

**Factors Related to Participation in Faith-Based Local Social Welfare Organizations:
Social Capital and Community Change in Northern Ireland**

By Derek Bacon, University of Ulster, Coleraine, and Carl Milofsky, Bucknell University

This paper reports results of a survey of participants in twelve community faith-based social welfare organizations in Northern Ireland. Detailed case studies were done of each organization. They were selected in terms of the success and promise of their work, to represent different geographic areas of the country, and to capture sectarian differences. A survey was then sent to participants in these organizations. It concerns individuals' personal histories of involvement in social volunteering, their values about the importance of community service in relationship to the peace process, their religious participation, and their religious values.

The study was designed to explore three issues. First, little information exists about faith-based social welfare organizations in Northern Ireland and case studies would describe the variety and effectiveness of those that exist. Second, congregation members share a strong sense of community, social ties of mutual obligation and obligation, and values that emphasize the betterment of humankind. As such, they are repositories of social capital and we sought to learn whether that social capital truly exists and whether it can be mobilized as a reservoir of resources to expand social services. Finally, we sought to learn whether faith-based organizations can serve as vehicles of conflict resolution, reconciliation, and social bridging between segregated sectarian communities.

The case studies provide organizational stories that shed light on these issues. Although we interviewed several activists from each organization, case studies generally tell the stories of a few leaders and the policies and practices they have forged. We

wanted to learn about the experiences and values of other organizational participants. Do the rank and file share the background and commitments of the leaders? This is the function of the survey sent to 120 individuals producing 88 responses.

Linkages Between Three Types of Social Capital

We view bonding social capital, bridging social capital, and linking social capital as overlapping. They bleed into each other because members grow in terms of their motivations, skills, and commitments over time. As a consequence they become more interested in having intensive involvements in the community, more skilled and motivated at building community, more in demand for their abilities, and more connected to training and learning experiences by which they will learn from others and outsiders.

Since our survey is a snapshot in time, and an incomplete one at that, what we see is a mosaic of individuals at different places in learning and development, holding different responsibilities, and expressing different commitments. Our description of the forms of social capital express these differences.

Bonding Social Capital

Bonding social capital refers to the traditions, relationships, and personal skills that lead people to form strong local communities. We expect churches to be an important source of this community building. Faith-based organizations that emerge out of congregations and activities aimed at generating an inward looking, self-maintaining, member-serving culture build bonding social capital.

While we intuitively believe churches serve this function, social researchers have found little relationship between various measures of volunteering, social commitment, or social involvement and measures of religiosity or religious involvement. That pattern is

repeated in our data. Statements of religious belief, degrees of involvement in church life, and frequency of participation seem to bear little relationship to community action, service, or conflict resolution efforts. Our objective was to learn if faith had anything to do with the activities of faith-based social organizations.

To understand how people involved in faith organizations relate to social action we need a theory of church life that is developmental and that recognizes a divergence of interests or styles among members as their religious involvement becomes more intense and sophisticated. This follows the theory of Clay (2002) developed to interpret the activities of faith-based economic development organizations in American inner cities and also used by Milofsky (2002) for interpreting ethical challenges in an Episcopal Diocese. Our ideas roughly follow the theory of spiritual development of Fowler (1981). However, we do not think of “development” in the psychological sense used by ego development theorists (Loevinger and Blasi 1976). Development rather refers to a process by which people move from a more individualistic to a more group-oriented style of religion and then from a membership orientation to a leadership orientation. As they become more committed to religious life and more sophisticated in their approach there tends to be a divergence in styles that results in sharply different organizational practices despite a roughly similar level of sophistication.

We find three levels of development represented in questionnaire item responses related to the congregational level of organization. Table One presents the first two of these levels. **(Table One Here)**

First, we have a set of items similar to the following: *The words of the Bible are to be taken literally as the word of God: Agree Strongly(25), Agree(29), Disagree (16),*

Disagree Strongly (8), Not Sure (8) n=86, 2 missing. In American culture we might expect this statement to be associated with a conservative religious and political perspective. In Northern Ireland we could find no significant relationships between this variable and the other 70 variables in the study, except that this is a Protestant viewpoint rejected by the Catholics in our sample. We interpret this as a private religious value that does not have anything much to do with the particular Protestant denomination one relates to or with other ideas respondents have about religion, church like, or faith-based social action. Religious values like this one are individualistic and they simply are not integrated into the culture of churches and congregational life.

