Clergy leader in Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence and POWER), interview with author November 25, 2014.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Rev. Jarrett Kerbel (Clergy leader in Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence and POWER), interview with author September 25, 2014.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Craig, David Melville. "Debating Desire: Civil Rights, Ritual Protest, and the Shifting Boundaries of Public Reason," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 27, No. 1, March 1, 2007, pp. 157–82.
- 23 As of 2018, POWER was roughly one-third Black Christian, one-third white Christian, and one-third Jewish, Muslim, Humanist, Unitarian, or multiracial Christian. POWER is currently expanding beyond Philadelphia to become a state-wide network, a shift which will inevitably change the religious and racial balance.
- 24 Richard L. Wood, Brad R. Fulton, and Kathryn Partridge, "Building Bridges Building Power: Developments in Institution-Based Community Organizing" (New York: Interfaith Funders, 2012), [https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.iu.edu/dist/4/9/files/2016/12/Wood-Fulton-and-Partridge\\_2012\\_Building-Bridges-Building-Power-1b2mjew.pdf](https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.iu.edu/dist/4/9/files/2016/12/Wood-Fulton-and-Partridge_2012_Building-Bridges-Building-Power-1b2mjew.pdf).
- 25 POWER website, <https://powerinterfaith.org/mission-and-history/>.
- 26 The Economic Dignity Campaign which began with a focus on the Philadelphia International Airport expanded and ultimately resulted in POWER's work to get a citywide referendum passed in 2015 which mandated a \$12.00 hourly wage for all city subcontracted workers. In 2016, POWER worked with Philadelphia City Council to ensure that all projects involving public dollars paid workers a fair and livable wage.
- 27 Royster, interview.
- 28 From EQAT website, [www.eqat.org/our\\_mission](http://www.eqat.org/our_mission) and Martin Luther King, Jr. "Letter from a Birmingham Jail."
- 29 Walter Sullivan (EQAT Board Member), interview with author October 9, 2019.
- 30 Laura Cofsky, "SEPTA's Plan for Natural Gas Plant May Put Nicetown Residents in Harm's Way," *Hidden City*, January 27, 2017, <https://hiddencityphila.org/2017/01/septas-plan-for-natural-gas-plant-puts-nicotown-residents-in-harms-way/>. The Pennsylvania Department of Education labels schools with a certain number of violent incidents as "persistently dangerous." While this designation is based on violent criminal encounters, because of their proximity to toxic fuel sites such as oil refineries, chemical plants, and garages that expose residents to dangerous levels of chemical and other toxins, the neighborhoods with the most dangerous schools are also the neighborhoods with disproportionately high rates of childhood asthma—often four times that of an average American child.
- 31 It should be noted that the author was among those participating in this action and was also arrested on this day.
- 32 Sullivan, interview.
- 33 Straw purchases, the most common form of gun trafficking, are criminal acts in which guns are bought by one person on behalf of another who is legally unable to make the purchase themselves. Often, the person prohibited from buying firearms is present, sometimes negotiating the sale and even putting money on the counter while the "straw purchaser" provides identification that would pass a background check.
- 34 The Code of Conduct is a voluntary 10-point agreement signed by firearms dealers that implements responsible business practices which prevent straw purchases by gun traffickers and acknowledges the role that gun dealers play in protecting the public from gun violence. Walmart, the country's biggest seller of guns, adopted the Code of Conduct in partnership with Mayors Against Illegal Guns in 2008.
- 35 [www.heedinggodscall.org/memorials-to-the-lost](http://www.heedinggodscall.org/memorials-to-the-lost).
- 36 Kerbel, interview.
- 37 A prolonged presence of protestors outside several gun shops and multiple Good Friday Vigils at the same businesses have not yet led to the signing of the Code of Conduct, but they did lead to the implementation of some of the measures of the code by some of the Philadelphia gun shop owners.
- 38 Miller, interview.
- 39 Holtzman, interview.
- 40 POWER and Heeding God's Call are explicitly interfaith. EQAT, while founded by Quakers and rooted in Quaker principles, is increasingly multi-faith in its membership and public actions.

- 41 POWER member speaking at 100 Leader Gathering in West Chester, Pennsylvania, September 6, 2019.