The second level of religious involvement involves congregational worship. People have joined a congregation, think of worship as something they do in the company of others, feel that participation is important, and feel a responsibility to engage in various kinds of organizational maintenance activity. Some of that is personal “work”, like attending church regularly, talking to others about their religious beliefs, and bringing newcomers to their church. We find that these activities intercorrelate. That is, people who do one of them tend to engage in a set of activities that go along with being a dutiful member, doing the right things on a personal level, and trying to support and foster congregational life. An important activity is engaging in personal Bible study and prayer. This turns out to be a strongly supported activity at all levels and in all styles of church life (including the first level). At this second level people also engage in joint Bible study. Doing Bible study with uninformed people is an important linking activity with the next stage, church leadership.

What distinguishes activities at this second stage is that there is little correlation between these activities and other activities that indicate more intensive involvement: leadership, service, or community outreach. People involved in the more “advanced” activities may strongly support congregation-building activities but congregation builders do not show a consistent pattern in terms of leadership, service, or community building. We understand this to mean that action and commitment in faith-based organizations tends to socialize people into certain narrow commitments (so that the activities of leadership, service, and community building do not intercorrelate) but that congregation-building activities are more general and not shaped. This is the work people do when they have joined and become committed to a congregation but have not yet developed a strong personal direction. They may be involved in service or leadership or community building but their involvement is an ad hoc product of their personal biography, not a systematic product of organizational shaping.

One group at this stage involves individuals who have taken on organizational or church leadership roles. **(Table Two Here)** Usually these individuals are actively involved in Bible study, especially with new members, youth work, and work with church leadership. They tend not to be very “religious” in their expression of personal values and they may even feel somewhat marginal to the social life of the church. They tend to see the church as a family and their role seems to be more an expression of their relationship to their community as family-like. They tend, for example, to see fellow workers at their place of employment as like a family.

What is most important about these people is that they seem to have skills that place them in some demand because they end up being the people most often involved in

broader community work. Their church leadership links into community leadership and this is an important way that the bonding social capital of the church becomes social capital available to the community.

Bridging Social Capital

Our suggestion that the forms of social capital can usefully be seen as linked to each other and developmental means that there are specific precursors that lead people to become involved in activities that cause them to reach beyond their local community and become involved in community activities that relate to a larger area. In our data, bridging social capital seems best understood as a specifically organizational quality of involvement. That is, we call people bridgers if they play a role in organizations that span community boundaries. Their involvement does not seem to have a specific values component. Rather, specific kinds of background features or past experiences seem to prepare people for this work and perhaps push them into extra-community involvements.

This allows us to use the image of multivariate analysis where a set of independent variables can be said to “cause” patterns in a dependent variable. This was not possible in the area of bonding social capital where there were many cross cutting (although patterned) ways that people at different levels of development helped to build community.

Table Three shows three distinct factors related to whether or not people become involved in activities that reach outside of their community. **(Table Three Here)** We see that experience and involvement in congregational leadership seems to prepare people for involvement and leadership in other community organizations. They may develop a broader perspective on the need for cross-community linkages as they take on

church leadership roles. Alternatively, their leadership skills may be recognized and they may be recruited for this work.

Cosmopolitanism is strongly related to community work outside the church. This is an expected finding in sociology. Generally in our set of survey responses, however, cosmopolitanism vs. localism does not turn out to be strongly related to attitudes or practices we would see in the United States. For example, cosmopolitans are no less likely than locals to be Biblical literalists and they are no less likely to be active in church life. Northern Ireland is a society where there are very high levels of church participation (Brewer, 2002; Boal et al., 1997). As one might expect in a survey of people involved in faith-based organizations participation is especially high in this group.

Finally, if someone close was hurt or killed in the troubles people become involved in wider community work. We can understand this as a consequence of sectarian violence becoming a personal matter for these respondents. However, in a society that we perceive to be divided on sectarian lines with strong opposition between groups, this finding might be a surprise. Violence close to home might make people more hostile to the opposing group, more supportive of their sectarian group, and less willing to be involved in larger community groups. Although we do not know what community groups people are referring to (there are secular but sectarian community groups) the impression we have is that violence makes people feel that they must become active and involved in working for community peace. The overwhelming sentiment among respondents reflected in attitude items on the questionnaire was to favor peace, social integration, and a climate of cooperation in their communities.

Linking Social Capital

In a society beset by inter-community conflict like Northern Ireland, productive links that cross community lines can form a web of relationships that mute conflict and help to promote commitment to the welfare of the whole society rather than a preference for sectarian conflict. This study is based on case studies of organizations that have made unusual contributions to linking communities, working for social justice, and building a faith-based infrastructure of voluntary organizations that link communities. One of our primary questions was how staff and volunteers in these organizations contribute individually as sources of linkage and social moderation.

Put bluntly, we could find no relationships between variables related to the substance of our focal faith-based organizations and characteristics of our respondents who were participants in those organizations. This probably reflects limitations in our data and our strategy of measurement. However, it also suggests that these organizations qua organizations are not very different from each other (so we cannot find correlations indicating differences) despite clear differences in size, location, and degree of religious affiliation. It also seems that these organizations do not shape or socialize their participants in ways that would create distinctive organizational types of participants.

We did find, however, distinct patterns of which individuals were most likely to engage in the kinds of social action work we describe in terms of linking social capital. **(Table Four here)**. The key measure of linking to our way of thinking is whether or not individuals report spending time in social service work, indicated in our variables by working to provide food or clothing, helping others to find jobs, and helping others to find housing. Providing these services is less connected to whether a recipient is

Protestant or Catholic than with whether they have a problem a respondent can help them with.

Helping to provide these services also seem like the kinds of commitments that would lead individuals to become involved in the faith-based organizations we are studying. Since all of our respondents are involved in the faith-based organizations, we cannot predict who would or would not be involved. Those particularly committed to giving concrete social help might be those individuals among our respondents most likely to move into other, cross-community helping roles.

The variables in Table Four are presented in an order meant to suggest precursors to helping and consequences of helping. Having a friend or relative killed in the trouble once again appears as an important motivator of cross-community involvement. We also see that these individuals organize their spiritual belief in terms of a commitment to advancing social justice in the world. This value choice was offered in the question as one of a menu of choices about respondents' core spiritual orientations. Our expectation is that values precede action. Those moved by a concern for social justice report little interest in the Bible and church-oriented factors reported in Table One that seem to build bonding social capital in congregations.

The bonding social capital stream is tied into the linking social capital theme through the work of congregational leaders who engage in many of the activities we have associated with linking social capital. So we see one stream of linkers being people with independent motivations (friends or relatives killed or social justice values) and another group working their way up through the system of bonding social capital and from that developing an involvement and commitment to social service and leadership.

We then see that people involved in social services become involved in other community organizations as do church leaders. Once they become involved in these community organizations individuals seem to become involved in the more structured organizational activities provided by large, formal organizations such as those that have made up some of our faith-based organizational case organizations. The best indicator we have of formal organizational contributions are whether or not individuals have participated in training programs oriented to economic development and community building. We see that those involved in social services have as have church leaders and community organization leaders. We cannot disentangle causality here. It might be that the reason those engaged in social services participate in trainings is that they are the church leaders and community organization leaders in the population of those providing concrete services.

Conclusion

Despite the distinctiveness of Northern Irish society, the processes of building social capital through bonding, bridging, and linking are roughly similar to the processes we have observed in American congregations and faith-based social change organizations. There is a gradual process within congregations of drawing people to support the congregation as an organization and moving into leadership roles. Congregations tend to be oriented to work related to worship and their bonding social capital tends to make them strongly bounded communities. Yet as people assume leadership roles we see that they tend to become involved in wider community leadership and social service functions. In this way, the bonding social capital of the church is a factor involved in building bridging and linking social capital.