- 42 For more on faith-based community organizing and bridging social capital, see Richard L. Wood and Mark R. Warren, "A Different Face of Faith-Based Politics: Social Capital and Community Organizing in the Public Arena," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 22, No. 9/10 (October 2002): pp. 6–54. doi:10.1108/01443330210790148.
- 43 For a discussion of the limits of a multicultural approach to organizing, see Vincent Lloyd, "Organizing Race: Taking Race Seriously in Faith-Based Community Organizing," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, No. 4 (December 2014): pp. 640–60. doi:10.1111/jore.12076.
- 44 Bishop Krister Stendahl, a Swedish theologian, is accredited with "Three Rules of Religious Understanding," originally issued at a press conference in Stockholm, Sweden in 1985 as ground rules of interreligious dialogue: 1) if you want to understand another religion, ask its adherents, not its enemies; 2) don't compare your best to their worst; and 3) leave room for "holy envy."
- 45 C. Melissa Snarr, *All You that Labor: Religion and Ethics in the Living Wage Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).
- 46 Holtzman, interview.
- 47 Flanagan, interview.
- 48 Rev. Dr. Leslie Callahan (POWER Clergy Leader), interview with author October 30, 2014.
- 49 Rev. Rhetta Morgan (EQAT Board Member), interview with author October 13, 2019.
- 50 Callahan, interview.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 EQAT, founded by Quakers, has less of an emphasis on clerical vestments as Quakers, for the most part, do not have ordained clergy.
- 53 Heeding God's Call Media Advisory, December 17, 2012.
- 54 Kerbel, interview.
- 55 Callahan, interview.
- 56 Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 76–95, pp. 115–6.
- 57 Ronald L. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 256–9.
- 58 Mircea Eliade describes this as *axis mundi*. Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958).
- 59 Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).
- 60 David Chidester and Edward T. Linenthal, eds, *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 16–20.
- 61 French sociologist Émile Durkheim coined the term "collective effervescence" to describe how ritual experiences can intensify, galvanize, and enlarge religious experience, generating "a kind of electricity that quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exaltation." Émile Durkheim, Carol Cosman, and Mark Sydney Cladis, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 162.
- 62 Holtzman, interview.
- 63 For more on ritualization, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009) and Ronald L. Grimes, *Marrying and Burying: Rites of Passage in a Man's Life* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995).
- 64 Orlando Espin, *Idol and Grace: On Traditioning and Subversive Hope* (New York: Orbis Books, 2014).
- 65 There is a general consensus in Religion and Social Science literature that ritual is a key component in all religious traditions. It is generally viewed as a formalized aspect of religion in which words, symbols, and gestures are used in routinized performances with little or no variance over time. Through these features of repetition and formality, ritual provides a sense of solidarity and distinct identity for the community of faith while also reinforcing a sense of continuity between the faith community in the present and its past. According to traditional ritual theory of Émile Durkheim, Arnold Van Gennep, and Victor Turner, ritual functions to reinforce the rules, customs, and norms of society. It renews our shared and corporate identity and serves to maintain order. It also confirms and reconstitutes the social order and position of each person in it. It is ritual which also facilitates the transition from one position in society to another, as is the case with initiation rites. In this way, then, ritual becomes the matrix of our social and symbolic lives, reinforcing spiritual solidarity and cohesion.

- 66 Arnold Van Gennep, "The Classification of Rites" in *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. ix.
- 67 A framework built around the dialectical relationship of disruption and sanctification helps overcome some of the shortcomings of traditional ritual theory. First, it avoids the teleological problem in approaches to ritual that view ritual as having clear goals, such as integration of individuals following a change in social status. Here the focus is on the ritual process itself and its transformative possibilities not just for the larger society, but for the individuals and organizations as well. In contrast to this picture of ritual as a self-fulfilling prophesy, I propose a process-based approach in which goals are embedded in the methods and process of ritual practice. In other words, the ritual process itself already models an alternative vision of society in which critical citizenship is linked to public responsibility. Second, it avoids the typological problems in traditional ritual theory in which rituals are isolated into self-enclosed types. Here, each ritual moment mobilizes aspects of different types in one total series of actions. For instance, most of the Heeding God's Call public actions include elements of what would traditionally be called "rites of lamentation" and "rites of intensification." Multiple ritual aspects are happening simultaneously.
- 68 Saul Alinsky, co-founder of the Back-of-the-Yards Neighborhood Council and founder of the Industrial Areas Foundation, is known as the father of modern day community organizing.