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Table One: Correlations Showing the First Two Stages of Congregational Affiliation and Involvement

		Q33a-the words of the Bible are to be taken literally as the word of God	Q34d-attend church regularly	Q34a-spend time in prayer and Bible reading	Q13c-participation in Bible/scripture study	Q18b-frequency - given religious literature to someone	Q18e-frequency-studied scripture with someone who did not know it well
Q33a-the words of the Bible are to be taken literally as the word of God	Pearson Correlation	1	.060	.277(*)	.117	.073	.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.589	.010	.332	.521	.315
	N	86	84	85	71	80	80
Q34d-attend church regularly	Pearson Correlation	.060	1	.544(**)	.226	.066	.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.589	.	.000	.058	.561	.862
	N	84	86	86	71	80	79
Q34a-spend time in prayer and Bible reading	Pearson Correlation	.277(*)	.544(**)	1	.391(**)	.242(*)	.220
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.010	.000	.	.001	.029	.050
	N	85	86	87	71	81	80
Q13c-participation in Bible/scripture study	Pearson Correlation	.117	.226	.391(**)	1	.466(**)	.599(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.332	.058	.001	.	.000	.000
	N	71	71	71	72	69	68
Q18b-frequency - given religious literature to someone	Pearson Correlation	.073	.066	.242(*)	.466(**)	1	.430(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.521	.561	.029	.000	.	.000
	N	80	80	81	69	81	78
Q18e-frequency-studied scripture with someone who did not know it well	Pearson Correlation	.114	.020	.220	.599(**)	.430(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.315	.862	.050	.000	.000	.
	N	80	79	80	68	78	80

For all tables:

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table Two: Bonding Social Capital measured as correlates of people holding a church leadership position.

	CHURLEAD	Q13c-participation in Bible/scripture study	Q18b-frequency - given religious literature to someone	Q18e-frequency- studied scripture with someone who did not know it well	Q13d- participation in work with young people	Q18c-frequency - invited/brought someone to church for their 1st visit	Q20b- like a family	Comp Friends Wk
Combined Q's church leader	1	.421(**)	.477(**)	.514(**)	.657(**)	.537(**)	.421(**)	.475(**)
roles	.	.006	.001	.000	.000	.000	.005	.004
Q13c-Take Part in Bible Study	42	41	42	42	38	42	42	35
Q18b-gave religious lit to someone	.421(**)	1	.466(**)	.599(**)	.214	.510(**)	.171	.409(**)
Q18e-studied scripture with someone who did not know it well	.006	.	.000	.000	.101	.000	.157	.002
Q13d- participation in work with young people	41	72	69	68	60	67	70	56
Q18c-invited someone for 1st visit to church	.477(**)	.466(**)	1	.430(**)	.298(*)	.573(**)	.071	.243
Q20b-my church is like a family	.001	.000	.	.000	.017	.000	.536	.053
combined Q's: People at work are friends	42	69	81	78	64	78	79	64
Comp Friends Wk	.514(**)	.599(**)	.430(**)	1	.314(*)	.453(**)	.265(*)	.331(**)
Q13c-participation in Bible/scripture study	.000	.000	.000	.	.012	.000	.019	.008
Q18b-gave religious lit to someone	42	68	78	80	63	77	78	63
Q18e-studied scripture with someone who did not know it well	.657(**)	.214	.298(*)	.314(*)	1	.133	.382(**)	.114
Q13d- participation in work with young people	.000	.101	.017	.012	.	.300	.002	.413
Q18c-invited someone for 1st visit to church	38	60	64	63	65	63	62	54
Q20b-my church is like a family	.537(**)	.510(**)	.573(**)	.453(**)	.133	1	.168	.320(*)
combined Q's: People at work are friends	.000	.000	.000	.000	.300	.	.147	.011
Comp Friends Wk	42	67	78	77	63	78	76	62
Q13c-participation in Bible/scripture study	.421(**)	.171	.071	.265(*)	.382(**)	.168	1	.177
Q18b-gave religious lit to someone	.005	.157	.536	.019	.002	.147	.	.161
Q18e-studied scripture with someone who did not know it well	42	70	79	78	62	76	83	64
Q13d- participation in work with young people	.475(**)	.409(**)	.243	.331(**)	.114	.320(*)	.177	1
Q18c-invited someone for 1st visit to church	.004	.002	.053	.008	.413	.011	.161	.
Q20b-my church is like a family	35	56	64	63	54	62	64	69