- 69 Royster, Philadelphia Die-In Action, December 7, 2014.
- 70 POWER website, Mission and Values
- 71 McClintock Fulkerson, Mary and Marcia W. Mount Shoop. *A Body Broken, A Body Betrayed: Race Memory, and Eucharist in White-Dominant Churches* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015).
- 72 Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003).
- 73 Michel Foucault, "Two Lectures," in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*, ed., Colin Gordon (Brighton: Harvester, 1980), p. 81.
- 74 Walter Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26. No. 7–8 (2009): p. 1, quoted in *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives: Only One is Holy*, ed., Cláudio Carvalhaes (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 9.
- 75 Cláudio Carvalhaes, ed., *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives: Only One is Holy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 3.
- 76 Flanagan.
- 77 Carvalhaes, p. 3.

## Bibliography

- American Lung Association. "Air Quality in Philadelphia Metro Area Again Worsened for Ozone Smog, Finds 2019 'State of the Air' Report, Had Best Ever Results for Year-Round Particle Pollution." American Lung Association. Accessed April 24, 2019. [www.lung.org/local-content/\\_content-items/about-us/media/press-releases/air-quality-in-philadelphia.html](http://www.lung.org/local-content/_content-items/about-us/media/press-releases/air-quality-in-philadelphia.html).
- Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).
- Bretherton, Luke. *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness*. First Edn (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).
- Callahan, Leslie. *Interview by Author*. St. Paul's Baptist Church, Philadelphia, PA, October 30, 2014.
- Carvalhaes, Cláudio, ed., *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives: Only One Is Holy*. 2015 Edn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
- Chidester, David and Edward Tabor Linenthal. *American Sacred Space* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).
- Cofsky, Laura. "SEPTA's Plan for Natural Gas Plant May Put Nicetown Residents In Harm's Way." *Hidden City Philadelphia*. Accessed January 27, 2017. <https://hiddencityphila.org/2017/01/septas-plan-for-natural-gas-plant-puts-nicotown-residents-in-harms-way/>.
- Craig, David Melville. "Debating Desire: Civil Rights, Ritual Protest, and the Shifting Boundaries of Public Reason." *Journal of the Society Of Christian Ethics* 27, No. 1 (2007): pp. 157–82. ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost. Accessed September 9, 2014.
- Day, Katie. "Church-Based Community Organizing: Philadelphia Perspectives." Church-based Community Organizing: Philadelphia Perspectives, paper presented on COMM-ORG: The On-Line Conference on Community Organizing and Development. 1998. Accessed November 17, 2020. <https://comm-org.wisc.edu/papers98/warren/faith/day.html>.

- Day, Katie, Esther McIntosh, and William Storrar, eds, *Yours the Power: Faith-Based Organizing in the USA* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013).
- Day, Katie. *Prelude to Struggle: African American Clergy and Community Organizing for Economic Development in the 1990's* (Lanham, MD: UPA, 2002).
- Durkheim, Émile, Carol Cosman and Mark Sydney Cladis. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).
- Eck, Diana L. *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2003).
- Eliade, Mircea. *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (New York: Meridian Books, 1958).
- EQAT. "Our Mission." Earth Quaker Action Team. Accessed February 26, 2020. [www.eqat.org/our\\_mission](http://www.eqat.org/our_mission).
- Espin, Orlando. *Idol and Grace: On Traditioning and Subversive Hope* (New York: Orbis Books, 2014).
- Flanagan, Eileen. *Interview by Author*. Video, October 8, 2019.
- Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977*. Edited by Colin Gordon. First American Edn (New York: Vintage, 1980).
- Fulkerson, Mary McClintock and Marcia W. Mount Shoop. *A Body Broken, A Body Betrayed: Race, Memory, and Eucharist in White-Dominant Churches* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015).
- Fulton, Brad and Richard L. Wood. "Interfaith Community Organizing: Emerging Theological and Organizational Challenges." In *Yours the Power: Faith-Based Organizing in the USA*, edited by Katie Day, Esther McIntosh and William Storrar (Boston, MA: Brill, 2013).
- Grimes, Ronald. *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Heeding God's Call. Media Advisory, December 17, 2012.
- Heeding God's Call. "Memorial to the Lost." Accessed October 19, 2014. [heedinggodscall.org](http://heedinggodscall.org).
- Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence. "Memorials to the Lost." Heeding God's Call to End Gun Violence. Accessed February 26, 2020. [www.heedinggodscall.org/memorials-to-the-lost](http://www.heedinggodscall.org/memorials-to-the-lost).
- Holtzman, Linda. *Interview by Author*. Interviewee's home, Philadelphia, PA, November 25, 2014.
- Jones, Robert P. *The End of White Christian America*. Simon & Schuster (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2016).
- Kerbel, Jarrett. *Interview by Author*. High Point Cafe, Philadelphia, PA, September 25, 2014.
- Kilde, Jeanne Halgren. *Sacred Power, Sacred Space: An Introduction to Christian Architecture and Worship* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2008).
- Lloyd, Vincent. "Organizing Race: Taking Race Seriously in Faith-Based Community Organizing." *Journal of Religious Ethics* 42, No. 4 (2014): pp. 640–60. doi:10.1111/jore.12076.
- McAdam, Doug. *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930–1970*. Second Edn (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).
- Mignolo, Walter. "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom." *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, No. 7–8 (2009): p. 1, quoted in *Liturgy in Postcolonial Perspectives: Only One is Holy*, Cláudio Carvalhaes, ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
- Miller, Bryan. *Interview by Author*. Chestnut Hill Coffee, Philadelphia, PA, October 29, 2014.
- Morgan, Rhett Morgan. *Interview by Author*. Video, October 13, 2019.
- Murphy, Darryl C. "Poverty Still Plaguing Philadelphia, Poorest Big City in the Country." *WHYY*. Accessed September 14, 2018. <https://whyy.org/articles/poverty-still-plaguing-philadelphia-poorest-big-city-in-the-country/>.
- Otterbein, Holly. "Philly Is the 4th Most Segregated Big City in the Country." *Philadelphia Magazine*. Accessed September 22, 2015. [www.phillymag.com/citifed/2015/09/22/philadelphia-segregated-big-city/](http://www.phillymag.com/citifed/2015/09/22/philadelphia-segregated-big-city/).
- Pew Charitable Trust. "Philadelphia's Immigrants." Accessed February 26, 2020. <https://pew.org/2swfWPw>.
- POWER. "Mission and Values." Accessed November 17, 2014. [www.powerphiladelphia.org/who/mission](http://www.powerphiladelphia.org/who/mission).
- Royster, Dwayne. Comments made at POWER "Die-In." Near Lincoln Financial Field at Broad and Pattison Streets, Philadelphia, PA, December 7, 2014.
- Royster, Dwayne. *Interview by Author*. Trolley Car Diner, Philadelphia, PA, September 17, 2014.
- Safety.com. "The 5 Most Surprisingly Dangerous Big Cities in America." Accessed January 20, 2015. [www.safety.com/dangerous-cities/](http://www.safety.com/dangerous-cities/).
- Smith, Jonathan Z. *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual*. Reprint Edn (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).
- Snarr, C. Melissa. *All You That Labor: Religion and Ethics in the Living Wage Movement*. Religion and Social Transformation (New York: New York University Press, 2011).
- Stout, Jeffrey. *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

- Stout, Jeffrey. *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
- Sullivan, Walter. *Interview by Author*. Haverford College, Haverford, PA, October 9, 2019.
- Turner, Victor. "Communitas: Model and Process" in *The Ritual Process* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985).
- Van Gennep, Arnold. "The Classification of Rites" in *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1960).
- Wood, Richard L. and Mark R. Warren. "A Different Face of Faith-Based Politics: Social Capital and Community Organizing in the Public Arena." *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 22, No. 9–10 (2002): pp. 6–54. doi:10.1108/01443330210790148.
- Wood, Richard L., Brad R. Fulton, and Kathryn Partridge. "Building Bridges Building Power: Developments in Institution-Based Community Organizing." New York: Interfaith Funders. 2012. Accessed November 17, 2020. [https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.iu.edu/dist/4/9/files/2016/12/Wood-Fulton-and-Partridge\\_2012\\_Building-Bridges-Building-Power-1b2mjew.pdf](https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/blogs.iu.edu/dist/4/9/files/2016/12/Wood-Fulton-and-Partridge_2012_Building-Bridges-Building-Power-1b2mjew.pdf).