Table Three: Linking Social Capital Measured as Having Many Memberships in Non-Church Local Organizations

		Comp Local Org Mem	cosmopolitan or localistic	CHURLEAD	Q41-friend or relative seriously injured killed in Troubles
Comp Local Org Mem	Pearson Correlation	1	-.381(**)	.510(**)	.438(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001	.001	.000
	N	79	78	39	79
cosmopolitan or localistic	Pearson Correlation	-.381(**)	1	.029	-.120
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.	.853	.283
	N	78	86	42	82
CHURLEAD	Pearson Correlation	.510(**)	.029	1	-.004
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.853	.	.980
	N	39	42	42	41
Q41-friend or relative seriously injured killed in Troubles	Pearson Correlation	.438(**)	-.120	-.004	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.283	.980	.
	N	79	82	41	84

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Variables: Comp Local Org Mem=A combination of variables where respondents report

being involved in local organizations outside their church or faith-based organization.

Cosmopolitan or Localistic=a measure that combines education level, occupational status, and whether or not a person is Protestant (a trait that seems to lead them to be more localistic in orientation).

CHURLEAD=a measure that combines self-reports of people holding one or more of various church leadership roles.

Friend or Relative Seriously Injured or Killed in Troubles=a measure that combines several items that asked whether individuals had friends, relatives, or neighbors seriously injured or killed in the “troubles” in Northern Ireland.

Linking Social Capital measured as correlates of involvement in broad community service programs.

	Q41-friend or relative seriously injured killed in Troubles	Q20c-social agent for change	Q18g-frequency-provided food/clothing/£	Q18h-frequency-help find a job	Q18l-frequency-provided emergency housing	CHURLEAD	Comp Local Org Mem	Q17-Summary-- Trainings Received
or relative	1	.149	.224(*)	.261(*)	.426(**)	-.004	.438(**)	.164
injured killed in	.	.189	.044	.021	.000	.980	.000	.136
	84	79	81	78	77	41	79	84
agent for	.149	1	.365(**)	.425(**)	.238(*)	.470(**)	.240(*)	.392(**)
	.189	.	.001	.000	.037	.002	.040	.000
	79	82	81	78	77	41	74	82
ency-	.224(*)	.365(**)	1	.520(**)	.413(**)	.353(*)	.261(*)	.214
od/clothing/£	.044	.001	.	.000	.000	.022	.023	.051
	81	81	84	81	80	42	76	84
ency-help	.261(*)	.425(**)	.520(**)	1	.411(**)	.381(*)	.358(**)	.265(*)
	.021	.000	.000	.	.000	.013	.002	.017
	78	78	81	81	80	42	75	81
ency-provided	.426(**)	.238(*)	.413(**)	.411(**)	1	.319(*)	.371(**)	.259(*)
housing	.000	.037	.000	.000	.	.039	.001	.020
	77	77	80	80	80	42	74	80
Church	-.004	.470(**)	.353(*)	.381(*)	.319(*)	1	.510(**)	.532(**)
Roles Held	.980	.002	.022	.013	.039	.	.001	.000
	41	41	42	42	42	42	39	42
Community	.438(**)	.240(*)	.261(*)	.358(**)	.371(**)	.510(**)	1	.510(**)
ments	.000	.040	.023	.002	.001	.001	.	.000
FBO	79	74	76	75	74	39	79	79
ary--	.164	.392(**)	.214	.265(*)	.259(*)	.532(**)	.510(**)	1
ceived	.136	.000	.051	.017	.020	.000	.000	.
	84	82	84	81	80	42	79	88

is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).